La via italiana: Togliatti's legacy to the Italian Communist Party

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I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degree.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis argues that Palmiro Togliatti's strategy of transforming and developing the Communist Party of Italy (PCI) as a mass party which would progress to government by a process of compromise, adaptation and the seeking of alliances, did not come to fruition in the manner intended, because of social, economic and political influences which Togliatti had never envisaged. The strategy was flawed also because of the authoritarian, hierarchical and (in practice) undemocratic nature of the party — largely Togliatti's legacy — which reduced its capacity for the rapid adaptation and flexibility necessary to bring the strategy to fulfilment.

Context

The Togliatti / PCI strategy was launched following what appeared to be a distinct change in direction of the party line which came to be known as the *svolta di Salerno* and which coincided with Togliatti's arrival in Italy from Moscow in 1944 — some 23 years after the party's foundation as a section of the Communist International called the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I).[1] The context in which the strategy is recognisable can be observed in three phases.

Phase One recognises the line of development of the strategy from its initiation by the 'Turinese' group of the *Ordine nuovo* movement in 1919, through the foundation of the PCd'I in 1921, to the party's Lyons Congress in 1926, the Comintern's Seventh Congress in 1935 and then to its exposition in concrete terms by Togliatti in 1944. The theory behind the strategy was heavily influenced by Antonio Gramsci and contributed to substantially by Togliatti himself. It was attacked by both the party's left and right factions and was subject to some oscillation on the part of Togliatti, who reacted in turn to changes in direction of the Moscow leadership of the international communist movement.

Phase Two covers the period from 1944 until 1968 during which the PCI, despite diverse political opposition from inside and outside Italy, together with rapid social

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[1] The party changed its name to 'Italian Communist Party' (PCI) in 1943 with the dissolution of the Communist International.

and economic changes and despite changing electoral fortunes, established itself as a strong political force with substantial support from the electorate.

Phase Three covers the period up to and including the 1980s and beyond, a period in which there was a recognisable decline in the party's ability, as a communist party, to achieve the aims of the strategy. In this period the PCI, although substantially entrenched as a political force in Italian society, was not able to go beyond that situation to become a party of government in its own right. This phase also briefly covers the period until 1996 during which the party again changed direction and adapted itself to a change in name and constitution, with the intention of taking part in government with popular support, a project in which the new party was eventually successful.

Rationale

Despite the failure of the PCI / Togliattian strategy to bring the PCI to government as a communist party, its major achievements must be acknowledged. First, the PCI became the largest and most successful communist party in western Europe. It did this despite enormous opposition from the Catholic Church, generally through its propaganda and particularly through the Christian Democratic Party (DC) which it backed. Although the PCI formally supported Italy's membership of NATO, the party's existence was treated with more than suspicion by the USA which openly and strongly opposed the involvement of a communist party in government in Italy. It developed its membership and its position in parliamentary opposition against the pressures of both sides in the Cold War. Second, despite its disappointments regarding some of its domestic electoral results and the fluctuations in its membership, the PCI became entrenched as a major political party in Italy in the post-World War II period. The extent of this entrenchment in terms of membership and electoral results for the Chamber of Deputies in 1921 and then for the period 1948 to 1996 is shown in the Appendix. Third, the PCI consistently polled well in many local government elections and, sometimes in alliance with the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), played a strong role in local government administration. Fourth, it enjoyed strong representation in the European Parliament. Although many interpreted its 34.4 per

cent vote in the June 1984 elections as a sympathy vote following the death of its leader Enrico Berlinguer, the PCI then became the largest single party in the European Parliament. Fifth, although mentioned only briefly in this thesis, the PCI made innovative contributions to western-European communism, notably Togliatti's concept of 'polycentrism' and Berlinguer's promotion of 'Eurocommunism'. Both concepts were intended to establish that national communist parties were independent of control by Moscow.

The transformation of the PCI, a communist party, to the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) in February 1991, provides a point of reference from which the whole story of the PCI can be examined. The post-second World War PCI has always been the subject of attention by editorialists, political commentators, and historians. Flores and Gallerano (1992, 7) acknowledge that *'è stato senza paragone il partito più discusso e studiato'*. Among communist parties the PCI was an anomaly. It succeeded and grew in the very period in which Italy became a major economic power. Seventy years after its foundation — as a revolutionary vanguard — and 47 years after the *svolta di Salerno*, the party formally abandoned its communist past and, in its supreme act of adaptation, transformed itself into a new organisation. To put the enormity of that act into perspective, this thesis examines the motivation and attributes of major players in the formation of the Italian Communist Party and attempts to trace the effectiveness of the strategy that the party developed as a guide to its intended entry into government. There has been a great deal of analytical attention given to the party's transformation in the last five to six years. Given that new material is now available, since the opening of archives, and there is ongoing discussion about both Togliatti's and Berlinguer's roles, it is of value to re-examine the earlier periods of development of the PCI's strategy.

The thesis shows that the motivation behind attempts to implement the PCI / Togliattian strategy declined in circumstances for which it was not designed. However it notes that the 'descendants' of the PCI — the PDS and the Refounded Communist Party (RC) — have not only survived the collapse of the 'First Republic' but have adapted to the changed electoral system and the PDS is now a member of

the governing majority. The PDS is the largest party in the coalition while the RC's support is essential for it to govern. Of the 20 ministers, nine were members of the PCI.

Method

The thesis draws on secondary sources in Italian and English. For the earlier periods of the PCI's history, reference is made to the traditional sources from Paolo Spriano and Ernesto Ragionieri as well as Togliatti's biography by the journalist Giorgio Bocca, who is widely quoted by recognised historians. Reference is also made to a new biography of Togliatti by Aldo Agosti who uses material which only became available when access to archives in the USSR was allowed after the fall of the Soviet regime. The material taken from these authors is supplemented from the texts of other authors who have covered aspects of the PCI's history. As far as possible, reference is made to texts by protagonists in relevant periods, including Antonio Gramsci, Palmiro Togliatti, Pietro Secchia, Alfonso Leonetti, Luigi Longo, Giorgio Amendola, Umberto Terracini, Ignazio Silone, Giulio Seniga, Giorgio Napolitano, Gian Carlo Pajetta, Enrico Berlinguer, Gerardo Chiaromonte, Renato Curcio, Alberto Franceschini, Mario Moretti and Antonio Negri.

Structure

Chapter One discusses the backgrounds of the people who were prominent in the early leadership of the party and, in particular, outlines the political influences to which Togliatti was exposed in the first two decades of the party's existence. It emphasises the differences in political views and background of the party leadership and previews the continuation of differences over a period when the leadership was changing. Tolerance of different views suggests a strong element of democracy — and there was a certain amount of tolerance when Bordiga and Gramsci were party leaders. Bordiga did not expel anyone from the leadership group, nor did Gramsci. In fact, Gramsci, despite having clear differences of views with Bordiga invited him to remain on the Executive when he was deposed from the leadership. Expulsions reached a peak when Bordiga's and Gramsci's influences were removed — Bordiga himself was expelled — when Togliatti had closer relations with the Moscow

leadership than anyone else in the Italian party. Togliatti, more than anyone else, recognised that if his party did not conform to the changes in Comintern policy, whatever his own views might have been, it could not survive. By the end of the 1930s Togliatti's leadership of the party was accepted and he was in the ascendant, although his absence in Moscow during the war until 1944 resulted in some misunderstandings within the party about its objectives.

Chapter Two covers the *svolta di Salerno* and its long term implications for the party, the 'new' direction of the PCI; the *partito nuovo*; the formal change from a small party of cadres to a 'mass' party — which in practice was really cadre-led —; the PCI in government; the legacies to the PCI's future due to Togliatti's compromises while in government; and the long 'road to socialism' while in opposition. The chapter also introduces the anti-communist forces within and outside Italy with which the party had to contend.

Chapter Three covers how the PCI attempted to implement its strategy in the 1950s and 1960s; how it dealt with the 'southern question' and tried to expand its rural base; its attempts at rapprochement with the church; Togliatti's leadership style; and indications of a decline in the impetus of the strategy.

Chapter Four reviews the origins and development of the 'historic compromise'; discusses how the party and its strategy of an historic compromise became enmeshed with terrorism and the 'Moro affair'; the failure of the compromise in 1978; and the effects of terrorism on the PCI's strategy.

Chapter Five shows how, instead of continuing along the 'road to socialism', the party moved along the road to metamorphosis; how a hiatus developed after Berlinguer's death and during Alessandro Natta's stewardship; and how, with the PDS — a so-called post-communist party — in government, and the RC supporting the government, there are residual elements of the strategy of adaptation, compromise and alliance-building, at work today.