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The Rise and Fall of Communist Parties in France and Italy

Entangled Historical Approaches

Marco Di Maggio

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Marco Di Maggio
Department of History Anthropology Religions, Performing
Arts
Sapienza University of Rome
Rome, Italy

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To Gino, my grandfather

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PREFACE

On the occasion of the centennial of the foundation of the French Communist Party (PCF, December 30, 1920) and that of the Italian Communist Party (PCI, January 21, 1921), this book is an attempt at synthesis, re-elaboration, and adaptation for an international readership of research conducted by the author over the last decade.¹

Because of the ideological and political controversy which has accompanied it, the history of communism as a scientific discipline has long been characterized by a dualism in which one side emphasizes national specificities and the other focuses on the international dimension represented by each party's link with the Soviet Union. Regarding communism in Italy and France, the notion of vertical dependence, according to which communism is a global phenomenon with a Soviet center, is at the origin of the tendency to assign a preponderant significance to the link between the Western parties, the Soviet Union, and the countries of the Socialist bloc. This reading, in addition to emphasizing material and political dependence on the Soviet center, looks at the communist

¹M. Di Maggio, *Les Intellectuels et la stratégie communiste. Une crise d'Hégémonie (1958–1981)*, Paris: Les Editions Sociales, 2013; Ibid., *Alla ricerca della Terza Via al Socialismo. I Pci italiano e francese nella crisi del comunismo (1964–1984)*, Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2014; Ibid., (Editor), *Sfumature di rosso. La Rivoluzione russa nella Politica italiana del Novecento*, Torino: Accademia University Press-Biblioteca di Historia Magistra, 2017; Ibid., *Fra socialdemocrazie e Perestrojka. Le relazioni internazionali del Pci di Alessandro Natta (1984–1988)*, in “Studi Storici”, 1/2020, 193–227.

political culture as a doctrinal universe that allows the Western communist parties to set themselves up as the opposition in the national system. Furthermore, the absolutization of the relationship of dependence on the Soviet center has led some scholars to insert communist parties such as the Italian and French within the group of totalitarian movements, accusing them, for example, of having an instrumental relationship with democracy and anti-fascism.

On the other hand, the desire to prioritize the national dimension in the history of the communist parties has been expressed both in the choice of subjects for study as well as in methodological orientations, with the publication of numerous works on training and rootedness in the national social and political fabric as well as the contribution made by the Western communists to the development of democracy and the welfare state. This type of approach, especially in countries like Italy and France, where communism had a mass dimension, has in many cases shown a tendency to relativize, if not minimize, the international and global dimension of the communist phenomenon, in some cases going as far as downplaying the originally revolutionary and anti-system matrix of these parties and their evolution during the twentieth century.²

Finally, some scholars in the area of comparative history have stressed the differences between the PCI and the PCF, emphasizing a bifurcation in their evolution starting at the end of the 1950s.³ This type of scheme has also fed a political-ideological debate related to the events in the Italian and French left-wing after 1968.

For this work the methodological approach of entangled history was adopted, which tends to surpass the comparative methodology.⁴ In a

²For a reflection on trends in the historiography of Italian and French communism see M. Di Maggio, G. Sorgonà, *Nazionale e internazionale. Itinerari della storiografia sul comunismo italiano e francese*, in “Historia Magistra”, n. 16, 2014, 101–115.

³D. Blackmer and S. Tarrow (Editors), *Communism in Italy and France*, Princeton, Princeton Legacy Press, 1977; B. Groppo and G. Riccabboni (Editors), *La sinistra e il 1956 in Italia e Francia*, Padova, Liviana 1987; M. Lazar, *Maisons rouges. Les Partis communistes français et italien de la Libération à nos jours*, Paris, Perrin, 2002; S. Cruciani, *L'Europa delle sinistre. La nascita del mercato comune europeo attraverso i casi francese e italiano (1955–1957)*, Roma, Carocci, 2007; M. Bracke, *Which Socialism, Whose Detente? West European Communism and the Czechoslovak Crisis of 1968*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007.

⁴M. Werner, B. Zimmermann, *Penser l'histoire croisée: entre empirie et réflexivité* in “Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales”, 2, 2003, 7.

study of the political history of ideas and the history of political movements such as this, if a comparative approach seeks to analyze different political phenomena in their national dimension, highlighting differences and similarities, the entangled historical approach—which some have tried, in turn, to insert into the dimension of global history—presupposes a more solid common ground, determined by a relationship of interdependence between national and international which allows the reconstruction of relationships, reciprocal influences, exchanges, and the circulation of ideas and analysis.⁵ The entangled history approach makes it possible, for example, to highlight the way in which the positions of the Italian communists, which had been defined as their reformist attitude within the communist movement,⁶ contribute to the growing contradictions and troubles in the PCF; or how the French party limits, and in some cases determines the failure of efforts at reforming communism promoted by the PCI, contributing to the Italian party's international isolation, and pushing it to intensify relations with social-democracy.

From a general point of view, the analysis and historical reconstruction contained in the following pages is developed along two main lines: the first focuses on the ways in which the leadership of the two communist parties of mass dimensions in the Western world view the social economic and cultural changes in their own countries, the evolution of the bipolar and European world, and above all the process of fragmentation and progressive crisis that affects the international Communist movement from the late 1950s until the collapse of the USSR. The second line is the analysis of some elements of these parties' theoretical-ideological production, which is the work of top politicians as well as intellectuals who are individually placed at various levels of the leadership.

⁵Regarding the new historiographical approaches to the history of communism, see: S. Wolikow, *Problèmes méthodologiques et perspectives historiographiques de l'histoire comparée du communisme* in “Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'Histoire critique”, n. 112–113, July–December 2010, 19–24; S. Pons, S. Smith (Editors), *The Cambridge History of Communism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017; A. Hobel, *Il comunismo internazionale nella prospettiva della storia globale*, in “Ricerche di storia politica”, 1, 2020, 43–57.

⁶Pons, M. Di Donato, *Reform Communism*, in Pons, S. Smith (Editors), *The Cambridge History of Communism*, vol. III, J. Furs, Pons, M. Selden (Editors), *Endgames? Late Communism in Global Perspective: 1968 to the Present*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017, 190–202.

In this way an effort was made to keep the plane of political history and that of ideological history together, inserting them into the relationship of interdependence between national and international. This relationship is not only ideological-cultural in nature, but is also the result of a spatial-temporal condition (in our case that of the evolution of Western European society and political systems) in which the national particularity of Italian and French communism, and their character as movement parties rather than party-states in power, fits into the specificity of Western Europe and establishes a dialectical relationship with the policies of the other parties and the Socialist states. This relationship unfolds in the context of the evolution of the Communist movement as a global phenomenon that is not reducible solely to the history of the Soviet center, and whose ideological heritage cannot be reduced only to the doctrinal corpus of Marxism-Leninism.⁷

In 1966, Eric Hobsbawm, in a review of *Lire la Capital* by Louis Althusser, identifies four main trends in the Marxist rethinking begun in 1956: the first consisted of a sort of “archaeological operation” aimed at tracing the theoretical stratifications accumulated on the original thought of Marx; the second tried to identify and to follow the various original theoretical strands produced on the basis of Marxism; the third began to account for the different intellectual developments that were external to Marxism, which had been excluded during the Stalinist period; the fourth, finally, was expressed in the desire for a return to analysis of the real world after two decades in which “the official interpretations had become increasingly detached from reality”.⁸ All the communist parties and the theoretical and intellectual debates which take place within them are impacted, in different forms and degrees, by the breakdown of ideological unity, and are traversed by these four currents.

This book inquires into the link between the theoretical problems created by the end of ideological monolithism and the big strategic questions which face the two major Communist parties of the capitalist world starting with the 20th Congress of the CPSU. The way in which these questions develop over three decades is examined, as is the way this link

⁷A. Agosti, *Ascesa e declino del comunismo europeo*, in P. Bairoch, E. J. Hobsbawm (Editors), *Storia d'Europa*, V, Torino, Einaudi, 1996, 1057; M. Di Maggio (Editor), *Histoires croisées du communisme italien et français*, special issue of “Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique”, n. 112–113, July–December, 2010.

⁸Hobsbawm, *I Rivoluzionari*, Torino, Einaudi, 175.

is structured and evolves within the two parties operating in their specific national and the Western European context, which find themselves in a very particular position in the international communist movement.

To understand this particularity it is worth summarizing some long-standing aspects which, grafted on to the national contest, characterized the political culture of the Italian and French Communists. Some of these elements, and their evolution in the period 1956–1991, will be at the center of our analysis.

In a troubled and contradictory journey that began in the early 1930s, the politics of popular fronts allows some national communisms to get out of the bottlenecks and isolation into which they had slipped in the previous decade, which saw Stalin's rise to the leadership of the USSR and the international communist movement. With the 7th Comintern Congress in August 1935, anti-fascism starts to become the main road for the nationalization of some communist parties.⁹

In the era of the French popular front, the PCF represents an experience of nationalization of communism which is partially alternative to that of the German communism of the preceding decade.¹⁰ Along with the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939, the French experience profoundly influences the political culture of the leadership of the Italian Communist Party.

Therefore, between the 1930s and 1940s, frontism becomes a central element in the political culture of Western European communism. The most important communist parties of this region of the world begin to adopt new cultures and language, and discover a source of national legitimization which up to that time had been rejected and denigrated; the defense of democracy and the expansion of social and political rights, to be won through struggles for demands carried out in the context of the bourgeois parliamentary institutions, begin to assume great importance in the strategic debate of the Western European communist parties. Set out this way, frontism, in its varying national declinations, becomes an element which differentiates the Western communisms from other communisms: from those in the colonial and Asian countries, which are structured around the question of nation building and accelerated modernization,

⁹Wolikow, *L'Internazionale comunista. Il Comintern e il sogno infranto del partito mondiale della rivoluzione (1919–1943)*, Roma, Carocci, 2016, 127–154.

¹⁰Ibid., 87; R. Martelli, J. Vigreux, Wolikow, *Le Parti Rouge. Une Histoire du Pcf (1920–2020)*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2020, 51–74.

and from those of the socialist parties in power in post-war Western Europe. The latter, following the Soviet model, place the construction of an authoritarian State at the center of the socialist project and a system of economic, political, and military relations gravitating around the USSR.

In the period that runs from 1917 to the beginning of the Cold War, the terms of the relationship between the Soviet center and the other communist parties are defined through the primacy of the USSR, the role played by the Communists in the anti-colonial revolutions of vast regions of Asia, and the capacity of some European parties to win primacy in the anti-fascist struggle and encourage the access of large sectors of the popular classes to the national political life. However, from 1947 the Soviet leadership concentrates on consolidating its internal and external empire, and Soviet policy during the Cold War appears to be inspired by a closed and defensive conception, where the reference to global revolution takes on an essentially ideological character, functional to legitimize and support the policy of power. In this context, any effort to expand the margins of autonomy of each party raises the issue of reconfiguring the internal balances in the communist movement, and of a more or less implicit questioning of the primacy of the USSR within the international communist movement.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, when the socialist camp ends up occupying large regions of the world, the Communist movement does not seem to have a hegemonic projection which goes beyond the ideological dimension and the foreign policy of the Socialist states. Faced with the complexity and growing heterogeneity of the postwar world, and the primacy of the state element, represented by the centrality of the interests of the power policy of the USSR, it becomes increasingly difficult to develop and deploy a strategic project that holds the prospect of global revolution together with the specificity of national ways to socialism, the latter of which continue to impose themselves in the objective reality of the various geographical contexts. Especially from the second half of the 1950s, when the global revolutionary movement regains vigor with the national liberation struggles in Asia and the southern hemisphere, the Soviet Union supports these movements in order to use them for the consolidation of its own power policy. In this phase the Socialist

camp is impacted by decolonization and by the movements which arise in advanced capitalist countries, and finds itself increasingly divided.¹¹

Alongside the progressive economic and social decay of the USSR, brought to light by historiography after the opening of the archives,¹² from the second half of the 1950s communism as a global phenomenon is affected by a process of political, cultural, and symbolic erosion. This process precedes and accelerates the crisis of Soviet socialism as a political and social system, as well as the ability of the communist parties that are not in power to represent, in their individual national contexts, the interests of the popular classes and to build hegemony on the new forms of social conflict.

As mentioned, from the mid-1930s anti-fascism and frontism became the tools, for the PCF as well as the PCI, for guiding the process of the nationalization of the popular masses in their respective countries.¹³ However, the development of this model is not free from contradictions; in the first place, the only partial transformation of the policy of popular fronts—also solely on the level of theory and political culture—from a defensive strategy useful for opposing fascism to a hegemonic project for socialist revolution in advanced capitalist countries, is once again a result of the centrality of the interests of the Soviet state. This primacy manifests itself on various occasions: for example, in the criticisms aimed at the PCF regarding its desire to enter the government of the Socialist Léon Blum in 1936, but above all in the German-Soviet pact of August 1939, which required all of the communist parties to put aside anti-fascism.¹⁴

The frontist paradigm begins to be recovered only two years later, with the Nazi-fascist aggression against the Soviet Union in June 1941. Despite this, the return to anti-fascism does not fail to show its fragility,

¹¹ Pons, *The Global Revolution. A History of International Communism (1917–1991)*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, 231–254.

¹² N. Werth, *Storia della Russia nel Novecento*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000; M. Lewin, *Le siècle soviétique*, Paris, Fayard 2003; A. Graziosi, *L'URSS dal trionfo al degrado. Storia dell'Unione sovietica, 1945–1991*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2008.

¹³ G. Caredda, *Il Fronte popolare in Francia (1934–1938)*, Torino, Einaudi, 1977; A. Agosti (Editor), *La stagione dei fronti popolari*, Bologna, Cappelli, 1987; F. De Felice (Editor), *Antifascismi e resistenze*, Annali della Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Roma, 1997; Wolikow, A. Ruget (Editors), *Antifascisme et Nation. Les gauches européennes au temps du Front populaire*, Dijon, Presses Universitaires de Dijon, 1997.

¹⁴ Wolikow, *L'Internazionale comunista*, 170–205.

and its instrumentality in the political culture of the Soviet leadership.¹⁵ Nonetheless, at the end of the Second World War the anti-fascist and frontist paradigm is placed at the center of the Western European communist parties' identity and their conception of the transition to socialism. This increases their specificity within the international communist movement, and is one of the essential conditions for the hegemony of these parties within the national left-wing.

For the Western parties, with the end of the Second World War and the aftermath of the national resistances, the question begins to be raised, often in implicit, partial, and contradictory forms, of a way to socialism that is distinct from that followed in the Soviet Union, and from the type being built in the popular democracies of Eastern Europe and Asia.¹⁶

In Western Europe, where the communist parties have mass dimensions, they assume a particular position within the society and national political systems; that of anti-system parties - of organizations committed to the radical transformation of the economic and social order even beyond the confines of the nation-state—and that of subjects which at the same time bring the demands of the social conflicts back within the institutions of representative democracy, and through this role encourage the participation of the popular masses in political life. This dual position, which marks the nature of the Italian and French parties, characterizes their specificity in the context of the communist phenomenon as a whole.

This position, and its determinations and representations on the plane of political culture and ideology, evolves in the context of the Cold War. Reflection on national ways becomes severely limited (the case of the PCI¹⁷) or set aside (the case of the PCF¹⁸) with the birth of Cominform in 1947. It begins returning to importance with the end of the 1950s, de-Stalinization, the repression of the Hungarian revolt, the end of the unity of the international communist movement provoked by the Sino-Soviet split, the intensification of the decolonization process, international

¹⁵ Pons, *The Global Revolution*, 102–114.

¹⁶ Pons, *L'Urss, il Pci nel sistema politico della guerra fredda*, in R. Gualtieri (Editor), *Il Pci nell'Italia repubblicana*, Roma, Carocci, 2001, 3–46.

¹⁷ G. Fiocco, *Togliatti, il realismo della politica: una biografia*, Roma, Carocci, 2018, 207–214.

¹⁸ Martelli, Vigreux, Wolikow, *Le Parti Rouge*, 120–124.

détente, and the socio-cultural changes that impact Western society in the first half of the Golden age.

The goal of this book is thus to analyze the evolution of the political cultures of Italian and French communism in the phase which opens with the failure of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization and the beginning of international détente, and concludes with the collapse of real socialism and the end of twentieth century communism.

Between the late 1950s and the end of the 1980s, the Italian and French Communist parties pass from exercising great influence on their respective national political contexts (an influence which reached its apex in the mid-1970s) to a condition of growing marginality. During the 1980s this condition, in different forms and time frames, reveals these parties' inability to halt the decline of their political and cultural influence over the popular classes.

The evolution of the political culture of the two parties will be considered as the theoretical-doctrinal universe which regulates the functioning of the two organizations, guarantees the legitimacy of their leadership, structures the action of the two parties in the national social and political space, and defines their international action. The political discourse, both in its public representation and its internal structuring, will be analyzed as a strategic project based on the horizon of social and political transformation. This element, albeit in differing national and temporal declinations, structures the identity and the very nature of the communist parties. As such, it allows us to identify the common thread in their political cultures, and to look, from the perspective of the political history of ideas, at the crisis of some of the cultural and political forms of the twentieth century workers' movement, which, in the last two decades of the 1900s, characterized the end of the Golden Age and the affirmation of neoliberal hegemony.

Rome, Italy

Marco Di Maggio

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Western Communist Parties and the Crisis of International Communist Movement

1.1 THE INTERNATIONALISM OF THE WESTERN COMMUNIST PARTIES IN THE 1960S

With the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of Soviet Union CPSU, the monolithic unity of communism founded on loyalty to the Soviet Union begins to rupture, and a troubled search for new balances begins. This process, which involves multiple and contradictory dynamics, brings about the preponderant and chaotic re-emergence of the national question in the transition to socialism.¹ The loss of symbolic capital represented by the myth of Stalin and the homeland of socialism leads to the need for a new legitimization for the Communist movement. The contradictory responses of the Communist Parties of Western Europe, bulwarks of communism in the capitalist world, to the crisis of Stalinism allow us to perceive divergent evolutions behind the Cold War unity.²

Togliatti and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) Directorate see in Khrushchev's de-Stalinization and in the conflict between the Soviets and

¹S. Pons, *The Global Revolution: A History of International Communism (1917–1991)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 206–217.

²B. Groppo and G. Riccabboni (Editors), *La sinistra e il 1956 in Italia e Francia*. Padova: Liviana 1987, 2.

the Chinese that erupts at the beginning of the 1960s, not only the end of Cold War monolithism but also a crisis of perspective for the global Communist movement, which lacks alternatives to the Soviet model of transition to socialism. So, the contradictions in the Communist movement, which have accumulated since the Second World War, which are rooted in the organizational structure and political culture built by Stalin and the Soviet leadership from the end of the 1920s, push the PCI to promote a revision of internationalism. Starting at the end of the 1950s, Togliatti raises the issue of elaborating a new strategy for the Communist movement. In the new scenario, open to peaceful coexistence and the processes of de-colonialization, the Italian Secretary would like the Soviet Union and the Western communist parties establish a special relationship with national liberation movements, with the goal of rebuilding the relationship between the Communist movement and the global revolutionary movement.³ According to Togliatti, a polycentric reorganization of the Communist movement, based on the respect of autonomies and on their own specificities, could have contained the conflict between Moscow and Beijing, whereas communist action in the capitalist countries should have been built starting from the strategic convergence of the two big Western communist parties, the Italian and the French. The PCI Secretary understands the importance of collaboration with non-communist left-wing forces, and that of building a totally autonomous and privileged relationship of Western Communists with the national liberation movements in the Western European scenario. In fact, the priority which Togliatti attributed to the European dimension and to the relationship with the liberation movements would have led to the renewal of the PCI's political culture and would have also supported a greater emancipation of Western communist parties' strategy from Soviet policy interests.⁴

The French Communist Party (PCF) takes the opposite position: after the revelations of the 20th Congress, the French leadership, led by Maurice Thorez, assumes a reticent attitude: in 1956–1957, they consider de-Stalinization to be a temporary phenomenon and place their bet on Soviet opponents to Khrushchev, more or less implicitly converging with the criticisms expressed by the Chinese Communists.

³C. Spagnolo, *Sul Memoriale di Yalta. Togliatti e la crisi del movimento comunista internazionale (1956–1964)*. Rome: Carocci, 2007, 30.

⁴A. Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti*. Torino: Utet, 1996, 546; G. Fiocco, *Togliatti, il realismo della politica: una biografia*. Roma: Carocci, 2018, 298–302.

In November of 1957, the international meeting of the Communist Party is held in Moscow, where, thanks to the agreement between the Soviets and the Chinese, a document is approved condemning the Yugoslavs and identifying revisionism as the main threat to the unity of the movement. During the meeting, Jacques Duclos, who is number two at the PCF, vehemently criticizes an amendment proposed by the PCI requesting that explicit recognition of the parties' autonomy be inserted in the final document. From the podium, Duclos attacks the PCI's polycentrism and implicitly accuses Togliatti of revisionism.

The controversy with the Italian party confirms the PCF's refusal, in the period 1957–1959, to begin an analysis of Stalinism and its origins, as the leadership wants to avoid any question about the consequences of Stalinism on the workings of the French party. Thus, from 1956 to 1959, the PCF proves to be incapable of producing a real theoretical and political elaboration to fill the void caused by the crisis of the political-organizational assets and ideological unity of the Communist movement.

This clear closure can be explained by several interconnected interpretive keys: the political culture of the party and its leadership, which oscillates between the reactivation of the Popular Front scheme and the reaffirmation of the iron bond with Socialist countries within the international Communist movement, interacts with the context in which the Communist Party operates in France and in the world in the 1950s.

The upheavals affecting the international Communist movement are perceived by the French leadership, in fact, as a dangerous disturbance. The sequence of events that include the Suez crisis, the escalation of the Algerian conflict, and the anti-communist wave that follows the repression of the Hungarian revolt drives the leadership and the base of the French party to close ranks in the face of the virulence of the anti-communist campaign. Between 1956 and 1958, the PCF finds itself in a condition of paralysis, marked by tactical vacillations and uncertainties with respect to the international situation as well as the internal political context. The return of De Gaulle thus brings about a further entrenchment of the Communist Party, which, starting with the referendum of 1958, denounces the influence of fascism in French political life. This attitude, which is born from a significant theoretical and strategic inadequacy, which leads the party to “consider any novelty as a repetition of something that happened in the past,” is behind the dramatic defeat in the elections of 1958. That defeat represents a greater trauma than what

has been called “the shock of the 20th Congress.”⁵ As we will see, this serious electoral defeat necessitates a change of the political line, which Maurice Thorez and the leadership address by starting a process of slow and gradual renewal.

Between 1961 and 1964, Togliatti still tries to involve the French in an attempt to avert the convocation of a new global conference of communist parties aimed at promulgating the official condemnation of the Chinese positions. In the meantime, the Chinese have opened a violent dispute with Khrushchev. But the PCF and Thorez resist the pressure from the Italian Secretary, entrenching themselves behind loyalty to the principles of proletarian internationalism.⁶ The French, who reacted badly to the PCI’s support for the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN), interpret the polycentrism of the Italians as a pretext for taking over leadership of the Western Communist movement and insist on asking the Soviets to condemn the Italian party’s revisionism.⁷

Resolving the tensions and suspicions between the two communist parties will require the evolution of the Soviet political picture. In a speech given in Moscow on September 28, 1964, during the centennial celebration of the First International, Boris Ponomarev calls for building large workers’ coalitions in the capitalist countries and identifies the fight for peace and against the monopolistic international oligarchy as the primary objective of the Communist movement, in which “there is no longer ground for a centralized organization.” Faced with the fragmentation of the movement, the USSR appears inclined to recognize greater national autonomy for the Western communist parties.⁸

Shortly afterward there is a sudden change in the top leadership of the USSR. The immediate reaction of the PCI and the PCF to Khrushchev’s

⁵R. Martelli, *1956 communiste. Le glas d’une espérance*. Paris: La Dispute, 2007.

⁶M. Di Maggio, *Il partito comunista francese il movimento comunista e i fondamenti della “via francese al socialismo” (1961–1974)*, in “Studi Storici”, n. 4, October–December 2007, 1091–1118.

⁷Archives Départementales de la Seine Saint Denis, Fonds du Parti Communiste français (from here APCF), Fonds Wadeck Rochet (from here FWR), *Rencontre PCF-PCUS à Moscou le 30 mars 1963*, in the process of being cataloged at the time of consultation.

⁸Fondazione Gramsci, Archivi del Partito Comunista Italiano (from here APCI), Estero, URSS, *Discorso di Ponomarev alle celebrazioni della I Internazionale (Mosca, 28/9/1964)*, mf. 520, 2693–2695.

removal on October 15, 1964, is essentially the same: the PCI Directorate and the PCF Political Bureau show strong concern about the news coming out of Moscow. They fear, more than the attacks from the anti-communist press, that the new leadership under Kosyghin and Brezhnev will repudiate the process of de-Stalinization, setting aside the principle of peaceful coexistence and realigning closer to the positions of the Chinese. This would seriously impede the joint strategy pursued by the two Western communist parties at the national level. Both decide to send delegations to Moscow to ask for further explanation.⁹

In an atmosphere of great anxiety, the PCI leadership discusses the most suitable form for communicating the news of Khrushchev's removal to the base. With the exception of Umberto Terracini, who demands that a clear negative opinion be expressed, all the members of the Directorate agree on the advisability of presenting a description of the events which excludes criticism, reassures the militants, and at the same time communicates the seriousness of the moment. Given the uncertainty of the situation and the scarcity of information, the Italian leaders fear that there will be a wave of arrests in the Soviet Union that will interrupt the process of de-Stalinization.¹⁰

The failure of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization represents a further step in the Soviet model's loss of strength. Furthermore, when the dispute between the CPSU and the CPC becomes a conflict between states, the chances of success for hypotheses of regionalization are further reduced: that of Togliatti, who sought to exploit the spaces opened by Khrushchev's reforms, but also that of Mao, which aims to influence the strategy of the other CPs and of Third World countries. This trend is already recognizable at the beginning of 1965, at the preparatory meeting for the international conference of CPs, which is held in Moscow on March 2 and 3.

For the PCF, the meeting is an occasion to take stock of foreign policy: during the gathering of February 22, the Political Bureau confirms its loyalty to "the fundamental analyses" of the CP conference of 1960, in particular regarding peaceful coexistence. Recalling theories developed in the last period of Communist movement unity, the French want to

⁹APCF, Bureau Politique (from here BP), meeting of October 15, 1964; APCI, Direzione, meeting of October 15, 1964, mf. 28, 864-877.

¹⁰APCI, Direzione, meeting of October 15, 1964, mf. 28, 864-877.

prevent a return to the Cold War. At the same time, though, they reaffirm a monolithic conception of internationalism now outdated by the facts.

The meeting held in the Soviet capital, however, forces the PCF to moderate its intransigence. In fact, the meeting, originally “preparatory” for the international conference, becomes “consultative”: the CP world conference is therefore postponed indefinitely, demonstrating how, confronted with the fragmentation of the Communist movement and the demands for autonomy raised from many sides, the Soviet leadership is forced to limit its prerogatives and to set aside its design for rebuilding the ideological unity of the movement around the condemnation of Chinese positions.

The PCI approves of this outcome, despite the perpetual “trouble that the other parties have understanding our positions.” In the report on the meeting in Moscow, Enrico Berlinguer underlines how the circumstances require “asserting our internationalist commitment and developing relationships with the parties.”¹¹ The determination of the Italians was therefore decisive in wrecking the last Soviet attempt to unify the Communist movement on the basis of old ideological schemes. From this moment on, the Soviets concede wider margins of initiative to the CPs that operate outside the Socialist bloc in order to not further aggravate the fragmentation of the movement.

Regarding the PCF, upon the return of the delegation from Moscow, the Political Bureau changes the position it took the week before: the French now recognize that “bilateral and multilateral meetings between Communist parties regarding specific problems can have a useful role,” even if it is necessary “to be vigilant that they do not result in the formation of regional centers.” The possibility is also raised of a debate between parties concerning issues of a theoretical nature, provided that it is well organized and that “responsible militants” participate.¹²

It is significant that figuring among the events that inaugurate the French party’s new course is a meeting between Waldeck Rochet and Luigi Longo, scheduled for May 24 and 25 in Geneva. The atmosphere which hangs over the Franco-Italian summit in Geneva is captured

¹¹ APCI, Direzione, meeting of March 2, 1965, mf. 29, 581–590; *Ibid.*, meeting of March 8, 1965, mf. 29, 608–623.

¹² APCF, BP, meeting of March 3, 1965.

perfectly by two documents from mid-March: a memo by Eugenio Peggio, who is in charge of the economic section of the PCI, and a letter in which the PCF officially requests the convocation of a conference of the European CPs about security.

In the memo addressed to his party Secretary, Peggio reports on a meeting held in Paris on March 5 related to the launch of a joint project on the European Common Market and monopolistic concentration, which should have also involved the CPs of Belgium and Holland. Peggio is dissatisfied with the poor results produced by the meeting, due to the uncooperative attitudes of the French and the Dutch, who are opposed to the formation of a study group on the European Economic Community (EEC), fearing that this could represent “a step in the direction of forming permanent organizations” on the continental European scale.¹³

This does negate the fact that the PCF tries nonetheless to promote joint initiatives based on its own schemes: on March 16 a letter signed by Rochet hopes for the convocation of a meeting of the Communist parties of capitalist Europe to address the issue of the Atlantic nuclear arsenal, support for the Vietnamese people and solidarity with Spanish democrats.¹⁴ In order not to leave the initiative to the PCI, the French thus aim for collaboration among the European CPs on a platform of opposition to imperialism that is complementary to Soviet foreign policy and that carefully avoids opening areas for debate, even only on specific problems.

Faced with the intransigence of the French, the PCI emphasizes its own diplomatic stance; this is demonstrated by the care with which Longo prepares the meeting with Rochet, striving to mitigate the misunderstandings between the two parties. The Italian Secretary receives three reports on the subject between May 19 and 22: on the joint action in the EEC (once again drawn up by Peggio), on relations between the CGIL and the CGT, and on relations between the *Istituto Gramsci* and the PCF.

¹³APCI, Estero, France, *Nota di Peggio alla segreteria del 11 marzo 1965*, mf. 527, 2417–2419.

¹⁴Ibid., *Lettre de Waldeck Rochet au Comité Central du Parti Communiste Italien du 16 mars 1965*, 2424.