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Relations between the PCI and the League of Communists from the Second Post-War Period to the Mid-1960s

Abstract: The relations between Tito and Togliatti and their respective parties were conditioned by the omnipresent influence that Communist party of Soviet Union had on both partners. During the period of Stalin's rule, the Italian communist were staunch Stalinists, thus Tito's split with Stalin and the issue of Trieste were the main obstacles in bilateral relations. Khrushchev's destalinization process opened new possibilities for inter party relations across the Adriatic, which however continued to be conditioned by the strategy of their Soviet comrades. Khrushchev's lessening of the control over 'sister' parties give more space for Italians to learn more about Yugoslav path to communism. Nevertheless, the PCI continued to follow the Moscow line, while PCY looked to create its own based on nonaligned movement and self-management, which continued to be closely watched but not applied by PCI during Togliatti's time in office.

Keyword: Tito, Togliatti, PCI, PCY, communism, Stalinism, bilateral relations.

Introduction

At the end of the Second World War, Togliatti and Tito led the respective communist parties of two ravaged countries. The conflict had left deep wounds, not only in terms of material and human losses but also on a social and political level. Both Italy and Yugoslavia were committed to rebuilding their institutional order and had to do so with a society torn apart by hatred and fratricidal wars that had been raging for years. The Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY, from 1952 League of Communists of Yugoslavia, LCY) had been active participants in those painful events. In Italy, the PCI enjoyed the moral high ground of having been the only anti-fascist political force to continue operating in the country during the regime. In wartime, it had been recognised as having a leading role, as demonstrated by the fact that the second Badoglio government, supported by the anti-fascist parties, had come into being after the agreement reached between Togliatti and the monarchy in April 1944. Of course, the commitment to the partisan struggle that had

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lasted for over a year and a half after 8 September 1943 had also played a role, but Togliatti had been in Russia until the spring of 1944 and Stalin had urged him to return to Italy and accept a compromise solution with the monarchy and other political forces. The Soviet diplomat Andrey Vyshinsky confirmed Stalin's decision while speaking with the representative of the Greek government in exile, stating that in Italy, the Allies were in control of the occupying forces, and it was, therefore, necessary to realistically take note of this and favour a solution of collaboration.¹ All this had taken place with the approval of the Allied forces, who had in fact granted Togliatti a pass to come to Italy via Africa.² The circles close to the Royal Palace, in turn, had every interest in reaching an agreement: Renato Prunas had discussed this with Vyshinsky in January of the same year.³

Tito, on the contrary, had remained on the ground, risking his life; he had led his country's resistance throughout the conflict, staying in contact with Moscow but also demonstrating that he knew how to move with a certain cunning and autonomy. He had not exactly done everything on his own: military aid from the western allies and money from Moscow had been decisive at certain times.⁴ Tito had also been urged by Stalin to find a *modus vivendi* with the royal government led by Ivan Šubašić, but in his case the support of Winston Churchill was crucial, as it guaranteed him legitimacy even from the Allies. Thanks to this, the Communist Party remained the political force that negotiated with the international anti-fascist coalition, getting rid of the other inconvenient actors operating in Yugoslavia, in particular Draža Mihajlović's četnik forces. It is true that Churchill's objective was not dissimilar to the one Stalin imposed on Togliatti (to accept the monarchy), but in any case communist domination in the anti-fascist struggle remained a fixed point and would have allowed Tito not to remain bound by the agreements signed during the conflict. At certain moments, he was extremely skilful in playing with the precarious balance of power taking shape between the USSR and the Allies. Just as he had exploited the latter to legitimise himself in the fight against fascism, he sought the support of the former to get rid of the ruling Karadjordjević dynasty.⁵ In the end, however, it was his interlocutors who decided: it was Stalin, at Yalta, who endorsed the continuation of the arrangement with Šubašić and the appointment of a royal

¹ The Gennadius Library, Archeia Gennadeiou Vivliothikis. Moscow, March 17th 1944.

² M. Clementi, *L'alleato Stalin. L'ombra sovietica sull'Italia di Togliatti e De Gasperi*, (Milano: Rizzoli, 2011), 37.

³ Fondazione Gramsci, carte Botteghe Oscure, sottospecie 1, UA 8, "Documenti biografici", Armadio 20 sc., Palmiro Togliatti Documenti personali e cimeli, 15 febbraio 1944-24 marzo 1944, foglio 2.

⁴ J. Pirjevec, *Tito e i suoi compagni*, Torino: Einaudi, 2005, 161, 163.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

regency. On the other hand, as well as with the Italians, Stalin had made the same manoeuvre with the Greeks, pushing the communists to align themselves with the monarchists. It was clear that his primary concerns were the war and how much the USSR managed to win on the ground before its conclusion, rather than support for the sister communist parties. Contrary to what Togliatti did in Italy, however, Tito vehemently protested to the Soviets. It was the first sign that future relations would not be easy.⁶

At the close of hostilities, the two parties found themselves in very different circumstances. The CPY legitimately claimed the management of the construction of the new state, while the PCI found itself within coalition governments in which it could try to reach a compromise with the other parties in writing a new constitution. Togliatti's position was much more uncomfortable than Tito's because his manoeuvring space was limited. Stalin had already made it clear to him during the war that the USSR did not intend to commit itself to supporting a revolutionary struggle in Italy and so the PCI found itself wedged between a power that had little interest in Italy's internal dynamics and its allies in the government's, whose ideological orientation and international framework were increasingly emerging as the future antagonists of the socialist camp. In all this, the problem of the eastern border loomed large. The issue proved to be a major problem for the PCI, which was trying to juggle between displaying loyalty to the cause of socialism and not appearing internally as a party with little national reliability.⁷

In the two years following the end of the conflict, the situation remained fluid. The fate of Trieste and the surrounding area was played out on the tables of the peace negotiations in light of Stalin's desire not to provoke ruptures with the former allies on the European continent.⁸ Neither Tito nor Italy could hope of conditioning them beyond a certain limit. So, Togliatti found himself supporting Stalin, who was first in favour of annexation to Yugoslavia⁹, then annoyed by Tito's protagonism. It was at that moment that he sought a bit of manoeuvring space, suggesting that a referendum be held to allow the local population to express their will.¹⁰ Space that in fact did not exist, since when Togliatti proposed a Trieste/Gorizia exchange and Tito seemed to take it into consideration at the time, the Soviet leader at a meeting in the autumn of 1946 imposed his views

⁶ Ibid., 180.

⁷ P. Karlsen, "Il PCI, il confine orientale e il contesto internazionale. 1945-1954", *Ventunesimo secolo*, IX, 2010, 28.

⁸ S. Pons, "Stalin, Togliatti and the origins of the Cold War in Europe", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, III (2001), 21.

⁹ P. Carlsen, "Il PCI, il confine orientale", 13.

¹⁰ Ibid., 13-14.

on the two colleagues and the proposal was dropped without too much fuss.¹¹ Trieste was also a problem for Tito, who could not disregard it because of the historical significance of the eastern border from the First World War onwards, but above all because it allowed him to mobilize all nations that formed his party to a common commitment in the name of the fight against an external enemy. The facts showed, however, that neither he was able to impose his solution. The Allies had already forced him to withdraw his troops when he had unilaterally attempted an occupation of this territory in May 1945¹² and Stalin had not supported him. Thus, in the following months, his activism waned.

A Cold War

Then came 1947: the peace treaty, the Cold War. For the PCI, the Paris Agreement was the official confirmation of the lack of influence it had already demonstrated in the previous months. The official character of the Agreement was in a sense an advantage because it made it clear that the Soviet Union had also chosen the path of the international solution for the Yugoslav-Italian border and, at the same time, kept Tito quiet. It was on this occasion that Togliatti decided to set up, with Yugoslavia's consent, a Communist Party of the Free Territory of Trieste. The choice of Vittorio Vidali as its secretary was due to Togliatti's intention to control the organisation, but it also served to reassure Moscow since Vidali was staunch Stalinist.¹³ Tito did not obstruct the operation, perhaps also so as not to favour the Slovenian element, which had always hoped to gain control over the Adriatic port.

At the beginning of June, the PCI was excluded from the De Gasperi government, and Togliatti's hopes of being able to continue to influence its political decisions were dashed. A few days later, the Marshall Plan would accelerate the start of the real Cold War. The lack of a strong Soviet response to the aid plan launched by the USA was proof, according to Silvio Pons, that the USSR had no plans for continental hegemony.¹⁴ This was already true during the war¹⁵: Stalin was a realist and was well aware that, at that time, the Soviets

¹¹ As Patrick Karlsen claims, by supporting the creation of the Free Territory of Trieste, Stalin had one foot on the Adriatic, which was a better solution than Belgrade's direct annexation. Cf. P. Karlsen, *Vittorio Vidali. Vita di uno stalinista (1916–1956)*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2019), 234.

¹² J. Prijevec, *Tito e i suoi compagni*, 210.

¹³ P. Carlsen, "Il PCI, il confine orientale", 27.

¹⁴ S. Pons, "Stalin, Togliatti and the origins of the Cold War in Europe", 21.

¹⁵ V. Zubok, R. Di Castro, "La Realpolitik del Cremlino e le origini della guerra fredda", *Ventesimo secolo*, II, marzo 2003, 35–75.

would not be able to advance such impressive ambitions, given the human and material losses suffered during the conflict. Stalin's choices of the following years, in particular his attempt to arrive at a shared solution for Germany, would have shown that, at that moment, what mattered more to the USSR was stability and the implementation of a 'safety zone' to protect it rather than the global spread of socialism.

Togliatti and Tito thus found themselves on opposing sides in a world divided into blocs. Despite his departure from the government, Togliatti still had to play the Constitution game and prepare for the 1948 elections. He continued to move by observing Moscow's indications and trying to offer internally the image of a political organisation that was in any case collaborative and primarily concerned with defending the interests of the weaker social classes. As the 1948 election campaign would show, the communist leader would constantly link the idea of the realisation of socialism to the solution of the problems of the Italian proletariat. Tito was perhaps in a worse predicament: in the Soviet bloc, Yugoslavia was the second most prestigious country, a position it had won on the ground with the victorious war of national liberation. However, he was still second and therefore could not think of questioning Moscow's decisions. Thus, CPY tried to show its credentials as opposed to other Communist parties, and especially at the expense of Italians. At the founding meeting of the Cominform in September 1947, the PCI was accused of having given up the revolutionary cause and accepting a compromise with the bourgeois parties.¹⁶ Counting on Yugoslavian diversity, Tito tried to gain room for manoeuvre from Moscow by demonstrating considerable activism in the Balkans. In addition to supporting the Greek partisans, he went so far as to take up old ideas of a regional federation that would include the Bulgarians and Albanians.¹⁷ Stalin's irritation was the prelude to the final break, which came, as we know, at the June 1948 Cominform meeting in Bucharest.

The Excommunication

Yugoslavia's exclusion from the socialist camp shaped Italian-Yugoslav relations. The harmony between Tito and Britain, which had never entirely disappeared, was restored, and the CPY was able to play that card on the eastern border. Not that this substantially shifted the positions of the western powers, which in any case could not excessively penalise Italy, where the April 1948 elections were touted as a decisive choice of the camp to which the country would belong. The

¹⁶ P. Carlsen, "Il PCI, il confine orientale", 27.

¹⁷ J. Prijevec, *Tito e i suoi compagni*, 229.

DC¹⁸ and even the PSI¹⁹ moved to ensure that the final agreements did not disappoint Italian expectations too much.

Admittedly, Tito did not push the issue of Trieste too much: his most pressing concern at the end of the 1940s was to become an interlocutor of the western powers. Yugoslavia was a small-medium sized country with a recovering economy, and the only card it could play internationally was that of its strategic position and, above all, of being the first country to have emerged from Soviet tutelage, an aspect that made the Adriatic state particularly attractive in the eyes of the United States and the United Kingdom. This was true in its external projection. Internally, the Soviet threat was used by the Yugoslav leader as glue to bind together the party, which was still threatened by different orientations among the national groups and the criticism of those who blamed him for the break with the USSR. Those were the years when the camps for political prisoners, primarily Goli Otok, were filled with so-called ‘cominformisti’, people considered not completely loyal to the regime. Among them were also Italians: groups of so-called ‘Monfalconesi’, the workers who had left the Monfalcone shipyards in 1946 to make their contribution to building socialism in Yugoslavia, and other Italians who had emigrated for the same reason.²⁰ The break with the USSR was more diplomatic than ideological, and, on the other hand, Tito demonstrated on several occasions that he knew how to bend ideology to the needs of the context. Thus, he launched a campaign of savage collectivisation in the late 1940s, only to withdraw it when its disastrous consequences became evident. This was also perhaps the last attempt to mend the rift with Moscow.²¹ When it became clear that this was not enough, Tito looked more decisively to the West: he accepted the aid offered by London and Washington and, at the same time, withdrew his support for the Greek communists, contributing to their defeat in the civil war that was bloodying the nation.²²

The fact that Tito had initiated a dialogue with interlocutors from the western bloc was an advantage for Togliatti. In fact, internally, he could overturn the accusation of plotting with the enemy levelled at him by the centrist political forces, accusing them of collusion with the main adversary of Italian interests

¹⁸ D. D’Amelio, “Democristiani di confine. Ascesa e declino del ‘partito italiano’ a Trieste. 1945–19790, *Contemporanea*, XVII (2014), 413–440.

¹⁹ A. Varsori, “Bevin e Nenni (ottobre 1946-gennaio 1947). Una fase nei rapporti anglo-italiani nel secondo dopoguerra”, *Il Politico*, XLIX (1984).

²⁰ A. Berrini, *Noi siamo la classe operaia. I duemila di Monfalcone*, (Milano: Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2004); Enrico Miletto, *Gli italiani di Tito. La zona B del Territorio libero di Trieste e l’emigrazione comunista in Jugoslavia*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino), 2019.

²¹ J. Prijevec, *Tito e i suoi compagni*, 266–268.

²² *Ibid.*, 276.

on the Trieste question. In addition, the PCI leader found himself in dialogue with Moscow, finally free from the looming shadow of his victorious Yugoslav colleague. This did not solve all his problems, as demonstrated by the embarrassing situation in which he found himself in 1950 when Stalin offered him the leadership of the Cominform, an offer that Togliatti refused on the grounds that he did not want to abandon the party in such a delicate phase of Italian political life. As a show of goodwill towards Stalin, Togliatti tried to demonstrate his loyalty by expelling Valdo Magnani and Aldo Cucchi from the party, guilty of calling for dialogue with Yugoslavia. Magnani was a personal friend of Togliatti's and a cousin of his companion, Nilde Iotti: his expulsion was probably proof of the PCI secretary's political realism, but it was also perhaps a message to his own party, at a time when some, in the wake of Moscow's offer of an international commission, had already begun to weave plots for replacing him.²³

Stalin's death

Stalin's death came suddenly in March 1953 and inevitably upset the international balance. The PCI waited to see who would succeed him and what consequences the change would have for the 'sister' parties. What happened was perhaps beyond the expectations of the party secretariat: the minutes of the meetings in those months reveal all the disorientation and internal confusion, in a desperate attempt to understand which way Moscow would move before taking any position. It was Togliatti who dictated the course, showing himself to be cautious in a delicate moment when, at an international level, the Trieste question was being prepared to be closed almost definitively. In those months, the Communist press accentuated its critical tones towards Yugoslavia²⁴, both to claim for itself the role of authentic defender of the interests of the local community and to weaken the DC at a difficult time for the Christian Democrats, who were grappling with the task of replacing De Gasperi. Tracing the London Memorandum of 1954 (which assigned zone A of the FTT to Italy and zone B to Yugoslavia) to the plots of the 'strange couple' Tito-Churchill, the PCI denounced the inability of the Italian government to influence the terms of the agreement, considered 'the worst possible result'. The Pella government, in fact, had no way of influencing the negotiations and, as a result, underlined the na-

²³ F. Tenza Montini, *La Jugoslavia e la questione di Trieste, 1945-1954*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2020), 198.

²⁴ M. Zuccari, *Il dito sulla piaga. Togliatti e il PCI nella rottura tra Stalin e Tito 1944-1957*, (Milano: Mursia, 2008), 267.

tionalistic tones²⁵, refusing to recognise the contents of the Memorandum²⁶ as definitive.

As the Trieste question came to a close, the two leaders closed ranks within their respective parties. Togliatti, in 1954, marginalised Secchia, whose image had been compromised after the escape of his collaborator Guido Seniga with the party treasury and some documents.²⁷ Tito, for his part, made far more prominent victims, dismissing Milovan Djilas after he criticised the party's centralism.²⁸ Shortly afterwards, it would be Edvard Kardelj's turn.²⁹ In the case of Togliatti, this was probably just a fortunate circumstance, which the PCI secretary took advantage of to get rid of an old adversary. But the attempt to settle the scores within the LCY was something more: Tito wanted to eliminate his potential adversaries and, above all, those who could weaken the centralist line, opening up space for dissent.³⁰

While Togliatti was still accusing Tito of betraying the cause of socialism, the rapprochement between the Soviets and Yugoslavia was already underway, and the secretary of PCI was aware of it, but chose to ignore it. When the Soviet rehabilitation of Yugoslavia became public in February 1955, the Italian communists were forced to revise their line. At that time, Khrushchev was consolidating his power, and the discontinuity with Stalinism was becoming evident in foreign policy, with the start of the small *détente*, the convening of the Geneva Conference and the reopening of a dialogue with Yugoslavia. Togliatti moved, as always, following the indications that came from Moscow. Thus, on 1 May 1955, at the stadium in Trieste, he gave the speech that the Soviets expected from him, not going so far as to rehabilitate Tito, but presenting the rapprochement between the USSR and Yugoslavia as a way to wrench the latter away from the imperialist camp.³¹ The alignment with the USSR also had, once again, an internal implication. The PCI was under pressure since the Eisenhower administration, through its ambassador in Rome, Clare Boothe Luce, was pushing the DC to issue legislative measures limiting the PCI's freedom of action. In fact, the US was aware of the change in the relations between the PCI and other communist movements and of the fact that Moscow had chosen the path of de-Stalinisa-

²⁵ M. Del Pero, "Pressures and Restrictions Exercised by America in Italy During the Mandate of Ambassador Clara Boothe Luce. 1953–1956", *Diplomatic History*, XXVIII (2004), 422.

²⁶ D. D'Amelio, "Democristiani di confine", 422.

²⁷ M. Zuccari, *Il dito sulla piaga*, 297.

²⁸ J. Prijevec, *Tito e i suoi compagni*, 327–334.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 334–336.

³⁰ M. Zuccari, *Il dito sulla piaga*, 277.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 301.

tion, although it had been warned by Togliatti and Maurice Thorez (the then secretary of the French Communist Party) that this would harm them.³² US diplomacy had, therefore, called for taking advantage of this difficult moment to weaken the satellite parties. The DC did not follow US directives to the letter, but the Communists felt they were in trouble anyway.³³ In the months following the Trieste speech, the secretary was busy managing the internal confusion within his party: every meeting of the secretariat turned out to be an occasion for members to raise doubts or ask for interpretations of what was happening.³⁴ The sharpest criticism, especially because it was pronounced publicly (in an article in the Trieste-based periodical *‘Il lavoratore’*) came from Vittorio Vidali, who, as a Stalinist, could not accept the rapprochement with Yugoslavia. Togliatti criticised him bitterly, proving once again that Soviet directives could not be ignored, even when they imposed tactical twists.

Togliatti's arguments about the need to wrest Tito from the blandishments of the western bloc were the same as Khrushchev's. The new Soviet leader questioned the Stalinist policy that had insisted on the compactness of the bloc, its internal homogeneity and perfect alignment with the USSR, and preferred a more flexible approach, with the aim of attracting countries that were not included in the system of military and economic alliances but could nevertheless become strategic allies. Yugoslavia, from this point of view, was of particular interest, since reintegrating it into the socialist system would have meant, on the one hand, distancing the new leadership from Stalin and, on the other, removing from the adversary camp the insidious weapon of having co-opted a socialist country. At the time, the rapprochement resulted more in a victory for Tito than for Khrushchev. The visit of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) secretary to Belgrade in May 1955 was portrayed as the *‘Soviet Canossa’*³⁵, and the Yugoslav leader claimed it was proof of the mistake the Soviets had made in 1948. The Tito success, in terms of his image, was considerable but should not be exaggerated. Returning into the arms of the USSR for his country meant losing the quality that had made it internationally relevant. The Yugoslav leader knew this and, in fact, not only did not go through with it, but simultaneously sought a diversion. Shortly before welcoming the CPSU secretary at Zemun airport, he had made his move in Bandung, becoming one of the leaders of the

³² General CIA records, CIA-RDP-00915R000400380002-4. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp78-00915r000400380002-4> (Last accessed January 6th 2020).

³³ M. Del Pero, *‘Pressures and Restrictions Exercised by America in Italy’*, 435.

³⁴ Fondazione Gramsci, Archivio Partito Comunista Italiano, Fondo Direzione verbali, riunione della direzione del PCI, 10 giugno 1955; 26 giugno 1955.

³⁵ M. Galeazzi, *Togliatti e Tito. Tra identità nazionale e internazionalismo*, (Roma: Carocci, 2005), 38.

Non-Aligned Movement. The message, also to the USSR, was clear: Yugoslavia remained outside the blocs.

Destalinisation

The 20th CPSU Congress was one of the most ambiguity-laden events in the history of the Soviet bloc. Khrushchev's denunciation of the deviations of Stalinism triggered a series of undesirable effects in the satellite countries and took the other communist parties by surprise. Admittedly, there had been signs of discontinuity with the past already in 1953: the accusations levelled against Beria had also concerned part of Stalinist policy.³⁶ The figure of Stalin had never been questioned, however, and his body continued to rest beside Lenin's in Red Square. The leaders of world communism probably expected an adjustment of the course without a public 'patricide'.

The effects were more disruptive inside the bloc than outside, but they also had repercussions for the communist parties of the capitalist world. Khrushchev's message was clear: the Stalinist model of centralised co-ordination of the political strategies of communist movements had to come to an end, and, in April 1956, the Cominform was dissolved. Togliatti had to realise that an epoch was ending and that it was necessary to find a way to redefine the role of his party, in Italy and in the socialist world. On the domestic front, Khrushchev's acceptance of the parliamentary path to the realisation of socialism³⁷ offered him the possibility of solving the old problem of legitimisation to become a government force, something the PCI had always pursued. On the international front, the PCI had to reposition itself and find an identity, as it could no longer be the western outpost of Stalinism. It was then that Togliatti intensified his efforts toward Yugoslavia. In May, he officially visited Belgrade.

The meeting with Tito had a very different character from the one the Yugoslav leader had had a year earlier with Khrushchev. There was no 'Walk of Canossa' although the very gesture of the visit had the value of rectifying a move made eight years earlier. Rather, there were signs that a marriage of interests was about to take place. The Yugoslavs offered the PCI meetings, official visits to learn more about self-management, coveted holidays on the coast for members of the secretariat, but they also asked for a commitment of the Italian gov-

³⁶ A. Graziosi, *L'Urss dal trionfo al degrado. Storia dell'Unione Sovietica, 1945–1991*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2008), 15.

³⁷ N. Werth, *Storia dell'Unione Sovietica. Dall'impero russo alla Comunità degli Stati Indipendenti*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 1997), 468.

ernment to definitively recognise the 1954 agreements on the eastern border.³⁸ Togliatti, on the other hand, demanded, as a gesture of détente, the release of the Italian ‘cominformisti’ imprisoned in 1948. Tito did not declare this unacceptable, but stated that the liberation of the Italians had to take place gradually. In the end, Togliatti negotiated the return of seven prisoners. The balance was not negative for the PCI because, although dozens of prisoners still remained in Yugoslavia, the party had qualified as the main interlocutor of the LCY. This was demonstrated by an objection of the Italian government, which accused the Yugoslav regime of not having responded to official requests, but of having acquiesced to those of an opposition party.³⁹

But what exactly was Togliatti’s objective? David Sassoon, and more recently Alexander Höbel, have insisted that Togliatti had the ambition to make his party the reference point for communist organisations in the capitalist world.⁴⁰ Over time, this project matured, but it is difficult to understand how clear the idea was in the secretary’s mind in the aftermath of the 20th Congress of the CPSU, not least because it was not yet clear how far it could go. Before the Hungarian crisis, Togliatti personally experienced that things were not simple and the problems were far from trifling. In the late spring of 1956, in an interview with ‘Nuovi argomenti’, the secretary went so far as to envisage a socialist world without a single leader. He was immediately recalled by the Soviets and forced to correct his statement.⁴¹ The Hungarian crisis did the rest and, at the cost of a split in the Italian left and in his own party, Togliatti kept the PCI strictly on the side of the USSR. On that occasion, it became clear that the prospect of coordination between the communist parties of the western world was anything but easy. The leader of the French Communist Party accused the PCI of not being completely loyal to the USSR, having judged the first Soviet intervention ‘an error’ and the second ‘a necessity’.⁴²

The Hungarian crisis, however, created even more difficulties for the Yugoslavs, because the way events unfolded saw them involved in spite of them-

³⁸ S. Mišić, “Yugoslav Communists and the Communist Party of Italy 1945–1956,” In *Italy’s Balkan Strategies (19–20 century)*, ed. Vojislav Pavlović, (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2014), 291.

³⁹ S. Mišić, “Obnavljanje odnosa između Saveza komunista Jugoslavije i Komunističke partije Italije 1955–1956. godine,” (“The restoration of relations between the Union of Communists of Yugoslavia and the Communist Party of Italy 1955–1956”), *Tokovi istorije* 2, (2013), 121–145.

⁴⁰ D. Sassoon, *Togliatti e la via italiana al socialismo. Dal 1944 al 1964*, (Torino: Einaudi, 1980); A. Höbel, “Il Pci nella crisi del movimento comunista internazionale tra Pcus e Pcc (1960–1964),” *Studi Storici*, XLVI (2005).

⁴¹ A. Höbel, “Il Pci nella crisi del movimento comunista,” 517–518.

⁴² M. Galeazzi, *Togliatti e Tito*, 175.

selves. Tito had supported the Red Army's intervention but had also chosen to receive Imre Nagy, who expected political asylum, in the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest. The Yugoslavian leader was convinced that he could guarantee him safety and perhaps even a quiet life, albeit far from politics, and made requests to this effect to Khrushchev, who, however, flatly refused. Despite the safe conduct granted to him, Nagy was captured by the Soviet armed forces and later taken to Romania, where he was to be imprisoned. Tito watched in irritation and helplessness as the Soviet action irreparably undermined the on-going dialogue. The lack of delicacy with which Khrushchev had treated him probably showed that the Soviet leader had realised that the ambition to bring Yugoslavia back under Moscow's wing was doomed to failure. There would be no return to 1948, and a new phase of coldness began. Tito found himself isolated: on the one hand, he could no longer expect any flattery from Moscow, and on the other hand, his involvement in the Non-Aligned Movement had led him in those same days to challenge the capitalist powers at Suez, eliciting criticism from the West.⁴³ In the following two years, there were spats and rapprochements, provocations and dialogue, but at least relations at the state level never completely broke down. It would be the crisis in relations between the USSR and China that would be the 'lucky' circumstance that would make Tito a legitimate actor again.

Togliatti viewed the new round of coldness between Moscow and Belgrade with extreme caution. He did not, of course, disavow Khrushchev, but neither did he interrupt relations with the LCY; he continued to send delegations on visits to Yugoslavia and disregarded the voices of those who, like Pietro Ingrao or Mauro Scoccimarro, warned of the risks of maintaining good relations with the neighbouring country.⁴⁴ Admittedly, only Alfredo Reichlin was sent to the 1958 Congress of the League of Communists, after a long internal discussion⁴⁵, but in time, relations with Yugoslavia continued to consolidate⁴⁶, as demonstrated by the presence of a party delegation at an official visit of the Yugoslav Minister of Agriculture to Italy.⁴⁷ Togliatti kept a low profile during the official events. The developments in Hungary and the different positions taken in the socialist world did not prevent the continuation of the dialogue with Yugoslavia. After all, the PCI was becoming increasingly isolated within the Italian left and, after

⁴³ J. Prijavec, *Tito e i suoi compagni*, 352.

⁴⁴ Fondazione Gramsci, Archivio Partito Comunista Italiano, Fondo Direzione verbali, 25 ottobre 1956.

⁴⁵ Fondazione Gramsci, Archivio Partito Comunista Italiano, Fondo Direzione verbali, 8 aprile 1958.

⁴⁶ M. Galeazzi, *Togliatti e Tito*, 191.

⁴⁷ Fondazione Gramsci, Archivio Partito Comunista Italiano, Fondo Anni – Estero, telegramma 25 marzo 1959.

the crisis of 1956, when many intellectuals left the party condoned the action of the Soviet tanks, the idea of incorporating some aspects of the Yugoslav model seemed to allow it to argue more emphatically for an autonomous path to socialism. In 1959, the secretary went so far as to speak of the need to overcome the 'current split that rests on the division into two military and opposing blocs'.⁴⁸

The 1960s

At the turn of the decade, as mentioned, the breakdown in relations between the Soviet Union and China caused a chain reaction that had repercussions on Moscow's relations with Belgrade, which in turn paved the way for changes in the PCI's actions. The rupture, which took place between 1960 and 1961, had more to do with Mao's rigidity and Khrushchev's foreign policy improvisations⁴⁹ in that phase than with a real theoretical clash about the foundations of socialism, although later the disagreement was presented as the confrontation between a de-Stalinised country and one anchored in Stalinist orthodoxy. In any case, China claimed its 'ideological purity', accusing the USSR of revisionism. The Chinese question exploded at a time when Tito was particularly active within the Non-Aligned world. After a long tour of Africa, he convened the first conference of the Third Bloc in Belgrade, which followed the already mentioned Bandung Conference, with the ambition of being recognised as the leader of a group of countries whose economic and military potential could not be compared to that of the two superpowers, but whose demographic and territorial dimensions were so vast that they could not be considered irrelevant, if only because of the availability of strategic natural resources in some of the member states. At the same time, Tito was rebuilding his relations with the USSR: the new friendship was sealed by a visit of the Yugoslav president in 1962. In the same months, a fierce power struggle was taking place within the League, which led first to a new marginalisation of the reformist (and anti-Soviet) Kardelj, then to a return of the party to positions more inclined to reform and to the torpedoing of the orthodox (and pro-Soviet) Ranković. Tito's seemingly schizophrenic oscillations were probably the result of his difficulties in moving in a rapidly changing international context (these were the years of the transition from Eisenhower to Kennedy, of the Berlin crisis, of the Cuba crisis) and of the simultaneous need to strengthen his control over the party while the most prominent exponents (Kardelj and Ranković) were trying to ensure they would succeed him.⁵⁰ The

⁴⁸ Fondazione Gramsci, Archivio Partito Comunista Italiano, Fondo Anni – Estero, telegramma 25 marzo 1959.

⁴⁹ A. Graziosi, *L'Urss dal trionfo al degrado*, 241–242.

⁵⁰ J. Prijavec, *Tito e i suoi compagni*, 377–379.

acceptance of the Moscow rapprochement was the result of both processes: in part, it facilitated the marginalisation of the reformists within, and in part it seemed useful at a time when the USA appeared active and threatening on the international stage, ready to intervene whenever they perceived a threat.

The fact that Tito moved between non-alignment and rapprochement with Moscow made him the perfect interlocutor for Togliatti, who in those years increasingly explicitly expressed the idea of 'doing as in Yugoslavia.' The PCI secretary needed a more reassuring model than the Soviet one to use as an identity card in Italy, where the centre-left was emerging and his party was in danger of being increasingly marginalised. That is why he emphatically endorsed the accusations against the Chinese,⁵¹ responsible for still espousing Stalinism; he declared admiration and interest in the Non-Aligned Movement; he lost no opportunity to celebrate the peaceful outcome of conflicts. In his later years, Togliatti's trips to Belgrade were frequent, so much so that the foreign press even spoke of an alleged desire on the part of the PCI to 'bypass Moscow'. This was probably not the case: simply because Moscow allowed him to do so, Togliatti could afford to show himself a friend of Tito and a supporter of his model of socialism.⁵²

Concluding remarks

When Togliatti died in August 1964, almost twenty years had passed since the end of the Second World War. Many things had changed: Italy was at the height of its economic boom and was led by a government that included the PCI's former allies, the socialists; Yugoslavia had become the leading country of the Non-Aligned Movement; it was not an economic power, but was experiencing a decade of cultural flourishing; the Soviet Union was no longer Stalinist, even though Stalin's successor, Khrushchev, was to be deposed a few months later.

Italy and Yugoslavia, however, remained two peripheral countries. The former had always remained in the western bloc. The second had made a complicated journey from the Soviet sphere of influence to equidistance from the superpowers to non-alignment, but by the 1960s, its international political gravitas was waning, while internal disputes were coming to a head.

⁵¹ Archives of Yugoslavia, 507 Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Tito's letter to Togliatti, November 25th 1962.

⁵² "The Times", 16 gennaio 1964, in Fondazione Gramsci, Archivio Partito Comunista Italiano, fondo Anni – Estero, Comunicazione delle delegazioni dei Comitati Centrali del PCI e della LCJ sugli incontri del 15–21 gennaio 1964; "The Guardian", 16 gennaio 1964, in Fondazione Gramsci, Archivio Partito Comunista Italiano, fondo Anni – Estero, Comunicazione delle delegazioni dei Comitati Centrali del PCI e della LCJ sugli incontri del 15–21 gennaio 1964.

In these two decades, the PCI had gone from participating in the government to being the only left-wing political organisation to remain outside the executive. Despite this, its ideological profile, at least officially, had become increasingly detached from orthodox Stalinism. Tito's LCY was under the control of its secretary, who, however, had spent those years trying to keep the balance between the different national and ideological orientations within it, and when necessary to exclude representatives of these currents.

It was all these complex dynamics, international, within the socialist bloc, within Italy and Yugoslavia, and within the PCI and LCY, that shaped the relations between Togliatti and Tito. The position of the USSR, undoubtedly, was important. Togliatti was never in a position to disregard it and even when he seemed freer to follow his 'national path', it was because Moscow allowed him to do so. Tito had to reckon with the Soviets, whose hostility drove him to seek space and support elsewhere: with the West first and later as leader of a new bloc. The two leaders thus often found themselves sharing the same limitations and concerns. Nevertheless, their profiles appear very different.

Togliatti had firmly adhered to Stalinism, even though he was aware that, in the post-war context, his party could only seek legitimacy and space within the institutions if it did not want to be excluded and become an anti-system force. Stalin, on the other hand, did not want this and consequently did not prevent the secretary from continuing dialogue with the other political parties. Togliatti, in any case, adapted to Moscow's line trying to make it appear as his own, sometimes with more embarrassment (as in the case of the Trieste question), sometimes seizing opportunities (as in the early 1960s). At that time, political spaces opened up that Togliatti took advantage of to push more explicitly in the direction of the national path to socialism.

Tito played his game on two levels: the internal and the international. Internally he had much more serious problems than his Italian counterpart, having to hold together a heterogeneous state in which the national components did not always move in tune with the centre and having to deal in the secretariat with adversaries of the highest calibre, such as Djilas, or very deeply rooted in one part of the territory, such as Kardelj. Internationally, he was committed to preventing his country from becoming isolated. Stalin's excommunication and Tito's long-standing friendship with the British had made things easier for him, but when Khrushchev initiated the phase of peaceful coexistence, he sought new ways not to condemn Yugoslavia to irrelevance. He found a way out in the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement. Tito was probably aware that this 'third bloc' could not aspire to compete with the other two, and perhaps this was not even his goal. His aspiration was rather to have a 'resource package' with which to negotiate with the Soviets and possibly with the West. Until the national

question exploded within his country and shortly afterwards the phase of real détente began, he played a winning hand.

Relations between the leaders of the two most important communist parties in the Adriatic were mainly conditioned by the changing international and domestic framework, and the phases of rapprochement and coolness depended more on this than on any real interest in collaborating or convinced ideological opposition.

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