

THE SPECTRAL FIGURE OF AMADEO BORDIGA

A Case Study in the Decline of Marxism  
in the West, 1912-26

John E. Chiaradia

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E A Tannenbaum*

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Dissertation Abstract

John E. Chiaradia

Dr. Edward R. Tannenbaum

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This is a study of the ideological and political activities of the founder of Italian Communism, Amadeo Bordiga, during the years between 1912-26, when he played a major role first within the Italian Socialist party and later in the leadership of the Italian Communist party. Following the victory of the Socialist left wing in 1912, Bordiga emerged as one of a number of ideologues seeking to make the party take more seriously its revolutionary goals. Well before 1914 he showed that he understood the conflict leading to war, and in 1915 he became the spokesman for the antiwar Socialist base.

Bordiga came to the fore of Socialist politics again in 1919, when the journal with which he was associated, Il Soviet, urged the Socialists to abstain from the national election and turn their energies to building soviets. Bordiga then led the left wing in abandoning the Socialist party to form the Communist party in 1921. A majority of the Communist membership continued to adhere to left-Communist

views, until the ranks were purged and dismembered by a faction formed in 1924 in the leadership of the party by Antonio Gramsci upon his return from Moscow.

The narrative is divided into seven chapters. The first reviews the contradictory appraisals of Bordiga found in various historiographies; emphasis is placed on the revival of interest in him appearing in Italian leftwing writings. Subsequent chapters look into the political background influencing the views of the young Bordiga, the policies pursued by the Communist party at the time of the Sinistra, that is, left, leadership, the conflicts between that leadership and the Third International, and the means used by Gramsci to break the resistance of the Sinistra base, thus neutralizing the loyalty to Bordiga. In the course of presenting Italian Communism in a new light, two findings are claimed: 1) that the contributions of Gramsci to the origins of Italian Communism were minor, and 2) that Bordiga was the outstanding Italian Marxist

during the years under review. The political eclipse of Bordiga was a major event in the decline of Marxism in the West, and was accompanied by the abandonment of a revolutionary perspective by the new Communist leadership headed by Palmiro Togliatti.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the years after 1945 it was still possible to find oneself in New York talking to Italian anti-Fascists, men of an older generation though largely of working-class background; some had been members of the young Italian Communist movement, of the Partito comunista d'Italia as it was known in the 1920's and 1930's. A few had even participated in the tumultuous Red Week of June, 1914. These men never mentioned Amadeo Bordiga and rarely spoke of Antonio Gramsci; they directed most of their remarks to politics of Palmiro Togliatti, indicating a deep disagreement with the tactics being used by the latter to bring Italy to socialism.

Their scepticism was puzzling and could be shrugged off as old thinking. Against a background of Soviet behavior marked by cruel and bizarre purges, the postwar political postures and speeches of Togliatti, with their careful analyses and reasoned pleas for immediate reform, were closely listened to in Italy and dutifully reported in The New York Times. Togliatti seemed the very embodiment of reason. It is not easy in the early 1970's to fully convey the moral stature of Togliatti in 1945, and the power of his appeal to worker and intellectual, Communist and non-Communist.

Now if Western man had been guided by the easy rationality of Second International Marxism, Togliatti would have

been a smashing success, and Western history a progression such as envisioned by mid-twentieth century American liberalism. A widely read commentator on Italian Fascism, Angelo Tasca, once summarized this optimistic, old fashioned Marxism as follows: "The masses more and more conscientious, the bourgeoisie more and more enlightened; the former patient, the latter resigned to the inevitable: joint executors to a world whose ends were desired and accepted."<sup>1</sup> With these words Tasca characterized the Marxist Weltanschauung of Filippo Turati, leader of the reformist wing of the Italian Socialist party before the rise of Fascism.

With time Togliatti sounded incongruously like an elder statesman of this earlier socialism. Now for Togliatti to mouth the platitudes of an adolescent socialism raised questions, since the communist movement of this century had developed as a reaction to the bankruptcy of these earlier beliefs. The problem deepened when Marxist considerations were introduced, for Marxism was an attempt to understand human history by centering attention on the paramount influence exercised by factors underlying class conflict, while justifying the need to break institutional obstacles, an act usually attended by violence and indicative of a new consciousness.

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<sup>1</sup>[Angelo Tasca] Angelo Rossi, The Rise of Italian Fascism (London: Methuen and Co., 1938), p. 72.



The Russian Revolution and Leninist thought had, initially at least, emphasized both the inevitability and desirability of revolutionary violence. For Togliatti to sound like a reformist was a paradox.

The inconsistencies of Italian Communism grew with the passing of the postwar years; there was the heavy reliance on electoral politics, the reluctance to press for a realistic analysis of Soviet and East European reality even after the magic baton of Soviet primacy had been snapped by the revelations of the 20th Party Congress, and its torpor and immobilism in the face of the crisis induced by increasing American intervention against revolution in the Third World. The party's conduct posed dilemmas only if posited against the assumption that Italian Communism in 1945 represented a revolutionary force. One easy way out of the problem was to conclude that Italian Communism had simply adjusted to the "soft living" of the postwar republic.

This study in the origins of the Italian Communist party soon revealed that my earlier views about the reasons for the party's behavior were not just simplistic but altogether wrong. Something more fundamental had been involved. As the findings began to indicate the outlines of a political drama, one recalled the scepticism of the old Communists. Possibly they had been bordighisti, followers of Amadeo Bordiga; more certainly they were former members of the old

"extreme left," the Sinistra. Since this is one of the key terminological referents in the ensuing narrative, the meaning must be made clear. Sinistra designates the political current that gathered in the left wing of the pre-1914 Italian Socialist party becoming, after the schism of Livorno in 1921, the leadership and rank-and-file of the Italian Communist movement.<sup>2</sup>

A probe into the studies of Italian Communism brought to light a very obvious but little commented anomaly: in the already substantial bibliography on this subject no monograph dealt with the circumstances surrounding the rise and fall from leadership of Amadeo Bordiga, the founder of Italian Communism. This gap rendered the historiography incomplete, at best; at worst, the historiography might suffer from a serious defect in perspective. A concentration on the activities of Bordiga was called for. Then another finding came into view. Bordiga's activities in politics before 1926 had earned him a place in history; now his place in historiography was bringing him back as a factor in politics. This development is discussed in the first chapter.

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<sup>2</sup>This Sinistra should not be confused with the middle-class political elites coming to ministerial leadership of Italy after the 1876 election.

In the subsequent narrative there are some questions about Bordiga which I did not discuss. One of these concerns his analysis of Fascism. A proper evaluation of his views would have required a setting of those opinions within the context of the nineteen twenties, when Fascism was a new phenomenon, and a review of the thoughts of the other Communist leaders: Gramsci, Togliatti, Gregory Zinoviev, Angelo Tasca, and so forth. For example, in March 1924, Gramsci wrote, "The Fascist Government can only maintain power in so far as it renders life impossible to other organizations which are not Fascist. Mussolini bases his power on the petty bourgeoisie, which (since they have no function in the productive life and hence do not feel the antagonisms and the contradictions resulting from it) in fact believe the class struggle to be the diabolical invention of socialists and communists. The entire so-called hierarchical conception of Fascism is dependent upon that fact."<sup>3</sup> One can accept what Gramsci seems to be saying, namely that the focus of Fascist power was in the lower middle classes of Italy, but for a Marxist to take that view is to raise immediate dilemmas. The point I am trying to illustrate is that a consideration of the views then held of Fascism would have meant an intensive study, interesting no doubt, but tangential to this monograph.

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<sup>3</sup>[Antonio Gramsci] G. Masci, "Fascism: A Letter from Italy," Daily Worker, March 29, 1924, Second Section.

Also for reasons of economy of time and difficulty in getting at sources, I sidestepped any consideration of the Arditi del Popolo controversy. The Arditi was a movement of anti-Fascist war veterans which came into prominence in the spring-summer of 1921, and quickly declined thereafter. Post 1945 Italian Communist critics of Bordiga maintain that his sectarian handling of the Arditi movement led to its collapse, and a potential major obstacle to Fascism was lost. One Italian commentator, Guglielmo Palazzola, who looked at Communist resistance to Fascism in 1921-22, when Bordiga was at the head of the Communist party, does not agree with the critics.<sup>4</sup> In my opinion, any review of Communist resistance tactics during those two years must be seen within the context of general party tactics, which would include a survey of Communist policies within the Italian trade union movement; that is where the Communist party under Bordiga concentrated most of its efforts. Such a study was beyond my possibilities, and the result was that no mention of the Arditi del Popolo appears in the narrative. I suspect, though, that when all the analyses are in--and they are coming, slowly, but they are coming--the charge around the Arditi incident will be placed in limbo, along with the many other accusations made against Bordiga in the last forty years by the present Communist leadership.

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter IV, footnote 43.

CHAPTER ITHE IMAGE OF AMADEO BORDIGA IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Forty years after he had been consigned to political oblivion via expulsion, the spectral figure of Amadeo Bordiga has returned to haunt the historiography of the Partito comunista italiano, the PCI. The spectre has been materializing for several years, as increasing attention is being focused on the role played by Bordiga a half century ago; the point has been reached where Paolo Spriano, the best known Communist historian on PCI history, has felt the need to speak against the "myth of Bordiga" in rebutting the views of the latest study on the topic.<sup>1</sup> This is a strange invocation when one recalls that the PCI and Spriano actively promoted the Myth of Gramsci. In this new labor the PCI must increasingly contend with factors outside its control: revisionist thinking on Bordiga is now occurring in West Germany, the USA, and in Italy; the new views of Bordiga, the leader of the old Sinistra, are gaining currency at a time when a significant challenge has appeared to the left of the PCI. The Italian developments, in particular, are not unrelated; since historiographic assessments represent a distilled form of political judgment,

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<sup>1</sup>"Il mito di Bordiga," Rinascita, May 21, 1971, p. 29. The book under review is Andreina De Clementi, Amadeo Bordiga (Turin: Einaudi, 1971).

the new appraisals of Bordiga constitute an aspect of the dissatisfaction felt by many with the political performance of the PCI, and this development poses a political problem to the party.

Thus both contemporary politics and history condition one another, and one result has been the reassessment of the roles played by the men associated with the origins of Italian Communism. The process has brought about the salvaging of Bordiga from historiographic obscurity, to his reinstatement as a man of considerable importance in the leftwing politics of the first several decades of the century, and to his reconsideration as an important Marxist and leading revolutionary.

What provides particular human interest in the case of Bordiga was the indignity to which he was subjected during the four decades of Togliattian leadership of the PCI, 1926-64. As if fate had intended some degree of retribution, the last years of Togliatti (the early 1960's) witnessed the reappearance of Bordiga in commentaries on the PCI past, a return that was a startling development in of itself, because in the earlier years (1926-40), Togliatti had first recast the role of Bordiga and then expunged it completely from the annals of Italian Communism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> While these lines were being written, news arrived of the death of Bordiga in July 1970.

Knowledge of a Bordiga and a recollection that he had played a role in Italian Communism never completely died out in Italy, but, apart from specialists in Italian Communism, in Marxism, or in Comintern history, he has remained almost unknown abroad, and a brief biographical sketch is in order here. Born in Naples in 1889 of non-Neapolitan parents (his mother was Tuscan and his father Piedmontese), Bordiga studied to be an engineer and by 1910 had joined the Italian Socialist party; he quickly identified with the Intransigent Revolutionaries, the name assumed by the left wing prior to its victory at the 1912 Reggio Emilia Congress of the Partito socialista italiano, the PSI. A series of articles by Bordiga in the official party daily Avanti! during and after August 1914 have remained an indelible evidence that he was by then probably the clearest thinker in the PSI. Beginning with December 1918, Bordiga and the Socialist sections of Naples began publishing Il Soviet, a weekly drawing wide attention because of its insistence that the PSI abstain from participating in the parliamentary election of 1919. Bordiga's ideological capacity and the faltering policies of Giacinto Menotti Serrati, then the key figure in the leadership of the PSI, led many Socialists to abandon Maximalism, the name used to designate the majority current within the PSI, in favor of the Sinistra led by Bordiga. These dissidents had by the fall of 1920 established the basis of the Partito comunista d'Italia

emerging from the Livorno Congress in 1921.<sup>3</sup> Thus Italian Communism was born under a Bordigan leadership and remained loyal to Bordiga at the grassroots level at least through the end of 1924.<sup>4</sup>

Although Bordiga gave unquestioned fealty to the principles underlying the Third International, political dissension over Comintern tactics and the coming of Fascism limited his actual leadership of the PCI to 1921-22. Spending most of 1923 in prison, between 1924-26 Bordiga unsuccessfully led the left wing of the party, the Sinistra, which constituted a numerical majority of the membership, against the centrist leadership of Gramsci-Togliatti, joined now by the party's small right wing, the Minority.<sup>5</sup> The triumph of the Centro, the Center, was made official at Lyons, the PCI's Third Congress, in 1926. Arrested by the Italian authorities in 1926 and sentenced to confinement on an island prison, Bordiga was not released until 1930. Since Gramsci had also been seized not long before Bordiga, the PCI passed into the hands of the exiled Togliatti. Bordiga was expelled in 1930 on the charge of "Trotskyism."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>The name was changed to Partito comunista italiano in the 1940's, and henceforth the newer name will be used.

<sup>4</sup>Letter from Ercoli (Togliatti) to Comintern, November 11, 1924, and reprinted in Rinascita, XIX, September 29, 1962.

<sup>5</sup>Paolo Spriano, Storia del Partito comunista italiano (Turin: Einaudi, 1967), I, p. 488.

<sup>6</sup>Bordiga was a defender of Trotsky but never a member of the Fourth International. Along with victims of the Stalinist purges of the 1930's, Bordiga, too, remains "unrehabilitated."



In short, his expulsion occurred some nine years after the founding of the party at a time when, under Fascist persecution, the PCI was restricted to a handful of exiles and a tenuous membership surviving precariously in Italy.

In this rapid political biography a number of salient facts were omitted, not the least important of which was that in the struggle against the Gramsci-Togliatti faction Bordiga defended Trotsky, while his opponents identified with and were supported by the Comintern. Comintern endorsement of the Centro was certainly a decisive aid in helping to account for Bordiga's defeat. The influence of Stalinism in the Italian party became very evident only much later, when the PCI began to alter Bordiga's role in its historiography.

Thus, in his 1961 popular paperback history of the party, Togliatti felt no compunction about referring to Gramsci as "the founder of the Italian Communist Party, without doubt the most profound student on the question of the existence, character and activities of political parties...."<sup>7</sup> The characterization not only ignored Bordiga, but also the very element Bordiga had insistently pushed as the instrument of revolution, the political party, seemed attributable to Gramsci. In the text Togliatti alluded indirectly to Bordiga when he described the pre-Gramscian leadership as sectarian and un-Marxist. This (anonymous) leadership was charged with

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<sup>7</sup>Palmiro Togliatti, Il Partito comunista italiano (Rome: Riuniti, 1961), p. 13.

having misunderstood Fascism and, presumably, was somewhat responsible for the success of that movement.

Togliatti's book does contain a very questionable association meriting some attention. While describing Gramsci's activities in the years after 1918, Togliatti wrote: "Such was the work undertaken by Gramsci, the initiator and the soul of the Turinese worker council movement. Now we are not interested in the ideological and historical origins of that movement, of which much has been written. Certainly the Russian Revolution and the example of the New State organized on the basis of the worker, peasant and soldier soviets (councils) was a decisive influence."<sup>8</sup> This passage gives the erroneous impression that the Soviets, defined in parenthesis by Togliatti as councils--consigli in Italian--and the councils of Turin were similar bodies.

By the beginning of the 1960's Bordiga had become, in the words of one American historian, the "outstanding Italian example of the Stalinist reduction of disaffected leaders to 'un-persons,'"<sup>9</sup> and one might begin tracing the strange role assigned to Bordiga in PCI historiography beginning with 1930,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 32-3.

<sup>9</sup> John M. Cammett, Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), p. 159.

the year of his expulsion. According to a recent study, Togliatti in that year was faced with the dilemma of having to justify the left turn decreed by the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928 without at the same time opening the door to the crushed Sinistra.<sup>10</sup> At the congress Stalin had attacked the right wing of the International, and this attack led to a shift in the Italian party: while Ruggiero Grieco, a prominent Communist before his death in 1955, joined Togliatti in skipping to the left, Angelo Tasca, the former leader of the PCI's right wing before 1924, was made the sacrifice and expelled.<sup>11</sup> The irony of this victimization was known only to the few who were aware that Tasca had led in the effort to transform the PCI into a subservient follower of the Comintern.<sup>12</sup> Togliatti mastered his dilemma by reducing the Italian Sinistra to a series of traits ascribed to the character of Bordiga, who was said to have been "sterile," "abstract," "pedagogic," "petit-bourgeois," and a man whose political abilities were totally negative. In reality, all these charges stemmed from

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<sup>10</sup>Rosa Alcara, La formazione e i primi anni del Partito comunista italiano nella storiografia marxista (Milan: Jaca Books, 1970), pp. 19-22.

<sup>11</sup>Giuseppe Berti, I primi dieci anni di vita del PCI. Documenti inediti dell'Archivio Angelo Tasca (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1966), p. 30. In 1930 Berti was in exile with Togliatti.

<sup>12</sup>After being expelled Tasca returned to the Italian Socialist party, becoming well known for his writings on Italian Fascism and on Italian and French Communism.

the earlier campaign unleashed by the Centro against the Sinistra after 1924, that is, from the time when the centrist minority in leadership crushed the left majority in the party base.

The task of recasting Bordiga became a two-fold one, and only one aspect had to do with his belittlement and denigration, an undertaking which must not have been very rewarding in 1930 when the memory of Bordiga was still quite fresh. By the time of Gramsci's death in 1937, the Stalinist purges were in full swing, and the reconstruction of the Bolshevik past was proceeding apace. Togliatti now utilized a political biography of Gramsci to press the attack against Bordiga as part of the effort to rewrite the PCI past. Togliatti attributed Bordiga's rise to leadership in 1921 to the deep pessimism engulfing the Italian proletariat after the failure of "the occupation of the factories" in September 1920. Togliatti claimed that Bordiga had opposed Lenin, and he accused Bordiga of having introduced "methods used by the Neapolitan underworld (Camorra)" into the party. The political nature of these charges was shown most clearly by one of Togliatti's culminating remarks. "Bordiga lives tranquilly in Italy as a police and Fascist-protected Trotskyite scoundrel, yet hated by the workers as traitors should be hated."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>P. Togliatti, Antonio Gramsci, capo della classe operaia italiana (Rome: Edizione del Partito comunista italiano, 1944), pp. 43-7.

The appearance of these defamatory remarks in a biography of Gramsci was not casual, for if the downgrading of Bordiga represented one of the dual aspects, the other was the assignment to Gramsci of Bordiga's deeds, and this constituted the beginning of the apotheosis of Gramsci. The eventual elimination of Bordiga from PCI commentaries was a last step in a logical sequence modeled after a Soviet practice.

Befitting the public image now being assembled around the memory of the deceased, this first political biography was entitled Antonio Gramsci, the Leader of the Italian Working Class. Gramsci was described as the "first Marxist, the first Leninist, the first Bolshevik of the Italian working-class movement." One incident will illustrate how Togliatti rewrote history in his account. In 1917 Bordiga and the Sinistra had reconstituted the Intransigent Revolutionary faction in anticipation that the February Revolution in Russia was merely the first outburst of an impending proletarian upheaval. During the difficult days following the rout at Caporetto, this faction forced the PSI directorate to a meeting at Florence. The retreat to the Piave and the Bolshevik coup had unsettled the whole Western camp, and Italy seemed poised on the brink of irreversible cataclysm. At this November 1917 meeting, Bordiga "analyzed the situation in Italy. He noted the defeat at the front, the disorganization of the Italian state and he concluded with these words: 'We must act. The proletariat...has had

it. But it is armed. We must move.' Gramsci agreed."<sup>14</sup> But in Togliatti's biography of Gramsci the roles were reversed; here it was allegedly Gramsci who "spoke of the need to transform the socialist defeatism into a struggle for power, and he was understood by all, even by Bordiga."<sup>15</sup>

This November event has always been severely embarrassing to the PCI, for it was Bordiga who sounded so like Lenin. Two facts should be kept in mind: the meeting was not called to lay plans for insurrection, and no minutes were made of the discussion. As a result, most accounts rest on the description found in the French edition of Giovanni Germanetto's Memoirs of a Barber.<sup>16</sup>

The PCI and PCI-influenced histories dealt with the incident in a number of ways. Germanetto, an ex-Bordigan turned Gramscian, omitted the scene from a later edition of his memoirs; Togliatti turned the roles around; a Soviet historian, B.R. Lopukhov, quoted the gist of the discussion with approval

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Spriano, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Togliatti, Antonio Gramsci, p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> This book was published in 1931 under the title Souvenirs d'un Perruquier. A later edition issued by International Publishers of New York contains the deletion.

but not a word on Bordiga;<sup>17</sup> even John Cammett judged Bordiga's call for revolution an example of the "futility of such advice"; of Gramsci, Cammett wrote, "At Florence as later, it was his positive attitude towards the problem of revolutionary Socialism that distinguished Gramsci from his comrades."<sup>18</sup> Since Cammett cited no source that would bear out this conclusion, one is left with suspended judgment over his interpretation. The "Bordigan history" issued in the 1960's had this to say about Gramsci at Florence: "Gramsci (despite all reconstruction efforts) did not say a word."<sup>19</sup>

The analysis of the stages of the "mythologizing" of Gramsci is not under study here, except in so far as an understanding of the process serves to illustrate the historiographic treatment of Bordiga. As a general rule one might state that, as the real Bordiga is brought to light by the newer historiography, there will be a correspondingly rapid diminution of

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<sup>17</sup>B. R. Lopukhov, Faschism i Rabochee Dvizhenie v Italii (Fascism and the Working Class Movement in Italy) (Moscow: Izdatelstvo "Nauka," 1968), pp. 39-40.

<sup>18</sup>Cammett, op. cit., 57-8.

<sup>19</sup>Storia della sinistra comunista (Milan: Edizioni "il programma comunista del partito internazionalista, 1964), I, p. 115. The appearance of this volume, and of its supplement Ib, was part of the historiographic history of the 1960's. Although these volumes were issued by the "Bordigan" party, responsibility for authorship remains unclear. Alfonso Leonetti, a veteran Communist who has devoted his efforts in recent years to bringing to light the documents from the PCI past, claimed that Bordiga was angered by their publication. Personal interview with Leonetti in Rome, June 7, 1970.

the historical stature of Gramsci.

An indication of the extremes to which the PCI was wont to go in the 1930's was an illustrated watercolor booklet entitled Antonio Gramsci.<sup>20</sup> In one scene Gramsci is depicted as an infant in the lap of a woman flanked by people standing on either side in an obvious allusion to the triptych of the Holy Family. The caption reads, "Antonio Gramsci is the name of a man of great knowledge...who renounced all--honors and the life of leisure--to consecrate his life to the workers' cause." Following these hallowed sentiments, Gramsci is identified with Lenin and Stalin and with Togliatti and Umberto Terracini, a Communist imprisoned in 1925 who did not escape until the fall of the Fascist regime in July 1943. Bordiga is mentioned as the negative contrast. "While Gramsci slowly died in prison, continuing to the last with studying, writing, working and struggling, the Engineer Bordiga, one of those in the past who attempted to detach the Communist party from Gramsci and from his policy of worker unity...that same Engineer, free and unfettered, does not hesitate to get along with Fascists, seeks their friendship, participates in their ceremonies."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Antonio Gramsci (Rome: L. Gigli, n.d.). No pagination.

<sup>21</sup>This last remark referred to the marriage of Bordiga's daughter to a man with some standing in Fascist circles. Livio Vallillo of the Neapolitan section of the Bordigan party claimed that Bordiga was unhappy with the union and with the ceremony during which he was forced to pass through a double file of Blackshirts. Personal interview in Naples, July 9, 1970.



Aside from being an interesting example of crude and deceitful propaganda, the booklet does suggest the enormous psychological difficulties a PCI-bred historian would have when forced to handle without bias that dual-faceted PCI-inspired myth covering the pasts of Gramsci and Bordiga.

The defamation of Bordiga in the 1930's is, at first glance, difficult to explain, though the extreme vituperation does suggest the existence of an exaggerated and unfounded fear. During the period of exile, Togliatti's close co-worker was Ruggiero Grieco, Bordiga's dearest associate before defecting to the Centro in 1925. In 1923 Grieco had written a comparison of Bordiga and Gramsci.

Gramsci shows a bent for publication, for schools, for teaching. Bordiga prefers to command armed battalions: he has a dislike for the professional chair and for the foot-racing of the peripatetics. Bordiga has written no books and we fear he will never write any...but what counts the most is the revolutionary education he gave the party, the habit of study and discussion.<sup>22</sup>

One possible reason for Togliatti's concern may have been the putative abilities of Bordiga. But in the 1930's Bordiga was locked up inside Italy and rendered powerless by the impotence of the surviving remnants of the Sinistra. One senses hovering over these indictments of Bordiga resonances

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<sup>22</sup>Quoted in Spriano, p. 265.

that inexplicably call to mind the Fallen Angel.

The most scurrilous of the attacks came with the Communist periodical Rinascita's anniversary issue (1952), Trenta anni di vita e di lotte del PCI, an occasion for self-congratulations but celebrated with ample discounts from historical honesty.<sup>23</sup> In the "Detailed Chronology of the Communist Party 1921-51" Bordiga was mentioned once--the date of his expulsion, March 1930. In this issue Eduardo D'Onofrio wrote, "At the Congress of Livorno probably no one understood the whole significance, the profoundly revolutionary value of the act separating clearly the Communist minority from the reformist and centrist majority,"<sup>24</sup> without having to encumber this account with the acknowledgment that Bordiga had first suggested that step well before 1919.

The major task of demolishing Bordiga (again) was left to Giuseppe Berti, who, as a youth, seems to have been a

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<sup>23</sup>Quaderni di Rinascita, 2 (Rome: 1952). Earlier, a different number had been prepared. This version, Trent' anni di vita del Partito comunista italiano, never went beyond the galley-proofs; returning from Moscow after a difficult clash with Stalin who wanted him to remain in the Soviet capital, Togliatti ordered a second version. The unpublished manuscript may be found in the Feltrinelli Institute of Milan. Giorgio Galli made much use of it in preparing the 1958 Storia del Partito comunista italiano.

<sup>24</sup>

Trenta anni di vita e lotte del PCI, p. 35.

protégé of Bordiga.<sup>25</sup> The quality of Berti's onslaught may be gauged from this rhetorical question posed at the beginning of his article. "How, when, and why did bordighismo, an anti-Leninist current in the workers movement, become at one point open counterrevolution sympathetic to Trotskyism, a political instrument of Fascism and of the Italian bourgeoisie?"<sup>26</sup> After that introduction, Berti's other findings that Bordiga was "superficial" and a "nullity" were unneeded and clearly in excess. By this date (1952), Bordiga had been out of Communist ranks for more than two decades and absent from the political scene for a quarter of a century.

Complementary to Berti was Felice Platone's adulatory comment about the Ordine Nuovo faction, the group in Turin which had formed around Gramsci's 1919 weekly Ordine Nuovo (this included Togliatti and Platone): "In the history of the Socialist and working-class movement in Italy there is no other group like the Ordine Nuovo, which has given rise to such vast interest and has attained such popularity amongst the workers-- to the point of becoming legend."<sup>27</sup> Yet Platone knew, as did the editor of the issue, Togliatti, that the legend was spurious

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<sup>25</sup> Alleged by Livio Vallillo of the Partito comunista internazionalista of Naples.

<sup>26</sup> Trenta anni, p. 61.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

and deliberately cultivated by the PCI leadership to conceal the history of the past. A decade later, the noted historian of Italian socialism Gaetano Arfe` categorized the Trenta anni issue as an example "of the application in Italy of a historical methodology entirely governed by the needs of the party."<sup>28</sup>

Bordiga also received scant attention in the older historical works by non-Communists. In the now dated Communism in Western Europe by Mario Einaudi, and others, both Bordiga and the Ordine Nuovo group are described as sectarian.<sup>29</sup> Evidently influenced by PCI views Hilton Young made Gramsci the party's founder and its chief prophet and martyr, while dismissing Bordiga as an extremist.<sup>30</sup> More sophisticated was Ignazio Silone, to whom Bordiga was a left Communist chewed up and spewed out of the Comintern along with Ruth Fischer and Boris Souvarine.<sup>31</sup> Silone, who like Tasca had supported the centrist leadership against the Sinistra, made no mention of the undemocratic means used by the former to break Bordiga's political hold. Franz Borckenau thought Bordiga a "man of

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<sup>28</sup> Gaetano Arfe`, Storia del socialismo italiano (Turin: Einaudi, 1965), p. 381.

<sup>29</sup> Mario Einaudi, Jean-Marie Domenach, Aldo Garosci, Communism in Western Europe (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1951), pp. 161-62.

<sup>30</sup> Hilton Young, The Italian Left (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1949), pp. 99 and 111.

<sup>31</sup> Ignazio Silone, Emergency Exit (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 67.

culture and temperament, devoted and sincere but utterly unpolitical."<sup>32</sup> And Arthur Rosenberg, a supporter of the left wing of the German Communist party, found Bordiga to have been of "high character and keen ideological mind."<sup>33</sup> The last two wrote in the 1930's, and Rosenberg was probably acquainted with Bordiga. Many years later, G.D.H. Cole thought Bordiga was a syndicalist.<sup>34</sup> George Lichtheim in his analytical Marxism in France placed Bordiga with the "genuine believers in workers democracy," though Lichtheim seems to have believed that the suppression of the Kronstadt revolt in 1921 was the beginning of Bordiga's disenchantment with the Soviets.<sup>35</sup> One American historian of Italian labor history, Maurice F. Neufeld, contrasted an "emotional" Bordiga with an "orthodox" Gramsci, while omitting mention of Bordiga as a founder of the PCI, along with Grieco, Terracini, Gramsci, and Togliatti.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Franz Borkenau, The Communist International (London: Faber & Faber, n. d.), p. 442.

<sup>33</sup>Arthur Rosenberg, A History of Bolshevism (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 185.

<sup>34</sup>G.D.H. Cole, A History of Socialist Thought: Vol. V. Socialism and Fascism 1931-1939 (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1961), p. 306.

<sup>35</sup>George Lichtheim, Marxism in France (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 54n.

<sup>36</sup>Maurice F. Neufeld, Italy: School for Awakening Countries (Ithaca: Cayuga Press, Inc., 1961), pp. 373 and 268.

An expectedly unsympathetic presentation of Bordiga is found in the works of the Soviet historian B. R. Lopukhov. Anti-Bordigan views are de rigueur in his The Formation of the Italian Communist Party, where Lenin is made to bear testimony. "V. I. Lenin having given great attention to the decisions of the Bologna Congress (of the PSI in 1919) saw that the Abstentionists were pushing the Socialist party from the route indicated by the congress. Their actions were leading to the alienation of the party from the masses."<sup>37</sup> There would be no point in mentioning this writer--or citing this monograph, which is close to a quasi-pamphlet--if not for the fact that six years later Lopukhov issued a second book, Fascism and the Working-Class Movement in Italy,<sup>38</sup> whose considerable merit demonstrated that he was capable of being an excellent historian. But on the question of Bordiga, his new work remained locked in step with the earlier one. Even though between the two studies numerous articles had appeared in Italy to suggest a more judicious treatment, these found no echo in his second work, and Lopukhov continued to rely on PCI writings from the 1930's, to document his judgment of Bordiga.<sup>39</sup>

But the two works of Lopukhov unwittingly tore another

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<sup>37</sup>Obrazovanie Italyanskoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (The Formation of the Italian Communist Party) (Moscow: Akademii Nauk, 1962), p. 42.

<sup>38</sup>Fascism i Rabochee Dvizhenie v Italii, cited in footnote 17.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 78 and 87.

hole in the PCI version of its own past. In both of them Lopukhov designated the Turinese worker councils as fabrichno-zavodskie soviety, the worker council soviets. Earlier, attention had been drawn to Togliatti's use of consigli to describe the Russian soviet and the Turinese worker council, a natural equivocation arising from the application of a common term to designate both bodies. In Russian usage this equivocation does not exist. During the Russian Revolution, these two organs, the worker councils--the fabrichno-zavodskie komitety--and the soviets, were clearly different and separate bodies with unequivocally distinct and non-interchangeable functions. The fabrichno-zavoskie komitety handled problems of factory administration and control, and were a subsidiary of soviet power.<sup>40</sup> The Soviet historian known for her discussion of the Russian factory council movement, A. M. Pankratova, explained the quintessential difference between the two bodies: "the worker councils did not have the prerogatives of state power."<sup>41</sup> The soviet, by contrast, was exclusively an organ dedicated to making political policy, a point driven home at the very beginning of the February Revolution with the promulgation of the Pervii Prikaz, the famous Order Number One, by the Petrograd

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<sup>40</sup>A.M. Pankratova, I consigli di fabbrica nella Russia del 1917 (Rome: Samsone e Savelli, 1970) and her Fabzakomi v Borbe na Sotsialisticheskuiu Fabriku (Factory Committees in the Struggle for Socialism in The Factory) (Moscow: Krasnaya Nov', 1923), Chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>41</sup>Pankratova, Consigli, p. 74.

Soviet. Regarding Lopukhov's fabrichno-zavodskie komitety, the question is were they administrative worker councils, political bodies (soviets), a new synthesis unique to the Turinese scene, or terminological phoenixes--a hybrid that never existed outside of historiographic mythology? Departing for the moment from the question, though adding that the answer will be given by the actual function exercised by the Turinese worker councils in 1919-20, let us turn to John Cammett and his study of Gramsci and Italian Communism.

Antonio Gramsci and the Founding of Italian Communism

is the most penetrating political study of Gramsci to appear in English. The author makes abundantly clear throughout that he has been profoundly struck by the historic and intellectual figure of Gramsci, even to the point of polemicizing with Rosario Romeo for having challenged Gramsci's view on the absence of a Jacobin phase in the Risorgimento.<sup>42</sup> With this attitude Cammett ran the added danger of not being sufficiently critical of his subject. But only his handling of Bordiga and the description of the Turinese worker councils are relevant here.

Cammett appears to have made an effort to get a more balanced view of Bordiga, though in the end his judgments do not really diverge from the PCI's. Thus, Bordiga's 1914

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<sup>42</sup>Cammett, op. cit., pp. 312-22; also, Rosario Romeo, Risorgimento e capitalismo (Bari: Laterza, 1959), pp. 54-89.



articles in the Avanti! are said to have affirmed, "as Lenin had, the imperialist nature of the war";<sup>43</sup> also mentioned were the high praise of Bordiga by Radek and Stalin. On the other hand, Cammett bracketed Bordiga with such characterizations as "ultimate sterile sectarianism" and with "clever, if specious" argumentation.<sup>44</sup> This contrast between Gramsci and Bordiga would seem to exemplify Cammett's beliefs. "Gramsci was by nature cautious and thorough, virtues that were not Bordiga's; but his youthfulness (he was 26 in 1917) and the incensed atmosphere of the times made him temporarily receptive to Bordiga's exuberant personality and superficial brilliance."<sup>45</sup>

Three observations can be made about the above citation: i) the lack of documentation, ii) the counterposing of "superficial" to "brilliance"--so similar to "clever, if specious"--which sounds so much like a rotating formula, iii) Cammett's failure to note that Bordiga was only 28. In summarizing Cammett's assessments of Bordiga, these conclusions stand out:

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<sup>43</sup>Cammett, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 91. Cammett here refers to Bordiga's argument that the proletariat cannot emancipate itself so long as the state remains capitalistic. A reasoning similar to Bordiga's was used by A. Lozovsky, who noted that in the Russian Revolution class struggles had ultimately to be resolved on a state level. See The Role of Labor Unions in the Russian Revolution (New York: The Union Publishing Association, [1920?]), pp. 12-3.

<sup>45</sup>Cammett, op. cit., p. 58.

first, they do not hold up to closer scrutiny (judgments not his own seem to have been coopted indiscriminately); second, writing in the mid-sixties Cammett appeared not to have realized that the portrait of Bordiga as a political leader of negative qualities was one outcome of the Togliattian crusade against the old Sinistra, which made it politically motivated and historically suspect.

Lastly, Cammett's description of the Turinese worker councils indicates that these bodies did not perform as soviets, though he referred to them by that designation: "the Italian soviets." Much of his discussion of the councils is taken up with what Gramsci saw and wanted; even during the famed April strikes of 1920 the councils did not act as political bodies, though the strike embodied a political challenge. Furthermore, Cammett does not clarify the situation when he runs the council and the soviet together, as in this citation: "Gramsci's campaign to organize Italian soviets (consigli di fabbrica)...."<sup>46</sup> Therefore, one cannot cull from his work data to support Lopukhov's designation of the councils as soviets--or that would contradict this revealing remark dropped by Berti: "But these Turinese worker councils were they real and actual soviets? Perhaps they would have been so in an acute revolutionary situation (in an open bid for power), but certainly they had emerged in response to needs vastly different from the soviet in Russia of 1905 and

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<sup>46</sup>Cammett, op. cit., pp. 71-2.

1917."<sup>47</sup>

By the publication of Gammett's study (1967) the image of Bordiga in historiography had begun to radically improve, a reversal brought about by events in Italy and abroad.

The removal of the Fascist regime, in whose shadows the Sinistra had been crushed in the 1920's, did not immediately bring a change in the situation. Bordigan grouplets were now free to operate and publish in the new postwar democracy,<sup>48</sup> but the prestige of the USSR and of the PCI were such as to preclude any ideological challenge from the left. So great was the PCI's attraction in those years that ex-victims of earlier purges sought to rejoin the party.<sup>49</sup> When a Communist Sinistra did flash through Neapolitan working class circles in 1946-47, Emilio Sereni, a very capable Communist intellectual, called on the workers to clear out the Bordigan and Trotskyite agents of Fascism.<sup>50</sup> Sereni, a veteran Communist from the Bordigan

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<sup>47</sup>Berti, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>48</sup>These groups were known as Partito comunista internazionale.

<sup>49</sup>Such was the case of Alfonso Leonetti, expelled in 1930, for a period a member of the Fourth International. His readmission into the PCI was delayed a number of years. Apparently, Bruno Fortichiari, one of the staunchest pillars of the old Sinistra, also attempted to rejoin the party; from his pamphlet, Come è stato fondato il PCI (Milan: Editrice Movimento Operaio, 1958), one has the impression he was unsuccessful.

<sup>50</sup>Alcara, op. cit., p. 31. A Sinistra influence had reappeared in Naples after 1945.

period, undoubtedly knew better than to believe what he was saying. The moral and ideological ascendancy of the PCI over its intellectuals became unassailable with the publication of Gramsci's Lettere dal carcere (Letters from Prison) (1947) and the prison Quaderni (Notebooks).

The diffusion of the Gramscian mystique was politically inspired and exploited by Togliatti.<sup>51</sup> The Quaderni not only altered Italian historiographic views of the Risorgimento, but-- along with a growing esteem for Gramsci, which was based on these postwar publications--also influenced the development whereby Gramsci was figuratively disinterred, embalmed and apotheosized. The image most cultivated here was that projected by the Quaderni, which was now applied retroactively to the period before 1926, to the very period tampered with in PCI historiography. This political legerdemain was not readily apparent. In that first postwar decade, another element helped bind together the PCI and its followers: the image the party projected of itself as a communist movement rooted in the working masses and seeking a revolutionary transformation of Italian society.

In the political climate of the 1950's challenges to the PCI had scant appeal and drew limited attention. In August and September, 1953, Angelo Tasca, the victim of

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<sup>51</sup>Giorgio Amendola, Comunismo, anti-fascismo e resistenza (Rome: Riunti, 1970), p. 148.

Togliatti's earlier maneuvers, returned to write a series of articles on the PCI past appearing in the weekly Il Mondo.<sup>52</sup> In rejecting the PCI's version of this past, Tasca indicated that the Rome Theses, the political tactics adopted by the Bordigan party in 1922, expressed the views of the entire leadership, and that party unity extended through June, 1923. He was saying in effect that there had been less disagreement between Gramsci and Bordiga than extant party historiography was willing to admit. Tasca also made Gramsci the initiator of dissension over Bordigan policies when he refused to join Togliatti, Terracini and Mauro Scoccimarro in signing Bordiga's "Manifesto," a document prepared by Bordiga while in prison during 1923 defending the policies of the Communist Sinistra, then under Comintern attack. But in these articles Tasca was not essentially concerned with Bordiga, with whom he had long-standing ideological quarrels dating from the Young Socialist Federation (FGS) congress of 1912.

A general public indifference also greeted Fulvio Bellini and Giorgio Galli's Storia del Partito comunista italiano.<sup>53</sup> That Bellini was an expelled ex-Communist did not

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<sup>52</sup>The articles appeared on these dates: August 18, 25, September 1, 8, 15, and 25. Tasca is best known as the author of The Rise of Fascism.

<sup>53</sup>Storia del Partito comunista italiano (Milan: Schwarz, 1953).

add lustre to the book,<sup>54</sup> but as the first attempted history of the PCI by non-Communist authors their labors deserve consideration. Acknowledging that (in 1953) "there does not exist-- either in Italy or abroad--an historic profile, whole and documented of the events that have characterized the Communist party from its inception," and admitting difficulties in obtaining research materials (the book is undocumented), these authors describe a Bordiga possessed with qualities of strength and weakness. To them the germ of the future PCI was already present in Bordiga's speech to the Bologna Congress of 1919, for Bordiga was "a typical Leninist"; they meant that Bordiga had arrived at views very close to Leninism. Bellini and Galli agreed with Tasca in finding less disunity amongst the early PCI leaders than expressed in later party accounts, and they belittled the problem of parliamentary abstentionism.

Bellini and Galli noted Bordiga's intention, prior to the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in 1922, to abide by the decisions and to resign if in disagreement. According to them, Bordiga understood the danger to his leadership arising from Gramsci's stay in Moscow, where he was being offered the leadership of the party.<sup>55</sup> After the Comintern made all its member

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<sup>54</sup>Alcara, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>55</sup>Berti quotes Trotsky as saying in 1922, "We had to do much to convince him [Gramsci] to take a position against Bordiga, but I don't know whether we succeeded." Op. cit., p. 38.

parties defenders of Soviet policies, the parties themselves were transformed. Bordiga opposed and warned against this development. To Gramsci, Tasca and Togliatti fell the task of destroying the Sinistra. Depicted by the authors as a schemer, Gramsci was not above using demagogic slogans--"With Bordiga or with Moscow!"--that masked the real issues; where necessary he manipulated the provincial congresses to neutralize majorities of the Sinistra. "Where the Sinistra retained its influence amongst the members, the party executive intervened with full and unbridled harshness. The last Bordigan strongholds of Naples, Reggio Emilia, Trieste collapsed." In Naples, the section was dissolved. When Bordiga appealed the decisions of the Congress of Lyons, in 1926, the Executive Committee of the Communist International refused to uphold him. "Today," Bellini and Galli conclude this phase of their account, "official party history declares Antonio Gramsci the precursor, the founder, the leader of the Communist party from the incandescent days of Livorno."<sup>56</sup>

Bellini and Galli are important because they presented a historical recapitulation of the PCI which, for the first time, did not rest on the "triumphant superiority"<sup>57</sup> of Antonio

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<sup>56</sup>Bellini & Galli, op. cit., pp. 10-202.

<sup>57</sup>I borrowed this phrase from Luciano della Mea, as cited in Alcara, op. cit., p. ii.

Gramsci. They ascribed Bordiga's defeat to a complex of circumstances--Bordiga's arrest, his political mistakes, Gramsci's move to Moscow, and so forth, played out against the murky events and troubled struggles then beginning to darken the Comintern stage in Moscow, from which Comintern intervention against the Sinistra proved fatal. An additional aspect about this book is worth noting. In 1953 there was widespread belief in Italy that Bordiga had abetted or aided Bellini and Galli.<sup>58</sup>

Five years later, Giorgio Galli published a new history,<sup>59</sup> resting on a modest documentation. The new profile of Bordiga and the narrative of events do not greatly differ from the earlier version. More than earlier, perhaps, Galli stressed the credo governing all communist thinking in the initial period after 1918--the belief that Europe had entered the era of proletarian revolution. This expectation explained the Rome Theses. In the text, Galli now quoted the Bordigan language used by Terracini (in 1958 a much respected leader of the PCI who had the reputation of being somewhat independent and critical of the Togliattian leadership) at Livorno. "The political party of the class does not create but utilizes the situation." And "...the Italian proletariat...is capable of

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<sup>58</sup>Franco Ferri, Director of the Gramsci Institute of Rome, expressed this view in a personal interview at the Institute, June 4, 1970. Also, Alcara, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>59</sup>Storia del Partito comunista italiano (Milan: Schwarz, 1958).



beaux gestes but it needs a guide...and for this we must create the political party of the working class."<sup>60</sup>

Galli was less harsh with Gramsci, considering him an original elaborator of Marxism and Leninism. Nevertheless, Galli underscored the role of the Comintern in accounting for the Centro's victory. That Togliatti and Stalin rose to positions of leadership in the Third International contemporaneously was for him ominously indicative of a new development. Bolshevization of the party and the defeat of Bordiga, he wrote, "signaled a new conformity justified by contingent considerations, whose rationalization would lose validity in the succeeding years."<sup>61</sup>

Galli's decision to produce the new study may have been induced by the ferment and upheaval set off by the Soviet 20th Party Congress. Surprisingly, the book did not lead to any public polemics, a result, Arfè explained later, of the silence with which the PCI greeted the publication.<sup>62</sup> However, symptomatic of a new stir in Italian leftwing circles were two events from that same year (1958). The first of these was a

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>62</sup>Arfè, op. cit., p. 331. Despite a quiet initial reception, in 1970 Galli's book could be seen in most Roman book stores. Alcara, op. cit.

congress of Gramscian studies in Rome at which doubts were expressed over the parallelism between the 1917 Russian soviets and the Turin councils.<sup>63</sup> The second was an article by Aldo Romano, "Antonio Gramsci between War and Revolution," where Romano came to some surprising conclusions about Bordiga.<sup>64</sup>

Romano made an ideological check on the views of Gramsci and Bordiga at the outset of the First World War, but the Bordiga he found had much in common with the image depicted by Galli. Romano acknowledged that by 1912 Bordiga was a Marxist and an internationalist. After looking into the Tasca-Bordiga cultural debate dominating the FGS congress that year, he concluded that it was indicative of a Bordiga who was "certainly not 'anti-cultural' as was said," but who was looking beyond culture in seeking a means to renovate Italian socialism.<sup>65</sup> Comparing the thoughts of Gramsci and Bordiga, Romano placed Bordiga closer to Lenin. In 1915, Bordiga "was the key man of Italian socialism." The article appeared in the prestigious Rivista storica del socialismo, and Romano laced the text with large extracts from the 1914-15 writings of Bordiga, thus exposing the readers of the leftwing periodical to authentic

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<sup>63</sup>At this congress Alberto Caracciolo asked that scholars be permitted to look at the original Gramscian manuscript.

<sup>64</sup>Rivista storica del socialismo, (hereinafter called Riv. stor. soc.), I, No. 4 (1958), 405-42.

<sup>65</sup>Anti-culturalism remains one of the PCI charges against Bordiga.

Bordigan ideas for the first time in thirty years.

Startling as were the findings of Galli and Romano, their impact on the PCI seems to have been limited. Partially this was due to the dichotomous internal structure of the PCI, which separates the intellectuals from the working-class rank and file. The problems facing the former rarely became a concern of the latter; the leftwing intellectual, like his bourgeois brethren, operates within a milieu only tangentially related to working-class life. Moreover, the late fifties were dominated by the "economic miracle," and anyone traveling amongst working class groups saw that attention was on increasing one's share of income or on how to follow those who had made the successful leap to the "millions." Historiographic concerns were of no interest to workers and to most activists, and the occasional critic who broke with the PCI to denounce its pseudo-revolutionary policies soon dropped into obscurity.<sup>66</sup>

In the next decade the number of historical studies on Italian Communism was so large as to constitute a renaissance of interest in the subject. The appearance of documents and memoirs and even the death of Togliatti provided the materials and lessened the obstacles to a reconsideration of the past.

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<sup>66</sup>Donald Blackmer, Unity in Diversity (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968). This author stresses that Togliatti utilized reformist tactics from 1944, preferring them to more radical actions. The awakening in Italy to the reality that the PCI was pseudo-revolutionary was accelerated with the decline of Cold War pressures.

The PCI cooperated in bringing these documents to the fore, albeit reluctantly. The new sources were now seized by an increasing number of political dissidents to construct an alternative history of the PCI. To understand the dialectic at work, one must recall that during the early sixties various world left forces had experienced a series of great hopes and sharp defeats, all of which excited leftist circles in Italy; the rise and assassination of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, the coming and isolation of the Cuban Revolution, and the impunity with which the United States government violated the Geneva Agreements to bloc revolutions in Southeast Asia. The impotence of the PCI (at a time of rising success at the polls) was raised to high relief by its unwillingness to face up to vital questions posed by these and other developments, and this in turn raised the spectre of the "crisis of communism." By the mid-1960's new groups and intellectuals to the left of the PCI were openly questioning its revolutionary stance and were digging into the past to find out what had happened to the former "vanguard." Some soon found themselves peering at, and refurbishing, the image of Bordiga, with whom they discovered an unsuspected affinity.

The most important of the new sources was La formazione del gruppo dirigente del Partito comunista italiano nel 1923-24,<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> La formazione del gruppo dirigente del Partito comunista Italiano nel 1923-24 (Rome: Riuniti, 1962).

and its appearance marks the critical turning point in the historiography of the PCI. The tide now began to ebb. Whatever the particulars preceding publication of La formazione,<sup>68</sup> a volume of documents taken from the PCI and the Feltrinelli Archives, there is no doubt that these papers shook up many party members. The documents consisted mostly of letters exchanged amongst Gramsci, Togliatti, Terracini and Mauro Scoccimarro, all of whom had been prominent in the early leadership along with Bordiga; at first glance they showed a respected Bordiga who was held in affectionate esteem even by Togliatti. While this disclosure proved unpalatable to some, a closer scrutiny revealing how the Centro had been surreptitiously organized in the early months of 1924 had the effect of shattering the official PCI version of its own past. After publication of La formazione one can say that the PCI no longer had a viable history: the old had been compromised and the new not yet ready. Evidence of the change was Togliatti's reference to Bordiga as a man of "great ability."

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<sup>68</sup>The claim is made by Luigi Cortesi that Togliatti took the lead in preparing this volume after the editors of Feltrinelli had decided to publish documents in their possession; thus Togliatti (Cortesi speaking) hoped to blunt the "shocking" impact they would have. Personal interview with Cortesi, Rome, June 2, 1970. A similar reaction to changes then occurring was felt by Michele Salerno, a retired editor of the Roman leftwing evening daily Paese Sera. Signor Salerno used the term "shocking" to describe his reaction upon hearing Togliatti publicly praise Bordiga as a man of "great ability." Personal interview in Rome, June 7, 1970.

The introduction to La formazione was written by Togliatti. He began with a compliment to the initial leadership of the party: "One cannot deny to the men who were in the leadership...the merit of having been brave and tenacious as circumstances demanded." Then he gave as harsh an assessment of the Bordigan policies as was possible at the time: "The image of the party was that of a military rather than a political organization; but of an old fashioned military kind, without spirit, founded on obedience...."<sup>69</sup>

Bordiga was here accused of having concentrated all decision making at the top, thereby paralyzing the initiatives of the party, though the presentation of a Bordiga minus the familiar charges of Trotskyism and fascism was for all an advance towards the light.

Entering the historiographic gap left by the impact of La formazione was the Rivista storica del socialismo. This journal had been conceived as a sort of united front of all views on the Italian left. Co-edited by Communist Luigi Cortesi and Socialist Stefano Merli, the periodical drew into its issues the great names of postwar Italian socialist historiography: Richard Hotstetter, Enzo Santarelli, Gaetano Arfe, Renzo De Felice, Aldo Romano, Paolo Spriano and others.

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<sup>69</sup>La formazione, pp. 18-21. The irony of this comment needs little elaboration. Togliatti himself was a faithful Stalinist, becoming mildly critical of Soviet policies only shortly before his death in 1964.

As already noted, the Rivista had published Romano's 1958 article, and in an unrelated commentary a year later Spriano raised an old charge that Bordiga was crude and uncultured.<sup>70</sup> However, if the once well-set and seemingly permanent features of the founding fathers of Italian Communism began to distend and change physiognomy much of the new perspective was the work of the Rivista, in whose articles there began to take shape a Bordiga who was the ideological superior of Gramsci during the years before 1926.

The involvement of the Rivista in this issue stemmed from a decision by the editors to look into the impact of Stalinism on the international working-class movement; a more sensitive choice of topics could not have been made, for they began focusing attention on PCI history of the early 1920's. By 1962 the openness of the historical debate had led to an unpleasant exchange with a Soviet historian.<sup>71</sup> Both Merli and Cortesi participated in the research, and the simultaneous appearance of La formazione simply provided fuel for the fire they had built.

In 1964 Merli announced that the disagreement between Bordiga and Gramsci did not date earlier than the June 1923

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<sup>70</sup>Riv. stor. soc., II, No. 6 (1959), 217-42.

<sup>71</sup>The exchange was between Z. P. Jachimovic and Luigi Cortesi, Riv. stor. soc., IV, No. 15/16 (1962), 341-65.

meeting of the Enlarged Executive Committee of the Communist International (something Tasca had said back in 1953), and that Gramsci, unlike Bordiga, had not at the time devised "an alternative strategy."<sup>72</sup> A year later Cortesi outlined a new history of the PCI beginning with the period before 1914, that is, with the PSI Sinistra which later became the PCI. He called for a more truthful handling of the years 1914-21 and 1921-26, and asserted that Bordiga's intransigence was not a striving for purity but an attempt to build a communist movement on a sound theoretical basis. (This assertion dovetailed with Romano's earlier findings.)<sup>73</sup> The Communist political scientist, Enzo Santarelli retorted that Cortesi had created a "mythical Bordiga."

Piecemeal and without plan the Rivista storica del socialismo was providing the chapters for an alternative history. Other authors now joined "the enterprise." In "Revolutionary party and abstentionism in two letters by Amadeo Bordiga to the Communist International" Roberto Gabriele criticized the PCI charge that Bordiga had been responsible for the schism at Livorno; the fault lay with Serrati's "social democratic" vision, which led him to prefer remaining with 14,000 Reformists,

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<sup>72</sup>"La origine della direzione centrista del PCd'I," Riv. stor. soc., VII, No. 7 (1964), 605-25.

<sup>73</sup>"Alcuni problemi sulla storia del PCI," Riv. stor. soc. VIII, No. 24 (1965), 143-72.



thus allowing the 58,000 strong left wing to escape to a new party.<sup>74</sup> The exacerbation entering the debate was evident from this comment: "But no one is fooled who for years has seen the trustees and official interpreters of the history of the PCI and the working-class movement punctually alter their 'scientific' work to fit the decisions of a political direction; often, and this is the real tragedy, without conviction."

Most recently, Andreina De Clementi, looking at the relationship Gramsci-Bordiga in 1921-22, concluded that Gramsci's concepts of institutions and relationships were un-Marxian. Gramsci had narrowed the question of revolution to the development per se of the worker councils; just as his view of bourgeois power were equated with economic domination, so working-class conquest had been equated with the seizure of the factory, an unrealistic view "closer to syndicalist theories than to the scientific materialism of the Leninist experience." Bordiga had understood that the state was the nucleus of bourgeois power and had put the accent "on the conquest of political power." Although De Clementi was critical of the Rome Theses in her article, she found Amadeo Bordiga to have been "the only Communist leader loyal to Marxism."<sup>75</sup> Continuing her critique in a review of two books

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<sup>74</sup>Partito rivoluzionario e astensionismo in due lettere di Amadeo Bordiga all 'Internazionale comunista," Riv. stor. soc., IX, No. 27 (1966), 178-88.

<sup>75</sup>"La politica del PCd'I nel 1921-22 e il rapporto Bordiga-Gramsci," Riv. stor. soc., IX, No. 28 (1966), 137-81.

by Communist authors (Berti and Spriano),<sup>76</sup> she denied the conclusion drawn by Spriano, that the Congress of Lyons had witnessed the triumph of Leninism. All signs were to the contrary; the defeat of Bordiga had meant that Stalin's perspective had been accepted, while Bolshevization was synonymous with the Stalinist conquest of the Comintern. Here she was close to Galli. The Rivista storica del socialismo disappeared after 1967, but it left behind the portrait of a Bordiga who was "a Marxist and a Leninist...from the time of his youth."<sup>77</sup>

While analyses continued to pulverize the blasted myth of the PCI past, a new and re-tooled version of that history now appeared in the form of Paolo Spriano's Storia del Partito comunista italiano, I, Da Bordiga a Gramsci. Though reportedly ill-received by some in the PCI, this book attempted to recast the past without breaking the image of Gramsci as a sacrosanct Leninist innovator. Clearly written, admirably documented, the narrative of Italian Communism related to domestic and foreign events, this was history in "grand style."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>"Il movimento operaio tra 'ricordi e ideologia.' A proposito di due libri recenti sui primi anni di storia del PCI," Riv. stor. soc., X, No. 31 (1967), 99-116.

<sup>77</sup>Alcara, op. cit., p. 90. One result of the historiographic controversy was the expulsion of Cortesi from the PCI.

<sup>78</sup>As pointed out earlier, indicative of the historiographic concern was the appearance in two volumes of Storia della sinistra comunista. Volume I is a history of the Socialist Sinistra from 1884 to 1919; the narrative is written in a singular style; the volume contains many articles reprinted from the

On many points Spriano conceded historiographic ground. He admitted the formative role of Bordiga and the helping hand of the Comintern in raising Gramsci to leadership. Moreover, although Spriano did not accept the charges that the Gramscian leadership had manipulated the ranks to get the imposing majority (90.8%) at the Lyons Congress, he did note that Gramsci "defended the right of the party's Centrale to 'use its position and its means to implement the directives,' for he considered factionalism as having nothing to do with free discussion, and the result of the Sinistra's detachment from the life of the party and the masses."<sup>79</sup> This statement would seem to open the door to the eventual admission of the contrived nature of the Lyons Congress.

Spriano's volume is not so much a history of the PCI as it is an account of one faction, the victorious Gramsci-Togliattian Centro that, before Lyons, established itself as the whole party and then proceeded to appropriate the history of the past. Spriano's text is not useful as a history of the Sinistra, the group founding and dominating the early years

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Socialist press. Volume Ib is a slim supplement of reprinted articles. Since most of the articles are by Bordiga, whose name never appears, one has here an anthology. The prose of the narrative enhanced the PCI's claim of Bordiga as a "sectarian," while the articles facilitated the revisionism at work.

<sup>79</sup> Spriano, op. cit., pp. 483-84.

of the party. Furthermore, Spriano repeatedly takes documents and comments subsequent to the formation of the Centro (1924) and uses them retroactively to cover events occurring earlier. This trick has the effect of gliding the reader around the earlier years when Togliatti and Gramsci were firmly in agreement with the policies of the Sinistra. One therefore cannot help suspecting that Spriano wrote with an a priori intent of justifying the historic postures played by Gramsci and the PCI. This is seen most clearly in his treatment of Bordiga, toward whom he made the least possible concessions. Although acknowledging Bordiga as the original leader of the PCI, he continued to describe him in terms little different from those used by Togliatti in 1930.<sup>80</sup>

Spriano's views coincided with those of several other party hard-liners publishing at about the same time. Ernesto Ragionieri devoted some twenty-five pages of his introduction to the first volume of Togliatti's collected works to demolish the "cliché" that Togliatti's earlier political writings had been influenced by Bordiga.<sup>81</sup> Giorgio Amendola admitted the

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<sup>80</sup>Spriano used the following descriptions with Bordiga, the number referring to the page: "without intellectual complications" and "no inclination to cultural discussion" (11), "obsession of purity" and "Jacobin accent" (12), "tenacious and inflexible to absurdity" (12), "geometric intellect" (13), "doctrinal tone" and "extreme linear simplicity" (40), "few references to reality" (42), skipping to "coherent but sterile" (54), "scholastic, byzantine" (179), "Machiavellianism" (204), and "a catastrophic reactionary populism" (qualunquismo catastrofe, 207).

<sup>81</sup>p. Togliatti, Opere (Rome: Riuniti, 1967), I, pp. lxxix-civ.

existence of a Gramscian myth, implying that this use of history was derived from the teachings of Gramsci.<sup>82</sup> Giuseppe Berti now asserted that Bordiga was authoritarian and Gramsci democratic.<sup>83</sup>

Refusing to admit political value to the role of Bordiga is the converse of maintaining that the revolutionary mantle of 1919 was worn exclusively by Gramsci. Writing on the centenary of Lenin's birth, Spriano insisted that Gramsci "was the first Italian Leninist, as a matter of fact, at least for the entire postwar period, from 1918 (one can say from 1917) to 1926; he was the only Leninist worthy of name in Italy."<sup>84</sup> As proof Spriano adumbrated four reasons: from the novelty of the Russian Revolution Gramsci had been able to revive the concept of man making his own history, draw theoretical formulations on the peasant question, see history, as "a march," and appreciate the importance of culture to the working class.

By so defining Leninism away from its traditional ingredients--the need for revolution, for proletarian dictatorship, and for a vanguard party--one is left to conclude that Spriano's

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<sup>82</sup>Amendola, op. cit., pp. 144-45.

<sup>83</sup>Berti, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>84</sup>"Gramsci e Lenin," Rinascita, XXVII, No. 20 (May 15, 1970).

writings--this piece and his history--are simply a continuum of the party's tradition of modifying its past to meet current needs. Significantly in this 1970 enumeration of the foundations of Leninism, Spriano omitted mention of the Turinese worker councils. This was just as well, for from historiographic evidence one must conclude that there never were any Italian soviets: the worker council soviets, the Togliattian consigli, and the fabrichno-zavodskie soviety were after all historiographic phoenixes.

That the loose and unplaited ends of PCI historiography should themselves one day become the object of close scrutiny was inevitable: such was Rosa Alcara's La formazione e i primi anni del Partito Comunista Italiano nella storiografia marxista, published in 1970.<sup>85</sup> What stands out from this comparative and exhaustive study of the relevant literature on the early history of the PCI were the continuous modifications made in that history to fit the changing political needs of the PCI. This was certainly not a new finding, but never had one author gathered and analyzed all these "histories" within the covers of one book. Of special interest is a postscript to the historiographic study, in which Alcara looked at the make up of "revolutionary organization" as indicated in the writings of Bordiga and Gramsci during the years prior to Livorno. Two of

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<sup>85</sup>See footnote n. 10.

her findings are no longer eye-openers: 1) that the Turinese councils operated almost exclusively on a trade union basis,<sup>86</sup> and that Bordiga had a more "realistic vision of various elements that could have at the time brought about a political change in Italy, just as on the whole he was more realistic about the situation in Russia."<sup>87</sup>

But there still remains the spectral figure of Amadeo Bordiga, now a shade from the dead as well as from the past. The role of Bordiga is more than just a troublesome contradiction to PCI historiography. To admit validity to it means to put into jeopardy the Gramsci-Togliattian tradition and the very basis of the present political conduct of the PCI. For an understanding of why this is so, one must move from historiography back to history.

In the present chapter we have looked at the conflicting opinions expressed about Bordiga. On the whole, the recent non-Communist writings have been more sympathetic to Bordiga, and tend to contradict the older PCI-inspired views. Such a deep controversy invites historical analysis, and in the subsequent chapters an attempt will be made to follow the political role of Bordiga after 1912. A summary

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<sup>86</sup>Alcara, op. cit., p. 178.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

of some of the social and political movements found in Italy before 1914, the matrix from whence emerged Amadeo Bordiga, is taken up in the first part of Chapter II.



## CHAPTER II

### THE MAKING OF AN IDEOLOGUE

#### 1. The Political Background

One of the paradoxes of the twentieth century is that Marxism has been used to justify graduated reform and to rationalize violent change. In the advanced capitalistic countries of Western Europe Marxism was fit to the needs of social democracy; in the underdeveloped the association is with revolutionary communism. With the former, Marxists stressed adjustment<sup>1</sup>; with the latter, change. By the end of the second decade of this century social democratic meliorism and communistic revolution had become politically antagonistic. Every "socialist" revolution of this century has dramatized the distance between the two types of society.

Whether capitalist society has proven too dynamic or Marxism as a tool for analysis and guide to action is simply unfit<sup>2</sup> to harness the contradictions of advanced capitalism

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<sup>1</sup>The lead here was taken by German Social Democracy. By 1895 the German Social Democratic party had forced Engels to delete from his last written piece references to armed struggles. This "bowdlerized" version was used to condemn revolutionary movements and justify "legality, under whose beneficent sway working class parties would grow strong." Paul Froelich, Rosa Luxemburg (New York: Howard Fertig, 1969), pp. 61-2.

<sup>2</sup>Noting the emergence of powerful privileged elites in the USSR, and the cropping up of problems similar to the West,

has been long debated. Certainly the phenomenon indicates the flexibility, even the deceptiveness, of ideology; nevertheless, there is a fair consensus that creative Western Marxism ceased to be innovative by the 1920's. The date is hardly incidental: while the first World War cut across the leftwing socialist resurgence immediately preceding it, the Russian Revolution shifted Marxists' attention away from the advanced societies to the underdeveloped, to the "weaker link." These considerations also act as a preliminary introduction to the social matrix in which Amadeo Bordiga matured ideologically.

If Bordiga's ideas in 1914 and 1919 bore a resemblance to Leninism, it may have been because both men developed in basically backward societies relegated to the periphery of capitalist Europe. Indeed, until 1861 Naples resembled St. Peterburg as the administrative and cultural capital of a backward hinterland. Unlike St. Peterburg, however, there was

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some Western commentators have suggested that the problems ascribed by Marx to capitalism are really problems of industrialism. One of them, George Lichtheim, found Marxism rendered obsolete by the rise in France of an independent state bureaucracy able to mediate between labor and capital, an observation in the tradition of the French étatistes. This observation made by Lichtheim in the 1960's occurred at the time United States revisionist historians were pointing out how American reforms from the Progressive Era to the New Deal had structured a political capitalism that facilitated the preservation of the political and economic power of the rulers of industry. The radicals amongst these revisionists have not concealed the influence of Marx on their writings. Few were aware that a Marxist theoretical analysis of their findings had been made by Nicolai Bukharin in his Economics of the Transformation Period (New York: Bergman Publishers, A Subsidiary of Lyle Stuart, Inc., 1971). Bukharin wrote the study in 1920.

little industrial development during the decades following unification. At the end of the nineteenth century Naples had no heavy industry, no factory with more than 500 workers; the economic activity of the city was largely commercial and artisanal. To a visible degree Naples was made to subsidize the growth of favored northern industry, and the middle class optimism generated in the north by the limited industrialization of the 1880's and the decade before 1914 was never felt in the south. When industry did arrive with the new century (the Ilva of Pozzuoli and the Cotoniere Meridionale) foreign capital was heavily represented, as it was also in insurance, navigation, tramways and water works.<sup>3</sup> Here too the analogy with tsarist Russia is significant.

The unification of Italy had "dethroned" Naples as the capital of the south and plunged it deep into a crisis from which it had yet to emerge in 1900. Naples in that period felt all the strains of underdevelopment. There flourished here, not surprisingly, the politics of revolution. Later, in exile and in the post-Liberation period, PCI historians stressed the petit-bourgeois character of these Neapolitan revolutionaries, thus misstating the relationship between underdevelopment

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<sup>3</sup>Raffaele Colapietra, Napoli tra dopoguerra e fascismo (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962), pp. 12-19.

and revolution; even the best of these men were blinded to a readily demonstrated truth: once revolutionary Marxism had been banished from Western Europe by reformist movements, an infusion of new revolutionary ideas would arise largely from the areas outside the main arena of capitalism, from the peripheries where the impact of Western industrialization was creating distressing results.

Such an area was the Italian south. The political challenge arising from the conditions there had been acute long before Bordiga's time. This challenge was articulated by the southern intellectuals who could see how unification had subordinated the south to northern interests. In addition to their dissatisfaction, and the protest demonstrated by the southern bourgeois elites in the 1876 election, there was the turbulent discontent of the southern peasantry, whose actions introduced a dimension of unavoidable realism to political considerations. Peasant movements dominated the social history of the region down to the First World War, feeding the banditry of the 1860's, the massive rural violence of the 1870's-- destruction of vines, crops, forests and livestock--the mass emigration beginning in the 1880's, and spicing subsequent decades with numerous examples of local uprisings or protests, the best remembered being the Sicilian Fasci in 1893-95. The latter, an attempt by peasants to organize themselves, was brutally suppressed by the government of Francesco Crispi, who,

in 1860, had been a leading Garibaldian "redshirt" himself. Taken together these conditions sensitized the young intellectuals, newly arrived on the scene around 1900, to a social awareness drawn to large scale change. They viewed politics as the key to emancipation.

Politics dominated the muckraking journalistic activities of the historian Gaetano Salvemini during the early 1900's. This southern rebel quickly perceived the causes of southern disaffection: the exploitive and oppressive conditions created in the south by the unitary state which further impoverished the peasantry.<sup>4</sup> Salvemini saw that this condition touched on the life of all Italy, for from the southern reserve was gathered the strength needed by ministerial conservatism to obstruct reform.<sup>5</sup> The very dimensions of the Italian problem, the misery of its people, was deceptively hidden behind a regional label, "the Southern Question." In reality, he said: "When we speak of southern Italy, we mean all of the south, two-thirds of the center, and one-half of the north."<sup>6</sup> Publicized nationally by his journalistic talent, these insights

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<sup>4</sup>Opere (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1963), IV, Il Mezzogiorno e la democrazia italiana, II, Movimento socialista e questione meridionale, p. 237.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

of Salvemini were accompanied by a severe and debilitating pessimism that doubted the south's capacity to act on its own. The actual tragedy of the Italian south lay not only in its wretched circumstances--common enough in the world of that day--but in the inability of its spokesmen to transmute this societal backwardness into social dynamite.

Having described the social condition of more than half the nation, Salvemini was unable and unwilling to seek within the figure of the most oppressed, the peasant, the explosive force that might have yet altered Italian history. His commentaries on southern developments tended to dissolve into statements of southern effacement: "Unfortunately, left to themselves southern peasants can do nothing."<sup>7</sup> Salvemini recognized the supremacy of political action, but eschewed the most profound political act of all, revolution. Not appreciating the scope of the break needed to move a society out of underdevelopment nor realizing the tenacity of an established political economy, Salvemini was wont to ridicule those southern socialists who declared themselves revolutionary.<sup>8</sup> He was therefore forever compelled to seek solutions to southern retardation in remedies originating outside the south. "But

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 317.

<sup>8</sup> Critica Sociale, XVIII, No. 20 (October 16, 1908), 318, hereafter referred to as CS.

give us," he begged the delegates of the 1908 PSI congress, "the one proof of useful solidarity which you can render; the only sign of solidarity amongst free men. Help us to become free by conquering, in your interests and ours, universal suffrage; we will do the rest."<sup>9</sup>

By advancing proposals that did not match his empirical findings, Salvemini unfortunately beclouded the very dimensions of the problem he had unearthed. He thus rendered a disservice to the region he so keenly loved. It is difficult to overlook in his rhetoric a weakness long characteristic of the Italian left, namely the inability to devise the tactics appropriate to the goal sought. Thus, Salvemini was one of the first in 1914 to urge Italian intervention, believing as he did that the war would further the democratization of Europe. Long before Woodrow Wilson, Salvemini called on Italians to turn the war into a crusade to end all wars. But to Salvemini belongs the merit of having been amongst the first to spot the duality folded into Italian socialism: "There are only two, the true tendencies of Italian socialism: the economic tendency prevalent in the north, the political tendency found in the south."<sup>10</sup>

A political movement that intended to utilize the revolutionary tactics evaded by Salvemini arrived to charge the

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<sup>9</sup>CS, XVIII, No. 21 (November 1, 1908), 334.

<sup>10</sup>Salvemini, op. cit., p. 244.

Italian political scene shortly after 1900.<sup>11</sup> Italian revolutionary syndicalism enjoyed several noteworthy successes in the north,<sup>12</sup> but its intellectual flash was brightest in the south, where it attracted a host of young thinkers, the best known being two Neapolitans, Enrico Leone and Arturo Labriola. Whereas Salvemini understood the key role of politics, the revolutionary syndicalists went further--to the politics of revolution.

Revolutionary syndicalism appeared in Italy as a vindicator of revolutionary Marxism and as a means of bringing the working class to overthrow bourgeois society. In southern Italy revolutionary syndicalism was adopted by those intellectuals who were opposed to the northern practice of dismissing from Marxism the ideology of revolution. "From the theory of value to the dialectical method; from the concentration of wealth to the growing periodic crisis;...all the constituent elements that make Marxism the most authoritative and universally followed school of socialism have been buried,"

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<sup>11</sup>The arrival of revolutionary syndicalism is dated 1902-5. Spencer Di Scala, "Filippo Turati and Factional Strife within the Italian Socialist Party, 1892-1912" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Faculty of Political Science, Columbia University, 1969), p. 192.

<sup>12</sup>The successes were in Parma, Milan, and lower Lombardy. Giuseppe Mammarella, Riformismo e rivoluzionari nel Partito socialista italiano (Padua: Marsilio Editori, 1968), pp. 165-68.



was their lament.<sup>13</sup> Revolutionary syndicalists were especially scornful of socialist political conduct, and suspicious of any trend leading away from revolutionary doctrine or from direct class confrontation. A leading northern syndicalist, Alceste De Ambris, even referred to the PSI as "putrid carrion."<sup>14</sup> By turning to George Sorel to re-find Marx, the revolutionary syndicalists from the south slighted Salvemini (which was just as well) but they also overlooked the one figure who might have helped them, the southern peasantry.

Italian revolutionary syndicalism tried to break away from the central dilemma faced by the Second International: how to combine a revolutionary Weltanschauung with the need of getting from the bourgeois system the maximum advantage for the working class; this meant working within the parliamentary institutions. The revolutionary syndicalists found their answer in a politically motivated decision to neglect parliament in favor of the trade unions, the syndics, the most immediate organ of working-class representation. In the views of the revolutionary syndicalists one found, therefore, a mixture of myopia and realism, for no proletarian revolution was possible

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<sup>13</sup> Enrico Leone, Il sindacalismo (Milan: Remo Sandron, n.d.), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Alfredo Gradilone, Storia del sindacalismo, III, 2 Italia (Milan: Dott. A. Giuffrè, 1959), p. 9.

in Italy so long as the General Confederation of Labor, the CGL, exerted a reformist influence second only to the Socialist parliamentarians. The tactical and ideological clash between the revolutionary syndicalists and the CGL leadership in this period was so intense that one Italian commentator described the conflict as "the most serious and most painful episode in the history of the Italian labor movement."<sup>15</sup>

Northern revolutionary syndicalism established ties with some working-class groups in the cities and amongst agricultural laborers of the Po Valley, although syndicalist organizations never represented more than a minority of the organized workers. These revolutionary syndicalists found themselves at odds with the CGL when they stressed the importance of keeping freedom of action in the hands of the local working-class bodies, and in minimizing the role of national working-class leadership; furthermore, the revolutionary syndicalists advocated preparing the working class for those moments of direct action when a general strike was used to paralyze the bourgeois regime or bring about the conquest of power. Revolutionary syndicalism found allies amongst the anarchists, who were also opposed to centralized political organization and parliamentary participation. The failure of

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

a major syndicalist-led strike of agricultural laborers in 1908 in the Parma region of the Po Valley deeply embittered relations with the CGL. Finally, in 1912, the revolutionary syndicalists organized their own labor body, L'Unione sindacale italiana, the USI.

One cannot understand clearly the role of syndicalism in Italy without keeping in mind that a working-class base for the movement existed in the north while the most influential intellectual figures came from the south. The prestige of the revolutionary syndicalism had been enhanced by the general strike of 1904. "In Italy," wrote G. D. H. Cole, "the general strike...arose spontaneously out of the conditions under which the workers lived and suffered oppression."<sup>16</sup> In the writings of Leone and Labriola the theory of revolutionary syndicalism is deceptively simple. The state, argued these intellectuals, is the instrument of the ruling class (here even the Reformists agreed), and the ballot could neither emancipate the worker nor teach him the technical capacity to run the new socialist world. The worker could carry out these historic duties only through working within the trade unions. Leone saw the local Chambers of Labor, the Camere del Lavoro modeled after the French Bourses

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<sup>16</sup>G. D. H. Cole, A History of Socialist Thought: Vol. III, Part II: The Second International 1889-1914 (London: Macmillan, 1963), p. 733.

de Travail, as the nucleus of future society (a view originated by Fernand Pelloutier and used by Tasca in 1919 to oppose Gramsci's stress on the worker councils).

Both writers were suspicious of any reform undertaken for the working class but not under direct worker control. They insisted that reforms helped to prolong, not displace, the capitalistic state. Labriola warned against separating the working class from the actual exercise of political power, otherwise a socialist conquest would mean the reign of "new bosses, who, in the name of socialism, would dominate society."<sup>17</sup> Leone foresaw that mere nationalization of industry was a spurious substitute for socialism. "Nationalization (statizzazione) is like a second rate capitalism."<sup>18</sup>

Having established the rule that only direct working-class action could bring about socialism, the revolutionary syndicalist writers withdrew all importance from political and parliamentary activities. This turning to political goals by class action did not mean a belittlement of the political nature of the change sought--the revolution remained a political act, Labriola insisted.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Arturo Labriola, Riforme e rivoluzione (Milan: Società Editoriale Milanese, 1914), p. 217.

<sup>18</sup> Leone, op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>19</sup> Labriola, op. cit., pp. 19-42.

But in the writings of these two men the efficacy of political action is underestimated, and they fostered illusions over the complexity and extent of violence inherent in a revolutionary change. Their vision of struggle remained an abstraction with no intimation of the magnitude of state power. Within their syndicalist texts are found precepts of revolutionary conduct, but an absence of immediate tactical steps for the working class to follow--considerations which might have led them to reintegrate political action within their theory. In separating the real revolution from political action and in treating the passage to socialism as a light affair, their views came to rest on an untested assumption borrowed from reformist socialism, that "when the power of the working class matures, the arms will crumble in the hands of the bourgeoisie."<sup>20</sup>

By their attacks on all political activity, syndicalist denigration of the PSI coincided with similar assaults being mounted against the Socialist party by the reformist and trade-unionist right wing. As a result, the Socialist Sinistra reacted to both syndicalists and reformists with hostility. In 1907 the revolutionary syndicalists abandoned the PSI to concentrate on their trade-union activities. In the process, the entire Socialist section of Naples left the PSI to go along

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Leone, op. cit., p. 227.

with them. Outside the north, the influence of revolutionary syndicalism quickly evaporated, and many syndicalists soon evolved towards less extreme views. A case in point was Labriola, who supported the Libyan War and, later, the Reformists in the PSI.<sup>21</sup>

We have given much attention to revolutionary syndicalism for good reasons. The syndicalists sharpened the struggle against reformism. More importantly, many of the ideas associated with revolutionary syndicalism were to reappear, albeit in altered form, in the thoughts of both Gramsci and Bordiga. Revolutionary syndicalism was not a success in Italy, but the fact remains that in condemning syndicalism the majority of the PSI leadership failed to see in it an aspect of working-class reality; this fact of life was demonstrated by the many general strikes between 1904 and "Red Week" ten years later. Moreover, the ideological clash with revolutionary syndicalism may have helped to confirm the theoretical intransigence of those Socialists who saw reality more in their texts than in the fields and factories. When Bordiga entered the ranks of the Socialists in 1910, the syndicalists he met in Naples were a limp residue of the earlier breed, but in opposing them he again struck the note of the primacy of political action.

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<sup>21</sup>Labriola lived long enough to join the PCI after 1945. Earlier, he had opposed the Fascist regime but made peace with Mussolini after the conquest of Ethiopia.

Revolutionary syndicalism was a manifestation of the travail designated in Italy as the "crisis of socialism," an Italian variant of the discomfiture felt by many parties when forced to acknowledge the existence of political reformism. The difficulty stemmed from the contrast between the visionary revolutionary theory of Marx coupled with the harshness of class rule in Italy and the pragmatic conduct and small deeds policies of the PSI. After the collapse of syndicalism as a revolutionary alternative, discontented radicals had nowhere to go but seek a transformation of the PSI.

Italian historians looking back and attempting to understand how socialist conduct fed into the debacle of 1922 find no problem agreeing on the predominance of non-revolutionary components among the founders of the Partito socialista italiano at Genoa in 1892 (though this exact name was not adopted until several years later.)<sup>22</sup> Political socialism

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<sup>22</sup>This discussion of the early history of the PSI is based on consultations of various journals and the writings of Arfe, Di Scala, Mammarella, Cole, Storia della sinistra comunista, Julius Braunthal, History of the International 1864-1914 (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1966), Luigi Cortesi, Il socialismo italiano tra riforme e rivoluzione (Bari: Laterza, 1969), Gastone Manacorda, Il socialismo nella storia d'Italia (Bari: Laterza, 1966), and Enzo Santarelli, La revisione del marxismo in Italia (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1964).

arose in Italy in revulsion against the futility of the Bakuninist revolts of earlier decades. The names of Andrea Costa, Amilcare Cipriani, and Enrico Bignami belong to a heroic earlier age of Italian socialism which preceded the joining of two strands of the Italian labor movement in 1892: Costantino Lazzari's Italian Workers party with Turati's League of Milanese Socialists. The anarchists did not join, preferring electoral abstentionism. The new PSI declared its intention of seeking power through electoral participation, adopting the Erfurt platform of the German Social Democratic party as its program. Gaetano Arfe, the Socialist historian writing more than a half century later, discovered that the initial ideology of the PSI was closer to Garibaldi than to Marx. The internal history of first twenty years of the PSI becomes more comprehensible, if one sees there a struggle by the Sinistra to make that ideology Marxist, and succeeding somewhat only two short years before the crisis of Sarajevo.

In the early years of the new century the prevalence of small deeds, the diffusion of deterministic thinking (positivism), and the ministerial leanings of the PSI led by Turati were paralleled by a reformist literature abandoning orthodox Marxism.<sup>23</sup> While the PSI defended its orthodoxy,

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<sup>23</sup>There was Francesco Severio Merlino's short-lived Rivista storica del socialismo, and the more significant monograph, Le vie nuove del socialismo, by Ivanoe Bonomi in 1907.



the leadership did little to deepen the theoretical understanding of the party or try out any tactics beyond electoralism. When Lenin was formulating the precepts of What Is To Be Done? and Trotsky the model of permanent revolution--the instrument and theoretical guide that would permit the Bolsheviki to reap the opportunities presented by 1917--the PSI had reduced its tactics to a political promenade: "the party was intransigent and transigent, remissive, prudent, audacious, impetuous, made alliances, broke alliances, re-made them again, traveled along paths and highways, occasionally cut a new route; but what is important it always moved ahead."<sup>24</sup> These were actions of a party that had come to accept the game and the setting with no questions about the rules. Friends of the PSI sometimes had difficulty distinguishing it from the other parties on the bourgeois demoncratic left.<sup>25</sup>

In the context of these developments the right wing seemed justified in its claim that the political role of the party had been eclipsed by the function of the trade union and the cooperative. Keeping with this drift, a 1907 agreement between the PSI and the newly formed CGL formalized a division of responsibility; the pact represented a victory for the

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<sup>24</sup>Giovanni Zibordi, CS, XVII, No. 5 (August 1, 1907, 228.)

<sup>25</sup>CS, XIX, No. 3 (February 1, 1909), 33.

reformist element, for it led to a further shift toward a pragmatic adjustment leaning on immediate economic gains by the working class, paid for out of long-range party goals. This retreat showed at the next congress (1908), when the PSI committed itself to support only CGL-initiated strikes and denounced the general strike as dangerous, because it turned the proletariat away from a "gradual conquest" of power.<sup>26</sup> The abdication of political socialism was complete, though unofficial. The absence of a real revolutionary working-class tradition (as opposed to France where the Confédération Générale du Travail espoused anarcho-syndicalist theories) probably led the PSI to look for guidance from German socialism.

The crisis of socialism burgeoning through the first decade of the century was many-sided. The reduction of the party to an adjunct of electoral politics had turned many clubs into card-playing hangouts,<sup>27</sup> and by 1910 membership languished. The crisis was keenly felt by the intellectuals who were aware of the dichotomy between vision and reality; the crisis was also ideological, for there were no new studies of capitalist development which would prepare the working class for the shocks of 1911, 1914, 1915, and 1919. At this time Benedetto Croce heralded "the death of socialism," by which he meant the

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<sup>26</sup> Di Scala, op. cit., p. 248.

<sup>27</sup> Salvemini, op. cit., p. 325.

passing of revolutionary Marxist theory. Finally, the crisis was one of confidence, for, when the new generation of Socialists arrived, they turned against their elders. An indication of the continued malaise was the departure of Salvemini from the party and his thumping for suffrage reform. The event, if premature, probably spared him a hastier and less dignified retreat had he remained. The PSI was about to veer sharply left.

A wave of youthful discontent was set to sweep down over the PSI, putting an end to the crisis of socialism, and helping to ignite a period of enormous proletarian enthusiasm. Historians have been able to mark the birth of new radical forces that later converged on the 1912 congress. As early as 1907 a schism with the syndicalists had led to the formation of the Young Socialist Federation (FGS), soon 5,000 strong and allied to the PSI Sinistra.<sup>28</sup> In January 1910, a new periodical appeared in the Romagna, La Lotta di Classe, edited by Benito Mussolini, now at the beginning of the several years that would make him a national figure in Italian politics. In its first issue he said: "Socialism is not a business for merchants, not a political game, nor a romantic dream, but the dearest hope of millions of men who suffer and want to stop

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<sup>28</sup> Alfonso Leonetti, Mouvements ouvriers et socialistes (Chronologie et Bibliographie), L'Italie (des origines a 1922) (Paris: Les Editions Ouvrieres, 1952), p. 105.

wasting their lives and begin to live."<sup>29</sup> Despite the many intellectuals in the PSI, there were few first-rate minds--a situation that remained largely unremedied even with the arrival of the young guard, although a man like Mussolini did add an elan and combativeness missing earlier. Meanwhile, the formation in Parma of the syndicalist Comitato dell'azione diretta indicated how widespread was the ferment. At the 1910 PSI congress, Lazzari, Arturo Vella, Giovanni Lerda, Francesco Ciccotti, Angelica Balabanov, and Mussolini spoke for the Sinistra. The Reformists won 13,000 to 5,000 but a new note was sounded when the Sinistra disclaimed responsibility for reformist conduct and laid the basis for a nationwide faction.

That faction, the Intransigent Revolutionaries, issued a periodical in May 1911, La Soffitta, which met with instant success. The first issue described the depression, discomfiture and disillusionment, "salient psychological characteristics of most Socialists in this unhappy and inglorious hour of the party's life."<sup>30</sup> Before ceasing to publish following the 1912 congress, La Soffitta helped pull together the new faction and turn it into a majority. From its pages Mussolini threatened

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<sup>29</sup>Quoted in Renzo De Felice, Mussolini, il rivoluzionario (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), p. 85.

<sup>30</sup>La Soffitta, I, 1 (May 1, 1911).

class war in the event of international war, and other articles appeared by members who were soon to play lively roles in the history of the Italian Sinistra, amongst them Angelo Tasca and Amadeo Bordiga.

With the circulation of Avanti! drooping to 10,000 the Intransigent Revolutionaries received the support of 8,600 at the 1911 Modena Congress, and were beaten only by a combination of all other factions.<sup>31</sup> As this surge crested, the Libyan War swelled the insurgent ranks and moved them to complete victory. A mere ten months after Modena, the Reggio Emilia Congress expelled four rightwing parliamentarians,<sup>32</sup> marking the triumph of the faction. The historiography of this congress has been dominated by a concern for the conduct and remarks of Benito Mussolini, but his views represented the thinking that had been assembled by the Sinistra during the two decades since 1892. What he had to say was expected by the young hopefuls (and some not so young). The form was Mussolinian but the contents were common property. These included absolute intransigence in politics (no blocs or alliances with other political parties), the building of a homogeneous party and its refinement into an instrument of working-class action,

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<sup>31</sup>Cortesi, op. cit., pp. 406 and 421.

<sup>32</sup>They were Leonida Bissolati, Ivanoe Bonomi, Angiolo Cambrini, and Podrecca.

party control over the parliamentarians (and eventually over the CGL), the belief that bourgeois society was headed towards crises, and the expectation that action beyond mere voting would be needed to bring on socialism. The last two views ranged the Sinistra with other "apocalyptic" visionaries in the International--those who thought bourgeois society would end up on the shoals of disaster--and anticipated the need for the seizure of political power; such sentiments were in concert with leftwing socialist thinking at the time: with Jules Guesde,<sup>33</sup> Rosa Luxemburg,<sup>34</sup> and Lenin. Central to all was the belief in the instability of capitalism and concern that the political party be readied to take on revolution.

Mussolini's remarks illustrated the frame of mind of many delegates to the 1912 Party Congress. "Parliamentarianism is not absolutely necessary to socialism, in that socialism can be conceived, and has been conceived, as anti-parliamentarian or aparliamentarian; but it is essential to the consolidation and perpetuation of bourgeois rule."<sup>35</sup> Italy was then on the

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<sup>33</sup>Robert Wohl, French Communism in the Making (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 4.

<sup>34</sup>Froelich, op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>35</sup>Some of the remarks made by Mussolini before the congress are quoted by Manacorda, op. cit., pp. 376-86, and Cortesi, op. cit., pp. 494-98.

eve of universal manhood suffrage, but Mussolini (like most Socialists) discounted the reform. "The usefulness of universal suffrage--from a socialist view--is negative: on the one hand it hastens the democratic evolution of bourgeois political regimes; on the other it indicates the need to seek a more effective means of political struggle." To this one delegate shouted, "That's a hot one." And Mussolini retorted, "No, it's Marxist." And on the whole Mussolini was probably right: socialism does not seem to lend itself to being built from ballot boxes. The remarks made by Mussolini at Reggio Emilia were not particularly profound, but they struck chords to which the party responded in an overwhelming fashion, and he was soon the editor-in-chief of Avanti!

With hindsight one can see in the years 1912-14 the personal failures and ideological inadequacies of Mussolini, which were shared by the entire Sinistra. There were many intellectuals in the PSI, but few displayed keen analytical minds, a situation that remained unremedied even after World War I, when the party drew in a large new membership. After Reggio, the Reformists too thought the results dismal; they saw the future darkly, though they did note that the delegates were more intransigent than revolutionary. Still, behind the new smoke there was fire, and by 1914 membership in the PSI had doubled to 47,000, while circulation of the Avanti! zoomed to 60,000. Mussolini used the newspaper both to educate and

to agitate the working class, encouraging it to act. Without this supportive role, the labor history of those years might have remained less turbulent. Years later Germanetto nostalgically remembered that under Mussolini the Avanti! had become "a battle cry."<sup>36</sup> From a radical standpoint, these were Mussolini's finest years. Despite his successes, the time remaining to the new leadership was desperately short. Moreover, the heritage of the Sinistra was agitational, not revolutionary; no one had devised a means of utilizing the peasantry, and no set of tactics had been worked out for the working class. The Reformists were largely responsible for this deficiency, for they had obstinately disavowed revolution. But now the Sinistra did little better. Two years after Reggio the reformist Critica Sociale perceptively pointed out that the PSI had not in the slightest altered its theoretical outlook,<sup>37</sup> a disclosure confirmed by Serrati a decade later.<sup>38</sup> Thus the triumph of the Sinistra had been somewhat rhetorical in nature and to that degree illusory; soon the Sinistra would show itself to be of two minds and two souls.

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<sup>36</sup>Giovanni Germanetto, Memoirs of a Barber (New York: International Publishers, 1935), p. 55.

<sup>37</sup>CS, XXIV, 8 (April 16, 1914), 113.

<sup>38</sup>Pagine Rosse, I, No. 7 (September 30, 1923), 1.



"For me," said Mussolini addressing himself to the problem of seizing power, "it's a question of preparing a revolutionary socialist minority able to confront the bourgeoisie."<sup>39</sup> The occasion was a meeting devoted to that problem held in Florence in 1914. The theme indicated that the Sinistra had begun to grapple with the theoretical problems posed by revolution, but, as they stood, Mussolini's remarks were ambiguous: if interpreted to mean that history was the movement of elites supplanting one another, one hardly needed socialism. The tactical and theoretical immaturity of the Sinistra were dramatized by the tumultuous events of Red Week, June 1914. Police in Ancona fired on a mob which had been stirred up by the anarchist Errico Malatesta, and a general strike mingled with insurrectionary disorders spread to many parts of the peninsula. The CGL was forced to join the action, while Mussolini used the Avanti! to fan emotions. Unity amongst all groups on the left--anarchists, republicans, syndicalists, and Socialists--and between the left and the masses was achieved to a degree hitherto unknown, and this time the southern masses jumped in. In many localities Committees of Action were formed. Here was the Italian working

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<sup>39</sup>Quoted in De Felice, op. cit., p. 186.

class living up to "the great tradition," forcing the government to call out 100,000 soldiers before this "near revolution"<sup>40</sup> subsided. While the enormous power of working-class spontaneity was being demonstrated, neither Avanti! nor the PSI knew what to do with the opportunity. The CGL hurried to call off the strike, claiming that the proletariat was not ready for revolutionary action. The Reformists, stunned by the events, sniped from the wings and accused the Sinistra of having resurrected the mobe, la plebe.<sup>41</sup>

Frightened by the events of the week, Critica Sociale turned the fury of its polemic against Mussolini, arguing the impossibility of vaulting an economically underdeveloped nation into socialism. They reasoned that to seek socialism without an adequate economic base was to return to utopianism, "to the thaumaturgy of the Idea," "to the miracle of the will," to the discarded pre-Marxian beliefs that socialism could be built in the presence of mass illiteracy and backwardness.<sup>42</sup> Three years later Lenin would attempt to do what the Italian Reformists of 1914 said could not be done. After the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917, Gramsci turned the Reformists' argument around tracing

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<sup>40</sup>Denis Mack Smith, Italy A Modern History (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 291. Also, Gradilone, op. cit., pp. 31-34.

<sup>41</sup>CS, XXIV, 12 (June 16, 1914), 176-78 and 13 (July 1, 1914), 193-95.

<sup>42</sup>CS, XXIV, 14 (July 15, 1914), 209-11.

Bolshevik success to the triumph of human will over the unfavorable material circumstances of backward Russia.

With time the PSI could have overcome the weaknesses disclosed during the shock of Red Week. But the event that was soon to overwhelm the Socialists, deprive them of time and steal their future--the Great War--was now only weeks away. Like the sorcerer's apprentice, Mussolini had been capable of conjuring up great forces without knowing what to do with them once they were there. In November 1913, Mussolini and Guiseppe De Falco had launched a bi-monthly, Utopia, which had featured a statement by Louis-Auguste Blanqui: "Arms and organization. These are the decisive elements for social progress and the infallible means for ending war."<sup>43</sup> The lack of theoretical development within the Sinistra--of an understanding of the nature of the capitalist system then evolving--makes comprehensible this turn to war as a means of achieving the social revolution, except that their tack rested on the naive belief that violence per se would unhinge bourgeois society and send the proletariat wafting to socialism. The thought of revolution arising out of war was not new<sup>44</sup>--indeed, there was the unforgettable example of the Paris Commune of

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<sup>43</sup> Utopia, I, 1 (November 22, 1913).

<sup>44</sup> Wohl, op. cit., p. 4.

1871. But the process had to be thought out carefully, for war could be used equally to avert revolution. By May 1914 an article by Sergio Panunzio completed the circle by declaring war as the inevitable final crisis awaiting bourgeois society. These views of war as the midwife of revolution rested on simplistic conceptions omitting from consideration such questions as the nature of the revolutionary change, the tactics to be followed by the working class, and the central role played by the state. In a sense it was the spirit of syndicalism repeating itself over again, and would soon pass on to Maximalism.

With the coming of the war the PSI leadership began to strain: while the party base remained solidly loyal to non-intervention, the leadership began to falter, with many leading towards the reformist preference for passivity. Critica Sociale, reporting that the numbers supporting reformism in the Mantua Congress of the CGL in May was as large as those voting for revolution in the April 1914 Ancona Congress of the PSI, asked: "Does this signal a radical break between the political and economic organs of the Italian proletariat?"<sup>45</sup> The answer was crucial to the future of Italian socialism, but

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<sup>45</sup>CS, XXIV, 10 (May 16, 1914), 145-47.

before it could be properly determined the events of the war took up all attention. At a meeting of the Socialist directorate during the feverish crisis days of July-August, Mussolini urged the party to prepare an insurrectional general strike with which to oppose possible Italian intervention; a majority voted the proposal down.<sup>46</sup> Until this point Mussolini had remained loyal to his principles as a revolutionary and to antiwar decisions adopted by congresses of the Second International. In contrast, the wartime attitude of the PSI now began to surface. Bewildered by the collapse of the International, a majority of the directorate sidled toward inaction. By May 1915, that leadership had divided into a centrist majority--i.e., had abandoned active opposition to the war and was sympathetic to, when not openly approving of, the idea of defensive war--and a revolutionary minority upholding the traditions of the Sinistra. From the former rose the Maximalists of 1919; to the latter came Amadeo Bordiga. Attracted by the glittering prospects that beckoned from across the battlefields, frustrated by the timidity of the directorate, and, perhaps, for other well-known reasons, Mussolini defected to the interventionist cause in November. The PSI was thus deprived of a rare, audacious leader. During these harrowing early months of war, Amadeo

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<sup>46</sup> De Felice, op. cit., p. 226.

Bordiga stepped forth as the ablest ideologue in the ranks of the PSI.

## 2. The Renovator of Socialist Principles

Shortly before the Reggio Emilia Congress, the reformist section of Naples arbitrarily declared itself "revolutionary," designating Silvano Fasulo, a spokesman for Neapolitan reformism, as representative to the congress.<sup>47</sup> From all evidence, some of which will be presented later, this factional change of labels represented no ideological conversion. All the same, the act of bandwagon climbing does help illustrate why the ranks of the Sinistra in 1912 were somewhat less loyal than indicated by the votes of the delegates. Meanwhile, an inconspicuous notice in La Soffitta announced that a maverick Socialist group in the Portici district of Naples had designated Amadeo Bordiga to represent it.<sup>48</sup>

Bordiga's association with the PSI went back to 1910 when at twenty-one he joined the FGS. A remark quoted by Romano from a speech by Bordiga in 1912 leads us to suppose that he was drawn to socialism by its intellectual and moral

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<sup>47</sup> Mammanella, op. cit., p. 358.

<sup>48</sup> La Soffitta, II, 31 (June 15, 1912).

aspects.<sup>49</sup> In any case, Bordiga entered the Socialist movement at a time when the left wing was rapidly growing in influence. Following on the heels of the victory of Reggio, the new PSI leadership made a determined effort to renovate the thinking of the party, and, in conjunction with this effort, Bordiga was drawn to make a vital contribution. Although he had not formulated by 1914 all the principles that would mark him after 1919, Bordiga's efforts were deliberately aimed at removing the theoretical obstacles to revolutionary socialism.

References to some of the earliest activities of the young Bordiga appear in the prewar periodicals of the Sinistra. In November 1911, La Soffitta reported a speech in which he placed his hopes for ending the hated Libyan War on working-class action.<sup>50</sup> A number of young Socialists, Bordiga included, failed to convince the local labor chamber, the Borsa del Lavoro, that the working class should be called on to obstruct the movement of troops through the port of Naples and were arrested for

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<sup>49</sup>Romano, Chapter I, footnote 64. This observation is only partially confirmed by a memorandum on Bordiga sent to this writer by Oreste Lizzadri in January 1972. A Socialist, Lizzadri worked closely with Bordiga during 1913-15. According to the memorandum, henceforth referred to as the Lizzadri Memo, Bordiga was attracted to Marxism by the "rigor of its scientific analysis," without giving much thought to sentimentalism or humanitarianism.

<sup>50</sup>La Soffitta, I, 17 (November 19, 1911).

their efforts.<sup>51</sup> A few months later, Bordiga condemned anticlericalism as a distraction and asked all Socialists to renounce bourgeois ideology, "including one's own nationality."<sup>52</sup> His attacks on corruption in Neapolitan Socialist circles brought the angry retort from Fasulo that Bordiga and his comrades were "a group of kids." The local prefect had taken note of Bordiga, leaving a description of him as being "lively" and driven by the ambition "to make himself heard."<sup>53</sup>

Bordiga's intransigence, particularly his opposition to political alliances, had its roots in the fight against reformist socialism in prewar Naples. As indicated earlier, when the syndicalists left the PSI in 1907, they carried with them the Socialists of Naples. In 1912, the syndicalists and Reformists became reconciled and formed the Federazione socialista napoletano, with the leadership of that body being largely in the hands of Socialists who were also freemasons.<sup>54</sup> The fusion with the syndicalists was a violation of the decisions taken at the 1908 congress, but so vague had party guidelines become that the only dissent came from some young

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<sup>51</sup>Reported in booklet, Ai socialisti d'Italia, issued by the Circolo "Carlo Marx" in April, 1914.

<sup>52</sup>La Soffitta, II, 24 (March 4, 1912) and 27 (April 14, 1912).

<sup>53</sup>Report of the prefect of Naples (number 2531), July 7, 1913, in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Pubblica Sicurezza, Ministero dell'Interno, Divisione Affari Generali e Riservati, Vecchio Caselario Politico Centrale (henceforth referred to as ACS, VCPC), busta 531.

<sup>54</sup>Lizzadri Memo.



local Socialists who, led by Bordiga, established the independent Circolo socialista rivoluzionario "Carlo Marx" in May 1913.<sup>55</sup> Secession as a means of protest was not a new tactic, having been used successfully by Mussolini at Forlì in 1911. From a general reading of the documents of this period, all evidence is that the dissidents belonged to the young guard that carried out the upset at the Reggio Congress. Although the Circolo was active locally, it may have established contact with the revolutionary northern syndicalists of the Comitato dell'azione diretta.<sup>56</sup>

The Federazione, shortly rebaptized as the Unione socialista napoletana, found that marriage between the two elements was more easily brought to bed than kept there in a state of bliss, and family squabbles forced the PSI directorate to send down a peacemaker in the person of Costantino Lazzari.<sup>57</sup> What followed was in keeping with Lazzari's later conduct in the PSI: at Naples he confirmed the reformist body as the representative of the party, a step that left the dissident youths, soon organized as the Circolo, as "outsiders." The

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<sup>55</sup> Storia della sinistra comunista, I, p. 71.

<sup>56</sup> Prefect's report (number 15839), July 17, 1913, ACS, VCPC, busta 33.

<sup>57</sup> Report of prefect of Naples (number 2917), ibid.

decision conflicted with Lazzari's earlier affiliation with the Intransigent Revolutionaries and belittled the significance of the Reggio Congress of the year before. As an interesting contrast, an index of "revolutionary bodies" circulated by the Ministry of the Interior listed both the syndicalist Comitato and the Circolo "Carlo Marx," but not the Unione socialista.<sup>58</sup>

In the 1913 parliamentary elections the number of Socialist deputies climbed to 33; five were from Naples, though three had run as independents. The following January, two deputies urged the Neapolitan Socialists to form coalitions with other parties before entering the local elections. This type of electioneering was prohibited by the Ancona Congress in April 1914, thus completing the prevalence of the intransigent view in party tactics. (The same congress also expelled all freemasons from the PSI.) Bordiga addressed a party congress for the first time at Ancona. He attended as a delegate from the Socialist section of Gragnano, a commune in southern Italy; Bordiga had helped Lizzardi found that section in 1913.<sup>59</sup> Bordiga called upon the delegates to intervene in Naples and dissolve the reformist Unione socialista. This step proved unnecessary; hearing of the decisions of the congress, the Unione socialista, more concerned with attaining political office than

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<sup>58</sup>Circular (number 9960), May 10, 1913, ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Lizzardi Memo.

demonstrating loyalty to party principles, quit the PSI. The move allowed the dissidents of the Circolo to return and reconstitute the official Neapolitan section.

In the course of dealing with these practical difficulties, Bordiga evolved an ideological position. Later, the mature Bordiga--the ideologue who disputed with the Bolshevik leadership of the Comintern, analyzing more realistically and more correctly (we know now) the tactics then under discussion--was a revolutionary who had been tempered by a series of events: the severe class struggles of 1914, the collapse of the Second International, and the Russian Revolution, all of which turned Bordiga into the most able Italian Marxist in 1919. But from the beginning, Bordiga had interpreted the task of the PSI as being that of preparing the working class for the seizure of power, and thus he settled on revolution as a goal, the party as the means, and the removal of all ambiguity surrounding the two as the first order of business. The PSI, he felt, should present itself as a clear and viable alternative. Pursuing the tactics espoused by Bordiga meant reversing the trend toward accommodation and integration within the established order.

The need for tactical revision and a case in point of the influence of his Neapolitan background was given by Bordiga in a piece sent to Mussolini's Utopia; it appeared in print before the Ancona Congress. Bordiga argued against

Socialist participation in electoral coalitions, citing Naples as an example. He admitted that a coalition had won control of the city, and that the city administration had been improved, but the agreement with the other parties had subordinated the working class to the needs of the coalition, while the party had been forced to limit its activity and the range of its message to the proletariat. Bordiga concluded that coalition tactics would delay and not advance the attainment of socialism.<sup>60</sup>

He developed these ideas further in Il Socialista, the organ of the Socialists in the province of Naples. Founded by Bordiga, Grieco, and Lizzadri, 35 issues of the weekly were to appear between the Ancona Congress and the Italian intervention in 1915. The articles were tougher and more analytical than those in Utopia and showed that, by the middle of 1914, Bordiga was already a formidable polemicist endowed with the ability to win over his Socialist audience. The political problem thrown up by the coalition tactic was that socialism tended to fuse with bourgeois democracy to the point of beclouding both the ultimate goal and the intermediate steps to be taken by the Socialists. Coalition politics implicitly downgrades, when not renouncing outright, the need for revolution. Bordiga leveled his main criticism at this danger, resorting to an ideological clarification.

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<sup>60</sup>Utopia, II, 3-4 (February 15-28), 117-25 and 9-10 (July 15-31), 229-302.

Socialism, Bordiga asserted, was not the continuation of bourgeois democracy, but its negation. Socialism had developed in response to the failures of nineteenth century liberalism, not from its success, and socialism and bourgeois democracy were irreconcilable. To the class harmony advocated by the bourgeois democrat the Socialist must counterpose political and economic struggles.

Against its theories of evolution and progress we counterpose the historic reality of revolutionary preparation.

Against its educationism we advance the need for the economic emancipation of the working class, which alone will put an end to the intellectual inferiority of workers.

And if that were not enough, we need only recall that modern democracy is intrinsically colonialist, and therefore militarist, and this by virtue of the economic nature of the bourgeoisie; but the proletariat is internationalist and antimilitarist.<sup>61</sup>

Under democracy the representative system was used as a device to settle the collective problems of the bourgeois class, whereas Socialists realized that political equality was no more than a means by which a social oligarchy oppressed the working classes. The bourgeoisie concentrated its powers in the state, the focus of bourgeois power, while Socialists fought to maximize local autonomy. He concluded his presentation

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<sup>61</sup> Il Socialista, 12 and 16 July, 1914, reproduced in Storia della sinistra comunista, Ib, pp. 17-24.

indicating the two alternatives facing the PSI. "Therefore-- either with the coalition as democrats or against the bloc as Socialists. One cannot escape from these choices." Bordiga was telling the readership that immediate success was too prohibitive a price to pay, if it meant abandoning strategic goals. This conflicted with the reformist view making the means (reforms) more desirable than the goal (socialism).

From the axiom that the PSI must never detour the working class from the path leading to revolution, Bordiga drew a corollary. He urged that Socialists in southern Italy not be given special dispensation to break party discipline. The difficulty here was that ambitious individuals within the sections often exploited the organization to gain remunerative offices, in the process putting the PSI in a politically compromising position. These actions were frequently masked by an alleged concern for "moral questions." The matter had become an open scandal and the cause of bitter sarcasm in the north, reinforcing the belief that corruption in southern politics was more the rule than the exception. Bordiga's views were aired in the Avanti! after Mussolini had been made the editor and were evidence of the new collaboration between that paper and the new Socialist generation. Reeducation of the party demanded didactic journalism, and both men excelled at this activity. And to give the devil his due, Mussolini's ability to relate this ideological labor to the world of class struggles

elicited enormous enthusiasm from the young Socialists and from many working-class elements.

When Bordiga described the south as a storehouse of conservatism and an economic colony for northern monopolies, he sounded no different from Salvemini earlier. But Salvemini had looked to suffrage as the lever of social reform, whereas Bordiga turned to revolutionary pressure from the working masses. Bordiga insisted that the southern bourgeoisie would never play a progressive role, and he urged Socialists not to fear standing alone on their program nor hesitate to abstain from elections, if this would permit them to be more persuasive to the masses. Significantly, Bordiga told Socialists to utilize the everyday experiences of the working masses and not measure success by a quantitative scale based on electoral results. Only by sticking to class education would the Socialists "awaken the sleeping lion and turn him against all the national bourgeois parties that so abuse the servility of the unfortunate masses."<sup>62</sup> Strikingly absent from his analysis, and from the rhetoric of other Socialists, was any reference to the southern worker as a landless peasant. On this question, postwar Leninism was to prove instructive to the Sinistra.

Though assigning greater importance to political educa-

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<sup>62</sup>"Il socialismo meridionale e le quistioni morali," Avanti!, November 1, 1912.

tion than to electoral success Bordiga was not advocating abstentionism. He was to do so in the special conditions of 1919-20. In fact, in the prewar period his pen was directed against the abstentionism practiced by anarchists and syndicalists. Maintaining that the social revolution was "a political act prepared on the political terrain"--a definition resting on the repudiation of reformist belief in gradualism and the inevitability of socialism--Bordiga defended electoralism as another branch of socialist schooling: Socialists entered the elections in order to educate the proletariat. "Abstentionism is no remedy; in fact, it would mean abandoning the only means available to the proletariat to defend itself against political exploitation by non-socialist parties."<sup>63</sup>

The left wing in the PSI insisted that the party must become the guiding agent of all Socialists, including those in parliament and the trade unions. The potential power of the trade unions, as in Germany and Great Britain, was not lost on the Sinistra.<sup>64</sup> During the reformist decades, Turati had recognized the CGL as a co-equal in leading working-class

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<sup>63</sup>"Contro l'astensionismo," Avanti!, July 13, 1913.

<sup>64</sup>The Mannheim agreement between Socialist trade union and the German Social Democratic party may have inspired the 1907 pact between the PSI and CGL. The influence of the German party on Italian Socialists was broken only with the Reggio Congress. Since the future PCI became subservient to Soviet leadership after 1924, the period of 1912-24 was the heyday of independent radicalism in Italy.



struggles; such practice seemed in keeping with the vision projected by Marx in Capital. The Reformists interpreted Marx to mean that this "promethean" class would gradually self-emancipate itself. But the Sinistra knew that in reality the CGL was marching to the right.

Bordiga's views on this topic were in concert with the outlook of the Sinistra. His writings disclose no new insights, though they do parallel some concepts formulated by Lenin a decade earlier. There is no evidence that Lenin had any influence on the Sinistra at this time. Rather, the parallelism is further suggestive of the community of thinking shared by the leftwing revival before 1914, a revival making Leninist and Sinistra views ideologically congenial. The trade union to Bordiga was a working-class organization dedicated to improving the life of the worker; he found that the trade union tended to be apolitical and posed no threat to the social order. He believed that Marxian socialism had altered the picture by introducing an awareness of the scope, character and direction of class struggles. Enriched with this consciousness, the working class had created its political party, which now assumed the responsibility of leading the class and clarifying the objectives behind the class struggles. Bordiga never used the term "vanguard" (in this prewar period) but he defended the party as the most advanced and reliable element of the working

class.<sup>65</sup> Such views anticipated the vanguard concept and eased the acceptance of Bolshevik influence after 1917.

Bordiga was aware that neither the party nor the trade unions lived up to the Sinistra model of how working-class bodies should behave. He attributed the discrepancy to the "degenerate reformism" that had overtaken the party and to the prevalence of "guild" attitudes in the trade unions; by the latter he meant that the trade unions had preferred to benefit from immediate interests, abandoning the long-range goals of the working-class as a whole. Having routed the Reformists at Reggio, it was now the duty of the party to radicalize the masses with a socialist consciousness.

In 1913 the syndicalist USI lost a hard fought strike in Milan. In this action they were supported by Mussolini in Avanti!, but not by the local Socialists or the Chamber of Labor. Writing in Avanguardia Bordiga sided with Mussolini and criticized the party for not doing enough to educate the working-class on the meaning of class struggles. "The outbreak of a revolution in the social forms of production...must occur and succeed on the [political] plane lying beyond the trade unions."<sup>66</sup> Socialists

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<sup>65</sup>"Partito socialista e organizzazione operaia," Avanti!, January 30, 1913, and the more analytical "Organizzazione e partito," Avanguardia, July 20, 1913.

<sup>66</sup>"Lo sciopero di Milano," Avanguardia, June 15, 1913.

had to intensify class consciousness by disclosing the political aspect behind every economic struggle. Soon he returned to this theme, using the pages of Avanti!: the PSI had to "react to the alleged independence of the major working-class organization [the CGL] and resolutely defend both working-class political intransigence and a more socialist and less guild attitude by the trade unions. Otherwise our revolutionary stance will remain in midair, without its logical base."<sup>67</sup>

In the years when Bordiga had literally disappeared from the annals of the PCI, the one incident about him that was remembered was his confrontation with Tasca at the 1912 FGS congress. The young Socialists met shortly after the Reggio Congress and were divided on the ways to improve the Socialist education of FGS members. A rightwing motion introduced by Tasca, asking that young workers be educated in a traditional fashion was narrowly defeated by Bordiga's motion; the vote was 2,730-2,465. Noting the conservative intent of bourgeois-supported education and the impossibility of providing a network of schools that would prepare the young to be intellectually free and ready to sacrifice themselves to the needs of revolution, the leftwing motion invited the FGS to shape the character of its youth in the crucible of class

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<sup>67</sup> "L'Unità proletaria," Avanti!, August 1, 1913.

struggles.<sup>68</sup> The affirmation that young Socialists would learn more from action along class lines was in keeping with Bordiga's firm belief that no meaningful emancipation was possible so long as the bourgeois state remained. The FGS was to prepare young people, helping them to overcome personal and economic egoism, while the duty of the PSI was that of "giving to the proletariat the consciousness of its own completeness and the courage not to seek outside of its ranks the means for its own deliverance."<sup>69</sup> In both instances Bordiga directed his appeal to the consciousness of a class.

Candid in his views, confident that they were in keeping with the pulse of history, the twenty-five year old Bordiga avowed to the 1914 Ancona Congress, "Ours is not to patiently reconstruct the disintegrating body of present society; our task is to demolish it."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>The motions are quoted in Storia della sinistra comunista, I, pp. 193-85. In his 1958 article Romano made much of the fact that Bordiga stressed human sentiment, which impressed Romano when contrasted with the conventional approach of Tasca. Vide supra: Chapter I, footnote 64. Bordiga's motion was generally similar to one of the amendments introduced by Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, and Julius Martov at the 1907 Stuttgart Congress: "On the following day, August 22, the well-known amendments of V.I. Lenin-Rosa Luxemburg were introduced. The third of these amendments spoke of the need to rear youth in the spirit of internationalism, socialism, and to develop class consciousness." V.V. Chistyakov, "Rosa Luxemburg i Mezhdunarodnoe Rabochee Dvizhenie," Voprosi Istorii, 3 (1971), 74. The association of Martov with the other two is made by Braunthal, op. cit., p. 337.

<sup>69</sup>"Il problema della coltura," Avanti!, April 5, 1913.

<sup>70</sup>Cortesi, op. cit., p. 561.

### 3. Bordiga and the War

The war wrenched the PSI out of its deep involvement with domestic matters. Militant Socialists, even those who had theoretically foreseen the catastrophe, were stunned into a bewilderment shared with most of the Second International. The party had concentrated so heavily on its own problems that scant heed had been paid to what should be done in the event of international conflict. During the Libyan crisis some in the Sinistra (including Mussolini) had resorted to antiwar action, but that conflict was colonialist, and most Socialists had no trouble uniting against it. The war of 1914 was something else, for it raised issues close to socialist loyalties: defense of the homeland, opposition to autocracy, and the usefulness of democratic wars.

The PSI seems not to have listened to the voices raised against general war at the gatherings of the Second International. At the 1891 meeting a Dutch Anarchist, Domela Nieuwenhuis had urged that international war be turned into a civil war, but neither this suggestion nor his proposal for a general strike two years later had received any significant support.<sup>71</sup> At Stuttgart in 1907 Rosa Luxemburg, supported by Lenin and Martov, had managed to tack on a final sentence to a resolution on war making it a socialist duty to rouse opposition, thereby

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<sup>71</sup>James Joll, The Second International (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1955), pp. 71-3.

hastening the downfall of the system. The Reformists in control of the PSI were little interested in the problem, and at the international congresses Oddino Morgari, the Italian representative, made common cause with the German Socialists in opposing militant action. On the whole, the Reformists belittled the complexities posed by the outbreak of general war, and, after the Bosnian crisis in 1908, rightwing Socialists led by Leonida Bissolati began flirting with the idea of "social patriotism." Even the extraordinary Basel Congress in 1912, which declared that world war "would inevitably call forth... the revolt of the working class,"<sup>72</sup> echoed inaudibly in most Italian Socialist circles; one exception to this generalization was Bordiga and the young Socialists who had gathered around him. In a reaction to the congress, Bordiga wrote in December 1912, "The distinction between 'offensive' and 'defensive' can no longer be made with modern wars; all depends on the sophistries of the diplomats. A modern European war would never be the case of one nation aggressing against the other, but rather the consequence of territorial and financial greed by both sides..."<sup>73</sup> Nonetheless, at Basel, there had

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<sup>72</sup>Quoted in Joseph Rothschild, The Communist Party of Bulgaria: Origins and Development 1883-1936 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 60.

<sup>73</sup>De Clementi, op. cit., pp. 36-7. The quotation and De Clementi's discussion of the young prewar Bordiga bring to light another phase of his political development; before 1914 Bordiga had understood the nature of the conflict about to break out.

been "no discussion on the tactical means to prevent war,"<sup>74</sup> and after that the shattering of socialist solidarity awaited the inevitable crisis.

But Italy had not gone to war in August, and the PSI was not immediately faced with the wrenching problem of what to do. Other difficulties began to build up, however. From the outset Mussolini's Avanti! had adopted a pro-Allied slant in presenting the war news; this policy only increased the anti-German feeling in the ranks of the PSI. Even the pacifist Turati declared his readiness to resort to arms to keep Italy from joining the Central Powers.<sup>75</sup> Behind much Socialist reaction were thought patterns inherited from an earlier era. Some Socialists could not restrain themselves upon seeing the violation of republican France; others took war to be the slayer of capitalism and the demiurge of revolution; many were afraid that a German success would mean a victory for militarist autocracy. The most damaging to Socialists was the concept of defensive war. Marx and Engels and the First International had defended that concept,<sup>76</sup> and these views had been carried

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<sup>74</sup>Braunthal, op. cit., p. 346.

<sup>75</sup>Storia della sinistra comunista, I, p. 90.

<sup>76</sup>Braunthal, op. cit., pp. 324-25. Initially both men had supported Prussia in the Franco-Prussian War, but moved into opposition when the war turned into one of conquest.

over in the baggage of the Second International. Few Socialists in Italy openly questioned whether the early notions remained valid after the rise of imperialism.

Against the pressures building up for Socialist involvement on the side of the Allies Bordiga proved to be the man of the hour. The defectors from the PSI were few, but Bordiga developed an antiwar stance that most Socialist leaders would not accept; in so doing he arrived at a position close to that adopted by Lenin, though each probably remained unaware of one another. In addition, the war initiated for Bordiga the most important decade of his political life. Before the war he was one of a number of Socialists hammering to renew the PSI; with the war Bordiga became a national spokesman for the PSI base.

The first of these writings, "To our Posts!," appeared in Avanti! of August 14 and was addressed to the confusion and prowar sentiment growing in PSI ranks. Warning that by abandoning neutrality the Socialists would cast the proletariat into a war not of its making, Bordiga went on to display a keen understanding of the imperialist rivalry behind the war events.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> In the article Bordiga anticipated a critique made famous by Gramsci in the Quaderni. Bordiga pointed out that in great crises, the more politically advanced groups tend to fall back to retrograde positions; thus in the Risorgimento "the revolutionary republicans made the monarchy." Gramsci referred to the same with the quip that Garibaldi went south in the pocket of Victor Emanuel. Both pointed up a phenomena common in Italian history: the left sacrificing itself for goals not its own.



Bordiga denied that Germany was singularly responsible for the war and argued that guilt had to be shared by all the national bourgeoisies. Socialists were not to allow themselves to be deceived by the ruling class's device of making events appear to cast blame on the opposite camp. Rival economic systems had created the armed peace, and Germany had been only a contributory factor.

The thesis that the war was prepared by Austro-German militarism is textbookish and conventional. And it is superficial to ascribe the militarism of these two states to feudalism. The massive German armaments correspond to the developments of its industry and the needs of its commerce. Placed in the forefront of the capitalistic world by virtue of its excellent and intensive production, and not having a vast colonial empire, like France and England, modern Germany, having come on the scene after its two rivals, necessarily turned to armaments as a means to assure her place in the world.

The war had sprung from imperialist conflict not from the whim of Franz Joseph or the gusto of Wilhelm II. It was another of those periodic crises shaking capitalism, and Socialists must not throw themselves headlong into the defense of France or offer to sacrifice hundreds of thousands of workers in the massacre. For the moment Italian Socialists were duty bound to remain at their posts and keep their faith.

Accepting Bordiga's conclusions, though labeling them controversial, the editors (Mussolini amongst them) appended a

note separating them from Bordiga's sang froid; they declared that in some moments "reason is overcome by sentiment and logic cannot stand before the impetus of passion." But the break now opening between Bordiga and Mussolini had less to do with human psychology, perhaps, than with the ideology of politics; each was drawing from the war a different assessment. A complaint soon appeared in Il Socialista: "If Avanti! had kept its revolutionary antistate and anti-bourgeois attitude, the party would have responded with a stronger antiwar agitation."<sup>78</sup>

The editorial hinted at Mussolini's possible defection, concluding that the totality of the party must remain stronger than the sum of its individual membership. Within a fortnight Mussolini answered with a personal note in which he affirmed his antiwar resolve and expressing admiration and "sincere friendship" for Bordiga.<sup>79</sup>

The best of Bordiga's antiwar writings appeared in the organ of the FGS, Avanguardia. Here he set out to recompose the faith in socialism which was shattered along with the peace in those early August mornings. He started by pointing out that Socialists before the war had conducted antiwar agitation while accepting the notion that major wars were no longer probable amongst the powers; the truth was that this "grand

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<sup>78</sup>Il Socialista, September 17, 1914, reprinted in Storia della sinistra comunista, ib., pp. 28-9.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-30.

illusion" had been popularized by Norman Angell, along with the belief that the advance of civilization had opened the eyes of the rulers to the dangers inherent in modern war. This view was distinctly un-Marxian. Marxian analysis rested on the credo that the modern bourgeoisie was unable to control the consequences of its own development and would remain the victim of its own progress. Modern life was not an evolution towards greater stability, but a parabolic rise toward a crisis that would bring on the ultimate collapse of capitalism. The paradox presented by Europe was that "the growth of production in the economic field, of culture in the intellectual, of democratization in the political, instead of bringing an end to war and to the disarming of fratricidal armies, simply intensified military preparation." The return to barbarism Europe was now witnessing was an expression of the inner character of the modern democratic bourgeois society, which took to war as an outlet from inner contradictions. "The war we observe is not a throwback to a barbarous feudal epoch but the historical phenomenon of our times; it came about not despite our civility, but literally because the bourgeois regime conceals profound barbarism behind its outer decor."

With this tour de force, intended to restore validity to the Marxian vision, Bordiga proceeded to drain conviction from the arguments advocating defensive and democratic wars. No outcome from such a war could match the gain to socialism

if one socialist party--the Italian--kept its head and remained out of the holocaust. "We are the admirers of violence. We are the admirers of the conscious violence of those who rise against the oppression of the strong, of the anonymous violence of the masses striking for liberty. We seek the violence that smashes chains."<sup>80</sup>

During August and September of 1914 the arguments justifying "democratic war" resounded through Italy: men in the democratic and revolutionary left were urging the nation to leap into the furnace of war to defeat autocracy. That the arguments used later in October by Mussolini bore a resemblance to an appeal for intervention appearing in two earlier issues of the Critica Sociale is evidence that the reasoning was part of a fabric of national debate. Italian intervention, wrote the Socialist correspondent Ettore Marchioli, would rout the spectre of German militarism, end the suffering by shortening the war, and round out the ethnic frontier on the northeast. Like most observers at the time, Marchioli believed that the war would be short and that Italian intervention would shorten it further. In the arguments used by Marchioli appeared the fatal acceptance of the union sacrée: "at certain times--

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<sup>80</sup>Il socialismo di ieri dinanzi alla guerra di oggi," Avanguardia, October 25, November 1, November 16, 1914.

we are in one of these--the concept and principle of class must disappear to be replaced provisionally by that of the nation."<sup>81</sup> Absent from Marchioli's (and later Mussolini's) contentions was the observation that wars, unless they dissolve into revolution, serve the needs of those who order the armies and not of the men who fight in them.

Mussolini's editorial of October 18 in the Avanti! announced his retreat from "absolute neutrality," a first step towards intervention. The defection of Mussolini stirred the PSI ranks, perhaps as much as the initial war news. On the heels of Mussolini's departure there followed one of the remarkable episodes in the annals of Italian Socialism: nearly a thousand party sections met to pledge allegiance to the PSI and to neutrality. This was all the more significant since so large a constituency in the PSI had identified with Mussolini, yet old comrades at Forli were amongst the first to disavow him. The Milanese section with Luigi Reossi a future leader of the Communist Sinistra, voted down a pale and sickly Mussolini, 600-20. The mood of the party was caught up in the words of Maria Giudice. "I feel that not a drop of blood would I give to the fatherland, while I would sacrifice all to destroy and renew it."<sup>82</sup> Sentiments pledging fealty to socialism

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<sup>81</sup>I limiti della neutralità," CS, XXIV, 16 (September 16, 1914), 276-79 and No. 19 (October 1, 1914), 292.

<sup>82</sup>Avanti!, January 8, 1915.

and disloyalty to the bourgeois state took up pages of consecutive issues of Avanti! indicating how closely Bordiga was mirroring the rank and file. This was the beginning of a symbiosis between the PSI Sinistra and Bordiga which would carry to the formation of the PCI in 1921.

Bordiga now undertook an antiwar tour in Romagna. There was a note of insolence in this decision to speak in the region that had supported Mussolini's original radicalism. The tour lasted ten days: on October 25 he spoke at Forli, the next day at Cesena, the next at Rimini.<sup>83</sup> Prowar anarchists and republicans attempted to break up his audiences. The Avanti! of November 3 reported that he had made a brilliant speech at Faenza..

Under the new editorship of Serrati, Bordiga's collaboration with Avanti! continued. The declarations of war in August and the rallying of the socialist parties to the national union government had not shaken the conviction of Reformists that defensive wars were legitimate socialist concern, whereas to Bordiga the events were empirical confirmation that "national defense" was a trap for the unwary revolutionary. He expanded these views nationally in December.

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<sup>83</sup> Report of prefect of Naples, October 26, 1914, ACS, VCPC, busta 33.

While agreeing that the working class had good cause to oppose the coming of a foreign exploiter--an argument used by Mussolini in October--Bordiga stressed that under modern diplomacy it was impossible to determine the aggressor from the victim; moreover, in the conditions of the armed peace one state mobilizing posed a danger to all. Often the aggrieved state took the initiative in beginning an invasion, as had occurred in the Austro-Sardinian War of 1859 and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Even where fault could be determined, the policy of national defense imposed on the Socialists in the aggressor nation the obligation to obstruct their government, while Socialists in the aggrieved nation enrolled in the armies, if necessary crossing frontiers. At this point Socialist was pitted against Socialist. The doctrine of national defense, in conclusion, had broken the International. The war deposited all socialist parties at the crossroads: either they sacrifice their purpose and throw away the future "or they weaken without hesitation the state in which they find themselves." In either case the proletariat would have to pay, but with the latter for its own cause. "We can conclude that the least socialist solution to the problem of socialism and nationality is that which is vulgarly expressed by the phrase 'national defense.'"<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Socialismo e difesa nazionale," Avanti!, December 21, 1914.

The statement was bold, even if it did not possess the limpid simplicity of Lenin's advocacy of civil war made in November, a month earlier. Bordiga did openly urge working-class sabotage of ruling class war plans, but this suggestion was too extreme for the Reformists, and their response came from Giovanni Zibordi: "Comrade Bordiga has constructed, as usual, an edifice of algebraic logic in which no stitch is missing...but it's unrealistic."<sup>85</sup> Zibordi's comments turned into an ungainly ad hominem rebuttal, the first of many that would spike Bordiga's political life. The acceptance of Bordiga's position would have imposed an immediate counter-preparation by the PSI--the point made by Bordiga in a short answer to Zibordi: otherwise when the state decides to enter the war, "the government will announce a thousand menaces threatening Italy. It will not be difficult then to convince the masses...that it is a defensive war."<sup>86</sup>

Looking back on the ruin of the Second International in 1914, Bordiga thought he saw the reason for its failure. "Our error of perception was that of having seen the problem of antimilitarism as Reformists (reduction of armaments, armed peace, arbitration, etc.), while the task facing Socialists

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<sup>85</sup>"Proletariato, patria e guerra di difesa," Avanti!, December 28, 1914.

<sup>86</sup>"Socialismo, patria e guerra di difesa," Avanti!, January 6, 1915.



is not to restore bourgeois society but to hasten its destruction, ab imis fundamentis, to the roots of its economic structure."<sup>87</sup> Not a patchwork of reforms--the elimination of bourgeois society alone would do away with war.

#### 4. The Convegni of Bologna and Florence

Responsibility for PSI conduct lay with the party directorate, for Bordiga was a national ideologue, not a party leader. But the exit of Mussolini had left the PSI leadership to the Serratis, the Lazzaris, and Vellas. Although they had been carried to the leadership of the party by the intransigent Revolutionary faction, their mettle was of another sort. Enraged by the harsh inequities of the class system they could not openly support Turati, but neither would they endorse the actions of the revolutionary Sinistra. Later they would be labeled "sentimental revolutionaries," but they represented in 1915 that other side of the Reggio Emilia Sinistra. This group corresponded to the centrist faction in the International, and, unfortunately for the PSI and the working class, the group commanded the party.

In the history of the PSI no Socialists comported themselves more inconsistently than Serrati and Lazzari between 1914 and their deaths in the mid-twenties; their policies

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<sup>87</sup>"Dal vecchio al nuovo militarismo," Avanti!, February 19, 1915.

consisted of revolutionary rhetoric and reformist actions, with disastrous results for the party. For example, after Italy had entered the war, Zibordi informed his readership how Serrati had proposed an antiwar general strike in Avanti! while discouraging its use when speaking before the CGL; Lazzari had also been contradictory on another matter.<sup>88</sup> In August 1914, Critica Sociale hailed the general revolution as an event that "will come on its own, without anyone moving a finger to start it." Precisely the same sentiments--almost the same language--were to be expressed by Serrati in October 1920, after two years of agitation and expectant revolution! All the ambiguity of postwar Maximilism was already present within the leadership of these Socialists during the months preceding the Italian declaration of war on May 24, 1915.

By May the Italian Government was visibly nearing a decision for war. The illusion of a short war (and cheap victory) had been accepted by Prime Minister Antonio Salandra. The dreaded choice rose before the PSI: oppose the war or become an accomplice. Although the party directorate had done little since October 1914 to mobilize the party rank and file and the working class against the war, in early May, 1915, the

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<sup>88</sup>"Intorno alle cose del partito," CS, XXV, 14 (July 13, 1915), 197-99. Zibordi compared the two to women who say "no" to mean "yes."

10,000 strong FGS voted support for a general strike.<sup>89</sup> Only at this late hour did the directorate call a convegno, a meeting for Sunday, May 16, at Bologna, where policy would be decided. Present at the Bologna meeting were representatives from the directorate, from the CGL, from some of the more important party sections, Bordiga amongst them, and some 20 deputies.<sup>90</sup> A sharp struggle split the participants behind the various proposals. The Reformists wanted an agreement with Giovanni Giolitti, who was known to oppose entry into the war, and do little else if that failed; representatives of the Sinistra insisted on a general strike beginning two days hence, a move adamantly opposed by the CGL. The result was a compromise allowing each local party organization to decide its own actions. In actuality the Sinistra conceded more than it received, for the compromise represented an unofficial victory for the Reformists (who were opposed to any public demonstration). Turin proved how self-defeating the decision was: proclaiming a general strike, the working class heeding the Socialists' call went out alone, and the stoppage was short-lived.

Face to face with the need to move against the bourgeois

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<sup>89</sup>Storia della sinistra comunista, I, p. 122.

<sup>90</sup>This account of the Bologna convegno is based on Zibordi's "Intorno alle cose," Il Socialista of May 15 and 22, 1915, reproduced in Storia della sinistra comunista, Ib, pp. 60-62, and Bordiga's account in Rassegna Comunista, June 30, 1921, 208-15.

state--if the party was to seriously defend the working class from the slaughter--the PSI directorate retreated and seized on Lazzari's accommodating formula, "neither support nor sabotage," ne aderire ne sabotare.<sup>91</sup> The slogan evaded responsibility while accepting no action. Though the PSI kept out of the national union government, it offered no opposition to the war. With the PSI leadership curling into a position it was not to change for the duration, all the participants committed themselves not to attack publicly the decisions of the convegno, a blunder for the Sinistra and an agreement Bordiga would live to regret. Apparently as part of the compromise, Bordiga was allowed to write the editorial appearing in Avanti! on the eve of the war, May 23. "It was inevitable," ran the introduction to a bitter commentary. "The class struggle of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat does not lessen but intensifies...culminating in a blood sacrifice demanded of workers." Let each Socialist decide to remain loyal to his ideals or support the war. "Either towards a pseudo-national socialism or towards a new international."<sup>92</sup> There was no call to resistance, and the Italian

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<sup>91</sup>"The vote of some of the party delegates surprised us greatly," commented Il Socialista of May 22.

<sup>92</sup>"Il 'fatto compiuto,'" Avanti!, May 23, 1915.

proletariat marched off to war, some still writing odes to socialism and dreaming of social justice.<sup>93</sup>

With the war a reality, the PSI and the Sinistra in particular went into a stasis. Il Socialista ceased to appear, and for all of 1916 only one article by Bordiga was printed in Avanti!. The period from May 1915 to August 1917 is a lacuna for the historian of Bordiga. His public writings were few, and sources that would illuminate his thinking have not yet come to light. Yet this was the time of Zimmerwald and Kienthal, the moment for reforming and renewal, if the revolutionary left was to make use of the opportunities appearing in 1919. The absence, therefore, of Bordiga from these conferences must be considered a miss of the first magnitude. Bordiga would have found no difficulty in supporting the Zimmerwald left, support denied by the Italian delegates present-- Serrati, Lazzari, Morgari, and Giuseppe Modigliani.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Such was the fate of good Socialist Antonio De Bon, killed with the 7th Alpine Regiment in 1916. His notebooks recorded his sentiments. One of his last entries might serve as an epitaph for the mountain men of his generation:

Misurina  
 Fame, freddo, guerra--Hunger, cold, war  
 By permission of his widow, Mrs. A. De Bon, Valley Stream, New York.

<sup>94</sup> At Zimmerwald Lenin condemned centrism, at least such is the conclusion of the Soviet historian E.I. Spivakovsky. Of the Rumanian centrist, H. Pakovsky, whose slogan "against war and against sabotage sounded as if it had been drawn from the PSI, Lenin is alleged to have said, "We are not on the same road with such people." E. I. Spivakovsky, "O Nekatorix Problemax Istorii Sozdaniya Kommunisticheskoi Partii Ruminii," Voprosi Istorii, 3 (1971), 43.

Missing from that roster was any name connected with the Sinistra.

The war created other difficulties for Bordiga. Being of military age he was called to the colors in 1916 and assigned to a regiment in Rome. Soon classified as "unable to endure the rigors of war," he was back in Naples by January, 1917.<sup>95</sup> Depicted as "a fanatical and tenacious revolutionary" in police reports, Bordiga was kept under continuous surveillance, though there is nothing in these reports to suggest that he engaged in any activity beyond political opposition to the war.<sup>96</sup> But the question here is how he saw the war affecting the tactics of the PSI and the expectations of the Sinistra. At Zimmerwald Trotsky jokingly noted that a half century after the First International, the internationalists were a handful.<sup>97</sup> There is no doubt that the war had a dislocating and disintegrating effect on the PSI and on its Sinistra wing. This

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<sup>95</sup>Reports of the prefect of Naples (number 11077 and 842), December 13, 1916 and January 26, 1917, ACS, VCPC, busta 33.

<sup>96</sup>Report of the prefect of Naples, December 17, 1917, ibid. He was to remain under surveillance until his arrest in 1926.

<sup>97</sup>Quoted in Merle Fainsod, International Socialism and the World War (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), p. 65.

development may explain why--before the news of the February Revolution--neither in the Avanti! nor in Avanguardia (for a period beginning in 1917 Bordiga was made editor) did Bordiga hint that the war might turn out to be the midwife of revolution after all or that the PSI could not return to its prewar trajectory with the coming of peace. In this connection the agreement made at Bologna was a blunder and the absence of Bordiga from Zimmerwald and Kienthal a lost opportunity.

Before the Russian Revolution helped to stir and revive the left wing in Italy, and in Europe in general, the PSI held a conference in Rome in February 1917. Participation was particularly broad. Modigliani and Bordiga spoke against the acceptance of an invitation from Allied Socialist parties to meet in Paris; Modigliani feared a trap for the PSI, and Bordiga wanted the invitation extended to the parties of the Central Powers.<sup>98</sup> The delegates went on to vote "applause" for the work done by the directorate, Avanti!, and the parliamentary deputies, while a motion by Bordiga calling for more intensified work among youth, women, and workers was defeated by several thousand votes.<sup>99</sup> The actions of the conference point up how far the PSI was from the thought of revolution, which was about to break out in St. Petersburg. Reporting on

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<sup>98</sup>"I rapporti internazionali," Avanti!, February 27, 1917.

<sup>99</sup>Galli, op. cit., p. 20.

the conference, Claudio Treves did indicate that Lazzari had criticized, inter alia, "the left" and ruled out "insurrection."<sup>100</sup> The implication was that in private exchanges a suggested resort to arms was turned down by Lazzari.

Thus for the Socialist left wing the first two years of war represented a serious loss of time, and the organization of a new Sinistra did not begin until July 1917, when a number of sections reconstituted the Intransigent Revolutionary faction. The temper of the country had changed since 1915; the soldiers were war-weary, and in the PSI sentiment for action had begun to rise; antiwar feeling in the population was near the flash point leading to revolutionary upheaval,<sup>101</sup> as the Turin riots of August were to demonstrate. A circular issued by the Intransigent Revolutionaries in August read, "We feel that the great test is coming, that the great hour is about to strike."<sup>102</sup> The birth of another Sinistra demonstrated once again that the line of conflict within the PSI

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<sup>100</sup>Actually Treves used the expression "la parte estrema," the phrase designating the Sinistra. The passage in Italian reads: "volgendo contro la propria parte estrema irreducibile nel suo furore incompsto di dimolizione," which could only mean Bordiga and the Sinistra. CS, XXVII, 5 (March 1, 1917), 65.

<sup>101</sup>See Renzo De Felice, "Ordine Pubblico e orientamento delle masse popolari italiane nella prima metà del 1917," Riv. stor. soc., 20 (1963), 467-77.

<sup>102</sup>Storia della sinistra comunista, I, pp. 315-17.



separating the revolutionary left from the non-revolutionary centrists ran between the Sinistra and the Maximalist center, the stress line along which the party would fracture in 1921.

In November 1917 occurred the crucial meeting at Florence brought about by the initiative and insistence of the Intransigent Revolutionaries. This faction had met with the directorate in October, and, after Caporetto (October 24), a number of representatives of the faction had rushed to Rome to keep the PSI from panicking and joining the union sacrée; contact between faction and leadership was thus continuous. The Intransigent Revolutionaries insisted on the exclusion of the CGL and the parliamentary deputies from the meeting, which was restricted to a rump of the party. With Italy verging on military defeat, the delegates, Nicola Bombacci, Germanetto, Gramsci, Bordiga, Arturo Terrini, Lazzari, and Serrati,<sup>103</sup> unanimously agreed to circulate a motion "condemning and deploring the actions of those comrades and party representatives who found an excuse in recent events to support the war and grant a truce to the bourgeoisie."<sup>104</sup> They resolved nothing more than continued opposition to a national union government,

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<sup>103</sup>Partial listing. Lazzari and Bombacci were soon to be arrested for circulating the motion.

<sup>104</sup>Francesco Buffoni, "Entro le chiostre del partito," CS, XXVII, 24 (December 16, 1917), 303-4. Buffoni criticized the leadership for speaking in the name of the party after having consulted only one faction. Buffoni was right, but the inconsistency was typical of Serrati and Lazzari.

but at that critical moment the gesture was devoid of meaning for it opened no new avenue to the shocked and embattled masses.

Given that particular instance in national affairs and the excited political condition of the participants, the discussion surrounding the motion must have touched on many points of war and revolution; these tended to be the remarks reported back to authorities by informants and recalled by Germanetto when he wrote his memoirs a decade later. Thus one confidential report mentioned a preface to the motion "drawn up in the spirit of Leninist theory" and "the need to prepare an uprising."<sup>105</sup> Another said the meeting had ended "urging an insurrectionary movement whose success even in one state would be a victory for the proletariat."<sup>106</sup>

In a joint article many years after the war Carlo Rosselli and Pietro Nenni remarked that "after Caporetto one either attempted an open struggle against the war, that is, insurrection, or one supported Turati and Treves," for other alternatives did not exist.<sup>107</sup> What is striking about the 1917 meeting is that it produced no call against the war. Had the Intransigent Revolutionaries made some move in 1917, even

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<sup>105</sup>Quoted from Nitti papers by Lopukhov, Faschism, p. 40.

<sup>106</sup>Police report (number 10623), November 27, 1917, ACS, VCPC, busta 33.

<sup>107</sup>Quoted from Il quarto stato in De Felice, Mussolini il rivoluzionario, p. 365.

alone and with the likelihood of success ranged against them, at the very least the dubious revolutionary qualities of the PSI leadership might have been exposed. Would there have been a public response to an antiwar action in 1917? No answer can ever be given to that question, but the stiffening of military resistance along the Piave River in December occurred in the absence of any alternative. Both the PSI and the Sinistra let the opportunity go unexplored.

Through this long chapter we have looked at some of the events and influences that may help account for the formation of a Socialist Sinistra prior to 1914. Despite some serious drawbacks this current was on its way to maturing as a revolutionary force, when the war broke out. In 1914-15 and again in 1917 the Sinistra found in Bordiga its ablest spokesman. More than any other group in the PSI the Sinistra was responsible for keeping the party from abandoning the announced non-support of the war. These Sinistra actions were not publicly visible, because of the need to operate within the restrictions of wartime; one result was that at the end of the war the leadership of the PSI was widely credited with having been more antiwar than had actually been the case. After Caporetto Bordiga was put into uniform again, and hence he was absent for most of 1918 from the activities of the new Intransigent Revolutionary faction. How Bordiga and the PSI responded to the challenges in the immediate postwar period is discussed next.

CHAPTER III  
THE BIRTH OF THE PCI

A hopeful period for Italian socialism opened in 1919 with the crisis breaking out in Italy at the war's end. That this crisis began when Italy emerged from the war a victor suggests the fragility of the political base on which the unitary state rested. The roots of the problem went back to the process of unification, six decades earlier. Italy had been hurriedly put together, but in such a fashion as to preclude meaningful popular participation. The Risorgimento had been noteworthy and heroic but was reached without breaching the mid-century liberal bourgeois limits. Fear of the masses in action, the dreadful "social question," helped guide Cavourian policies, and to Garibaldi the question had lost all importance by 1859. A liberal success, the Risorgimento was at the same time one of the great failures of the nineteenth century, in that it did nothing for the peasant and lower class majorities.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, the new bourgeois state remained circumscribed by the needs of class interests, and Italy never developed the internal cohesiveness resulting when the masses identify with their government. This unstable state of affairs--the masses

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<sup>1</sup>The Risorgimento was ideologically and politically related to the 1848 revolutionary wave, and both fell terribly short of expectations.

apathetic, sceptical or hostile, the ruling elites unwilling to grant concessions--existed down to the World War. Indeed at least some Catholics are said to have supported Italian intervention in 1915 as a way to avoid another "searing experience" like the one registered during Red Week.<sup>2</sup> The introduction of virtual universal male suffrage in 1913 had not altered the situation, and Italy was made to support the war despite the internal cleavage.

Temporarily allayed by the war, the problem came welling to the surface stronger than ever with the end of the fighting. By tearing many men away from old patterns of living and pressing them to see their needs in relation to national problems, the war mobilized millions of Italians, pushing them to new political loyalties, to revolutionary socialism in the north, and to radical, though Catholic, populism in the south. The old ruling class had rode out the protracted war by relying on fatalism and exploiting mercilessly national sentiments; hopes were fed further by the vision of a new Italy that was promised for delivery at war's end.

The postwar crisis resulted from the demand for meaningful and immediate change coming from below and the stubborn refusal of the elites to concede reform. The crisis was too

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<sup>2</sup>Richard Webster, The Cross and the Fasces (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1960), p. 43.

much for the Italian government, and, in the end, it turned out to be revolutionary. The war thus presented the Socialists with an opportunity. The Italian crisis was domestic in the making, and both Red Week and 1919 stand in evidence of this, but its coincidence with the Russian Revolution did raise hopes and exaggerate fears in Italy. During the crisis the PSI proved to be more a laggard than a leader of working-class action.

There are many accounts of what happened in Italy between 1919-22, and without exception Socialist conduct is depicted as self-defeating or as irresponsible. An awareness of Socialist behavior makes understandable why many foreign observers saw Mussolini as rescuing Italy from chaos--or why other Italians mistook the Fascist movement to be genuinely revolutionary, especially after the incompetence demonstrated by the Socialists during the occupation of the factories by the working class in September 1920. Part of the price that the PSI paid was the departure of the left wing and the emergence of the Communist party in 1921. In the account that follows the post-war crisis will be sketched as background for the new Sinistra, now Bordigan. As the Maximalist star dimmed, Bordiga once again became the "key man of Italian socialism."

What kind of a person was Bordiga in 1919, when he was still a relatively young man of 30? There is no quick answer to the question; so thoroughly did the PCI influence the post-

1945 leftwing historiography that a first study of Bordiga did not appear until 1971, the work by De Clementi.<sup>3</sup> Since the post-Liberation Bordigan party has made no effort to accredit or delineate the role played by Bordiga after 1910, one must seek the personal traits of Bordiga from clues that are found in his political writings or rely on the subjective recollections of friends or former political collaborators--the latter remembering Bordiga across the span of half a century.

In 1970 Leonetti described Bordiga as a man with "a leonine head." He added that "volumes" could be written about Bordiga. At the time Leonetti stressed that Gramsci's victory over Bordiga had relied heavily on aid coming from the International. Both a party founder and, later, an organizer of the Centro, after being expelled from the PCI in 1930, Leonetti worked with Trotsky in France, and he remembered Trotsky wondering "why Bordiga does not come to give us a hand."<sup>4</sup>

Information on the Bordiga of 1910-15 is found in the Lizzadri Memo. Bordiga's debut into political action in 1910 had been as a young nationalist, but he was quickly drawn to

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<sup>3</sup>The contrast here is to Gramsci, about whom commentaries have appeared ad nauseam; many of these are of limited value for they posit a Gramsci who never existed.

<sup>4</sup>Did Trotsky attempt to turn Gramsci against the leadership of Bordiga, as Berti alleges (Chapter I, footnote 55)? Since Berti is unreliable one can never be really sure.

the Marxian concept of surplus value. For months Bordiga poured out the texts of Marx and Engels until he thought he had mastered them. "In those days," wrote Lizzardri, "Bordiga was somewhat of an older brother to all the young Socialists, though he was very severe." Lizzadri was for a time Bordiga's amanuensis. Both men were separated by the war mobilization in 1915. Lizzadri recalled that Bordiga's attitude to socialism had been impersonal. "He always gave me the impression of a doctor concerned with finding in the patient evidence of his diagnosis. In a few words, socialism was to him just a science." Lizzadri has given us another bit of information: Bordiga had been baptized Amedeo but changed to Amadeo to disassociate himself from the many Amedei of the House of Savoy.

In 1970, Livio Vallillo, who had worked closely with Bordiga in Naples, spoke of some of Bordiga's idiosyncracies. In the fifties and sixties Bordiga continued to demonstrate enormous vitality, being able to address a conference for eight hours with only a ten minute break. His prodigious energies were matched by interest and delight in eating, and he used every occasion to indulge a fondness for sweets. Bordiga loved cats, and his home became a refuge for many "proletarian" strays found in Naples. To the very end he carried out the onerous tasks usually assigned to simple party activists, and he used neither prestige nor age to obtain a relief from such duties.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>The 5-7 members of the Bordigan party of Naples with whom I spent a pleasant evening all agreed on Bordiga's modesty



Bordiga was arrested and questioned by the German military authorities during their brief occupation of Naples in 1943. The story is that this time he actually utilized the occasion "to prove mathematically" to his captors that Germany could not win the war. The German authorities were probably aware of Bordiga's communist past, though he was released unharmed. Members of the Partito comunista internazionalista of Naples claim that Bordiga's arrest had been caused by the paranoia manifested by his wife, Ortensia, a woman to whom Bordiga remained loyal even through long years of a terminal illness. Bordiga had met the Socialist schoolteacher Ortensia De Meo when both were members of the Circolo "Carlo Marx," later marrying her. The influence of Ortensia had been a source of complaint from close party comrades as far back as 1920-21, and was noted by Lizzadri in his Memo. "I met him for the last time at Naples in March 1944 in Piazza Carità, and he told me that he had been made happy upon learning that the Longobardi who had crossed enemy lines was none other than his old disciple Lizzadri.<sup>6</sup> His wife-- already ill--dragged him away, while I noted with some sadness that a man with such ability (ingegno), who was also endowed with more than the usual physical strength, was dominated by a loving but fragile and

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and dedication to work. Bordiga had often expressed the hope of getting another decade of labor from his life.

<sup>6</sup>Along with Bruno Buozzi, Giuseppe De Vittorio, and Guido De Ruggiero, Lizzadri played a major role in reconstituting the CGL in 1944. Maurice Neufeld, op. cit., p. 460.

sick woman."

After his death a one page article on Bordiga finally appeared in the Togliattian periodical Rinascita.<sup>7</sup> In the text Spriano recalled that during the American occupation of Naples, as well as after the war, Bordiga spurned offers to play the anti-Communist game.<sup>8</sup> Spriano also criticized Bordiga for not having taken an active part in the anti-Fascist resistance. The charge is not light and may be valid, but after one learns the fate of the Sinistra under the Gramscian leadership much of the fault may belong with the Centro itself.<sup>9</sup>

What impressed this observer the most is that Bordiga never attacked his political opponents by resorting to personal invective; nor did he subordinate principles to the needs of his ambition; and, lastly, Bordiga never doubted that simple proletarians, the working class as a whole, had both the capacity to overthrow the bourgeois state and the ability to build the new socialist society.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>"Il caso di Bordiga," Rinascita, July 31, 1971.

<sup>8</sup>Bordiga and the Sinistra were the first Italian victims of "the god that failed." At no time did Bordiga allow his bitterness to become a weapon in the hands of the Cold Warriors of the West. The contrast here is to Silone.

<sup>9</sup>Bordiga, Repossi, Bruno Fortichiari, and other Sinistra leaders, spent many years in prison or in confinement; others went into exile. An anti-Fascist Bordigan grouplet operated in Belgium in the 1930's under the leadership of Ottorino Perrone.

<sup>10</sup>My personal comments are limited to Bordiga's activities before 1927.

### 1. The Sovietisti

In early 1917 Lenin wrote to Boris Souvarine, a future leader of the Third International; he outlined how a revolutionary minority turns itself into a vehicle for the majority. With Lenin leading the revolutionary regime in Petrograd, the letter appeared in the Avanti! a year later.

Because that minority really represented the interest of the masses; because it had faith in the coming revolution; because it was ready to act with courage. Numerical weakness? But when did the revolutionaries hinge their policies on the fact that they were a minority within the majority? When our party in November 1914 proclaimed the need to divide ourselves from the opportunists, declaring that such a schism was the only dignified and correct answer to the betrayal of August 1914, to many this declaration seemed the sectarian extravagance of a group having lost all touch with reality.<sup>11</sup>

These views of Lenin effectively prefigure the credo underlying the tactical steps of the future Bordigan Sinistra: the need for the party to delineate itself, to be willing to sacrifice immediate popularity to the principles underlying the needs of the masses, and to have the faith that conflict in bourgeois society would point the masses towards the party. Trotsky later summed up the advice of Lenin in 1917. "Don't hang on an old word which is rotten through and through. Have the will to

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<sup>11</sup> Avanti!, January 3, 1918.

build a new party...and all the oppressed will come to you."<sup>12</sup>

Amongst the Socialists led by Bordiga, Lenin's precepts found the least response; to them postwar Leninism appeared as a restatement of earlier views, not as a novel interpretation of Marxism to be adopted and applied by rote. Yet indicative of the growing influence radiating from the Russian events, when the Neapolitan section searched for a name to give a new weekly, the suggestion Il Soviet was enthusiastically received by the membership.<sup>13</sup> The periodical that would help Bordiga rise to the leadership of the Communist party, born at Livorno over two years later, first appeared in December 1918.

Il Soviet joined the many socialist weeklies that made the local Italian socialist press one of the most numerous in Europe,<sup>14</sup> but, unlike the other, Il Soviet represented a new genre, and the influence it wielded in Naples was soon complemented by a national following. The single or double-sheet issues were filled with discussion, yet so slim were financial resources that at times publication ceased. With such slender means, Il Soviet deliberately excluded from its columns

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<sup>12</sup>Leon Trotsky, The Russian Revolution, ed. F. W. Dupee (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), p. 235.

<sup>13</sup>Storia della sinistra comunista, I, p. 127.

<sup>14</sup>These weeklies numbered over one hundred.

all non-political commentary.<sup>15</sup> Alongside of the writings of Neapolitan revolutionaries, Ludovico Tarsia, Roberto Fobert, Giovanni Sanna, and Bordiga, appeared such names as Béla Kun, Alexandra Kollontai, Bukharin, Radek, Anton Pannekoek, Georgy Lukacs, but never once Lenin. The early writings were largely anonymous, but from those columns rose a sense of immediate and pressing urgency. Il Soviet captured the expectation, the air of belief in the imminent arrival of great events marking 1919, the year that would pass into the language as a political metaphor, il diciannovesimo.<sup>16</sup>

In one of its first polemics Il Soviet took a stand against the demand for the convocation of a constituent assembly, which they identified as coming from Reformists, the CGL, republicans, and revolutionary interventionists. The cry for a constituent assembly, sounded by many during the Risorgimento, including the Italian National Society, had been

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<sup>15</sup>In comparison, Ordine Nuovo, the weekly associated with Gramsci which appeared on May 1, 1919, had many times more space. The Neapolitan Socialist section never counted more than 400 members, whereas some northern sections--Milan, Turin, Novara, etc.--could easily muster 2,000; resources in the south were slimmer. When postwar PCI historians contrasted the rich cultural discussions in Ordine Nuovo with their absence in Il Soviet, they never bothered to inform their readers about the limited means available to the Bordigan group.

<sup>16</sup>Also the title of a book by Pietro Nenni; it is cited in this study under its original title, Storia di quattro anni.

doggedly opposed by Cavour, who preferred to prove the solidity of Italian sentiment by using easily manipulated plebiscites. In the early months of 1919 the cause of the constituent assembly was revived and enjoyed a large but short-lived popularity. Hardly a public meeting closed without issuing a call for the assembly, and many returning army units voiced the demand.<sup>17</sup> Even Serrati briefly backed the movement.<sup>18</sup> As disenchantment with the existing order grew, the assembly held great fascination, with its conjured imagery of mass participation and popular renewal. But Il Soviet reasoned that for Socialists to place so much hope in an elected body was to do injustice to common sense; so long as elections were held under conditions of gross economic disparity between classes, the results would simply reproduce the supremacy of the bourgeoisie. "The socialist revolution will be realized when political power is in the hands of the workers...and the bourgeoisie will lose all influence in the organs of power."<sup>19</sup> The dissolution

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<sup>17</sup>Pietro Nenni, Storia di quattro anni (Rome: Einaudi, 1946), p. 7. This manuscript had been written in 1926, but was published after the fall of the Fascist regime.

<sup>18</sup>Lopukhov, Faschism, p. 52.

<sup>19</sup>"La costituente?" Il Soviet, December 22, 1918; hereafter Il Soviet will be designated as IS.

in January by the Soviet government of the Russian Constituent Assembly was interpreted by the Sovietisti<sup>20</sup> as bearing out the correctness of their analysis. The tone of Il Soviet was one of optimism, though concern was expressed at the PSI directorate's ability to handle the opportunities of 1919.

In these early postwar months Bordiga still saw himself as a didactic ideologue rather than a political leader of national stature. Several factors contributed to this circumstance. One was Bordiga's persistent refusal to accept any position of leadership, though he was clearly an important figure in the party; a second was that the directorate and the Avanti! had identified the PSI with Lenin and support of the October Revolution. At the Rome Congress held in September 1918, the PSI endorsed the concept of proletarian dictatorship. The war had kept Bordiga and many other important figures from attending the congress. But the donning of the robes of Leninism by the PSI leadership meant that it drew to itself the immense swell for change rising in early 1919. The key political ambiguity of the immediate postwar years lay in the making, for while the PSI emblazoned its banners with revolutionary slogans, the directorate continued to adhere to reformist visions of the Second International. With the party seeming to embrace

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<sup>20</sup> Followers of Il Soviet.

proletarian revolution there was no longer a need for an organized Sinistra, and the activities of the Intransigent Revolutionary faction organized in July 1917 ceased.

At the beginning of 1919, Bordiga remained the leader of the Neapolitan Socialists. Having abandoned the tactics of the past, he and his followers were now concerned with getting the PSI to confront the problem of seizing power; without that intent the Rome Congress would have remained an oratorical exercise. "The Italian Socialist party, the political organ of its class," admonished Il Soviet, "represents more clearly the will of the Italian proletariat than any meeting of trade unions or deputies...."<sup>21</sup> The interest of the Sovietisti in revolution was sounded at a conference of Socialists held at Naples in December 1918. The meeting was attended by representatives from party sections, trade unions, cooperatives, and FGS groups in the south. Bombacci came down as spokesman for the directorate. In speaking on the motion adopted by the conference, Bordiga spoke against the acceptance of meliorative reforms that would make the bourgeois regime more tolerable. The party must place faith in itself and draw into its ranks "the conscious minority constituting the vanguard. This minority will carry out the revolution by tearing power away from the ruling bourgeois minority...but it will enjoy the

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<sup>21</sup>Il convegno socialista di Bologna," IS, December 29, 1918.



solidarity of the great masses emancipated from bourgeois oppression and called on to make a new history."<sup>22</sup>

Carrying their analysis of revolution further, the Sovietisti found therein two essential ingredients: first, a determinist event ("the main historical cause will be provided by the inability of the bourgeoisie to extract itself from the bloody tragedy into which it has been led by its contradictions"); second, a voluntaristic action, the proletariat acting through its political party. But with these analyses was coupled an early warning to the PSI: "Since grave contingencies are about to mature, we must act quickly."<sup>23</sup>

In attempting to update the tactical weaponry at the disposal of the PSI the Sovietisti came to espouse electoral abstentionism. One may recall that in Italy the representative system was widely unpopular. The dealings of the deputies, if no worse than their counterparts abroad, had given rise to a vigorous anti-parliamentary literature. Contempt for the parliamentary system was widely shared amongst radical groups, and had been a keynote in Mussolini's speech before the 1912 Reggio Congress. Disillusionment had been deepened when 300 deputies voted for war in 1915, more from expediency than from conviction. The very demand arising in 1919 for a constituent

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<sup>22</sup>"Il convegno," IS, January 1, 1919.

<sup>23</sup>"Il compito," IS, February 2, 1919, and "Le prospettive," February 23, 1919.

assembly represented a repudiation of the parliament. These facts did not enter into the argument of the Sovietisti but lay in the background. The need to find the road to revolution and the coming of a national election triggered the turn.

The first step was a series of articles appearing in February. They quickly dismissed as illusory any notion that socialism could be legislated. Pointing out how the bourgeoisie had used the representative assembly to defeat the old regime, the articles went on to suggest that the proletariat, too, must create its own class organ. In the articles appeared one of the characteristic themes distinguishing the thinking of the Sinistra: "The proletariat must educate and accustom itself to realizing that the new social order arising from its ranks must be completely different from the present regime, which must disappear."<sup>24</sup>

The first of the three articles had been unsigned, but the last two bore the initials DL. Warning the PSI that it must first consider tactics before committing the party to an electoral campaign, DL pointed out that the Russian Revolution had succeeded in a nation without all the prerequisites of

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<sup>24</sup>"Contro gli equivoci," IS, February 9, 1919; "Tra gli ardenti problemi," February 16; "Elezioni o conquista rivoluzionaria del potere," February 23.

socialism. "The Russian Revolution has taught us that we must have a clear and precise will, and that we must not allow our well prepared energies to be deflected from action." After showing that he had understood the concept of permanent revolution, DL went on to reevaluate the tactic of electoralism. When the revolution was a distant goal, as it was before 1914, elections were useful to Socialists, but in revolutionary 1919 they were a waste of energy. "Socialist revolutions are not made by ballots, deputies or by serene laws." DL declared that a contradiction existed between revolutionary conquest and electoral participation; the choice of one excluded the other. The party must build itself, but it had also to seek to develop the organs of proletarian power.<sup>25</sup>

A major piece in March, "The Electoral Fraud," indicated that Il Soviet had adopted abstentionism, and the argument was now considerably broadened. Whereas earlier it had rested on the alleged impossibility of using a bourgeois institution to destroy the bourgeois state (and old idea by now), attention was shifted to the institutional advantages of the bourgeois class. The parliamentary system narrowed representation to

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<sup>25</sup> DL are said to have been the initials used by Dr. Ludovico Tarsia (DL=Dottor Tarsia). A leading surgeon in Naples and a life-long friend of Bordiga, Tarsia was a capable revolutionary in his own right and served in the Central Committee of the PCI in 1921-22. During the Fascist years Tarsia lived in Brazil. He died in 1970 at the age of 94.

small elites which identified more with the upper classes; moreover, the skills called for by parliament drew in the petit-bourgeoisie, while the workers remained tied to their place of labor. Above all, the bourgeoisie controlled all the levers of power: superior electoral means, economic resources, and command of press and industry. Without economic equality civil and political equality remained a sham. Moreover, through its control of government the bourgeoisie could always manipulate and abridge electoral gains.

Therefore we insist on the need to convoke as soon as possible a national congress. Despite the massive left (estremista) victory at the last congress [September 1918] too many ambiguities remain. We must...tackle the grave problems that have arisen in the last few years: support of the fatherland and defensive war, the theoretical legitimacy and actual possibility of revolutionary conquest of power, the matter of the proletarian dictatorship and the elections.<sup>26</sup>

Thus the Bordigan organ was asking the PSI to undergo an immediate overhaul and to adopt abstentionism. Bordiga attended a special meeting of the Socialist National Council at Florence during March<sup>27</sup> but failed to win the leadership to his views on abstentionism. Meanwhile, the weekly continued

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<sup>26</sup>"Il tranello," IS, March 2, 1919.

<sup>27</sup>The report of prefect of Naples (number 3510), March 10, 1919, ACS, VCPC, busta Amadeo Bordiga.

to press for the congress, now adding that the Reformists should be put out of the PSI.<sup>28</sup> In their endeavors, the Sovietisti were confident that a national congress, if held soon, would adopt their anti-electoral stand.

By insisting that the party should lead in bringing about the revolutionary change, Il Soviet became embroiled in a controversy with the CGL. Both the CGL and the PSI had renewed their pact dividing the political and economic leadership of the working class between them. Soon the CGL issued a series of demands; these were mostly economic, though some were clearly political. The CGL moved further into political terrain when it supported a constituent assembly based on economic (guild) interests. These views were drawn into a May First 1919 Manifesto declaring that universal manhood suffrage had completed the political revolution and eliminated the need for political parties. The Manifesto called for an end to class struggle and the basing of future legislative assemblies on economic interests.<sup>29</sup>

Although the CGL never gave a clear indication of how it expected to carry out the demands, the turn to corporativism

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<sup>28</sup>"È necessario il congresso," IS, March 30, 1919. Bordiga had first raised the need to separate from the right wing in "Ancor più avanti," Avanguardia, March 6, 1917.

<sup>29</sup>Quoted in IS, May 12, 1919. Also, see "Il partito chirurgico," IS, February 19, 1919.

carried an implicit abandonment of socialism. Thus, at the very height of the Socialist euphoria of 1919, the gap between the political and trade union organizations of the Italian working class was greater than in 1914. To the Sovietisti the actions of the CGL remained a matter of concern, but they considered the demands of the 1919 Manifesto somewhat ludicrous; adopting them, they felt, would mean a return to a form of medievalism, "with Dante having to enroll in the guild of pharmacists in order to enter politics." And yet when the CGL delegates traveled through Soviet Russia in the summer of 1920, they allowed themselves to be received as representatives of revolutionary Italian socialism. Hardly more than a year later the CGL broke with the Soviets and refused to join the Communist-led Red Trade Union International.

In opposing the CGL, the Sovietisti hammered away at the need for revolution. The PSI must think seriously of revolution, eliminate doubtful groups, and refrain from entering political alliances; we must cut the "general staff" (alliances) in order to expand "the army" (the party). In rejecting anew the political alliance the Abstentionists argued that in time of crises men acted as members of a social class; only the party had demonstrated an ability to embody the demands of the class as a whole. And in so serious an undertaking as revolution, to rest success on frangible political

alliances where each participant acted out of long-range goals and short-term expediency was to invite disaster. By abandoning the parliament the PSI would find the means to build the Soviets of workers, peasants, and soldiers. The PSI must not ignore the arrival of that new and grandiose political organ, the soviet; soviets would not arise from parliamentary elections. Action, not the Holy Spirit, was needed to overthrow the bourgeoisie.<sup>30</sup> Amongst the Socialist working-class factions of 1919 only the Bordigan Sinistra had a clear vision of what it wanted, remaining loyal to these views throughout the post-war crisis.

By the spring of 1919 the Abstentionists and their followers had picked up the label of Communists, and a first national meeting was held on July 6 at Rome. There they drew up a motion to be presented at the forthcoming sixteenth congress of the PSI. The motion embraced the violent overthrow of the bourgeois state, called on the party to join the Third International--which had been formed the previous March--and to change the name to Partito comunista italiano. Further, they wanted the party to separate itself from the Reformists and to adopt abstentionism.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>See the following articles in IS: "La parodia," February 16, "La conquista," March 30, "Rettificare il tiro," April 13, "La crisi," May 18, 1919.

<sup>31</sup>"Il programma della frazione comunista," IS, July 13, 1919.

The setting of a date for the opening of that congress had set off a tug of war between the Sinistra and the Reformists that lasted through much of 1919. The Reformists constantly sought to delay the opening of the body, for they knew that their influence in the party was at a low point. When the congress finally did meet in early October, il diciannovesimo was nearly over.

The sixteenth congress of the PSI, at Bologna, has been overshadowed by the attention drawn to the Reggio Congress of 1912 and the Livorno Congress of 1921. It met amidst the dramatic developments of 1919. Abroad the Soviet regime was then in the throes of civil war aggravated by foreign intervention; the congress declared its solidarity with the Bolsheviks, voted unanimously to join the Third International, and applied pressure on the Italian government to prevent military involvement. Only a few weeks before, the revolutionary Béla Kun coalition in Hungary had collapsed. In the Italian Socialist press the failure of that Communist regime was attributed to invading Rumanian armies and to the betrayal of the Hungarian Social Democrats. These accusations deepened the suspicion between the Sinistra and the PSI's right wing. But the real problem facing the body remained domestic--how to carry out revolution!

The party convening at Bologna had a membership that



had swollen to 80,000, having tripled in one year. The arriving delegates knew that they would have to choose from amongst three major factions, the strongest being the Electionist Maximalists under Serrati. Along with the Abstentionists, this group had abandoned the 1892 program. In their motion they accepted the violent conquest of power and a new state based on soviets; they came out against changing bourgeois society through using its institutions, and invited those Socialists opposed to violence to leave the party. However, these Maximalists declared that the moment of revolution had not yet arrived, and therefore supported continued electoral participation. Except for abstentionism and a change of name, the motions of the Electionist Maximalists and the Abstentionists were almost identical.<sup>32</sup>

On the right, the numerical weakness of the Reformists led them to join with the Unitary Maximalists under Lazzari. This last faction continued to adhere to the 1892 program of reforming the bourgeois state through the gradual transformation of its institutions. Their motion eschewed any mention of violence or revolution, though they sought to update the 1892 program by conceding that the socialist state would rest on a network of soviets.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>"Il programma," Comunismo, I, 1 (October 1, 1919), 1-12.

<sup>33</sup>"Il congresso socialista di Bologna," Comunismo, I, 2 (October 15, 1919), 84-93.

For a second time Bordiga spoke at length before a party congress. He distinguished between the abstentionism advocated by the Sovietisti, which was based on recognizing the importance of the role of the political party, and the abstentionism of syndicalists and anarchists who repudiated politics. Bourgeois equality was illusory since it rested on a society of unequal classes. Even when the state had been accepted as the arbiter of society, it remained nothing more than the guardian of the collective interests of the bourgeois class; that was the reason Socialists had denied that the parliament could speak for the interests of the proletariat as a class. In his remarks Bordiga praised the Bolsheviks; had the proletarian revolution occurred in Italy, "the Italian Socialist party would have adopted the same methods and followed the same mode of action the Bolsheviks had the good fortune to use in Russia." Here he drew warm applause. He warned the Serratian Maximalists against seeking to justify revolution while participating and using bourgeois institutions. Socialists had to bring a new communist consciousness to the masses, exposing the parliament and prepare the way for its overthrow. "This delicate, difficult, and complex undertaking cannot be achieved without quickly making clear the difference between the true and classical method of revolutionary socialism and the insidiousness of the other methods; otherwise we run the risk

of keeping the proletariat chained to oppression."<sup>34</sup> The Socialists had to move the working class beyond the limits of bourgeois democracy. "This first goal--which takes precedence over attacking the institutions of economic privileges--the first goal must be the pulling apart and destruction of the [bourgeois] democratic system of representation." As a way out of the problem Bordiga offered abstentionism. "Today," he concluded, "participation in the elections means collaboration with the bourgeoisie." This last remark drew sharp cries of disapproval from many delegates.

The voting results administered a severe setback to the Abstentionists. Serrati's Maximalists received an overwhelming 48,000, Lazzari gathered 15,000, and the Abstentionists a mere 3,500. Later, Bordiga was to claim that the electoral activity of the party, then in full swing, heavily influenced the vote. Had the Maximalists and Serrati constituted an effective political force, the Abstentionist Sinistra would have died at Bologna.<sup>35</sup> As it was, both the Maximalists and the Comintern now came to their aid.

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<sup>34</sup> Cortesi, op. cit., pp. 734-44.

<sup>35</sup> Other sources used for this account of the congress include "Frazione," IS, October 4, 1919; Nenni, op. cit., passim; CS, XXX, No. 16 (August 16, 1920), 251-56, and No. 7. (September 1, 1920), 264-70.

## 2. A Reformist's Critique

The ablest speaker at Bologna may have been Turati, now a grand old man of the party. War, revolution, and upheaval had not altered that faith in electoral socialism which he had carried to Genoa in 1892. Though his political followers in 1919 were fewer, he continued to command respect. "I speak therefore for the laggards, for the old, for the by-passed, for the mummies...." The words were delivered with a touch of hilarity as well as deep pathos. "I speak for the entombed. And I demand from you the reverence one owes to the voice from the grave." He ferociously scourged the Maximalists for their refusal to compromise with the bourgeois government. Who, he asked, had looked into the matter of armed struggle, evoked so fondly by all? He spoke against a seizure of power. In particular, he raised Italy's dependence on imports and her physical separation from Russia. A Socialist government would lead to an Allied blockade--and famine!

Although Turati seemed not to have won his audience, a year later, in 1920, The Maximalists were to use similar arguments in explaining to the Bolsheviks why they had not made the expected revolution.

Looking at the Reformists of those years meant viewing another aspect of Maximalism; having dismissed the Sinistra as "extremists," both remained locked in debate with each

other. From the Critica Sociale of 1919-20 much can be learned about the Maximalists, whereas the Sovietisti went unmentioned and unheeded; to Turati the Abstentionists were another breed of anarchists. The reformist following in the ranks of the PSI is difficult to determine; these numbers were few in the party base (Serrati once estimated that the circulation of Critica in 1920 was less than one thousand), but the influence grew in direct proportion as one mounted the party hierarchy; in the CGL the Reformists were supreme. When the Critica declared in July 1918 that "he who negates the defense of the nation blindly denies a premise of the Communist Manifesto," the statement was identical to one made by Lazzari before a FGS wartime congress ten months earlier.<sup>36</sup> At every major consideration of policy during the war, the party directorate had struck close to the Reformists, thereby leaving the Sinistra an isolated minority.<sup>37</sup> After Caporetto, many Reformists had wanted to join the union sacrée and openly call for support of the war, but the threat of that step had led to the November meeting in Florence discussed earlier. Consequently, Turati had to content himself with the simple announcement that for Socialists, too, the fatherland "stood on the Grappa," an allusion to

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<sup>36</sup>Cf. Spriano, op. cit., p. 10 and CS, XXVIII, 13 (July 1, 1918), 146.

<sup>37</sup>For Bordiga on wartime collaboration of Maximalists and Reformists see "Mosca e la quistione italiana," Rassegna Comunista, June 30, 1921, 208-15.

the Italian defense on Monte Grappa that had helped stem the Austrian advance at the Piave.

The Reformists had ended by adopting the war aims of the Allies. They welcomed the February Revolution under the erroneous impression that it would mean continuation of Russian belligerency and an end to the schemes of a separate Russian peace associated with Nicholas II.<sup>38</sup> Accepting the Zimmerwald Manifesto, they identified the principles of non-annexation and self-determination with Wilson. Kerensky, not Lenin, was their hope for peace and revolution. When Labriola argued that to reject Lenin in the name of Marx was to deny fact in the name of theory, Turati answered labeling Lenin the theoretician of a pre-capitalist socialism and of a communism existing in "an enduring Middle Ages."<sup>39</sup> They accepted the Bolshevik government, but never Bolshevik ideology.

The Reformists were opposed to Maximalism, therefore, for theoretical and practical reasons. The September 1918 congress of the PSI had witnessed a verbal triumph by the advocates of violence. Turati had been saddened by the congress, and he soon found other reasons for his growing apprehension. At a meeting at Rome in December of representatives from the

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<sup>38</sup>CS, XXIX, 2 (January 16, 1919), 21-24. Evidently there was not much to the peace feelers between Nicholas and the German government. See V.V. Lebedev, "K Istoriografii Problemi Vihoda Rossii iz Voini Nakanune Fevral'skoi Revolutsii," Voprosi Istorii, 8 (August, 1971), 147-53.

<sup>39</sup>CS, XXIX, 2 (January 16, 1919), 21-24.

PSI, the Railwaymen's Union, the Socialist delegation in parliament, the CGL, and the League of Socialist Communes a proposal endorsing a proletarian dictatorship was presented; by the following day 30 of the deputies had "disappeared" and the meeting collapsed. As early as the beginning of 1919 Turati was haunted by the fear that such gestures would trigger a useless revolt or provoke "the worst bourgeois tyranny."<sup>40</sup>

The editor of Critica Sociale, Claudio Treves, was as keen an observer as Turati. A month after the Bologna Congress, the PSI emerged from the November election with an expected success. By the early spring the party was seized by uncertainty and crises. Treves recorded what had happened.

The revolution immediately after the war was conceived as a voluntary act, rather than a profound transformation of institutions, and it was felt to be close. The party's real task was the preparation of the communist institutions, firstly the soviets. But this would have meant--had to be--the immediate concentration of efforts, not passiveness. The fact is days, weeks, and months passed and the occasion for the leap into the dark never came. We witnessed all the secondary crises indicating social disintegration and weakness of the state. This suggested a civil, administrative and political revolution, not a revolutionary assault of violence. The results of the election enhanced this version. Many saw the possibility of reform and feared that exclusive dedication to a total Maximalist revolution would allow the occasion

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<sup>40</sup> CS, XXIX, 1 (January 1, 1919), 5-6.

to be lost, and thus the dynamic period (as it was called) passed without revolution and without reform.<sup>41</sup>

The fears expressed by the Sovietisti a year before had come to pass.

### 3. The Maximalist Leadership

The full account of what happened in the PSI between the end of the war and the coming of Fascism will not be rounded out until there are good monographic studies of the roles of the PSI leaders, Serrati in particular. After the removal of Mussolini in October 1914, Serrati had become the titular head of the PSI and the zigzag of Maximalist policies corresponded to his own inner theoretical inconsistency. Serrati had not supported Lazzari's formula, "neither support nor sabotage," at the Bologna meeting in May 1915, yet he had opposed any violation of it; he went to Zimmerwald and voted against the Zimmerwald left; but, championing Lenin over Kerensky in 1917, he became an articulate exponent of revolution, at the same time denying its applicability to Italy. Having helped transfer the PSI to the Third International, Serrati returned from its Second Congress in 1920 rebelling against enforcement of the Twenty-One Conditions. In keeping with this record, when he died in 1926 he was a member of the PCI whose formation he had opposed

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<sup>41</sup>CS, XXX, 5 (March 1, 1920), 65-66.



while the PSI had almost ceased to exist.

Even if the Italian Socialists remained hobbled by theoretical inadequacies, they possessed impressive resources. By 1920 membership stood at 200,000. The November 1919 election had sent 156 deputies to the Chamber, making up nearly one-third of that body. The party's labor counterpart, the CGL, led 2,000,000 organized workers, 500,000 of whom were peasants or day laborers. In addition, another half-million workers belonged to the Railwaymen's Union, the syndicalist Unione sindacale italiana, and other bodies, all independent but potential allies of the PSI in a revolutionary confrontation. The circulation of the Avanti! touched 400,000 at times, an impressive figure for a country where the working class was not in the habit of reading the daily press. In a report to the Comintern in 1920 in which he listed the above figures, Serrati added, however, that the Socialists were unprepared for revolution.<sup>42</sup> The conditions for a revolution had been present, said Nenni reviewing the events of the postwar a few years after they had ended, but "the revolutionary preparation was absent."<sup>43</sup>

The Bologna Congress of 1919 authorized the leader-

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<sup>42</sup> Comunismo, II, 1 (October 1, 1920), 58-62.

<sup>43</sup> Nenni, op. cit., pp. 21-3.

ship to prepare plans that would have put the party on the offensive, when the November election intervened to give a jubilant PSI one-third of the popular vote. "The Italy of revolution is born," proclaimed the Avanti!. With the PSI doing so well, the national leadership felt even less urgency about preparing new tactics. So it was that while the party was caught up in a debate on how to install soviets in Italy, Serrati met with the parliamentarians to assure them that the Bologna Congress had neither promised revolution nor shelved reform.<sup>44</sup> By committing the PSI to immobilism, the momentum produced by the election was soon lost. Quite understandably, the PSI failed to act on a master plan for Italian soviets presented in February by Bombacci, one of the most pathetic figures in the history of Italian socialism.<sup>45</sup> In commenting on the deliberations of that important National Council meeting, Virgilio Verdaro, the leader of the Florentine Abstentionists, informed the readers of Il Soviet that the Maximalists were being overwhelmed by a task too large for their ability.<sup>46</sup> Verdaro was unaware of Serrati's change of mind on the soviets, though by March even

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 73-4.

<sup>45</sup>After several years as a member of the PCI, Bombacci went over to Fascism; he was shot and exhibited with Mussolini in 1945.

<sup>46</sup>See article in IS, February 8, 1920.

Treves could see that the PSI was marking time. Verdaro did warn that the party might suffer the consequences of an impending reaction, if it did not seize power. Verdaro repeated, thus, what Turati had said the year before (and would say again), and what Gramsci would warn about three months later in the much-cited editorial of May 8, 1920 in Ordine Nuovo.

The topic of Italian soviets was again discussed by the national leadership between April 18-22, after the site for this National council meeting had been moved to Milan from Turin, where a general strike led by the group around Gramsci was in progress. A new plan for installing soviets which had been prepared by Egidio Gennari and Ivan Regent from the directorate and Gino Baldesi of the CGL was approved, but the breakdown of the whole operation now became very clear. Serrati argued that Italian conditions did not match the Russian; Gennari was for parliamentary obstruction; Enzo Graziadei spoke of the impotence of the Italian proletariat, while Turati mentioned the reaction that was brewing. The adopted plan was undercut so as not to interfere with prior agreements or participation in the coming election to local bodies. Bordiga participated but came away in disgust. Il Soviet reported that the intent to establish the soviets had been effectively blocked. When the results of the conference were made known, the rightwing press noted with relief that the plan for Italian soviets was now

moribund.<sup>47</sup>

With the passing of summer the web spun by the Maximalists had begun to form a noose. The Second Congress of the Comintern, meeting between July 16 and August 6, imposed the Twenty-One conditions. These included the expulsion of the Reformists and a change of name, both of which Serrati vehemently opposed. In September the occupation of the factories ended dismally. Henceforth the PSI could no longer be taken as revolutionary, and a revolt by the left wing loomed.

In response to a request from some Socialists in the south Serrati published in October a theoretical piece in his periodical Comunismo. Since he chose to discuss the problem of a revolutionary seizure of power, the article contains an exposition of the precepts underlying Maximalism. Italy was still in a pre-revolutionary condition, he wrote, and one had to await the precise moment. In any case, the Italian revolution would meet with far more problems than had the Russian. The party had to prepare itself to inherit the regime which was due to collapse. From here Serrati went on to a puzzling observation: "For Socialists who go to power--before the revolution and against the revolution--cease to be Socialists and become bourgeois." What he meant had best be left to

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<sup>47</sup>Nenni, op. cit., p. 83; "Il consiglio nazionale socialista," Comunismo, I, 14 (April 15, 1920), 967-72, and No. 15 (May 1, 1920), 1029-35; "Il convegno di Milano," IS, May 2, 1920.

Serrati to explain. "In other words, it is not we who make the revolution or, to phrase it more clearly, who enact the resolute step of the revolution, that is, that which violently breaks the nexus between the past and the future; we...intend to make use of the revolution to force it to the goals laid down in our credo."<sup>48</sup> Thus Serrati revealed the essence of Maximalism: a barren passivity embellished by a revolutionary phraseology. As a matter of fact, the Reformists had said about the same, six years earlier.

#### 4. The influence of the International

While Maximalist incompetence was a prime factor in driving an increasing number of Socialists towards the Sinistra, a second factor spurring the political migration within the PSI was the Third International. Once most of the facts are assembled, it became clear that Lenin and the Bolsheviks never understood the A, B, C's of the Italian scene. One example will serve as illustration. At the Second Congress of the Comintern, Bukharin said to the PSI delegates, "Yours is one of the few parties defending revolutionary socialism from the beginning of the war."<sup>49</sup> The praise belonged to the Sinistra,

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<sup>48</sup>"Il dovere dell'ora presente," Comunismo, II, I (October 1, 1920), 1-4.

<sup>49</sup>Comunismo, I, 20 (July 15, 1920), 1349-51.

though no one corrected him. Ultimately the Comintern destroyed the very movement that had come to identify with proletarian internationalism; the evidence on this is overwhelming. What cannot be disputed was the influence of Moscow.

Excepting the issue of abstentionism, the message sent to Italy by the Bolsheviks in 1919-20 pretty much coincided with what the Sovietisti had been saying: expel the Reformists, turn the party into the political instrument, and make revolution. Ironically, by acting as spokesman for the Comintern, Serrati's bi-monthly, Comunismo, contributed to strengthening the left wing. "The worst misfortune and the greatest danger in Western Europe is that there is no revolutionary party." Or, "In reading Marx who has not understood that in a capitalist nation...only the dictatorship of the proletariat or of the bourgeoisie is possible?" The publication of the texts of Bolshevik writings weakened Serrati's centrism. Even more ironic was that by serializing the translation of Lenin's "Left-wing" Communism. An Infantile Disorder, Comunismo strengthened the Abstentionists, since all could read how the edge of Lenin's polemic was directed primarily against Dutch Tribunists and German anarcho-syndicalists. The Abstentionists were also critical of these two political movements, sharing in common with them only the tactic of abstentionism.

Serrati found it particularly difficult to accept Bolshevik demands to expel the Reformists. The Bolshevik

distrust of that group carried little weight with the Maximalists, who were being asked to cut away from men with whom they had labored jointly since 1915 at the expense of the Sinistra. Moreover, a break with the right wing in 1920 could raise awkward questions about Maximalist conduct in the recent past. The pressure on Serrati after the Second Congress must have been agonizing. . . . Whatever his inner reasoning, returning from Moscow in 1920 Serrati voted against acceptance by the PSI of the Twenty-One Conditions.<sup>50</sup> Serrati was probably for revolution, though in his own fashion, and when he finally gave himself to the Comintern in 1924, it was to join the Gramscian Centro, the political antibody cultivated by the Russian leadership to neutralize the revolutionary Sinistra.

By the spring of 1920 the International was becoming aware of the vacillating character of Maximalism. At the Milan meeting in April, a Comintern representative severely criticized the PSI's handling of the soviet question. In October, with the PSI now dissolving into factions, Zinoviev wrote Bordiga from Stettin, "If Serrati and his friends want to defend the Comintern...they must enter your faction."<sup>51</sup> And when that

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<sup>50</sup> Spriano, op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>51</sup> Some of the text of this letter is quoted by Jules Humbert-Droz, Il contrasto tra l'Internazionale e il PCI 1922-28. Documenti inediti dell'Archivio di Jules Humbert-Droz, segretario dell'Internazionale Comunista (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1969), pp. 13-14.

faction met at Imola in November, Zinoviev confirmed this support. "We recognize no other communist faction in Italy but yours."<sup>52</sup> After the schism in January 1921 Lenin agreed belatedly that the PSI had never been "a truly revolutionary party," adding praise for the newly formed PCI.<sup>53</sup>

#### 5. To the Congress of Livorno

The Congress of Bologna had routed the Abstentionists, and the November election seemed to confirm, at first, the correctness of the decisions made by the congress. In reality, Bologna was the apogee of Maximalist success and the nadir of Abstentionist influence in the party. At Bologna, Bordiga had refrained from breaking with the Maximalists and consented to suspend all abstentionist activities until after the election. At the same time amongst themselves the Abstentionists agreed that only a schism would free the good elements of the party from the rest. They reorganized into a national faction under a central committee consisting of Bordiga, Tarsia, Fobert, Tommaso Borracetto and Antonio Pisacane. During the congress,

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<sup>52</sup> Lettere e polemiche fra L'Internazionale comunista, il PSI e La Confederazione del Lavoro d'Italia (Milan: Societa Editrice Avanti!, 1921), p. 31.

<sup>53</sup> From a speech made by Lenin at the Third Congress of the Comintern in 1921 and cited in V. I. Lenin, Collected Works (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), XXXII, pp. 462-67.



the Sovietisti had attempted to transfer Il Soviet to some northern industrial city, preferably in Piedmont; having failed and strapped by the lack of funds publication of Il Soviet was suspended until after January 1, 1920.

When Il Soviet reappeared, it was as "The Organ of the Abstentionist Communists of the PSI." The first January issue spoke about the increasing discontent felt by the lower and middle classes of Italy, and reported disapprovingly on the thousands of opportunists pouring into the party "to reinforce the gray mass already found there."

A suggested change from abstentionist tactics now came from Francesco Misiano, who had participated in the Spartacist uprising of 1919 and was considered an expert on German matters. In December, the Avanti! had published a letter from Lenin to the German Communist party agreeing with their decision to abandon abstentionism and return to electoral participation. The letter had surprised the Abstentionists; repeatedly in Il Soviet they had asserted that abstentionism in the West was in keeping with the principles enunciated at the founding congress of the Third International held in March.<sup>54</sup> Analyzing the German situation, Misiano supported

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<sup>54</sup>Cf. "Verso il congresso," IS, August 31, 1919. In the article, DL pointed out that Western revolutionaries had to learn to defeat a democratic, not a reactionary, bourgeoisie.

the switch by the Germans, though he clearly had Italy in mind as well.<sup>55</sup> The editors of Il Soviet responded to this attack on their position, agreeing that abstentionism was merely tactical; they thought the political situation in Italy remained sufficiently fluid to justify abstentionism, and they hoped that the question would be aired and settled by the Third International. "We are astonished," they wrote in critical appraisal of Lenin's reasoning, "that Lenin equates non-participation in elections with non-participation in the trade unions as if they were the same thing...."<sup>56</sup>

Historically, the most significant debate involving the Abstentionists in 1919-20 was with the advocates of the worker council movement in Turin. Within the context of those times the debate was not especially dramatic, and the protagonists were much closer in their views than was alleged later by official PCI writers.<sup>57</sup> But the controversy did assume a new dimension many years after World War II, when a new historiography began to catch up with the myths the PCI had spun around its origins. The kernel of the exchange had little to do with the

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<sup>55</sup>Misiano, IS, January 4, 1920.

<sup>56</sup>"Lettera di Lenin," IS January 11, 1920 and editorial note in issue of January 18.

<sup>57</sup>Cf. Angelo Tasca, "Gradualismo e rivoluzionarismo," Ordine Nuovo, 271-72, January 17, 1920.

question of Italian soviets, since most of the participants involved, including Gramsci,<sup>58</sup> knew that the factory council was not the same as the soviet. The actual subject of dispute between them was how to make revolution, and, within that context, how to evaluate the factory council.

In 1919-20 Gramsci became the protagonist of a view that the revolution was a development forming within the nexus of the factory relations of the worker. In his rich metaphorical language, the workers' state would arise from the "subterranean consciousness" of the working class or would emerge from a "molecular transformation" of the state; hence the "formula 'conquest of the State' must be understood to mean: creation of a new state...to substitute for the democratic parliamentary state". The revolution was "essentially a problem of organization and discipline" or the "formation of new productive forces, that is, of a new revolutionary class." Gramsci believed that the seizure of power would occur after the creation of a new system of institutions which he, initially at least, identified with the councils of Turin ("organs of authority and of power.")<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>"Dai gruppi aderenti alla frazione," IS February 22, 1920. In a discussion before the Turinese section Gramsci acknowledged the difference between soviet and worker council, seeing the latter as a means to separate the working class from reformist influence.

<sup>59</sup>Not all of these Gramscian phrases are from 1919-20, though I sought to remain faithful to the worker council phase of thinking. According to Cammett: "Gramsci so emphasized the

What Gramsci seemed to be saying in 1919-20 was that the revolution coincided with the seizure and control of the industrial processes; that a victory at the productive level meant a political triumph over the bourgeois state. Missing from this view was the notion of the revolution as a primarily political act requiring some agency of coordination. Also missing were considerations about the reserve powers of the bourgeois state: e.g., the administration, the army, control of the prestigious higher offices of government, etc..

The concept of lo Stato operaio, the workers' state, sprouting from the consciousness of the proletariat was, therefore, a novel restatement of earlier ideas whirling loose in the Italian setting; the relationship was to syndicalism and Maximalism, in that they all belittled the political act and the violent destruction of the state. Defense of working class autonomy was then associated with syndicalism and reform socialism, not with revolutionary socialism. Belief in the efficacy of working class autonomy explains why Gramsci was so

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obligations of the Party and the trade union to the council that his words frequently sounded as though he believed in the possibility of the spontaneous revolution of the working class without the political direction and discipline afforded by the Party." Op. cit., p. 88. Even Spriano underlined this "molecular process" in his commentary. Op. cit., p. 62. In reviewing Spriano's volume, Andreina De Clementi taxed Spriano for not having developed further this aspect of Gramscian thought, which, she felt, would have shown definitively how distant Gramsci was from Lenin in 1919. See Chapter I, footnote 76.

late in joining the Sinistra (not before May 1920). Anyone approaching the Italian scene of 1920 by way of a review of earlier radical thinking sees immediately the indebtedness of Gramsci to syndicalism -- the observation made by Andreina De Clementi. But even in 1920 the relationship of the Worker Council views to syndicalism was spotted by the Russian Nicolai Lubjarskii, who was active in Italy under the pseudonym Carlo Niccolini. Niccolini discussed the Turinese councils in Serrati's Comunismo, describing them as a cross between the syndicalist factory run by the workers and the Marxist factory run by society. Russian experience had shown that the scope of the councils was very narrow.<sup>60</sup>

The political preeminence of the revolutionary act was the heart of the Sovietisti's criticism. Il Soviet had welcomed the appearance of Ordine Nuovo but cautioned that socialist relationships were not feasible within the capitalist structure, but only following the conquest of power. "So long as bourgeois state power remains the worker council is nothing." The soviet system, they maintained, was a class system of representation deliberately excluding all who did not belong to the working masses. "Only to a certain point do we see the germ of the soviet in the factory internal commissions [shop steward bodies

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<sup>60</sup>Comunismo, I, 6 (December 1, 1919), 401-07. For his clarification, Niccolini was given special thanks by the editors.

of Turin]: to repeat, we think that they are destined to germinate into factory councils that will be endowed with technical and disciplinary tasks after the socialization of the factory."<sup>61</sup> The polemic was undertaken by Bordiga himself and extended into the early months of 1920. But this debate appears to have excited little interest outside the readership of the two periodicals; most Socialists who thought of soviets had their attention on the party's plans. In these months, the PSI section at Turin went over to the Abstentionists, while the numbers adhering to the Sinistra multiplied throughout early 1920.

In the course of the debate Bordiga expounded anew his views on making revolution. The party must be drawn from only those who are ready to assume the risks needed to win the revolution, even if only a minority. The party makes the revolution and opens the door to the soviets. "The soviets of tomorrow must have their genesis in the local sections of the communist party." The party readies the candidates to be elected by the proletarian masses. Bordiga's scheme was undeniably authoritarian. Still, before the revolution the

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<sup>61</sup>Cf. "L'Ordine Nuovo," IS, June 15, 1919; "Il sistema," IS, September 14, 1919; "Per la costituzione dei consigli operai," IS, January 4, 1920, and many others following this date.

party represented the working class; after, the network of soviets constituted the state.<sup>62</sup> All was predicated on the successful seizure of power.<sup>63</sup> Building the party, therefore, was more important than establishing soviets, since a soviet was revolutionary only if a majority was communist.<sup>64</sup>

During the stormy postwar years of 1919 and 1920 Italy experienced more than 30 general strikes, perhaps a record for any single country. The most decisive for the Sovietisti were the unsuccessful April 1920 strikes of Turin and Piedmont, involving a half million workers.<sup>65</sup> A major reason for their failure was that the strike action had been begun without coordination or approval of the CGL or the PSI.<sup>66</sup> The Sovietisti were critical of the handling of the strikes, and they saw in the defeat evidence of the error of seeking power at the factory level. But with their criticism went homage to the Turinese working class, which they deemed the vanguard of the Italian

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<sup>62</sup>"Formiamo i soviet?" IS, September 21, 1919.

<sup>63</sup>"The state organization," wrote Bukharin, "is the most far-reaching organization of the class, in which it concentrates its entire strength, in which the tools of mechanical pressure and of repressive measures are concentrated, in which the ruling class is organized specifically as class and not as a small part or small group of a class." Op. cit., p. 27. This view was echoed by Bordiga and not by Gramsci.

<sup>64</sup>Bordiga's articles: "La costituzione," IS, February 1, 8 and 22, 1920.

<sup>65</sup>See discussion in Cammett, op. cit., pp. 87-104.

<sup>66</sup>Spriano, op. cit., pp. 56-7; Nenni, op. cit., p. 77; Zibordi, CS, XXX, 12 (June 16, 1920), 181.

proletariat.<sup>67</sup> April then, was decisive on two counts: the April meeting in Milan had proven that the PSI plan for soviets was no more than an evasion, and the strikes had sobered the proponents of the worker council movement, the Ordinovisti, with both events sending streams of recruits to the Abstentionists, amongst them Gramsci, who moved to the Sinistra without ever accepting abstentionism. Many of those who came now were probably attracted by other features of the Sinistra than by the stand on electoralism.<sup>68</sup> A sign of the change was Gramsci's May 8 editorial in Ordine Nuovo, in which the accent was on renovating the party. At this point Gramsci was a man in transition, one of the several that marked his political life before 1926.

The road to the Sinistra was opening wide, and Bordiga seemed to possess the stature required of new leadership. In the Italian State Archives there is preserved an anonymous portrait of Bordiga, as he appeared in 1920.

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<sup>67</sup>"Lo sciopero," IS, May 5, 1920. A factory seizure had first occurred with the Dalmine in Genoa. IS had raised the question: seizure of factory or seizure of power? Also, see Gino Baldesi, CS, XXX, 9 (May 16, 1920), 135-36.

<sup>68</sup>Berti makes the Abstentionists a minority in the future PCI, and Cortesi criticizes Bordiga for holding on to abstentionism too long. Both observations are probably sound.



Among the Italian Socialists (aside from Turati, whose ideals are petty bourgeois) Bordiga is a rare man of character. He is an impassioned worker and has sacrificed all to his communist ideal. That would not be enough to qualify him as the next duce of the Italian revolutionary movement. He has however a theoretical grasp of communism without parallel.<sup>69</sup>

A schism was already occurring in many sections, the report added, as the sounder elements sought to escape from Maximalism. "We must hurry to avoid the deluge."

By February Bordiga had begun an organizational tour through northern and central Italy: Turin, Milan, Arezzo, and Rome. Abstentionists were now found in many parts of Italy and Sicily. At Bologna Abstentionist membership was placed at 150, at Florence 50, at Novara 2,000, at Turin 1,000--"the entire Socialist section of the city"--at Trieste 1,000, and at Naples 180.<sup>70</sup> The police intercepted a request from Gerhardt Eisler, the brother of Ruth Fischer, asking Bordiga to write for the Vienna weekly Kommunismus, and Béla Kun sent word that he agreed with the Abstentionists. Il Soviet announced that the issues raised by the Sinistra were coming to the attention of

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<sup>69</sup>Anonymous report in Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Pubblica Sicurezza, Ministero dell' Interno. Direzione Generale, Divisione Affari Generali e Riservati, busta 327, fascicolo 38. Henceforth this source will be designated ACS, PS, with a busta number.

<sup>70</sup>ACS, VCPC, Amadeo Bordiga. Found in Bordiga's busta, this document was probably an estimate compiled by the police.

the entire party.<sup>71</sup>

A call for a schism had first been sounded in February by an article reproduced in Il Soviet from La Nouvelle Internationale of Geneva.<sup>72</sup> At this time Il Soviet commented: "A phenomenon that has occurred many times in Italy has been reenacted: la rivoluzione mancata," another expected revolution has failed to materialize! Misiano reentered the debate to suggest that the revolutionary Socialists should unite around the Third International and purge the party of the Reformists.<sup>73</sup> Il Soviet was sceptical; the matter rested with the Maximalists. In a subsequent issue Nicola Lovero remembered the successful campaign of La Soffitta under the title "For a Communist Party of Italy."<sup>74</sup> Having delayed a national congress of communist groups set to meet in Florence, the Abstentionist central committee called on the PSI to eliminate the chaos from the party. There must have been little conviction in this appeal, particularly after hearing the report on the April National Council meeting at Milan: "Let us renovate! Let us find as quickly and swiftly as possible the means to separate all that

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<sup>71</sup>L'Ex-massimalismo," IS, March 28, 1920.

<sup>72</sup>"Scissione," IS, February 1, 1920.

<sup>73</sup>Misiano may have been the first to sound the view that a schism would mean a defeat for the working class. Gramsci was to adopt this view after 1923, taking it from the hands of the PCI right wing, the Minority.

<sup>74</sup>IS, February 22, 1920.

is alive and healthy in the party from the cancer spreading throughout the organism."<sup>75</sup>

A national conference of communist dissidents held in Florence on May 8-9 was another step towards the schism. Delegates from central and southern Italy were a majority, though Turin, Novara, and Bologna were represented. Gennari came down from Milan, the headquarters of the directorate, Niccolini from the International and Gramsci as a representative of some critics of the party leadership. The Turinese section was represented by Giovanni Parodi. Niccolini attacked social democracy and the Poles, who were then at war with the Soviet regime. Misiano and Gennari urged the Abstentionists to remain within the PSI. Gramsci felt that abstentionism was too narrow a program on which to build a communist movement. Tarsia, Verdaro and Vittorio Ambrosini also spoke. Bordiga was the main speaker whose motion was adopted unanimously, with Ambrosini abstaining. The motion declared the PSI unfit to lead a revolution and committed the faction to the building of a communist party, with the founding congress to be held after the Second Congress of the International due in July. Although abstentionism was downgraded as not resting on principle, the Abstentionists announced that they would seek to form an abstentionist

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<sup>75</sup>"Il convegno di Milano," IS, May 2, 1920.

faction in the International. Antonio Cecchi, a Neapolitan labor leader (who along with his brother had helped found the Circolo "Carlo Marx" in 1913) was added to the Abstentionist central committee. Hopes were expressed that the offices of the faction could be moved north at least as far as central Italy.<sup>76</sup>

Using the threat of schism, the dissidents put the party leadership on notice that if substantial changes were not forthcoming the communist wing would depart. But after May all factions in the PSI looked to the Second Congress of the International; it was expected that the congress would resolve some of the problems bedeviling the Socialists. Bordiga did not leave Naples until July 18, and he returned on September 20. Though the congress crushed abstentionism as a tactic, the growing lack of confidence in Serrati and the September factory occupation left even greater disarray in the PSI.

The communist dissidents met again at Milan in October, now as a Communist Faction; their ranks had begun to swell. In a manifesto issued to the PSI by the Communist Faction, the new group asked for a change of name, the expulsion of the Reformists, and the restructuring of the party into a centralized and homogeneous organization. This was very close to the

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<sup>76</sup>This account is based on IS, May 14, 1920. Substantially the same account is found in ACS, PS, busta 80, fascicolo Firenze, 1920.

prewar Sinistra program, supplemented by the Twenty-One Conditions. The manifesto also announced acceptance of full participation in national elections and was signed by Bombacci, Fortichari, Gramsci, Misiano, Polano, Terracini, and Bordiga. The abstentionist phase of the Sinistra was over.

In those days Bordiga was the vortex of Sinistra activity. All the organizational work for the Milan meeting had been undertaken by him.<sup>77</sup> He was endlessly on the move from Naples to Milan, Rome, and Turin, where the Abstentionist section had prematurely abandoned the PSI to form a communist party.<sup>78</sup> All the dissidents now concentrated their fire on Serrati. Bordiga wrote heaping scorn on Serrati's belief that a revolution could occur without disturbing the party or its membership.<sup>79</sup> "The separation is necessary," counselled Rita Maierotti. "Comrades, let us not renew the jeremiads of the period before the Reggio Congress for fear of weakening the party: after Reggio the party grew stronger."<sup>80</sup> From Turin Gramsci wrote: "With a fraudulent mania for unity, the

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<sup>77</sup>Spriano, op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>78</sup>IS, October 3, 1920.

<sup>79</sup>"Una consultazione," IS, October 31, 1920.

<sup>80</sup>"La separazione e necessaria," IS, November 25, 1920.

Unitarians [the Serratian Maximalists] have only disintegrated a party; tomorrow they would compromise the revolution."<sup>81</sup>

"But a revolutionary movement can only be founded on a proletarian vanguard and must be conducted without prior consultations, without the apparatus of representative assemblies. A revolution must be minutely prepared by a workers' general staff, just as war is prepared by a general staff of the army."<sup>82</sup>

Was this Gramsci speaking with the tones of Lenin--or Bordiga? It is impossible to tell for in the Italy of 1920, the two sounded so much alike.

The culmination of these febrile activities was the Seventeenth Congress due in January 1921; in preparation the Communist Sinistra met again at Imola in November, while the Serratian Unitarians gathered at Florence, and the Reformists at Reggio Emilia. At Imola the dissidents were joined by others fleeing from the Maximalist camp; notable amongst them were Egidio Gennari and the veteran Socialist Anselmo Marabini. A new leadership was designated: Bombacci, Fortichiari, Gramsci, Bordiga, Misiano, Polano, and Terracini were put on the central committee, and Bombacci, Fortichiari and Bordiga

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<sup>81</sup>Scritti scelti, p. 388. The piece was entitled "Schism or Disintegration."

<sup>82</sup>From Ordine Nuovo of November 24, 1920, quoted in Cammett, op. cit., p. 122.

were sent to the higher executive committee. Ambrogio Belloni, Gennari, Grieco, Tarsia, and Togliatti were to prepare a party constitution, and Togliatti and Terracini were named to speak before the congress on the motion restructuring the PSI into a communist party.<sup>83</sup> Giuseppe Berti, a participant at Imola, left this description: "Not the famous duci of Florence and of Reggio who have assembled in search of an army, but a tight gathering of revolutionaries."<sup>84</sup> This faction hopefully expected to be a majority at Livorno.

##### 5. The Livorno Congress

The Livorno Congress ranks as probably the most important one in the eighty years of history of the Italian Socialist movement. The party had been born and assumed its reformist outlook at Genoa in 1892; at Reggio in 1912, the Reformist leadership had been removed, never to return; the departure of the Communist Sinistra at Livorno displaced the

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<sup>83</sup>"Mozione comunista," IS, December 9, 1920.

<sup>84</sup>"Il convegno di Imola," ibid. The variegated background coming to Imola is indicated by this description: "Bergsonian voluntarists and spiritualists like Sessaro in the company of pure Marxist Materialists like Bordiga; pragmatists like Tasca; insurrectionists like Bombacci; 'opportunists' like Pastore and idealists like Fortichiari; defenders of the old leadership like...Gennari, and its ruthless critics like Gramsci...Abstentionists like Boero." Comunismo, II, 4 (15-30 November, 1920), 85.

PSI as the primary vehicle of working class loyalties, though this fact would not become indisputable until after 1945. Arriving at the congress the delegates were divided into three basic groups: the Communist Sinistra, the Maximalist Unitarians, and the Reformists.<sup>85</sup> The key to the outcome of the congress lay in the hands of Serrati. Given the clear failure of revolutionary electoralism, upon which Maximalism rested, and the lack of confidence evidenced by the International, only a very serious effort by Serrati could have avoided a sundering of the party. Would the Sinistra have been amenable to a compromise? Surely not one that did not substantially alter the PSI. Maximalism had been found wanting, and the Sinistra intended to bury the corpse or remove themselves. The Communists had expected the support of a majority and for this reason were unwilling to split the party until the Congress pronounced itself; this suggests that the PSI could have left Livorno substantially intact, if shorn of its right wing and Maximalist ideology. Apparently the bid from the center to the Sinistra was never made.

The full story of the congress has been told elsewhere,<sup>86</sup> though some supplementary notes may be added here.

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<sup>85</sup>Initially five, the groups soon reduced to three. See Cammett, op. cit., pp. 141-43.

<sup>86</sup>Cammett, op. cit., pp. 141-45.



Both the Sinistra and the schism were favored by the international movement, either in the form of Paul Levi's remarks or the telegram from the Executive Committee of the Comintern bearing the signatures of all the top Soviet leaders (Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev).<sup>87</sup>

Amongst the speakers, Secondo Tranquilli (Ignazio Silone) for the FGS called on the delegates "to burn the pretense of unity." Lazzari attempting to hold the party together ended by accusing the Sinistra of seeking a dictatorship, thus contributing to the cleavage. Terracini, the first speaker for the Sinistra, gave the following description of the relationship between class and party: "A party is formed when social conditions require it. As the class gains a consciousness of itself...the party is formed, and when the class changes the party changes, and when the class disappears the party disappears."<sup>88</sup> When Terracini then called into question the attitude of a Socialist towards the war, voices rebuked him from the assembly with the shouts of "Gramsci, Gramsci!" a reminder that Gramsci had briefly supported intervention in 1914.

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<sup>87</sup>Resoconto stenografico del XVII Congresso Nazionale del Partito Socialista Italiano (Milan: Edizioni Avanti!, 1963), pp. 14-17 and 17-19.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

Bordiga did not speak until the morning of the fourth day, and his participation meant a change of original plans. His remarks--the most carefully followed of all the major addresses, judging from the lack of interruptions indicated in the transcript--recapitulated the history of the PSI, beginning with its integration within the prewar bourgeois order; because the working class had been made part of the system it had been unable to block the entry into the war in 1915. The war had provided ghastly evidence of the failure of prewar reformism. Bordiga reviewed the reformist arguments against revolution: before the war the Reformists had pointed to the stability of the bourgeois regime as the reason not to begin revolution; immediately after the war they had indicated instability as cause for keeping the working class from taking power. "Therefore, the two alternatives," said Bordiga, citing lines from Marx and Lenin, "which world history offers us are: dictatorship of the bourgeoisie or dictatorship of the proletariat."

Bordiga reminded his listeners that even the Sinistra had put up only a theoretical opposition to the war. When voices from the audience interrupted to say that some interventionist Socialists were now in Communist ranks, Bordiga answered, "Yes, comrades, some of them are with us...and even I, who never was a war supporter, prefer those youths who, having learned about capitalist infamy from experience and from the

fratricidal struggles of the bourgeoisie, have returned with a new faith in revolutionary war...." The importance of the remark is that it indicated Bordiga's open mind to those Socialists who were ready to abandon the tactics of the past. His speech was not an attack against leadership or personalities but a critique of the policies that had led the PSI to miss the opportunities of the postwar crisis. "The fact is that as a result of these tactics the party is today what it was on the eve of the war: the best party of the Second International but not yet a party of the Third...." The Communists stood for the Twenty-One Conditions and upon leaving would not disappear as had earlier groups deserting the PSI. Bordiga sought to win the delegates with one final cry: "We are a large army, the nucleus around which will form the great forces of the revolutionary world proletariat."<sup>89</sup>

The rebuttal should have been made by Serrati in a strong delivery, but by losing himself in charge and counter-charge he provided further evident of centrist weakness. The emotional climax was brought on by Turati, one of the two best minds of the congress along with Bordiga. Turati's face was highlighted by two domineering, intelligent eyes. His words inspired no conviction, although the voice was laden with a

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<sup>89</sup>  
Ibid., pp. 271-96.

sentiment touching all. In vain did Turati warn against the idolatry of prophets, be they Marx, Lenin or Turati; his use of impeccable and simplistic logic to disprove the need for proletarian dictatorship were lost labors. Alluding to victory as a triumph for all Socialists, he reached out with an embrace enveloping the heart of the congress.

Perhaps I will not see that day. Too many new people have arrived who make our progress harder and more difficult, though we will triumph along this path; majority or minority means nothing...that which is important is the driving force for which I lived, the faith with which I die--with you or without you it's the same to me, and fighting I remain; and with you I believe in its triumph, because this driving force is Socialism. Long may it live!<sup>90</sup>

Turati had delivered his credo along with a political statement; these heartfelt words carried a misty-eyed congress to its last moment of unity.

All the rest was anti-climax. Khristo Kabakchiev ritualistically announced that he and Mátyás Rákosi, as representatives of the International, supported the Communists. The vote of the congress gave 98,000 to Serrati's Unitarians, 58,800 to the Communists, and 14,700 to the Reformists. Bordiga announced that the PSI had excluded itself from the International, and he asked the Communist delegates to reassemble in the San Marco Theatre. The schism had occurred. The memorable

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., pp. 319-35.

postwar crisis--the lost opportunity of Italian socialism--  
was over.

While the remaining delegates of the PSI pledged anew their loyalty to the Third International, that body telegraphed to the new party, "The ECCI of the Communist International expresses solidarity and sends fraternal greetings. Your party is the only one accepted by the International in Italy."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> IS, February 13, 1921.

CHAPTER IVTHE BORDIGAN PARTY, 1921-22

A number of factors had brought about the schism of January: the long maturation of the Sinistra within which Bordiga operated, the loss of faith in Maximalist leadership, and the pressures coming from the International. In any case, a schism was inevitable once Serrati had made it clear that he would accept no real change in the policies and practices of the PSI, and thus he helped bring to completion a process of maturation and self-identification by the Sinistra stretching back into the history of the Socialist party.<sup>1</sup> Describing the event 50 years later, Alfonso Leonetti, who was active in those years, recalled the desire of the activists to get away from Maximalism. "In 1921-22 we were emerging from a great defeat, that of the occupation of the factories, and all--from Tasca to Gramsci, from Graziadei to Marabini--all had a desire to build a new party with an iron discipline and homogeneous ideology."<sup>2</sup> The schism was the product of all these factors,

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<sup>1</sup>In 1921 all the Communist leaders blamed Serrati for the schism; an example of this attitude were these remarks by Zinoviev: "Despite Serrati's charming words...at the Livorno Congress Serrati...united with the opportunists against the Communists." Comunismo, II, 19 (July 1, 1921), 1072-76.

<sup>2</sup>Personal interview in Rome with Leonetti, June 7, 1970.

not of Bordiga alone, and might have occurred even without Bordiga, though the political leadership of the Sinistra would have been poorer. Had the Communists been a majority at Livorno, perhaps the postwar crisis might have ended differently, for the party would have commanded a stronger following within the reformist CGL; alternatively, had the Sinistra remained within the PSI, there is no reason to expect that its presence would have altered party conduct, not any more than it had been able to do before Livorno. Serrati never understood the new needs brought in by the postwar crisis and he continued to flounder to the very end in 1926. Without the schism, the more clearheaded Sinistra ran the risk of disintegrating along with the PSI.

There were too many variables in the Italian situation to say that the March on Rome nearly two years later was an automatic consequence of the Livorno Congress. A Communist majority at the political leadership of the Italian working class could have made a Fascist triumph in 1922 more difficult. The other alternative was for the Socialists to strengthen the bourgeois government, bringing it some measure of ministerial stability, while toning down the acute clash between the masses and the ruling elites.<sup>3</sup> Both Turati and Giolitti sought this

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<sup>3</sup>A very similar reasoning was used forty years later in the 1960's by Pietro Nenni to justify the PSI's support for a coalition government with Christian Democracy. The success of this gambit depends on the successful implementation of widespread reforms, always a risky bet in Italian politics.

alternative at one point or another, while Serrati, opposed to joining the Communists or supporting the government, worsened the circumstances for all. How the new party operated within the changing postwar politics and what it was like are questions to which this chapter will provide partial answers.

### 1. The Initial Party

Meeting in the San Marco Theatre the Communist delegates at Livorno quickly put together the new organization, the Italian Communist party.<sup>4</sup> The birth of the PCI was hailed by the congratulatory greetings arriving from the international movement. At that time, a schism was readily accepted by the European leftwing vanguards, who saw the need to provide an alternative to the social democratic parties that had survived the collapse of the prewar movement. A Central Committee reflecting the three major currents drawn into the PCI--Abstentionist, left Maximalist, and Ordinovista--was quickly agreed to.<sup>5</sup> Bordiga, Grieco, Terracini, Bruno Fortichiari and Repossi were placed on the Executive Committee, the most important

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<sup>4</sup>The initial name, let us remember, was Partito comunista d'Italia.

<sup>5</sup>Togliatti, La formazione, pp. 13-14. Though disagreeing on some details, Berti acknowledges that the leadership positions were assigned in proportion to the numbers brought by the various factions; the Ordinovisti, who are not to be confused with the Abstentionist majority in the Turin section, were the least numerous.



organ of the party. During the course of the next two years a general unanimity of opinion prevailed in the views of the leadership and the membership.<sup>6</sup> In the initial leadership a limited role was assigned to the Ordinovisti: neither Togliatti nor Tasca were designated to sit on the Central Committee along with Gramsci and Terracini.<sup>7</sup>

A brief look at the all important EC<sup>8</sup>, which was responsible for the daily conduct of the party, will give an idea of the men making up the leadership. Bordiga and Grieco were long-term collaborators from the days of the Circolo "Carlo Marx" in 1913 and need little further introduction; both were from the south and, along with Terracini, were of petty-bourgeois origin. Terracini had been an Ordinovista by origins, becoming by 1920 (probably after the April strikes in Piedmont) a strong spokesman for Bordiga and Sinistra viewpoints. Along with Grieco, Terracini had served in the directorate of the PSI, although neither of them equaled Bordiga's political or ideological stature. Fortichiari and Repossi, on the other hand, were genuine proletarian figures who had been tempered in the political struggles

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<sup>6</sup>Terracini, International Press Correspondence (henceforth designated as IPC), 11, 14 (January 13, 1922).

<sup>7</sup>The 15 members of the Central Committee were Bordiga, Grieco, Fortichiari, Repossi, Giovanni Parodi, Luigi Polano, Cesare Sessa, Tarsia, Belloni, Bombacci, Gennari, Misiano, Marabini, Gramsci, and Terracini.

<sup>8</sup>Henceforth EC will designate the Executive Committee and CC the Central Committee.

of Milanese socialism. During the war, Fortichiari had used his position as secretary of the Milan section to smuggle deserters into Switzerland, and was forcibly removed from Milan. A similar fate befell Repossi,<sup>9</sup> whose cherubic face masked a simple but devastating sense of humor. Repossi startled a wartime meeting of Socialists when he denounced Victor Emanuel III as a "horse thief" (spiombi), regretting that the PSI had not used cudgels against the prowar demonstrators during the "radiant days of May." By 1921 these men were seasoned working-class leaders. Both remained with the Sinistra to the very end. In the EC Grieco and Terracini handled propaganda and political relations with other parties. Repossi covered trade-union activities. Fortichiari headed the underground party set up to meet the Twenty-One Conditions. Leading them was Bordiga.<sup>10</sup>

The party constitution contained 67 articles intended to stress its militant revolutionary character. This initial document contained little on tactical discussion; the meeting at the San Marco was devoted almost exclusively to putting the party into organizational shape. Nonetheless, the text assigned to the PCI the triple task of bringing together the vanguard elements, diffusing revolutionary consciousness, and

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<sup>9</sup>Report of the prefect of Milan (number 40188), November 5, 1918, ACS, VCPC, busta 3403.

<sup>10</sup>Togliatti, La formazione, pp. 18-19.

providing the working class with the strategy and weaponry needed for struggle. The party was to bring leadership to the working class, not act as its surrogate. In view of the absence of any party congress between 1922 and 1926, articles 56 and 57 are of special interest: these stipulated that the congresses must be held yearly, and no provision mentioned the conditions that would allow postponement. The Socialist deputies who had switched to the PCI--Belloni, Bombacci, Marabini, Misiano, and Reossi--were placed under the control of the EC. The constitution, in summary, laid out organizational procedures and centralized the party, though not excessively considering the purpose of the organization and the times. The central office of the PCI was established in Milan.<sup>11</sup>

Although only a fraction of the organized working class went over to the new movement, it was adequate to provide a base from which the PCI could begin operations. The PCI was well aware of its minority status and guided its policies accordingly. In short order the 50,000 members FGS held a congress and switched its allegiance, becoming the Federazione giovanile comunista, the FGC.<sup>12</sup> This event was significant not only because it brought in a young and enthusiastic cadre, but because it also left behind the image of a parent organiza-

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<sup>11</sup>The text of the constitution appears in Resoconto stenografico, pp. 454-64.

<sup>12</sup>Report of prefect (number 6197), February 18, 1921, ACS, PS, busta 88-B, fascicolo Firenze Partito Comunista.

tion, the PSI, shorn of its youth and of its future. The earlier efforts made by Bordiga to transform the ideology of the FGS undoubtedly had been a major factor in the decision made by the youth. The PCI had three dailies: Ordine Nuovo (from January 1, 1921) in Turin, Il lavoratore in Trieste, and Il comunista, a daily from September 1921 until its suppression after the March on Rome; these three--along with the theoretical bi-monthly Rassegna Comunista (suppressed in 1922), Il Sindacato (trade union weekly), La Campagna (for the peasantry), and Avanguardia--were aided by some 20 local weeklies. This press could never match the Avanti!, but the circulation of the smaller Communist circulation was probably magnified somewhat by the presence of many activists in the PCI; circulation ranged from 45,000 for Ordine Nuovo to 10,000 for Il Comunista.<sup>13</sup> Lastly, to this tabulation must be added the highly important moral and financial aid coming from the International. One of the misfortunes of the young party was that of being born at a time when the political climate of the "red years," 1919-20, had begun to change drastically. By 1921 working class agitation had largely spent itself, while a new menace had appeared--the Fascist bands. The change had been noticeable even before the Livorno Congress.

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<sup>13</sup> Spriano, op. cit., p. 167.

A more significant factor in determining the durability of the movement was the extent of its membership. At Livorno, delegates representing 58,800 had voted the Communist motion; not all materialized into members. Membership was placed at 43,000 by the end of 1921, one-quarter in Piedmont with the bulk of the remainder in the Po Valley and central Italy; to Turin's 3,772 and Milan's 2,417, Naples mustered only 396 and Salerno 79.<sup>14</sup> In April 1922, Gramsci declared that the delegates at Livorno had spoken for no more than 25,000 Communists,<sup>15</sup> while Bordiga believed that membership was still about 50,000 at the beginning of that year.<sup>16</sup> These conflicting estimates are of some interest, though their significance is difficult to assess. From remarks dropped by Gramsci after 1924, it is probably correct to say that he entered the Communist faction in 1920 with some reservations about the Bordigan leadership, and these uncertainties made him more susceptible to influence from Soviet leadership during his stay in Moscow. Whatever the actual membership, the numbers began to drop during the course of 1922.

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<sup>14</sup>Figures from document analysing the 1921 membership, found in Archivio del Partito comunista italiano (henceforth designated as APC), fascicolo 59. The Archivio is located in the Gramsci Institute of Rome.

<sup>15</sup>The report of the prefect of Turin (number 9572), April 10, 1922, ACS, PS, busta 88-B, fascicolo Torino Movimento Comunista.

<sup>16</sup>Report (number 568) of January 12, 1922, ACS, PS, Busta 88-B, fascicolo Napoli.

The phenomenon of a communist movement unable to hold on to its initial membership was more the rule than the exception in Europe, but in Italy the major cause of this loss was the diffusion of Fascist violence, especially throughout 1922 and 1923. By presenting themselves as simultaneously standing for revolution and for law and order, the Fasci di Combattimento, the local Fascist groups, multiplied rapidly, with their numbers becoming very evident only in the closing months of 1920. The Fascists gained an air of legitimacy from the ill-starred electoral arrangement of 1921, when the Giolittian ministry included them as part of the bloc contesting the May election. By 1922 the Fascist groups, drawing support from various sources which included the army, the police, and the landowners of the Po Valley, had begun to introduce a dvoevlastie into Italy. The term is used by Soviet historians to describe the dyarchy of political power springing up in Russia after the February Revolution, as the Soviets first paralleled and then challenged the authority of the Provisional Government. With the growth of the Fascist movement in 1921-22, the legal authority of the government was undermined and substituted in many areas, while the working-class opposition was subjected to enormous depredation. The similarity to what had occurred earlier in Russia led some to see Mussolini as the only true Italian "Leninist," and this enhanced the view

of Fascism as a revolutionary movement. For the Bordigan Sinistra the irony of the situation lay in that they were compelled to pay the consequences of the inefficacious policies followed by the Maximalists.

Pulling the party together in the same period was Bordiga; his continuous movements across the peninsula solidified the base and its loyalties. When Bordiga applied for a passport in December 1921, the prefect captured the essence of the relationship by describing him as "the soul of the Communist movement in Italy."<sup>17</sup> Almost missing from the general police reports of 1921 and 1922 were the names of Gramsci and Togliatti, the men who would come to personify the PCI in later years. In this period Gramsci rarely left Turin, though a trip to Naples is reported, and he remained essentially a local leader. The new party was Bordigan in leadership, in loyalty, and in theoretical outlook.

## 2. The Instrument

In the Bordigan conception the PCI was the supple instrument of revolution. Bordiga held that the very appearance of the party had completed the formation of the proletariat as an historic class, since the party gave the class its

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<sup>17</sup>Report (number 8928) of March 18, 1922; also reports of March 23, 1921 (number 9573), April 30, 1921 (number 12688), and telegram of April 7, 1921, in ACS, PS, busta 88-B.

vision. Recognizing that the majority of workers would never enter the ranks of the party, he believed that membership should be limited to those who were firmly convinced of the need for revolution and were willing to make the necessary personal sacrifices.<sup>18</sup> Once the party had been formed, it alone would speak for the working class and lead the proletariat. In fact, the delegation of authority by the class to the party constituted a revolutionary act.<sup>19</sup>

The role of the party consisted in recognizing the revolutionary goals implicit in proletarian activities and in devoting itself to their fulfillment; conceiving the relationship of the party to the class to be a dialectical one, Bordiga opposed any attempt to fix a numerical quantity as the minimum necessary to carry out revolution. As a defense against opportunism the party would have to rely on its theoretical consciousness and on international experience; the object here was not that of establishing "pure, perfect and orthodox parties," but to assure the historic and theoretical continuity of the movement, even at the price of being "without or against the masses

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<sup>18</sup>This recalls Lenin's remark at the second congress of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party in 1903. "It's better that 10 workers not have the right to call themselves party members...than give one blabbermouth the possibility of becoming a party member." Quoted in Borba V.I. Lenina i Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovietskogo Soiuza Protiv Trotskisma (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Politicheskoi Literaturi, 1970), p. 4.

<sup>19</sup>Partito e classe, "Rassegna Comunista, April 15, 1921, 63-69, and May 31, 1921, 157-69. The above paragraph and the next three in succession are based on the citations from Rassegna Comunista.



in some unfavorable circumstances."

An offensive by the party was possible only when social and economic conditions moved the masses into action, thereby presenting a situation whose exploitation in a revolutionary direction required the party's indispensable intervention. Circumstances and the movement of the masses would create a revolutionary flux, but only the party could establish the goals of the working class, help organizationally, and supply needed technical and military assistance. At this point, Bordiga saw the party faced by a dual danger; the first was making principle contingent on circumstances; this could be avoided if the party kept in mind its goal and remembered that its policies must lead and be understood by the masses; the second was the belief that the party could voluntaristically create a revolutionary situation on its own. All these theoretical elements in Bordiga's thinking would appear in fuller detail in the Rome Theses.

One of the most outstanding aspects of the Sinistra's ideology was the insistence and optimism that the entire proletariat could be won over to revolution. Whereas they believed that the long-term peaceful coexistence between proletariat and bourgeoisie was made impossible by the very nature of bourgeois society, it was the party's task to unify the former class and prepare its consciousness; hence the party had to work wherever that class was to be found. While the Sinistra

saw the party as a nimble and slender instrument of revolution, the role of the masses was highly appreciated. Communists were to strive for the unity of all non-political working-class bodies. Communists within the CGL had the dual task of eliminating the reformist leadership and persuading the CGL to join the Red Trade Union International, the RTUI, the trade-union body of the Comintern. The Communists also attempted to move the syndicalist USI to unite with the CGL. The importance assigned to this trade-union work was indicated by Bordiga at the Marseilles Congress of the French Communist party in 1921, which he attended as a representative of the International. He reported that ninety-five per cent of the PCI's energies were expended in the drive for labor unity. "Our party devotes its major efforts to the realization of this tactic, through which we see the possibility of bringing the entire proletariat to a position that can lead to the conquest of power."<sup>20</sup>

While the attempt was made to achieve labor unity from below, the party sought to convince the leadership of the major trade unions to adopt a united stand that would permit the working class to project its due weight and influence. After a direct appeal to these organizations from the EC, Bordiga and Repossi met at Rome with representatives of the CGL, the

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<sup>20</sup> Rassegna Comunista, July 15, 1922, 1219. Tasca also attended but not as a Comintern emissary.

Railwaymen's Union, and the USI. The PCI sought to get them to undertake a joint general strike to help strikers in the Venezia Giulia region and force the government to dissolve the Fascist terror squads operating in the Po Valley; the proposal was turned down by the CGL.<sup>21</sup> A negative response from the CGL killed a motion placed by the PCI before a National Council of that body meeting at Verona in November 1921; the PCI had suggested that such issues as the eight-hour day, the right to organize, the fixing of wage rates, aid to unemployed, worker control of factories, and the dismissal of workers be negotiated and resolved nationally and not left to local strike action.<sup>22</sup> At the Verona meeting the CGL voted to join the Amsterdam International, the non-Communist International Federation of Trade Unions.

Struggling to achieve the unity of the working class under a new leadership, the Communists faced the embittered hostility of the Reformists and the Maximalists in the CGL. Indeed, the lines in the CGL were as deeply drawn as at Livorno.<sup>23</sup> The Communists could count on nearly one-quarter

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<sup>21</sup>Prefect's report (number 32436), December 12, 1921, ACS, PS, busta 88-A, fascicolo K-1 Partito Comunista.

<sup>22</sup>"Rome and Verona," IPC, I, 12 (November 29, 1921); also, Bordiga in IPC, I, 13 (December 2, 1921).

<sup>23</sup>"The Situation in Italy," IPC, II, 5 (January 17, 1922).

of the two million members of the CGL,<sup>24</sup> and they were well aware that the conditions of 1919-20 were gone. They did fear that continued inaction by the CGL leadership would prove "fatal to the proletariat and destroy all hopes of recovery by the trade union organizations."<sup>25</sup> The CGL leadership was not revolutionary, and whenever possible sought a peaceful accommodation with both capital and government. Indeed, after the March on Rome, Gino Baldesi of the CGL accepted a position in Mussolini's cabinet, before that proposal was blocked by more rightwing figures in Mussolini's entourage.<sup>26</sup> Coincidentally, therefore, this attitude of the CGL worked objectively in favor of the Fascists, then on the offensive. Even Jules Humbert-Droz, a Comintern functionary in Italy and never a friend of the Sinistra, acknowledged that in the trade unions the PCI's "most realistic proposals encountered the systematic opposition of the reformist majority."<sup>27</sup> The obdurate opposition by the Reformists

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<sup>24</sup>Spriano, op. cit., p. 195. I am using his figures rather than the higher figures found in Rassegna Comunista, September 15, 1921, 454-55.

<sup>25</sup>Rassegna Comunista, July 15, 1922, 1209-12. In the June 15 issue, UG [arone] predicted that the unity of the trade unions would be achieved by "pressure from below, after long and patient work."

<sup>26</sup>Spriano, op. cit., p. 233.

<sup>27</sup>Humbert-Droz, op. cit., p. 18.

(and Maximalists) tended to convince the PCI that its more realistic policies would win over the working class in the end.

Communists within the labor bodies were grouped in cells, but the cells were not segregated along industrial or corporate lines. The working class was encouraged to view itself as a whole social class; members were discouraged from judging their interests on the basis of employment or profession. The proletariat was told to balance its narrow economic interests within the broader perspective of the class, and the social considerations arising from the wider views were expected to bridle the more egotistical interests. This stand, the Sinistra felt, was in keeping with past experience and would prevent a return to syndicalist or reformist opportunism. For Bordiga the key element in the workers' ideology was their recognition that they constituted a separate class, a class with its own history, needs and future. By opposing the factory cell per se Bordiga and the Sinistra would run afoul of the directives for Bolshevization which the Comintern imposed on all member parties after 1924.

### 3. The Illegal Party

One of the obligations imposed on the PCI by the Twenty-One Conditions was the creation of an illegal apparatus. The illegal party was expected to permit the PCI to continue

functioning in the event of hostile action by the government. The PCI used the illegal structure to prepare and organize a cadre that would play a role in the expected revolutionary struggle.<sup>28</sup> The present PCI denigrates this aspect of its earlier history. In post-Liberation Communist literature, these activities are simply ignored or belittled with vague charges of Blanquism. Togliatti writing in the 1960's exemplifies this latter-day view.

Gramsci knew that Togliatti was always very critical of this work of the party, for he often noted how its inefficiency was hidden by an ostentatious conspiracy, more romantic than revolutionary. One recalls a curious incident during the March on Rome. Believing that the moment for armed insurrection had come, it may have been the officio illegale that sent an envoy by train from the north with a small valise containing revolvers (four in all!)... and he went astray.<sup>29</sup>

But this scoffing and burlesque appraisal by Togliatti is not borne out by a look at the evidence left over from the early years, when the work was an item of serious and continuous attention by large strata in the party. The hidden nature of

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<sup>28</sup>An example was a party circular from 1923: "Amongst the duties imposed on the party and the International is that of PREPARING FOR THE ARMING OF PROLETARIAT." Circular No. 4, February 23, 1923, ACS, PS, busta 69-A, fascicolo K-1, 1923. Also, see FGC circular of February 12, 1923, ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Togliatti, La formazione, p. 19.

that work, the long Togliattian reign during which all was done to erase the traces of the Bordigan past, and the depredations of time have made it difficult to get a whole picture of what was being done then.<sup>30</sup> Enough has survived, fortunately, to allow us to reconstruct the undertaking.

Bruno Fortichiari, the militant Milanese activist, headed the apparatus which was labeled Ufficio Illegale at first and then changed to Primo Ufficio in late 1922 or early 1923. Under the supervision of Loris (Bruno Fortichiari), the PCI organized a series of hierarchical structures. In one such network, the EC nominated the provincial representatives (fiduciari) who, in turn, picked their district leaders; the district leaders designated those members (sicuri) of the PCI and the FGC who were to be given arms.<sup>31</sup> The apparatus was hierarchical and centralized; obedience was mandatory and criticism or recrimination was not tolerated. How the Communists saw themselves in this activity is disclosed by one of their

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<sup>30</sup> Cf Party circular (Number 4918), February 13, 1922, ACS, PS, busta 88-B.

<sup>31</sup> PCI document (number 7751), March 23, 1922, ACS, PS, busta 88-A, fascicolo Con. Naz. Comunista, and documents marked "Ufficio di Milano, istruzioni per fiduciari provinciali giovanili." Also, PCI instructions found in "Inquadramento Militare," ACS, PS, busta 88-B, fascicolo Milano Partito Comunista.

statements. "There must be no cowardice or pusillanimity in these squads. Sacrifice, faith, and love of humanity are its banners."<sup>32</sup>

Members were given elementary military training, collected arms, maintained contact with the Primo Ufficio, closed ranks when arrests were made, gathered information on garrison and supply depots, and attempted to subvert the armed forces.<sup>33</sup> When police seized some secret files of the EC in 1923, thereby inflicting a heavy blow on the party and on the illegal party, a rich booty of names, sources of income, and studies of weaponry were taken. Amongst the documents, some mentioned the propaganda and proselytism carried out in the ranks of the army and navy; another reported optimistically on anti-Fascist feeling among army personnel;<sup>34</sup> a report from Messina indicated that political subversion within the Guardia Reggia, a special police corps, was having its effect.<sup>35</sup> In a message sent to Bordiga, then in the Russian capital attending

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<sup>32</sup>Telegram (number 34351), December 24, 1921, ACS, PS, busta 88-A, fascicolo K-1 Partito Comunista.

<sup>33</sup>The prefect of Piacenza reported intercepting a request from Grieco asking for information about the powder magazines located around Piacenza. In same fascicolo one finds communist directives calling for the formation of armed Communist groups in the city and province. Report of prefect (number 34351), December 24, 1921, ACS, PS, busta 88-A, fascicolo K-1 Partito Comunista.

<sup>34</sup>These papers are found in ACS, PS, busta 67, fascicolo Partito Comunista, Affari Generali.

<sup>35</sup>The document (number 322758) is dated 1922, ACS, PS, busta 88-A, fascicolo K-1.



the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, Fortichiari urged, "If Amadeo has not yet left, I beg you to come to an agreement in Moscow so as to prepare in Odessa those arms our gun runners will bring into Italy through the ships of the Lloyd Triestino."<sup>36</sup> As a final confirmation that this illegal work occupied the thoughts of the Communist base, a summary issued by the Communist section of Turin in 1925 boasted of the rapid expansion of membership during 1924 to 800. "Our aim," so indicated the report, "remains an armed insurrection to overthrow the bourgeois state."<sup>37</sup>

So serious were these activities that those vigilant guardians of the state, the prefects, were highly disturbed, and their reports between 1921-25 listed numerous acts of Red recruitment and organization. Two examples will have to suffice here. A police raid in Cervia, Romagna, picked up 15 pistols, a rifle, and much ammunition, while the minister of the interior was informed that other Communist squads were distributing leaflets amongst army troops at Ravenna.<sup>38</sup> A report from Turin told how prefectural authorities had tried

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<sup>36</sup>Deciphered message (number 217), ACS, VCPC, busta Bruno Fortichiari.

<sup>37</sup>Entitled "Sezione Comunista di Torino," ACS, PS, busta 107, fascicolo Torino.

<sup>38</sup>Report of the prefect of Ravenna (number 4918), February 13, 1922, ACS, PS, busta 88-B, fascicolo Ravenna.

to obstruct the formation of Communist squads. "Sixteen months ago our office quickly broke the Communist military organization by the arrest and detention of their leaders... until acquitted by a court."<sup>39</sup> New squads were reported active at the end of the year.

It is difficult to evaluate the potential efficacy of these efforts, but clearly the Bordigan party gave much attention to the formation of paramilitary bodies within its illegal structure. Even with the most successful distribution of arms, the PCI could never hope to match the power of the state in a naked confrontation, and this was never contemplated.<sup>40</sup> At no time was the Bordigan party attracted by the adventurism of Blanquism. The PCI intended to employ its arms in related functions. First, it made itself the defender of the working class against violence coming from Fascist and other quarters. In March 1921, a PCI Manifesto promised to respond to bourgeois inspired violence in whatever form: "to answer to their preparation with our preparation, to their organization with our organization, to their recruitment with our recruitment, to their force with our force, to their arms with our arms."<sup>41</sup> The Bordigan party

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<sup>39</sup>Report of the prefect of Turin (number 32521), December 5, 1922, ACS, PS, busta 88-B, fascicolo Torino, Movimento Anarchico.

<sup>40</sup>See quote from La difesa dei comunisti in un memoriale di Bordiga found in De Clementi, Amadeo Bordiga, pp. 174-75.

Manifesti ed altri documenti politici (Rome: libreria Editrice del PC d'Italia, n. d.) pp. 34-5.

was undoubtedly overly cocky on this score--as subsequent events were to disclose. An example of this Communist defense in action was reconstructed by Guglielmo Palazzola; the scenes that are described below occurred during the "legal strike" of August 1922, the last general strike undertaken by a coalition of labor and leftwing organizations before the advent of Fascism.<sup>42</sup>

At Genoa during the first days of the strike the working-class quarters were impenetrable to the Fascists. The houses, the streets, the bridges were transformed into fortresses; the offices of the working-class organizations were constantly garrisoned. The Fascists could not get to the port. They were helped by the police in armored cars who advanced slowly shooting bursts of machine guns at the windows. Only on the fifth day were the Fascists able to assault the organization of the port workers....<sup>43</sup>

But the PCI had a second use for its armed groups. By keeping a significant trained cadre with some arms at its disposal, it hoped to utilize those sharp crises of bourgeois society when the proletariat is shaken out of its torpor and descends into

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<sup>42</sup>This coalition included the CGT, the USI, the Railwaymen's Union, the Confederation of Port Workers, and the small Italian Labor Union.

<sup>43</sup>"L'apparato illegale del PCI nel 1921-22 e la lotta contro il fascismo," Riv. stor. soc., IX, 29 (1966), 136. In 1922, Terracini mentioned the violence accompanying the 1922 strike: "city sections enclosed by barricades and trenches; machine guns rattling throughout the day; savage hand-to-hand encounters; conflagrations wildly lighting up the city and the

the streets as a class-conscious force, and an open-ended situation comes into being. In a sense, the whole purpose of the Bordigan party was to prepare itself and the working class for just such an occasion. These crises generally divide the bourgeois opposition and temporarily paralyze the repressive organs of the state. At such a moment the PCI expected to throw all it had into the balance.

An acute crisis did arise in Italy after the assassination of Giacomo Matteotti in June 1924, but by then the Bordigan party had been severely mauled by the Fascist terror of 1923 and decapitated by the absence of its leadership. Following the murder of Matteotti, the Fascist regime was in extremely difficult straits, and, as a further protest, all the anti-Fascist deputies abandoned the Chamber of Deputies, a move with which the PCI associated itself; thus was born the Aventine Opposition. No longer in the leadership, Bordiga was critical of this move by the PCI, for he thought Communists had their own unique role to play. When it became clear by October that

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country; the streets covered with dead; mass murder before the firing squad; trains at full speed attacked; public buildings stormed; children and whole families butchered...." IPC, II, 70 (August 18, 1922).

the Aventine boycott was not having the desired effect of bringing down the regime, a majority of the Communist Central Committee, whose numbers included no representative of the Sinistra, swung to Bordiga's view of sending all the Communists back to the Chamber. The step was blocked by the intervention of the Comintern<sup>44</sup> which was insisting on a united front. This episode, not to speak of the provisions found in the Rome Theses, would seem to indicate that Bordiga was mindful of the gain from using bourgeois political organs. Yet precisely during the late months of 1924 the Sinistra found itself struggling for existence against the first onslaught of the newly formed Centro leadership. One can say about the Bordigan party that it was grimly serious in its intention to end the Italian tradition of la rivoluzione mancata.

#### 4. The Rome Theses

The most mature expression of the tactical base of the Bordigan party is found in the Rome Theses, a set of operational precepts adopted by the Second Congress of the PCI held in Rome during March 1922. The brief two days spent in deliberations at the San Marco Theatre a year earlier had not allowed time to work out the tactical principles on which the party

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<sup>44</sup>This episode is discussed by De Clementi, Amadeo Bordiga, pp. 198-200.

was to rest in facing the increasingly complex political scene arising from the postwar crisis. In setting for itself the goal of winning the working class and leading it in a victorious assault on the bourgeois state, the party had to confront enormous difficulties, especially since the PCI was still only a minority current in that class. As a result of the May 1921 election, 15 Communist deputies were elected to the Chamber, more than had been expected, but the distribution of ballots confirmed how far the party had yet to go before it could speak for the class as a whole.<sup>45</sup> Prior to the election, Bordiga had turned back an attempt to revive abstentionism.<sup>46</sup>

In these years of 1921-22 the PCI faced a three-way struggle: against the leaderships of the reformist CGL and Maximalist PSI, against the government, and against the spreading street violence of the Fascists. In the course of action the PCI often found itself side-by-side with the rank and file of the CGL against the Black Shirts, while at one time or another the leadership of the PSI and CGL sought an accommodation with Mussolini<sup>47</sup> or looked for succor to the government, which,

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<sup>45</sup>The PCI received less than 300,000 votes, the PSI 1,600,000.

<sup>46</sup>Cf. Bordiga's answer to Nicola Lovero, IS, April 10 and 17, 1921.

<sup>47</sup>On August 3, 1921, the PSI, the CGL, the Socialist and Fascist parliamentary groups, and the National Fascist Council signed the Peace of Pacification agreement. Mussolini

more often than not, tolerated or delivered the Fascist squads in their attacks on the bodies of the Italian working and peasant classes. How to devise a way that would permit the PCI to pick its way through this labyrinth of difficulties, while gathering up an increasing number of workers, was the immediate problem to be solved by the Rome Theses. Before turning to an exegetic summary of the Theses, another commentary needs appending here.

As with many early PCI events, a latter-day historiography, often contradictory and rarely supported by documents, encrusts the accounts of this congress. In the 1960's Togliatti spoke of its outcome as a defeat for Bordiga, adding that if the congress had been offered an alternative the Bordigan leadership would have been replaced. As we will see, this version was first advanced by Gramsci two years after the close of the congress, at a time when he was beginning to seek an alternative to the leadership and policies that had guided the young PCI. The two assertions made by Togliatti are contradicted by all reports coming down from the events. Togliatti claimed, too, that Gramsci was not in agreement with the Theses, a point disputed by Tasca in 1953 and by Terracini in 1972.<sup>48</sup> Now, an

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was compelled to repudiate the agreement under pressure from the extremist wing in the Fascist movement. See Neufeld, op. cit., p. 270. Also, vide supra, p. 190; decision by Baldesi of CGL to accept position in Mussolini's first cabinet.

<sup>48</sup>"Conversazione con Terracini sui 13 congressi," Rinascita, March 17, 1972. In a parenthetical remark found in

opposition was born in the hall of the congress, but it clustered around the two representatives from the International, Vasili Kolarov and Jules Humbert-Droz.

The recollection of Humbert-Droz is that the congress had not been democratically prepared, and that the delegates were ignorant of the united-front theses first proposed by the ECCI of the International, that is, the Executive Committee of that body, the previous December; as a result, when Kolarov spoke, confusion spread among the delegates.<sup>49</sup> With the encouragement of these representatives an opposition group led by Tasca and Graziadei hastily improvised a set of counter-theses; meanwhile, a less numerous and less imposing opposition formed around Bombacci.<sup>50</sup> Both groups soon combined to form the Destra, the Communist right wing, or, as it was known in those years, the Minority. The existence of that wing was to weigh very heavily on the minds of the party for the next two years, for both Bordiga and Gramsci (until 1924) regarded

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an interview granted to Spriano, Terracini--the last surviving member of the first Communist Executive Committee--said, "I will never forget that both Gramsci and Togliatti were fully in agreement with my position and made no effort to lessen the validity of my endorsement of the tactics of the Rome Theses."

<sup>49</sup>Humbert-Droz, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>50</sup>Paul Boettcher, IPC, II, 30 (April 26, 1922). This account of the congress also contradicts Humbert-Droz and Togliatti. At the congress: Bordiga, Terracini, and Gennari did not believe the united front applicable in Italy, Tasca was for it in principle only, while Bombacci was for immediate application.



the Minority as subservient to the International, as "liquidators" of the party's traditions and independence.

Reports made by police informants, now found in the Italian Archives,<sup>51</sup> indicate that Bordiga made the introductory remarks "amidst very lively applause." He was followed by Kolarov, who must have alluded to the discord between the principles of the Rome Theses and the united-front tactic raised in December 1921 and approved by an Enlarged ECCI session in February-March. At this point Bordiga returned and proposed a motion that received unanimous approval; it pledged the PCI to abide by the tactics of the International without prejudice to its own discipline. Turning next to the matter of party officers, the congress approved the continuation of the old Executive Committee, but sent four new replacements to the Central Committee, Togliatti being the last of the four selected. Party membership was set at 41,000, and by a vote of 32,098 to 4,157 the body rejected the Tasca-Graziadei theses in favor of the Rome Theses.

These theses were three sets of tactical formulations, with the main body--dealing with the political conduct of the party--prepared by Bordiga and Terracini; a second set by

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<sup>51</sup>Report (number 11344) of May 1, 1922, ACS, PS, busta 88-A, fascicolo Il Congresso Nazionale Comunista.

Sanna and Graziadei handled The Agricultural Question, and the third, The PCI and the Trade Unions, was drawn up by Gramsci and Tasca.<sup>52</sup> The last two sets contain little that was significant, but the theses by Sanna and Graziadei reflect the Bolshevik influence in matters having to do with the peasantry.

Beyond being a tactical layout, the Rome Theses were a synthesis of the Sinistra's experience stretching back to Reggio Emilia and beyond. They were based on the need to free the party from reformism; to bridle the independence of the trade unions and bring all working-class bodies to pull along a common vector. Further, the theses grew out of the realization that achieving mastery of bourgeois society piecemeal, by reform, had hobbled the party and smudged its vision; that mastery of bourgeois society meant preparing the consciousness of the working class, so that in the moments of crises regularly shaking capitalism, the class, led by the party, would proceed to smash the bourgeois state and establish the proletarian order. These elements were in the background of the Rome Theses and came to rest on the preparation of a tight, ideologically homogeneous and clear-eyed party capable of leading the revolution.

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<sup>52</sup>Published in Rassegna Comunista, January 30, 1922; the work of Terracini and Bordiga appear in In difesa della continuità del programma comunista, 2 (Milan: Il programma comunista, n. d.), pp. 65-72.

In particular, this heritage was embodied in the first 55 articles prepared by Bordiga and Terracini; these constituted the essence of the Rome Theses. Articles 1-4 defined the party as a class organ representing the critical will and collective conscience of the working class. Articles 5-9 traced the origins of the party to a complex interaction highlighting the schism as a necessary act, when opportunism overcame the older working-class political organ. Since the party was the highest synthesis of the class, admission was open only to individuals wishing to sustain it and its aims, to the exclusion of all other political groups.

Articles 10-16 defined the relationship of the party to the class. Allowance was made for working-class spontaneity (11). Communists were duty bound to work in all the class bodies with the aim of uniting the class and bringing it under Communist leadership. Long-range goals would not be sacrificed to short-gain results. Having done all to incorporate and strengthen the major bodies of the proletariat and recognizing that a class action represented a complex series of interactions, article 16 went on to elaborate what Bordiga considered a crucial matter: "One cannot ordain that at a certain point or on the eve of general undertakings the party must establish in its control or in its ranks a majority of the proletariat. One cannot propose such a postulate separate from the real unfoldings of class developments, and it makes no

sense...to compare the number of proletarians enlisted in the party, or who are followers, to the numbers unorganized or dispersed or followers of bodies which cannot be organizationally involved." Bordiga and Terracini were here arguing against seeking to predetermine a numerical quantum as a prerequisite to revolutionary action, and both men may have been reacting to the discussion of that question, which had occurred earlier during the summer of 1921 at the Third Congress of the Comintern; at that session there had taken place a sharp, though inconclusive, exchange between Terracini and Lenin on the issue of numbers and working-class tactics.

Five articles (17-22) defined the relationship of the Communists to other working-class political parties. While Communists were duty bound to participate and join in all mass struggles and working-class bodies, they were not to enter other working-class political organizations and operate from within. The PCI would seek the class unification of the proletariat but not enter into coalitions with other political bodies of the class. The proletariat must understand that there could be no substitute for its political organ, the PCI--the political organ of the working class.

Articles 24-30 seem to have been designed to guard against any opportunistic violation of the party's program that might arise from evanescent circumstances or momentary exigencies. But these served as a prelude to a consideration of the

role of the party on the political scene (30-39). Bourgeois politics were described as the play of right and left political blocs. The PCI was aware of the differences between the two, but its attitude to the left bloc was shaped by the party's ultimate goal (revolution) and the need to prepare and organize the masses; these considerations excluded any political summersaults ("sudden conversion and change of front leading to a change of yesterday's enemies into allies") that might disorganize the masses and compromise preparation towards the final struggle. Within these restrictions of having to prepare for revolution and justify actions in terms of rising revolutionary consciousness, the party was free to act. The party was not independent and did not operate in a void, for its actions were to be judged by the political and moral needs of the class. Therefore, the PCI would eschew political coalitions, since they tended to delay the political maturation of the working class, and also delayed the formation of left bourgeois governments. The PCI encouraged such governments, and, in the event of one coming to power, urged the working class to accept all reforms, using them as graphic and empirical evidence of the limited and unsatisfactory nature of those concessions.

Should a right coalition attack a left bourgeois or social democratic government, the PCI would not declare its solidarity with the group under attack, since it had earlier labeled that government counterrevolutionary; nor would it

call on the masses to lend their allegiance. The working-class movement would fight, but not lose from view its own separate goals. The party would lead the fight in such a manner as to have the working class sacrifice itself for its own ends. Paraphrasing the Theses-arms in the hands of the working class would mean the institution of the proletarian dictatorship.

The articles next discussed the requisites for direct revolutionary action by the party (40-47). Here, again, Bordiga and Terracini showed that the will of the class, not the party alone, was the ultimate authority in deciding class action. The needs for such an undertaking were spelled out. The party

must dispose of a strong internal organization that gives the leadership assurance of absolute discipline; it must be able to count on the same discipline by the trade-union forces at its disposal with the certainty that it is followed by a large part of the masses; and it also needs a military type structure, along with communications and networks free of government control, which would permit it to continue contact in the likely event of being declared illegal. But above all, before taking action which will decide the outcome of a long preparation, the party must base itself on a study of the situation to assure...that the party following amongst the masses and the degree of proletarian participation will progressively grow in the course of the action....

The revolution was a serious undertaking not to be entered with insufficient forces or preparation. Thus these men saw the revolution as neither a "plot" nor a "putsch," but as a mature class action made possible only when the party and the

class were ready organizationally and politically. Lastly, some articles (48-55) discussed the political situation in Italy. As earlier, the tactics espoused by the PCI rested on the fact that the party saw itself as "the condottiere of the most massive revolutionary war."

The Rome Theses were centrally concerned with what was happening in Italy, and, unlike the Lyons Theses adopted four years later by the Gramscian leadership, Russian considerations played no role in their formulation. Both Bordiga and the PCI wanted to coordinate their tactics with those of the International, since they felt that neither the Russian Revolution nor an Italian proletarian state would succeed without the support of the international working class in the West. In early 1922 the Rome Theses were an expression of tactical independence, which would ultimately become ideological as well, and they were adopted at a time when imperceptible changes had begun to occur in Moscow. The Theses of the Second Congress of the PCI deepened the rift between the Bordigan party and the Soviet leadership which had appeared at the Third Congress of the International in 1921, with the immediate issue being discord over the united front, a tactic totally rejected by the PCI. After the congress, the PCI indicated a willingness to relegate the Rome Theses to a "consultative" basis,<sup>53</sup> but

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<sup>53</sup>IPC, II, 58 (July 4, 1922).

neither Bordiga nor Gramsci, Terracini or Togliatti, made any move to disavow them until the time of the Gramsci-led svolta (tactical change of view) in 1923-24. After the Rome Congress a mood against Bordiga began to be sensed in Moscow,<sup>54</sup> at about the time when Gramsci arrived on the scene. One of the decisions of the Rome Congress was to send Gramsci to Moscow as the Italian representative to the ECCI.

#### 5. 1923 and the Arrest of Bordiga

A look at the events of 1923, which constitute the interregnum between the Bordigan leadership and the new leadership rising under Gramsci-Togliatti, will help explain how the Centro after 1924 was able to defeat the strong Bordigan party emerging from the second congress. For all practical purposes, Bordiga's and the Sinistra's leadership ended in December 1922, when he voluntarily withdrew from the EC of the party over disagreement with the decisions taken by the Fourth Congress of the Comintern. The Italian delegation to that congress had left Italy in October, 1922, shortly before the Fascist coup. While the party survived, Il Comunista, its principal daily, did not, and Terracini who had remained behind, hastened to

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<sup>54</sup>Berti, op. cit., p. 131. Humbert-Droz, op. cit., pp. 28-30. Spriano, op. cit., p. 185. Zinoviev characterized the Theses as "infantalism."



notify the absent delegates that news of the dissolution of the PCI itself was not true.<sup>55</sup> After the closing of the congress, the Comintern and the RTUI issued manifestoes denouncing Fascism and calling for the united front of PSI-PCI. One of the decisions of the congress had been agreement on the details of a fusion between the two leftwing bodies. The manifestoes were now used as a pretext by the Fascist authorities to unleash a wave of arrests throughout the peninsula. Hundreds of party activists were picked up, with Mussolini taking personal responsibility for the manhunt.<sup>56</sup> Special instructions were sent to all coastal cities and border regions to seize the delegates returning from Russia. Judging from the numerous cables now found in the State Archives, the search for these men was carried on in an atmosphere of near frenzy. Spriano and others have suggested that Mussolini was driven by the fear that a PCI-PSI fusion might constitute a threat to his newly formed ministry. Within the general hunt for "subversives," the net was laid especially for Bordiga.

Bordiga and the other returning delegates managed to slip back into Italy unnoticed, but with the arrest of many

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<sup>55</sup>APC, fascicolo 127, letter of November 7, 1922.

<sup>56</sup>Mussolini quoted in Pagine Rosse, II, 2 (January 16, 1924), 5-7.

Communists and the forcing into exile of many others, considerable damage was done to the party and its structures; with documents seized by the police leading to further arrests. The police actions of January and February, commented the prefect of Milan, were "only the continuation of the tenacious work we have undertaken in the last two months against subversives in general and Communists in particular, that is since the beginning of December."<sup>57</sup> At Turin a massacre left more than 20 dead. From Rome on January 8, 1923, a letter by Bordiga to the ECCI summed up the state of affairs. "The workers and comrades who constitute the mass of the party, decimated by all manner of attacks, must choose between the renunciation of all political activity or emigration."<sup>58</sup>

On February 3, Bordiga was arrested by the police on the Via Frattini, a street running down from Piazza di Spagna and which today is bordered by some of the most elegant boutiques in Rome. As the arrests multiplied, Fortichiari sent out instructions to destroy all lists and party documents.<sup>59</sup> By March, Grieco had joined Bordiga in jail. Terracini and

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<sup>57</sup>The report of the prefect (number 5472), February 23, 1923, ACS, PS, busta 69-B, fascicolo K-1.

<sup>58</sup>APC, fascicolo 180, letter of January 8, 1923.

<sup>59</sup>PCI circular (number 4937), February 16, 1923, ACS, PS, busta 69-B.

Fortichiari fled to Moscow. Of the five members of the EC only Repossi, who was covered by parliamentary immunity, remained free. Utilizing the pages of the Avanti!, the PCI asked for the suspension of all communications to the EC, and the suspension of all provincial congresses that were to precede the coming third congress of the party.<sup>60</sup>

One of the immediate effects of the arrests was to bring new leadership to the Central Committee; to make up for loss at the top, Togliatti and Mauro Scoccimarro were "provisionally" added to the EC in April, while Comintern pressure brought about the promotion of Tasca and Graziadei (Minority representatives) to the CC.<sup>61</sup> In this way the Minority, the PCI right wing, managed to get into the leadership of the party, but as yet there was no real discord between Bordiga and the others. Bordiga's absence and the personnel changes made in the leading bodies would facilitate the triumph of the Centro, when the latter formed about a year later. The name Palmi, Togliatti's pseudonym, now became ever more common in the correspondence of that year, 1923. By the time he, Leonetti, Mario Montagnana, Giuseppe Vota, Tasca, and Gennari were arrested at Milan in September, Togliatti had become, in the opinion of one

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<sup>60</sup>PCI circular (number 3910), February 7, 1923, ACS, PS, busta 69-A.

<sup>61</sup>Spriano, op. cit., p. 264.

Communist correspondent, "the beacon and promulgator of all the activities of our Party."<sup>62</sup> Hearing of these latest arrests, Mussolini cabled to Milan, "Very good....I want to see that they are not freed before it is necessary."<sup>63</sup> But Togliatti and the others were to be free men in December.

The continued dangers from arrest forced the party into a major structural reorganization which was to prove highly significant later. An interregional secretariat was created to act as a link between the provincial organizers and the Executive Committee. The party was divided into five self-contained structures, each led by a secretary who was to be the sole link to the EC.<sup>64</sup> While these measures lessened the contact between leadership and base, they were expected to improve security. The party was shuffled into a hierarchy of command reaching down to the base cell, the gruppo, with between 5 to 10 members; only the cell leader, the capo-gruppo, was to contact the other cell chiefs. "Nomination of the technical leaders of the infrastructure moves from top to base:

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<sup>62</sup>Letter from Berlin, September 24, 1923, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale, Pubblica Sicurezza, Atti Sequestrati al Partito Comunista d'Italia della Questura di Milano (henceforth designated as ACS, PS, Sequestrati), busta B-1, fascicolo F-1.

<sup>63</sup>Cable (number N22410), September 22, 1923, ACS, PS, busta 67, fascicolo Milano Partito Comunista.

<sup>64</sup>The 5 structures corresponded to Italian regions: 1 Piedmont and Liguria, 2 Lombardy and Emilia, 3 Istria, Veneto and Trentino, 4 central Italy, 5 the south and Sicily.

the EC of the Party, along with the Primo Ufficio, nominate the Provincial Director...these nominate the Zone Chiefs...and the latter pick the Cell Chiefs."<sup>65</sup> Leading this hierchical triangle were the five interregional secretaries, all of whom were paid functionaries responsible to the EC. This arrangement shifted control--whatever there was--from the base to the infrastructure and, especially, to the EC. During the abnormal years 1923-26, when the PCI functioned in a twilight zone of semi-legality and under the constant threat of violence, the EC could survive independently of the membership base, if it had a source of funds to keep the central offices operating.

A survey of reports sent back by the interregional secretaries shows how devastating had been the attacks. At Biella in Piedmont, the trade-union movement was completely destroyed and nothing had replaced the Communist organizations. The Communist movement of Massa-Carrarra was "all but destroyed." "In Parma our forces are reduced to a group of 5-6 comrades, some of whom are ready to flee." Milan had dispirited meetings with twenty-five per cent of the membership reporting. In large parts of central Italy the PCI ceased to exist, while conditions in the south were hardly better. By the end of 1923 membership was estimated at about 9,000, hardly one-sixth of the figure at Livorno. less than two years

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<sup>65</sup>PCI circular (number 1355R), ACS, PS, Sequestrati, busta B-3, fascicolo 40.

earlier.<sup>66</sup> Fascism was a hard adversary, but as the party base thinned under the terror, the infrastructure, particularly the EC, grew in importance, first as surrogate of the party, and, later, as the party. Yet the party survived. And in August a new theoretical weekly, Lo Stato Operaio, appeared with an initial circulation of 21,000. The Communists were also tough adversaries; they would soon demonstrate amazing recuperative powers.

Bordiga had lain in prison as the party was shredded. At the moment of seizure he had congratulated the arresting officer on his success, and assumed personal responsibility for all papers on his own person; amongst these were English pound sterling notes to the value of 240,000 lire (\$22,000), which constituted a Comintern subsidy. The mass arrests of 1923 had as their motivation the anti-Fascist appeals made in Moscow, although the police extended their arrests to cover all Communist activity. Amongst the seized were most of the Central Committee and 72 provincial organizers.<sup>67</sup> Bordiga

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<sup>66</sup>See many documents in ACS, PS, Sequestrati, busta B=2, fascicolo 28 and busta B=3, fascicoli 20, 36, 37, and 39. Also, ACS, PS, busta 67-B, particularly fascicolo Partito Comunista Affari Generali; in a PCI directive addressed "Ai Segretari, Ai Fiduciari, April, 1923," the following optimistic note is found: "The latest very violent attack by the Fascist government badly shook our organization, though it stands. Everywhere there are wounds in the party, but no injury can destroy it."

<sup>67</sup>Spriano, op. cit., p. 263.

and those brought to trial with him were charged with plots and attempts to jeopardize the security of the state. Broken down this was translated into having organized a clandestine group with a paramilitary body, resorting to codes and pseudonyms, and having received money from foreign sources. Arrested in February, Bordiga was not put on trial until October 18. Among the 30 odd defendants in the Roman court were Grieco, D'Onofrio, Germanetto, Berti, Tasca, and Bordiga. Fortichiari, Terracini, and Gramsci were charged and tried in absentia.

Fortunately for the accused, they were tried on the basis of a pre-1922 law. The trial was so clearly political in intent and repressive in purpose that a number of able lawyers assembled to aid the defendants, the reformist Modigliani amongst them. Notwithstanding this important assistance, Bordiga became the key figure in blocking the prosecution. Using wit, honesty, and brilliantly refuting the prosecution's interpretation of the coded messages, he helped turn the case into a serious blunder for the government. The court was impressed most by his frankness on most matters, including the sources and purposes of the money found on his person; he admitted that it was a financial grant from the Comintern to one of the sections, though he argued that the Communist International and the Soviet state were two separate

entities. He ridiculed the charge that the PCI was out to overthrow the state by violent means, pointing to the defensive stance of the party since its birth. The accused were acquitted on October 23. In his final peroration Bordiga spoke for one and one-half hours.

We do not believe in the function of martyrs, of heroes, of the elites drawn up from unusual men. We consider ourselves members of a political party which is the historic function of the working class....The fact is that at this moment we are beaten and find ourselves in a situation of inferiority. It is not a question of using empty and abstract liberalism to support our right to be cleared: it is sufficient for us to say without arrogance that once free we will continue our work to change these relationships--so unfavorable to us today--in order to reverse them.<sup>68</sup>

Germanetto, who had sat through the trial largely as a passive defendant, and who would later alter his memoirs to delete the role played by Bordiga at the famous meeting of the Sinistra with PSI leaders at Florence in November 1917, recalled that Bordiga's words had a terrific impact on the court. "It was not a defendant but an accuser who spoke," added Germanetto.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Il processo ai comunisti italiani (Rome: Libreria Editrice del PCI, 1924), p. 225. Also consulted were the prefectural papers concerning the arrests and trial found in ACS, PS, busta 69-A, and Pagine Rosse, II, 2 (January 16, 1924), 5-7.

<sup>69</sup> Germanetto, op. cit., p. 307.



When the acquittal was announced, both spectators and defense lawyers seized Bordiga and carried him in triumph from the court.<sup>70</sup>

All the defendants, including the three in absentia, were now cleared. The trial had been a fiasco for the regime, and given the PCI its only bright note in an otherwise dismal year. By the fall, the wave of Fascist violence had passed, and the party could breathe a little more easily. In a letter written to the EC in December Bordiga insisted that he was no longer a member of that body. To appreciate the events that brought this situation on, we must turn to an account of the relationship between the PCI and the leadership of the Third International in Moscow. No one would have dared to believe it at the time, that Bordiga would live another half century but never again return to the leadership of the PCI.

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<sup>70</sup>Reported in the Calabrian newspaper La Sila, September 2, 1972, "The merit for the outcome of the trial," one reads in the article, "belonged to Bordiga, a man of great political value who was endowed with formidable talent (ingegno). He was able to conduct the exchanges using witty arguments and an uncommon skill." The article is another instance of the gradual re-discovery of Bordiga that is taking place in Italy. It is not possible from this distance (New York City) to determine how the periodical came by its information. However, before being destroyed by both the Centro and the Fascists during the course of 1925-26, the Communist movement of Calabria was probably Sinistra in outlook.

CHAPTER VTHE CONFLICT WITH THE INTERNATIONAL

In the bitter editorial of 1915, Bordiga had anticipated the coming of a new international. Three years later, Bordiga projected his vision of the new organization in an article in the youth periodical, Avanguardia. "The new international will be the political body of the socialist world, the collective organ of the working class in its conquest and exercise of power, the builder of a socialist economy."<sup>1</sup> One can begin to understand the many difficulties that marked the relationship between Bordiga and the Comintern--founded one year later--by keeping in mind the vision guiding the young revolutionary: for him, the new international was to be a political body transcending national boundaries, capable of leading the revolutionary movement and administering the socialist order. The concept of "national considerations" was absent from Bordiga's postwar views. Partially because of this initial vision, Bordiga was to become the foremost victim of the International in Italy.

1. The Clash of 1920

No Italian delegate was present at the founding congress of the Third International held in Moscow March 2-6, 1919, even

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<sup>1</sup>"Le direttive marxiste della nuova internazionale," Avanguardia, May 26, 1918.

though the PSI had refused to attend a meeting of the old international a few weeks earlier in Berne. There was practically no contact between the PSI and the new offices of the international in Moscow during most of 1919, and it was Bordiga and his group at Naples who made the first move to seek a serious exchange with the Comintern. The Abstentionists sent an introductory letter to the Moscow Committee of the Third International on November 11, 1919, shortly after the Bologna Congress of the PSI had voted to join. In the text the Abstentionists sought to apprise Moscow of the pseudo-revolutionary nature of the Serrati-Lazzari leadership, and they detailed the reasons why they had chosen to form a separate faction advocating abstentionism. "We assign great importance to the electoral question," they wrote, "and we believe it would be a violation of communist principles to leave the decision to the individual parties of the Third International. The International Communist Party must examine and resolve the problem."<sup>2</sup> The Abstentionists were willing to defer to the judgment of the International, but only because they thought that body would evolve into a truly international party, one reflecting the international character of the working class.

In December 1919, L'Avanti! reprinted the letter sent

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<sup>2</sup>Chapter I, footnote 74.

by Lenin to the German Communist daily Rote Fahne criticizing parliamentary abstentionism. On January 11, 1920, the Communist Abstentionists wrote again to Moscow. Disavowing any sympathy for anarcho-syndicalism, they described themselves as supporters of a "strong centralized Marxist party of which Lenin speaks." Since real soviets did not exist in Italy, they indicated, "our proposal is to take the initiative instead in the building of rural and municipal soviets elected directly by the masses of the villages and factories, because we believe that in the preparation for a revolution the struggle must have a predominantly political character." And they went on to add their well-known argument that electoral participation precluded any real revolutionary endeavor. Moreover, in Italy--unlike Russia--one had to demistify the role of parliament, something that could not be done while participating in its activities.<sup>3</sup> Both letters were seized by the Italian police, though some copies of Il Soviet reached Moscow in early 1920.

The antipathy toward parliamentarianism indicated by the correspondence from Naples was not at all different from some sentiments expressed earlier by Lenin. "The bourgeois parliament...is a machine that helps a handful of exploiters

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<sup>3</sup>Extensively quoted by Roberto Gabriele and reprinted in O preparazione rivoluzionaria o preparazione elettorale (Milan: Edizioni il programma comunista del Partito comunista internazionalista, n.d.), pp. 20-22.

oppress millions of workers," he had written in January 1919.<sup>4</sup> And later that year he again repeated, "The combination of the proletarian dictatorship with the new democracy for the working people...cannot be brought about in one stroke, nor does it fit with the outworn modes of routine parliamentary democracy."<sup>5</sup> Anti-parliamentarianism was especially strong amongst small groups of Western revolutionaries, ranging from the German Communist Workers party (KAPD) to the Industrial Workers of the World in the United States. Like the Italian Abstentionists, these groups were searching for an avenue to proletarian revolution, despite the absence of the more favorable circumstances under which the Bolsheviks had seized power.

Using the ECCI, Zinoviev also denounced the parliamentary system, at the same time urging the Communist movement to introduce revolutionary parliamentarianism. "Is soviet power reconcilable with parliamentarianism? No, three times no."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Letter to the Workers of Europe and America, quoted in O preparazione, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup>"Letter to American Workers," August 20, 1919, cited in V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, XXVIII, pp. 62-75.

<sup>6</sup>A Circular Letter from the Communist International, September 1, 1919, cited in O preparazione, pp. 11-14, and in Comunismo, I, 8-9 (January 15, 1920), 603-06.

Although admitting that "the real revolution" was to be found "outside parliament, in the streets," he counseled revolutionaries to work against the parliaments from within. This brought him squarely into conflict with the Abstentionists.

Suspicion that the Bolsheviks were in the dark about Italian conditions was confirmed by the appearance in early 1920 of Lenin's pamphlet, "Left-wing" Communism. An Infantile Disorder, where they could see how thin was Lenin's information on Bordiga and the Abstentionist group. The Sinistra knew they shared most of Lenin's precepts--the need for a strong political party, for separation from the Reformists, the rejection of anarcho-syndicalism, the need for trade-union unity, for violence to sweep away the old regime, and for a strong international. Disagreement was limited to electoral participation: Lenin was for using revolutionary parties within the parliament; the Abstentionists were for using the party to build soviets outside the parliament. "Repeating again," wrote Bordiga in May 1920, "our abstentionism is based on the vital task assigned to the Communist parties in the present historic period: the violent conquest of political power, the setting up of a proletarian dictatorship, and the installation of soviets."<sup>7</sup>

Not only were the Abstentionists critical of Lenin, but

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<sup>7</sup>"Le tendenze nella 3 Internazionale," IS, May 23, 1920.

they maintained that Bolshevnik experience with Russian representative bodies--the Duma and the Constituent Assembly--had been too brief to qualify them as judges of Western parliamentarianism; moreover, the Bolshevniks were forgetting that the October Revolution had ushered in a new historical period. "If you tell Communists in the democratic countries to go to parliament and agitate, which is very similar to the revolutionary and republican activities of the Bolshevniks in the Duma, then, this means leaving out of account the different historical circumstances in which struggles are undertaken today; we are in a revolutionary period, quite different from the times when the bourgeoisie developed and reinforced its power...."<sup>8</sup>

The struggle over this issue was carried into the Second Congress of the International, in July-August 1920. The appearance in Italy of the theses of this congress, that is, the lines along which debate would develop, had the effect of strengthening many of the earlier contentions of the Sinistra.<sup>9</sup> The theses had been worked out by the Bolshevnik leadership and contained

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<sup>8</sup>Tarsia, "Lenin e il parlamentarismo," IS, July 11, 1920.

<sup>9</sup>The statement that "the Communist party is formed by the natural selection from the best, most conscientious, most courageous and most perspicacious workers" or that the party was a minority until after the revolution paralleled ideas long associated with the Sinistra. See "Tesi," Comunismo, I, 21 (August 1, 1920), 1437-44.

most of the forthcoming Twenty-One Conditions; hence the area of agreement with the Sovietisti was greater than the narrow discord over abstentionism.

Meeting while the Red Army was marching on Warsaw and the belief in the continuation of the revolutionary wave still prevailing, the Second Congress was the first real plenary meeting of the new International. Across the years the highlight of that gathering has remained the Twenty-One Conditions, which the International hoped would prevent the opportunism and lack of revolutionary preparation displayed by its predecessor. These Conditions prescribed that the parties be composed of select revolutionary elites, whereas the International was to be as highly centralized and disciplined as the Bolshevik party itself.

The Conditions were organizational and tactical, and said nothing about abstentionism, dismissed earlier by Lenin as a "puerile" matter. One of the German Independent Socialists, Arthur Crispian, complained that the congress was elevating Russian experience to the level of principle, a charge not very different from the observation made later by Bordiga. Yet Bordiga was in such agreement with the Conditions that he contributed the twenty-first: any party not in agreement with the first twenty should be expelled.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Werner T. Angress, Stillborn Revolution, The Communist Bid for Power in Germany (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 68.



Bordiga had come to the congress following a special request from Lenin that an Abstentionist representative be present,<sup>11</sup> but he participated without being an official delegate.

The congress directed most of its attention to attacking social democracy, without whose support, it was felt, many bourgeois regimes would collapse. This line of attack, paralleling the program of the Sinistra, raised the discomfiture of Serrati, who had led the Socialist delegation. But the clash between Bordiga and the Bolsheviks came over abstentionism, first in the Little Commission set up to consider the problem, then in the congress itself.

Chaired by Trotsky, the Little Commission ended deliberations after adopting the Bukharin-Lenin theses on the parliamentary question. These twenty articles acknowledged that parliaments were instruments of bourgeois rule; nevertheless, they instructed the Communist parties to use the parliament as a forum from which to carry on their struggles. In a preface written for the theses, Trotsky repeated the characterization of parliament as "an instrument of falsehood," though maintaining that the birth of the Communist movement had created

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<sup>11</sup>O preparazione, p. 4. Also, R. Grieco, "Le reprecussioni della Rivoluzione Russa in Italia," Lo Stato Operaio, I, 9-10 (November-December, 1927), 992.

the opportunity for exploiting revolutionary parliamentarianism. The last four theses placed the International against any schism arising from disagreement on the question.<sup>12</sup>

The Sinistra's 12 counter-theses agreed that parliament had been useful in the era of the Second International, but then they veered sharply to the Abstentionist's position: in the era of proletarian revolution the use of parliament for revolutionary ends was not possible in those nations where democratic regimes had existed for some time. There the Communists must concentrate on the seizure of power. They called for the direct establishment of the alternative political organ, the soviet, but only in the presence of sufficiently strong working-class political and mass movements to back up the abandonment of the bourgeois institution. In summary, the Sinistra's counter-theses were highly restrictive, applying only to a handful of Western countries.

In order to understand the implication of some of the debate at the congress, one must become familiar with the eighth counter-thesis of the Sinistra. It read: It is necessary to destroy once and for all the bourgeois lie which states that every encounter between parties, every struggle for

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<sup>12</sup>The two sets of theses and the remarks of Bukharin, Lenin and Bordiga are reproduced in O preparazione, pp. 25-48, Also, Bordiga, "Sulla questione del parlamentarismo," Rassegna Comunista, August 15, 1921, 366-72.

power must occur by means of the democratic mechanism, through electoral campaigns and parliamentary debates; and we will not succeed without breaking that transitional method of calling workers to elections, to which workers are admitted alongside of the bourgeoisie, and without putting an end to the spectacle of proletarian delegates operating in the same parliament as their exploiters." The Sinistra was simply arguing the need to de-sanctify the parliament.

In the plenary debate Bukharin was the first major speaker. After identifying two groups of abstentionists, the anarcho-syndicalists and the Italian Sinistra, he directed most of his remarks to the latter. Quoting Bordiga's eighth counter-thesis, he gave it this interpretation: "Bordiga seems to say that working-class delegates, by the simple fact of being physically inside a chamber with the bourgeoisie, collaborate with the bourgeoisie." Most of his remaining remarks were equally illogical and failed to fully address the points raised by Bordiga. Most puzzling was Bukharin's statement that soviets could not be built where they did not exist, which left the Western Communists in a dilemma. Bukharin favored revolutionary parliamentarianism: "Try before denying it; provoke a scandal, get arrested, organize a political trial in grand style." The presence of a communist party would guarantee against a fall into opportunism. Bukharin's words were surprisingly superficial.

The Abstentionists saw in the renunciation of parliament the mechanism of political revolution; Bukharin sought in revolutionary parliamentarianism an instrument for tactical education, but he was reminiscent of the tactics used by the reformist PSI in Italy before 1912.

Bordiga's turn followed. He agreed that the problem was one of tactics and not of principle. Bukharin had not spoken on the limitation of abstentionism to the West, and Bordiga turned to this point, saying that the experience of the Russian Revolution could not be duplicated there. "The tactical experience of the Russian Revolution cannot be integrally moved to those countries where bourgeois democracy has functioned for a long time and where the revolutionary crisis will be marked by the passage from this regime directly to the political system of proletarian dictatorship." Further, he wondered "what destruction the Communists can carry out inside parliament." He argued that Lenin's "Left-wing" Communism was not relevant to Italy and did not hesitate to jab good-humoredly at Lenin: "I will answer this with an infantile argument...." After a serious exposition of his stand, Bordiga indicated that he would go along with the decision of the congress. "If the Communist International decides to create a communist parliamentarianism, we will accede to their decision. I don't think they will succeed, but we will do nothing to impede the work."

After Bordiga, a number of speakers lined up for and

against: Gallagher, Herzog, Suchi, Murphy, and Shablin--and then Lenin spoke. He also hammered at the absence of soviets in the West, and pointed to the weaknesses of the Western movements. "We know how we can destroy parliament. If we could do it in all countries with armed insurrection it would be fine." Lenin counseled the Communists to continue to educate the masses; the process would be a long one, as the Russian experience had shown. For the present the parliament would have to remain the arena of struggle. He closed his remarks by accusing the Western abstentionists of using abstentionism to cover their numerical weakness. The debate was really over, though Bordiga spoke briefly again to voice his scepticism: "I am more convinced than ever that the Comintern will never be able to concretize action that is both parliamentary and truly revolutionary." He requested that only the Marxist abstentionists support his counter-theses, and of the seven votes cast against the theses of Lenin-Bukharin, three were for Bordiga.

The congress buried the issue of abstentionism, and electoral participation was soon accepted by the Communist Faction meeting in Milan, but the debate had highlighted the differences between the Bolsheviks and a number of Western European revolutionary Marxists. Bordiga showed that he had an independent mind and would stand up even to Lenin. At Moscow, Bordiga had spoken for the Sinistra, but, unknowingly perhaps, his arguments cast him as spokesman for elements of the West

European left, the same left that had criticized Lenin in Herman Gorter's Open Letter to Comrade Lenin: An Answer to Lenin's Pamphlet "'Left-Wing' Communism. An Infantile Disorder."<sup>13</sup>

Both Bordiga and Gorter stressed that the Russian Revolution was not applicable to the West. According to Gorter: "The left believes that West European revolution will have its own laws and will follow them." The Bolshevik leadership had won at the congress, though the Sinistra remained unconvinced. That congress also marked the beginning of difficulties between the Russian leadership and the independent Sinistra, which would not cease until the Sinistra was shattered after 1924.

For the Italians the congress was to remain memorable for another reason. In notes to the congress, Lenin had praised one of Gramsci's writings. "As regards the PSI, the II Congress judges as essentially correct the criticism of the party and the practical suggestions...in the Ordine Nuovo of May 8, 1920, which correspond fully to all fundamental principles of the Third International." The entire Italian delegation was taken aback by this laudatory observation, for they, unlike the Bolshevik leadership, were all aware of how Gramsci had shifted his political stance, when he moved to the Sinistra.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Much of Gorter's Open Letter is republished in Helmut Gruber, International Communism in the Era of Lenin (Greenwich: Fawcett Publications, 1967), pp. 231-40.

<sup>14</sup>The quotation is found in Spriano, op. cit., pp. 72-3. Spriano notes how the entire delegation was negative in its reaction to the praise.

## 2. The Clash of 1921

The dropping of abstentionism by the Sinistra was an act of discipline, though it is not certain that Bordiga could have held on to the tactic once he agreed to combine with the other factions leaving Maximalism in the fall of 1920. Il diciannovesimo was in the past, and attempts to revise abstentionism in 1921 and 1924 were resoundingly beaten down by Bordiga. The congress of 1920 had illustrated the combativeness of Bordiga, and at the Third Congress of 1921 the spiritedness of the PCI was again highlighted.

Bordiga did not attend this congress, held during the early summer of 1921, but Terracini with a number of other Communists went in his stead, along with Lazzari, Fabrizio Maffi, and Enzo Riboldi journeying for the PSI. After the schism of the Livorno Congress earlier that year, the PSI had refused to accept expulsion from the Comintern, and the Socialist delegation was going to Moscow to clarify their party's status. The PCI hoped that the International would expel the Socialists and leave them as the sole representatives of the International in Italy. PCI disapproval of Turatian reformism and Serratian Maximalism was reinforced by the truce, the Pact of Pacification, being negotiated by the PSI with Mussolini that summer. When Terracini arrived in Moscow, he found that most of the Comintern's attention was taken up with consideration of the

German "March Action," an abortive Communist-led uprising which had taken place the previous March in central Germany. Terracini quickly became the major spokesman in defense of the "offensive theory."

The "offensive theory," a tactical stance worked out by Bukharin and initially supported by Zinoviev and Radek, called on the parties to maintain offensive actions at a time of emerging European stability and declining working-class militancy. The theory received strong support from the German party. Although the PCI had never pronounced itself on the theory, and later Bordiga was to disclaim responsibility for Terracini's conduct at the Third Congress, the PCI appears to have looked on the theory with some sympathy.<sup>15</sup> The rationale of the tactic optimistically minimized the obstacles to revolutionary conduct, which tends to be a "vocational disability" of genuinely revolutionary leadership. In addition, underlining Terracini's attitude may have been the recollection that the PSI's failure to provide leadership in Italy had allowed the revolutionary opportunities of 1919 to go by default. The "offensive theory" was, therefore, related to the questions raised by Trotsky in his Lessons of October of 1924. But at the Third Congress both

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<sup>15</sup> See comment in In difesa della continuità del programma comunista. (Milan: edizioni il programma comunista, n.d.), p. 29.



Lenin and Trotsky emerged as opponents of the theory.

Judgments on the German "March Action" varied. To Paul Levi it was an example of twentieth century Bakuninism, and deeply compromising of the International as well.<sup>16</sup> To the PCI it was a case of the immaturity of the German party. But to the left wing of the German party the episode was accepted as a learning experience, a view shared at first by Bukharin, Zinoviev, and Radek; whereas to Lenin and Trotsky it confirmed the need to alter the tactics of the International and bring them into conformity with the new policies typified by the NEP in Russia. At a closed debate within the Soviet party, Trotsky and Lenin won over Bukharin and Zinoviev, and this change was reflected in the theses presented for approval by the congress.

Thus these theses were intended to replace the "offensive theory."<sup>17</sup> "The first period of revolution after the war appears virtually to have reached its conclusion," one of them read. The Russians were rapidly backing away from the offensive position they had assumed a year before. Arriving in Moscow, Terracini quickly sensed that the climate "had enormously shifted to the right."<sup>18</sup> The Russians were about to seek a new modus

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<sup>16</sup>Gruber, op. cit., pp. 32-41.

<sup>17</sup>Jane Degras, The Communist International 1919-1943: Documents (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1956-60), I, p. 243.

<sup>18</sup>APC, fascicolo 37, letter of June 22, 1921.

vivendi with old Europe, and to them this necessitated a shift in Comintern tactics. The foreign delegates remained unaware of the change within the Russian ranks or of the inner reasoning within the closed debate. One result was the clash with Terracini that marked the congress, a clash which remains inexplicable if one seeks the understanding of it in the speeches alone.

Opening on June 21, 1921, under the joint presidency of Zinoviev, Kolarov, Gennari, and Fernand Loriot from the French Communist party, the congress quickly designated the German Communist Heinrich Brandler as an honorary president, along with Lenin and Trotsky. In the introductory remarks made by Kamenev and Zinoviev, the latter continued to attack the centrist elements of social democracy. It was Trotsky who sounded the new note when he referred to the revolution as a "matter of years" and not of "many months." Trotsky's speech took many hours and was discussed on the twenty-sixth. After listening to spokesmen from Germany, England, Poland, and Hungary, Trotsky returned "to beat down all the criticisms and objections raised by various speakers."<sup>19</sup>

Radek followed Trotsky's lead when he presented the tactical theses that shifted action away from confrontation; the change was summarized by the slogan "To the Masses!" This

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted from a summary found in Rassegna Comunista, August 15, 1921, 381-89, and September 14, 486-97.

slogan meant that the most vital problem facing the Comintern was that of winning a majority of the working class and involving it in the struggle. Although Radek in his remarks insisted that the Bolsheviks "had announced many times that our tactics are based on the slow evolution of the revolutionary movement," he rejected the idea that he was proposing a "war of trenches." "We can't make the revolution dependent on our wills; but we must prepare the revolutionary army."<sup>20</sup>

In concert with the German party, Terracini now rose to make some objections. While accepting the theses proposed by Radek, he wanted the attack on social democracy continued. The changes proposed by Radek would confuse the working-class parties, asserted Terracini. "We don't believe it necessary to wait until a majority of the proletariat is organized and follows communist principles before starting revolutionary actions." What was important was not the involvement of the masses but the influence of the party over the masses; the proletariat would get its education through the actions of the party, and the party would remain a minority until the day of victory.<sup>21</sup> Not knowing of Radek's behind-the-scene change,

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted from a summary of the proceedings of the congress found in Comunismo, II, 20 (July 16, 1921), 1122-30.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Humbert-Droz, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

Terracini was sure that the amendments he suggested would receive the approval of Radek.<sup>22</sup>

Lenin spoke in the place of Radek. There followed a mortifying attack on Terracini, apparently left speechless upon hearing his ideas described as "leftwing imbecility." Terracini had stressed the need to keep the party on the alert, in the process embodying one of the tenets of Leninism (and of the Sinistra); the words used by Terracini might have been taken from the very theses prepared by the Bolshevik leadership for the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920.<sup>23</sup> Lenin moved the stress to winning the sympathy of the majority of the working class: "Whoever in Europe...does not understand the need to win a majority of the working class is lost to the communist movement." In his remarks Lenin acknowledged that the Bolsheviks had been a minority at the time of the October Revolution.<sup>24</sup> In a manner of speaking, it was Lenin the Soviet

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<sup>22</sup>Angress, op. cit., p. 185.

<sup>23</sup>So long as the proletariat has not conquered state power...the Communist party will have organized only a minority of workers. In the period of transition before the conquest of power, the Communist party may, under favorable circumstances, extend an unlimited ideological and political influence over all the proletarian and semi-proletarian strata of the population; but it can never organize them all in its ranks." "Tesi del Comitato Esecutivo dell'Internazionale Comunista," Comunismo, I, 20 (July 15, 1920), 1438.

<sup>24</sup>Lenin, Collected Works, XXXII, pp. 468-77. Lenin claimed that at the moment of the seizure of power the Bolsheviks had a majority of the working class, but half the army and nine-tenths of the peasantry came over "after the seizure of power."

statesman speaking against some of the ideas associated with Lenin the revolutionary, although there was less incompatibility between the ideas of the two spokesmen than appeared at the moment of the exchange. Later, Lenin gave a far more elastic definition to the meaning of "to win a majority."<sup>25</sup>

Again it was the prestige of the Soviet leadership, not conviction, that led the Sinistra representatives and some Germans to drop their objections. Winning a majority of the working class had been the concern behind Terracini's outspokenness. Soon the views of Terracini were to appear in the Rome Theses. The episode at the Third Congress reinforced the image of an independent-minded Italian party associated with Bordiga, which may have been seen as recalcitrant from the Soviet view. In both congresses, 1920 and 1921, the center of gravity of decision making had lain outside the congress, in the prior decisions of the Bolshevik leadership. Still, the point of origin of the discord between the Bordigan party and the Soviet leadership began at the 1921 congress. By the following spring the PCI would be told how to alter its policies so as to conform

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 552. Speaking to Lazzari Lenin said, "Of course we don't give the winning of a majority a formal interpretation....when in Rome, in July 1921, the entire proletariat--the reformist proletariat of the trade unions and the Centrists of Serrati--followed the Communists against the Fascists, that was winning over a majority of the working class to our side." Lenin was referring to the Communist-led general strike blocking the founding congress of the Fascist party. See IPC, I, 13 (December 2, 1921).

with the new Soviet line. Meanwhile, even before the end of 1921, the first feeler from the Russians suggested to Gramsci that he enter the Executive Committee of the PCI to counter-balance or replace Bordiga.<sup>26</sup> That Gramsci was so designated suggests a recognition of his merits--and his pliability.

The Third Congress affected the Italian party in another respect. A Socialist delegation, minus Serrati, had affirmed the PSI's loyalty to the Comintern. But Trotsky, Zinoviev, Lenin and Gennari spoke harshly of Maximalist conduct, and Clara Zetkin now admitted doubts about the revolutionary temper of the Italian masses in 1920. "A real communist party, according to Lenin," one reads in the summary of the congress appearing in Serrati's Comunismo, "cannot be formed without breaking all ties with the centrists."<sup>27</sup> Scepticism greeted Lazzari's affirmation that but for the schism the May 1921 election would have produced a parliamentary conquest of power. The delegates of the PSI agreed that for their party to remain within the International, the Reformists would have to be expelled, after which the ECCI would oversee a fusion of the PSI with the PCI. In an appeal to the working class of Italy, Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek, Terracini, and Gennari attributed the failure of

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<sup>26</sup>La formazione, p. 228. This disclosure was made by Gramsci in March 1924, when he was involved in putting together a new faction to replace the Sinistra leadership.

<sup>27</sup>See footnote 19.

Socialist policy in 1921 to Serrati and to D'Aragona, Dugoni, and Nofri--all three of whom were leaders of the CGL. The Italian proletariat was called on to decide, "with the gang of Reformists and opportunists or with the Communist International."<sup>28</sup>

In looking at this last aspect of the congress from Italy, Bordiga was puzzled. He had hoped that the congress would have indicated clearly to the proletarian masses the road to be followed; in his opinion, this meant expulsion of the Socialists from the International. Instead the International was proposing fusion. He sensed in this move a refusal to accept the schism of Livorno and a lack of familiarity with the history of the Sinistra within the PSI. To believe that the PSI remained revolutionary was an illusion, and fusion with it would destroy the PCI.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. The Clashes of 1922

Bordiga had not understood; a fusion of the two parties was seen by the Russian leaders as the quintessence of the new policies breaking ground with the Third Congress. That congress had brought about a Russian imposed volte-face, and the PCI was

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<sup>28</sup>"Ai lavoratori d'Italia," Rassegna Comunista, August 15, 1921, 358-65.

<sup>29</sup>"Chiudendo 'la questione italiana,'" Rassegna Comunista, November 15, 1921, 601-08.

not in step. The congress had appealed for a proletarian "united front." "If the proletariat will form a united front against capital and the bourgeoisie, that will mean the defeat of the enemy...." The appeal was not only simplistic but downright misleading. Everyone wanted proletarian unity; the question was on whose terms. While the appeal still saw the need to attack the reformist right, by the end of the year the united front had been reworked, and in December Zinoviev announced that "to the masses" could mean "by way of their reformist leaders."<sup>30</sup> Another clash with the PCI loomed.

New parties like the PCI were asked to reknit ties with reformist bodies from which they had spent years separating themselves. On an international plane the Comintern expressed a desire to enter into joint actions with the Second International and with the Two-and-a-half International,<sup>31</sup> a group of Socialist parties that had separated themselves from the Second but had not gone over to the Third; because the offices were located in the Austrian capital, it became known as the Vienna International. At an Enlarged ECCI in February 1922, Zinoviev justified the turn by pointing to the failure of the Red Army in Poland during the summer of 1920, but under-

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<sup>30</sup> Wohl, op. cit., p. 258.

<sup>31</sup> See "Directives on the United Front," reproduced in Gruber, op. cit., pp. 362-371.



lying his ploy may have been a desire to gain a breathing spell for the new Soviet state. By the spring of 1922, the Soviets were seeking to rejoin the European community, and this was evidenced by their part in the Genoa Conference on European reconstruction and the Rapallo treaty with Germany. The 1921 congress had marked the end of Soviet hope in Western revolution, and a loss of faith in the abilities of the Western parties.

The advantages to be garnered from supporting parliamentary reformism were not clear to the militant new parties to whom the revolution was an event to be achieved, not defended. At the ECCI the French, Spanish, and Italian parties united to oppose Zinoviev, and Terracini became the leading spokesman for their views. With the new approach, Terracini argued, a majority of the working class might be won, but at the expense of the parties; the years spent creating the mature parties in the West would have been in vain. Illustrating his opposition to the united-front tactic, Terracini cited the Italian situation. The Italian working class had understood that the capitalist offensive was international; the PCI had not limited itself to daily struggles and had wanted to undertake a general offensive against capitalism. "What has been the slogan used by our party on every occasion...? It has been this: we must no longer enlist in partial struggles; we must lead the proletariat to general action." Turning, then, to the united front--

The matter of the united front, as posed by the Executive [of the International] created a great confusion in our sections. We are obliged to go to the sections and explain to them that it is not a matter of abandoning our intransigence, but that we were attempting to propose the basis for future work. The tactic of parliamentary accords will lose us many supporters. With these accords we will gain 100,000 workers but certainly lose 1,000 comrades. I prefer to see these thousand comrades with us. Now looking at the international scene. Can we march with Amsterdam [the non-Communist International Federation of Trade Unions to which the CGL had adhered a few months earlier] and Vienna? It would be a grave error.

Although Terracini went on to concede beforehand that his counterproposals would be defeated, as they were 46-10, the united front, he insisted, could not be applied in Italy.<sup>32</sup>

In the exchange between Terracini and Zinoviev two mutually exclusive tactical methodologies crossed. Terracini had accented the need to keep the political elite (1,000 Communists) who would be the eyes, hands, and brain of the working class; Terracini knew that 2 million in the CGL during 1919-20 had not prevented the defeat of the working class in the September occupation of the factories; furthermore, he was pointing to the general action, to revolution, while building up the class consciousness of the proletariat. Zinoviev

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<sup>32</sup>Quoted in Humbert-Droz, pp. 25-6. The words of Terracini and the IPC report of Paul Boettcher, footnote 50, Chapter IV, tend to refute the assertion by Humbert-Droz that the delegates to the Rome Congress were unaware of the united front tactic.

headed back to the political deal, to the agreement settling for intermediate action--in a word, for opportunism. In the response Zinoviev superficially characterized the stand of Terracini: "All of Terracini's philosophy can be summed up in this sentence, 'With D'Aragona yes, with Turati no.'" But to the Italian party the united front sounded like a trumpet call ordering them back into the quagmire of the Second International.

The PSI continued to pose a problem to the PCI in 1922. At its Eighteenth Congress at Milan, the delegates easily turned down the condition established by the Comintern to assure continued membership of the PSI, namely expulsion of the Reformists. A motion by Lazzari and Maffi embodying that proposal received a scant 3,765 votes, while Serrati's continued intransigence obtained 47,628, leaving 19,916 supporting Turati's program of parliamentary collaboration with the government. Nevertheless, the PSI renewed its pledges of loyalty to the Third International, thus leaving the door open for another attempted capture by the Soviet leadership.

The reaction to the Rome Theses and to the continued intransigence of the Italian party on the united-front issue was not long in coming. Having failed to block approval of the Theses at the Rome Congress, the Comintern turned to other pressures. In April Bordiga went to Berlin, where an effort to bring together the Third, Second and 2½ Internationals quickly

founded, leaving the principals more embittered than ever. At the German capital, Bordiga and Silone met with Bukharin, Radek, Varsky and Ludovic-Oscar Frossard. The Soviet spokesmen indicated the significance of the Third Comintern Congress by denouncing the Rome Theses as "extreme" and "absurd." If the PCI insisted on remaining on its course, Radek threatened that the International "would disinterest itself and discontinue subventions." Radek and Varsky added that the needs of the working class and of the Soviet state had profoundly changed and that all "putschist tactics" must be dropped. "If the masses want peace it is damaging to speak of violence. If the masses want reform it is damaging to speak of revolution." Soviet Russia needed good relations with other bourgeois states. The PCI must unite all parties to create a workers' government; should the PSI and the Popolari come to power, recognize the Soviet regime, and bring reforms to Italy, the PCI must support them "in parliament and in the country." The Italians contested all that was asked of them; after returning to Rome, Bordiga and Graziadei went on to Moscow.<sup>33</sup>

The Moscow trip could hardly close the differences between the two leaderships. The Soviets were insisting that the Western parties subordinate their tactics to the needs of

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<sup>33</sup>"Il viaggio di Bordiga, Gramsci, Graziadei a Mosca," ACS, PS, busta 88-A, fascicolo Partito Comunista. All underlinings in the original.

Soviet designs. Nothing could have been further from and more antithetical to the Italian party than that it should rest its tactics on the moods flashing through the working class or on the need of a foreign diplomacy. Although admiring the Bolshevik leadership, the PCI was mindful of its own independent origins and remained steadfast on its principles. Capitulation to Soviet demands was never a possibility; only agreements arrived at jointly. The fact is that neither then nor later did the Soviets openly admit to what ends they had begun to use the International. An Enlarged ECCI was scheduled for Moscow, and Gramsci and Belloni accompanied Bordiga and Graziadei. Gramsci played no significant role yet. While the ECCI discussed implementation of the united front from below, Bordiga and Graziadei met with Zinoviev, wrenching from him the concession that the expression "workers' government" was a synonym for the proletarian dictatorship. In a letter to the Italian EC describing the exchange with Zinoviev, Bordiga minimized the extent of the disagreement and complained of the support that Graziadei--a representative of the new Minority--had given to Zinoviev.<sup>34</sup>

After returning to Italy, at a meeting of the CC attended by Bordiga, Grieco, Fortichiari, Grandi, Azzario, Repossi,

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<sup>34</sup>APC, fascicolo 70, letter of June 13, 1922.

Togliatti, and Berti, the full depth of disagreement must have been disclosed. An informant's report described the meeting in Moscow as "disastrous," adding that the results would never be disclosed to the party press.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, a letter from the Executive Committee of the Communist Youth International accused the FGC of being "putschist."<sup>36</sup>

The history of the Young Communist Federation during the early nineteen twenties remains another facet of the Bordigan period left untouched by post-Liberation leftwing historiography. We know that when the FGC joined the Communist movement, it carried with it almost as large a membership as the parent body. From its founding in 1907, the Youth Federation had played an active and militant role in the leftwing, and surviving documents indicate that the young PCI relied heavily on the support brought by the youth. Some information on the Sinistra-led FGC comes to us indirectly, from Soviet sources. After the Communist Youth International had been founded at Berlin in November 1919, Silone, along with other western delegates, opposed the transfer of the offices of this body to Moscow. The views of the Soviet leadership prevailed on this question.<sup>37</sup> At the second congress of the Youth

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<sup>35</sup>Police report (number 18002), July 3, 1922, ACS, PS, busta 88-A, fascicolo Partito Comunista Affari Generali.

<sup>36</sup>Letter from the Communist Youth International, July 4, 1922, ACS, PS, busta 88-B, fascicolo Partito Comunista.

<sup>37</sup>"Bor'ba PKSM...Kommunisticheskoye Internationale Molodezhi (1919-21)," Voprosi Istorii, 12 (1971), 43-57.

International, July 1921, Trotsky severely criticized both Silone and Luigi Polano, the FGC delegates, who had stoutly defended the PCI's break with the PSI.<sup>38</sup> After moving to Moscow, the Youth International seems to have lost its vitality.

An old sore now reopened. In October 1922--the very month of the March on Rome--the Nineteenth Congress of the PSI finally expelled the Reformists. The change was made possible by Serrati's switch to a pro-International position, and by the expectation, or hope, of the liberated Reformists, soon reconstituted in the Partito socialista unitario (PSU), that they would be free to join and strengthen the bourgeois government. It was as if the PSI had read and decided to carry out some of the Rome Theses. Before the development of this new fracture, Treves and Vella denounced the International as an instrument of Soviet rule.

The problem of the PSI had been a source of difficulty between the PCI and the International for more than a year. Now that the Socialists sympathetic to the International had been rejoined by Serrati, the pressure exerted on the PCI to force it into a fusion with the PSI increased. Nearly all of the Communist leadership feared that with the ingestion of the Socialists, the party would lose its homogeneity, and the new

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<sup>38</sup> Leon Trotsky, The First Five Years of the Communist International (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1945), I, pp. 313-20. At this congress Trotsky said of Serrati--"there is a real Machiavelli for you."

element, joined with the Minority, would swamp the Sinistra leadership, the Majority. These fears were raised at meetings of leading party organs on October 6 and 12. For that occasion, Rákosi, whom the Italians disliked, arrived with two other emissaries to help force the party into a shotgun marriage with the Socialists. Such a step would have violated the party theses, and both Terracini and Bordiga were at the point of resignation, when Togliatti proposed a compromise in the form of a period of joint PCI-PSI cooperation. Togliatti offered the formula because he saw no other way of saving the party from the clutches of the Minority ("so as not to abandon the reins of the party to the Minority").<sup>39</sup> It was agreed to place the question before the Fourth Congress of the International scheduled to open on November 5, 1922, with the proviso that should that congress not uphold the Central Committee an extraordinary congress of the PCI would be called into session to tackle the problem.

#### 4. The End of the Bordigan Leadership

The situation in the Italian party just prior to the Fourth Congress was strained; the entire Executive Committee and a majority of the Central Committee were in total disagree-

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<sup>39</sup>Spriano, op. cit., pp. 226-7, Spriano interprets Togliatti's proposal to mean that he had begun to free himself from Bordiga's influence.



ment with the International over the questions of fusion with the PSI and implementation of the united front. The International had succeeded in tying up the leadership in a knotty wrangle on the very eve of 1923, the annus terribilis, when the Fascists would decimate the ranks throughout Italy. The state of mind of the leadership must not have been eased by a letter received from Italian representatives in Moscow in September.

These representatives had been trying to get an appointment with the Presidium, an honorific body created after the Third Congress, but they had to clear approval through Zinoviev, the president of the International. After much difficulty, Zinoviev was finally reached; according to the report:

Perfectly useless discussion with Zinoviev who showed us various issues of the Avanti! we had not yet received, and while we looked at the papers, he used his time to glance at some notated reports from Bordiga brought in by his secretary. He opened a letter by Bombacci on the table, which he did not let us see, saying that Bombacci spoke of the need for Communists to work in the Fascist unions; Ex Abrupto (by what association of ideas?) he asks where Misiano is, and answers himself, in Berlin--and thus ends this interlude which can be instructive.

Having met with the Presidium, the representatives found that the body supported Zinoviev against them.

We are left with the impression of a semblance of a Presidium that does not really work, but which is run according to the wishes of a few leaders who, no doubt, are affectionately attached to the International, but they are not infallible and they are determined to have

their ideas triumph at all costs: something very dangerous in as much as they don't give a damn about our views, but depend for information on their functionaries who have naturally the mentality of all functionaries.<sup>40</sup>

A large Italian delegation attended the Fourth Congress: Bordiga and his wife Ortensia, D'Onofrio, Bombacci, Scoccimarro, Gennari, Germanetto, Longo, Tasca, Graziadei, Berti, and others.<sup>41</sup> In his opening remarks, Zinoviev heaped mixed praise on the PCI. Referring to Bordiga as a man of great merit and praising the PCI for its courage, Zinoviev added that differences existed. "But at the same time we must state that we have serious disagreements with the PCI in which 'abstentionist' tendencies persist." The charge of abstentionism was a curious one, and really wide of the mark, but raising it tended to solidify the opposition of most the Italian delegation.<sup>42</sup> As in the earlier world congresses, the PCI would be a principal dissenter.

The congress approved five types of "workers' governments" based on various "united-front" arrangements; only one of these represented the proletarian dictatorship. The Russians

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<sup>40</sup>APC, fascicolo 91, letter of September 3, 1922.

<sup>41</sup>Ravera, Azzario, Peluso, Arcuno, Vota, Lunedei, Presutti, Gorelli, Tresso, etc.

<sup>42</sup>Why Zinoviev raised the charge is unclear, unless he was fed misleading information by--to use a remark from the September letter of the Italian representatives in Moscow--"his functionaries." The PCI was well aware that reports from Comintern agents were often unreliable. Whatever the case, the Soviet leadership would not let the accusation of abstentionism die, and it became a straw man, a means to beat down Bordiga while avoiding discussion of the issues he raised.

paralleled the right and left maneuverings required by such arrangements to agreements made by them between 1905-12, when they had made and broken various pacts with the Mensheviks.<sup>43</sup> Not to be ruled out is the possibility that by 1922 the Bolshevik leadership had become convinced of the universality of their tactical experience. The congress also endorsed the united front from above, advocated by Radek and the right wing of the German Communists, as well as from below, championed by Zinoviev and the German left wing. The proposals before the congress posited an intermediate stage between bourgeois society and the proletarian dictatorship.

Bordiga spoke in defense of the counterproposals presented by the Italian delegation. His reasoning represented a continuation of the general ideas he expressed at the Second Congress in 1920. Very simply, he denied that Bolshevik experience could be taken as a model, bluntly adding that a Marxist definition of the "workers' government" could not be found. At this point, Bordiga was challenging the tactics introduced, beginning with the congress of 1921. Bordiga and the Sinistra wanted the organizational unity of the working class, but feared that a political united front would obstruct the "understanding that only the program of the Communists and only the formation of forces around the Communist party will assure

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<sup>43</sup>Humbert-Droz, op. cit., pp. 30-32.

emancipation" of the proletariat. The majority of the PCI delegation denied the existence of a third, or intermediate, phase lying between the dictatorships of the proletariat and of the bourgeoisie. The essence of the PCI's opposition to the workers' government formulas was summed up succinctly by a sentence from their counterproposals. "To speak of a workers' government or to believe that it can arise from a parliamentary coalition with Communist representation means, practically speaking, the negation of the Communist political program or the necessity to prepare the masses for revolution."<sup>44</sup> Bordiga and his supporters were arguing that the International could not be at the same time revolutionary and reformist. These Sinistra representatives did not believe that the bourgeoisie could be seduced into accepting socialism under the guise of the united front, or the working class spared the effort and pain needed to bring into being the proletarian society.

Under the attacks of Bukharin and Zinoviev the decision of the congress was never in doubt, but at the plenary sessions the Italian delegation split, and a minority led by Tasca and Graziadei attacked Bordiga in terms almost identical with those used by the Soviet leaders.<sup>45</sup> The opposition of the right wing,

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<sup>44</sup>The Italian theses are in In difesa della continuità, pp. 65-72.

<sup>45</sup>Spriano, op. cit., p. 248.

the Minority, was now in the open. At this time, evidently, Giuseppe Berti, the secretary of the FGS, went over to the Minority. This defection was the first harbinger of things to come. The Italian delegation knew that it was beaten on the question of theses to be adopted by the congress, but it hoped to save the party from fusion.

It is hardly necessary to follow the detailed negotiations that occupied the various bodies handling the Italian question at the Fourth Congress.<sup>46</sup> What is important is that, while the Italian resistance was being worn down, Gramsci was again offered the leadership of the party,<sup>47</sup> by Rákosi ("the Penguin," as he was derisively called by some of the Italian delegates).<sup>48</sup> November and December marked the end of Bordiga's leadership. The minutes surviving from the almost daily meetings of the Italian delegation at the Hotel Lux of Moscow document the collapse of its opposition. On November 8, Bordiga discussed

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<sup>46</sup>Humbert-Droz, op. cit., pp. 33-40; Spriano, op. cit., pp. 248-54.

<sup>47</sup>Was Bordiga aware that Gramsci was being offered the leadership? From remarks made by Bellini and Galli in their 1953 study, it seems he had been informed. One of the factors contributing to the defeat of the Sinistra was that they did not--or could not--publicly denounce the underhanded interference practiced by Comintern emissaries.

<sup>48</sup>La formazione, pp. 288-89.

the situation created in Italy by the arrival of the first Fascist government. He indicated that since the Central Committee (Centrale) did not agree with the views of the Comintern on the Italian question, "it considers itself politically finished. At this moment the Comintern has no representative in Italy." On the following day, Bordiga spoke of the clash over the theses being debated at the congress. "We must not delude ourselves," the minutes quote Gramsci as saying, "the Congress will vote as the leaders want." At another meeting the delegation authorized Bordiga to request a delay in fusion until a party congress had deliberated the matter. On November 21, a majority including Longo and Scoccimarro was still in agreement with Bordiga. On the twenty-fourth a letter from Lenin, Radek, Trotsky, and Bukharin threatened the PCI, and simultaneously the commission handling the Italian question voted to fuse the two organizations. In the face of this fiat, a majority of the delegates abandoned their opposition. Gramsci, Scoccimarro, and Longo agreed to enter negotiations in order to assure that the PCI would dominate the new party, which would be known as the Partito comunista unificato d'Italia. Bordiga no longer typified the delegation.<sup>49</sup> Speaking to the congress Bordiga announced that the PCI would accept the decision of the International, but at the Hotel Lux he continued to urge the

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<sup>49</sup>All minutes in APC, fascicolo 84.

calling of a party congress and refused to participate in working out the details of the amalgamation.

The epilogue to the decisions in Moscow unfolded after the close of the congress and the return of the delegates to Italy. The Comintern had stipulated 14 conditions as prerequisites to the joining of the PSI to the PCI; one included the expulsion of Arturo Vella, a Maximalist who had first come into leadership with the Intransigent Revolutionaries of 1912. Later appendices to these conditions designated Serrati and Gramsci as coeditors of the Avanti! In January 1923 Nenni, then editor of the Avanti! unleashed in the columns of the paper a campaign to block the decision of the Fourth Congress. In this move he was aided by the ferocious anti-Communist wave of that year. At the Twentieth Congress of the PSI in April, a majority led by Nenni and Vella rejected fusion; thus all the labors had been in vain. By then membership of the PSI was placed at 10,250,<sup>50</sup> a figure which was indicative of the Fascist terror of 1923 and of the inefficacy of Maximalist leadership. Bordiga was arrested in February. Shortly before falling into the hands of the police in March, a letter from Grieco to the ECCI announced the resignation of the Executive Committee of the PCI.<sup>51</sup> The PCI was now decapitated in a dual sense: be-

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<sup>50</sup>Spriano, op. cit., p. 274.

<sup>51</sup>APC, fascicolo 180, letter of March 14, 1923.

sides the resignation, Bordiga and Grieco were incarcerated, Fortichiari and Terracini (who left Italy in April, but would soon return) were abroad, while Repossi remained free but no longer as a member of the Executive Committee.

##### 5. The International in 1923

The Comintern had plunged the PCI into a condition of unusual difficulty during the terrible year of 1923. Since the International was both a mentor and a source of vital funds, the PCI could not remain indifferent to the wishes of Moscow or to the unenviable reputation that began to be associated with the Italian party.<sup>52</sup> As indicated earlier, the openings at the top brought changes: Togliatti and Scoccimarro to the EC, Tasca, Graziadei and Camilla Ravera to the CC. Before leaving for Moscow to replace Gennari, Terracini noted how the International had unilaterally modified its policy vis-a-vis the PSI.<sup>53</sup>

As the PCI prepared to send a delegation to the Enlarged ECCI scheduled for June 1923, Bordiga sought to influence the outside leadership through correspondence smuggled out of prison with the aid of a sympathizer amongst the guards. Central to his thinking at the time was the realization that the political

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<sup>52</sup> See letter to Scoccimarro, July 17, 1923, ACS, PS, Sequestrati, busta B-1.

<sup>53</sup> La formazione, pp. 46-50.



line of the International was no longer in keeping with the original purpose, the sponsorship of proletarian revolution, and that steps had to be undertaken to safeguard the integrity of the International and of the PCI. An indication of Bordiga's concern appeared in a letter of May 1, 1923, by Togliatti to Gramsci. This letter conveys a sense of desperation, admiration for Bordiga, and criticism of Gramsci and of the International; Gramsci was informed that Bordiga had drawn up a manifesto and that he was seeking endorsement from the PCI leadership; Togliatti found in the move "a proposal that will attract the more intelligent comrades," but he was not sure the party would survive an open break with the International.<sup>54</sup>

Bordiga's "Manifesto" was an appeal to the rank-and-file for support, a defense of past policies, and a call for open discussion in the International of the tactics around the united front, of which Bordiga and the Sinistra were critical. Typical of Bordiga's approach to the problem was his insistence that the crisis in the party could "be resolved only by the participation of the whole mass of its members"; he also sought to produce a "mature examination of the whole International." How seriously Bordiga took the matter is indicated by the following statement: "We are perhaps on the eve of a crisis in

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 53-60.

the international camp; as the Italian party we are in the depths of the crisis." To resolve the crisis the "Manifesto" called for the aforementioned broad consultations, and if these did not "bring about a substantial consensus in a series of decisions based on common principles," that is, if they did not lead to the policies desired, the signatories would remain with the International but assume no position of leadership.<sup>55</sup> Publication of the "Manifesto" would have alerted the international camp and involved the PCI base in the conflict of judgments, which was in keeping with Bordiga's and the CC's earlier plans.

Although Gramsci's answer to Togliatti did not assuage the fears indicated in the latter's letter, it does provide the first direct evidence of a change of thinking on his part, and of his effort to separate himself from the Majority. He was optimistic, he told Togliatti, over the possibility of an early seizure of power, and he regretted not having organized the Ordinovisti [this is the first hint of a factional formation within the Majority], now that events had placed "our group" at the head of the party. We must remain, he counselled, "because we are really in the line of historical development,"

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<sup>55</sup>The "Manifesto" is reproduced in Gruber, op. cit., pp. 371-79.

and "we are in the historical current."<sup>56</sup> At a meeting of Western European Communist parties on May 3-6 at Zurich Radek, Zinoviev, and Gramsci pledged that in the event of war the Soviet armies would eradicate frontiers.<sup>57</sup> Hence by May 1923 Gramsci had begun to feel his destiny brushed by the demiurge of history; Gramsci's svolta, his move to the right, had begun. One can only guess at the influence that had been exercised upon him by Trotsky, Bukharin, Radek and, most of all, Zinoviev.

The problem of forming a new leadership for the Italian party was placed before an Enlarged ECCI meeting in June. Why the Italians resorted to this move remains unclear, and the delegation arrived in Moscow amidst confusion on all sides.<sup>58</sup> These delegates carried with them some mandates from the PCI, one of which asked for the exclusion of the PSI from the International.<sup>59</sup> After its congress had turned down fusion with the PCI, the PSI asked to remain in the International

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<sup>56</sup>La formazione, pp. 64-69.

<sup>57</sup>Police report (number 14215), May 21, 1923, ACS, PS, busta 69-A, fascicolo K-1, 1923.

<sup>58</sup>APC, fascicolo 190. An anonymous note in this folder reported, "We arrived in Moscow at a time when no one had any idea of what to do, including Gergory [Zinoviev]."

<sup>59</sup>PCI document, 1615R, April 23, 1923, ACS, PS, Sequestrati, busta B-1.

as a "sympathizer" party. Gramsci, Scoccimarro, Terracini, Fortichiari, and Gennari heard Zinoviev castigate the PCI for the failure of efforts to capture the PSI, a charge not without some basis since, even without Bordiga, none in the Majority really believed in fusion. The accusation was seconded by Tasca and Vota, two members of the Minority present. Zinoviev went further by placing the blame for the triumph of Fascism on the policies of the PCI [a charge Togliatti would later revive against Bordiga], while the discomfiture of the Sinistra representatives was heightened upon hearing Tasca scourge their leadership and the traditions of the party beginning with the schism and the "anti-Marxism of the Rome Theses."<sup>60</sup> At that time, the Minority was seeking a united front of all parties from Socialists to Monarchists.<sup>61</sup>

Disregarding the mandates carried from Italy, and the new request from the delegation that the leadership of the PCI be left to the Minority,<sup>62</sup> the ECCI kept the PSI as a sympathizer member and took the unprecedented--and unconstitutional--step of naming a new EC<sup>63</sup> composed of Togliatti, Scoccimarro, Fortichiari,

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<sup>60</sup>La formazione, pp. 72-3.

<sup>61</sup>Letter of ECCI to PCI, May 18, 1923, ACS, PS, busta 69-A, fascicolo K-1.

<sup>62</sup>"Declaration of Majority," IPC, III, 52 (July 23, 1923).

<sup>63</sup>The naming of a new EC by a foreign body was in violation of article 46 of the PCI's constitution. Cf. Resoconto stenografico, p. 462. This observation also applies to the designation of leadership at the Fifth Congress of the Comintern in 1924.

Tasca, and Vota, while Bordiga was promoted upstairs to the largely ornamental Presidium. Only the combined efforts of Terracini, Gennari, and Gramsci induced Scoccimmaro and Fortichiari to accept the position.<sup>64</sup> As a result of these appointments, the Minority now sat on the EC, an achievement due exclusively to Comintern maneuverings.

With Scoccimmaro, Togliatti, and Fortichiari, the party was still controlled by the Sinistra, the old Majority. Back in Italy before a gathering of Togliatti (who had not been to Moscow), Terracini, Fortichiari, Leonetti, and Ravera, these Italians released their true feelings. Terracini was for accepting the decision of the ECCI, at the same time organize to guarantee that the new EC would follow "our directives," that is, remain loyal to the traditions of the Sinistra. Togliatti thought the PCI had made a mistake by not having publicly disagreed with the Minority and the International; he was sure they would liquidate "all the traditions...leading to the formation of the Communist party." Bordiga (then in prison) was told, via a coded note, that he would be asked to help draw up the new statements of policy.<sup>65</sup> Togliatti must have continued to feel uncertain about accepting the decision, for Scoccimmaro now urged him to remain in the post to keep control from the

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<sup>64</sup> Spriano, op. cit., p. 284.

<sup>65</sup> La formazione, pp. 88-90, and 91-97.

Minority, even if it meant putting them under "political surveillance."<sup>66</sup>

The major move was now made by Gramsci, who indicated how far he had gone in his political turnabout when he pronounced the fatal words that the political doctrines of the Comintern represented "Marxism as developed in Leninism."<sup>67</sup> The implication of Gramsci's remark was the need to change the policies of the PCI and realign them on the positions of the Comintern. This could be done only after removing the control of the old Majority.

At the first CC meeting (August 9) the debate was on the June decisions. Rakosi, Azzario, Graziadei, Vecchini, Marabini, Ravera, Repossi, Terracini, Togliatti, Tasca, Leonetti and Palotta represented both factions and the International. Terracini spoke bitterly of the superficial handling of the Italian problem before the ECCI; the Majority had wanted a discussion of substance, but this had been reduced to a matter of personalities; he would go along on the grounds of discipline but saw "the error of removing from leadership of our movement the only man in the party who gave proof of being a leader [Bordiga]." Togliatti gave a defense of the party. Vecchini recorded that at Moscow the Italians had been stopped from making

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., pp. 98-99.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., pp. 100-01.

a public declaration. Repossi gave notice that he would not collaborate with the CC. Earlier, Fortichiari had already sent in his resignation from the EC, though the CC wanted him to reconsider.

Tasca, Graziadei and Rakosi thought differently. To Tasca it was no longer a question of Minority or Majority, but "who has the will and who has not the will to apply the tactic of the International." For Graziadei the schism of Livorno had been "too far" to the left. Rákosi defended the Minority as being "closest to the thinking and tactic of the Comintern." With Repossi abstaining, the body voted to go along with the ECCI's action.<sup>68</sup> Discipline had won out over political judgment.

What of Bordiga? Although incarcerated in the Regina Coeli prison in Rome since February, he had managed to prepare a draft of the "Manifesto." Hearing of the June ECCI decision, both Bordiga and Grieco resigned from the CC, and Bordiga attempted to induce the outside Majority leadership to do likewise,<sup>69</sup> after which they would obtain a new mandate from the party base. In Milan an attempt by rank-and-file Communists to have the ECCI appointments put to a party referendum was stopped.<sup>70</sup> Bordiga's

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 103-21.

<sup>69</sup> APC, fascicolo 190, letter of July 7, 1923.

<sup>70</sup> PCI document, July 27, 1923, ACS, PS, Sequestrati, busta B-2.

"Manifesto" was more important than ever now, but the intense difficulties produced by the repression of that year created additional obstacles. Terracini returned abroad, and the police struck another hard blow when they uncovered a major party center in August. In September Togliatti was arrested. Bordiga was not free until after the trial in October. At Naples he was notified that the Presidium had reassigned him to the EC of the party. Bordiga declined the offer in December, and he wondered how the Presidium, a powerless body, had found the powers to overrule the higher authority of the ECCI.<sup>71</sup> By the end of the month he had prepared the first issue of a new monthly, Prometeo.<sup>72</sup>

Gramsci's change became clear in December--he refused to sign the revised version of Bordiga's "Manifesto." Gramsci now suggested the formation of a new group that would occupy the political space between Bordiga and the Minority.<sup>73</sup> If one must indicate a point at which Gramsci's influence began to affect the PCI, it is with these decisions he took in December. Had Gramsci disappeared from the ranks of the PCI in November 1923,

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<sup>71</sup>La formazione, pp. 133-34.

<sup>72</sup>PCI document, 4415R, December 23, 1923, ACS, PS, Sequestrati, busta B-3.

<sup>73</sup>The existence of this letter is presumed from answers indicated immediately below from Scoccimarro, Togliatti, and Terracini.



his role would have remained distinctly minor, less than those of Repossi and Fortichiari, who disappeared from the party after 1926 with the crushing of the Sinistra. Significantly, perhaps, his first independent act--the refusal to sign--was a disservice to the party membership who, given the gravity of the dispute with the International, should have been involved before being presented with a fait accompli. Indirectly, of course, the action helped the Soviet leaders, since they wished least of all a public and analytical scrutiny of their policies.

At first Scoccimarro was fearful of splitting the Majority.<sup>74</sup> Just out of prison and more critical of the "Manifesto"--though remaining a signatory--Togliatti saw that Gramsci's proposal would please the Comintern, but might damage the party. "The formation now of a 'Centro' would mean," furthermore, "more a direct blow to the Sinistra (Bordiga) than to the Destra (Tasca-Vota)." Togliatti continued to find merit in the "Manifesto."<sup>75</sup> The refusal came as a shock to Terracini, who now realized that the "months and months" of discussion represented more than just another example of Gramsci's habitual indolence.<sup>76</sup> The absence of a strong Sinistra element in the leadership now proved fatal to Bordiga's plan. Gramsci's

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<sup>74</sup>La formazione, pp. 137-8.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 139-43.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., pp. 144-47.

decision killed the "Manifesto," and destroyed the incipient bid to regain the independence of the PCI and block Soviet manipulation of the International.

During the month of August 1920, Terracini and Togliatti had briefly joined Tasca in a united opposition to Gramsci. Writing about the incident in 1924, Gramsci referred to it as the time when Terracini and Togliatti had "caught up" with Tasca. For the metaphor to be appreciated one must recall that until 1924 Tasca was viewed by the three men as a distasteful political figure.<sup>77</sup> Gramsci now began to move towards the views of Tasca.

The relationship between the Sinistra and the International, 1920-24, was characterized by continuous clashes over policies, clashes made inevitable because the Sinistra refused to surrender its independence of mind. Despite these difficulties, the Sinistra never questioned its loyalty to the international body. As a result of this loyalty, the Sinistra now found itself unable to respond soon enough and vigorously enough to the attacks coming from a new source.

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<sup>77</sup>One example will have to do here. Writing to Gramsci in July 1923, Togliatti referred to "the petty bourgeois pseudo-idealism and the political confusion embraced by Tasca." La formazione, p. 95.

CHAPTER VITHE AGONY OF THE SINISTRA

During the closing months of 1917 Bordiga had mentioned without serious analysis the anomaly of a backward Russia being the scene of a strong Marxist party, the Bolsheviks. More than a year later, Gramsci had found in the leadership of the Russian Revolution "an aristocracy of statesmen unmatched by any nation."<sup>1</sup> In the course of 1924 the views of these two men diverged rapidly: while Bordiga saw the International being victimized by Soviet opportunism, Gramsci set about to align neatly the Italian party with the International, that is, on positions indicated by the Soviet leaders. 1924 was the year of the creation of the Centro and the beginning of the end of the Sinistra.

1. The Formation of the Centro

Gramsci, and Gramsci alone, led the change culminating at the Lyons Congress two years later, though he quickly found the aid of willing collaborators. The extreme danger in the lives of these men and the uncertainty of their future are two factors that go along way in explaining why they accepted the new policies brought back by Gramsci. Having chosen to be revolutionaries, their orientation to the Soviet regime was a natural one. But the explanation cannot be extended into

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<sup>1</sup>Scritti scelti, p. 199.

a justification or an apology; the victims, the Sinistra, labored under similar conditions. Through the early months of 1924 the process picked up momentum.

Having blocked the "Manifesto," now characterized as "mad," Gramsci set out to create a new group that would only "territorially appear to be a Centro."<sup>2</sup> Gramsci thus began very cautiously. He was possessed by the fear that only the International was holding the party together, and, without a settlement with that body, the party was in great danger. By 1924 Gramsci's doubts about the PCI paralleled the lack of confidence which the Soviets had felt earlier about the Western working classes. It is possible to trace the formation of the Centro by following the known correspondence between Gramsci and a half dozen leading figures in the Italian party. Most of the party remained uninformed of the new political grouping about to take shape.

Each in his own way these men followed Gramsci into alignment. Leonetti, an old Ordinovista, led the way. In January he suggested to Gramsci that only he, Gramsci, could save the party from chaos and a break with the International,<sup>3</sup> a call quickly echoed by Gramsci into "us," meaning the ex-

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<sup>2</sup> La formazione, pp. 149-60.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 164-66.

Ordinovisti.<sup>4</sup> In Moscow, Terracini began to waver. While continuing to defend the "Manifesto," he agreed that "we must not eternally tie ourselves to Amadeo." Bordiga was a political man, and Terracini was sure he could be made to change,<sup>5</sup> an observation endorsed by Gramsci. After admitting that the Comintern's swing to the left in early 1924 was largely rhetorical, Togliatti wrote that he saw advantages in allowing Bordiga to criticize, "while we think of our own affairs and define our position," even to the exclusion of Bordiga from the majority.<sup>6</sup>

Most instructive and revealing of the intrinsic political spirit of the new Centro was Gramsci's letter of February 9. Two of his comments deserve particular attention. The first deals with the struggles he had observed firsthand in the Russian party before leaving Moscow and moving to Vienna. He informed Togliatti that Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Stalin represented the Bolshevik right wing in opposition to the left wing which had drawn together Trotsky, Bukharin, and Radek. "Asking for a greater involvement of the worker element in the party and a diminution of the bureaucracy, in the final analysis, they

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 182-88.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 168-72.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 207-16.

[Trotsky et al.] want to assure the revolution its socialist and worker character," a goal with which Gramsci fails to identify in his letter.

A second comment concerned the PCI's recent history. (The "Manifesto" had by now reached the category of "byzantine.") Looking at the PCI's past, Gramsci discovered that loyalty to the International had been the principal motive attracting most delegates to the Imola Conference of 1920. Furthermore, the PCI's structure was abstract, undialectical, and led the party into passivity. The Rome Theses had never really been discussed, and had the EC not agreed with the International at the Rome Congress, that body would have turned out the Bordigan leadership. Gramsci alluded to Bordiga's views that the International was too much under Russian influence and Bordiga's hope of eliminating that hegemony through revolutions in Central and Western Europe. Gramsci disagreed, stating that Comintern tactics "were ideal for interpreting and guiding events."

This pivotal letter marks the birth of a "new history" which the Centro would make official after its victory at the Lyons Congress. Of special importance is that it shows Gramsci using rationalization to substitute for the objective reality of the past. A veil was now being drawn across that past, and with it the need to de-emphasize the actual origins of the

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 186-201.

Italian Communist movement. Within a year the terms used by Gramsci to characterize the organization of the PCI ("abstract," "undialectical," "passivity") would be applied personally to Bordiga. Writing to Moscow on October 7, 1924, Togliatti provided a different explanation for Communist passivity. "The passivity of the entire working class penetrated our ranks. Our activists lived in conditions which were perhaps worse than those of the working masses; thus inertia and passivity found their explanation."<sup>8</sup>

Assured of a support in the leadership, in March Gramsci proposed the formation of a faction guided by a new set of theses prepared by Leonetti, Scoccimarro and Togliatti or by Terracini, Gennari and Montagnana (Gramsci's name would not appear).<sup>9</sup> Terracini--who confessed to being demoralized and unhappy after spending five months in Moscow--and Togliatti agreed to Gramsci's suggestion,<sup>10</sup> while Scoccimarro and Ravera did not.<sup>11</sup>

As the Centro was being formed, Togliatti prepared an introductory editorial for a new series of Ordine Nuovo, appear-

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<sup>8</sup>Reprinted in Rinascita, September 8, 1962.

<sup>9</sup>La formazione, pp. 218-30.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 249-52.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 264-70.

ing on March 1, 1924. In the editorial Togliatti attacked Trotsky's defense of the usefulness of factions, later included by the latter in his Lessons of October. Togliatti was critical to some extent of the Rome Theses, charging that the formalism of the Theses represented a retreat from Marx and Hegel to "Kant and to idealism (kantismo)."<sup>12</sup> Factions belonged to the days of the Second International, Togliatti asserted, and were no longer "compatible with 'a revolutionary party of the working class.'"<sup>12</sup>

Togliatti's words stood as a public condemnation of Gramsci's private actions, though Togliatti did not intend them to be so. Undeterred by either the reasoning of Togliatti or the reluctance of Scoccimarro and Ravera, Gramsci proposed next that the new theses he presented in the name of the Central Committee.<sup>13</sup> This suggestion was too much for Scoccimarro, who feared that, if the surreptitious activities of the group came to the attention of the party, Bordiga would have no difficulty drawing to his support a vast party majority; Scoccimarro wanted a more open approach in changing the policies of the PCI, and was hopeful of obtaining a large consensus in the party base.<sup>14</sup> Leakage of Gramsci's activities reached Humbert-Droz, and he

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 349-54.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 252-56.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 264-70.



hastened to notify Zinoviev that Gramsci was seeking to create a Centro that would embrace all the party but the extremes of left and right.<sup>15</sup>

On March 15 a second issue of Ordine Nuovo featured Gramsci's noted editorial "Against Pessimism." In it he continued the rewriting of the recent past. "Only following the Second Congress [of the International in 1920] did the campaign to revitalize the Socialist party begin in Italy; it developed on a national scale because it had already been started by the Turin section the previous March in a motion destined to be presented to an imminent National Conference of the party." Gramsci omitted all that the Sovietisti had campaigned for from the initial weeks of 1919. His editorial included a muted criticism of the first years of the PCI, though the party membership was described as a "phalanx of steel." "The action of the International," wrote Gramsci giving currency to a view associated with the new history, "was for a time the only force permitting our party to maintain efficacious contact with the masses...." As a result of the policies of the Third and Fourth World Congresses and the decisions of the ECCIs of June 1922 and 1923, building a mass party was possible. Full speed with the International was the message of the editorial.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Humbert-Droz, op. cit., pp. 113-15.

<sup>16</sup>"Contro il pessimismo," reproduced in La formazione, pp. 354-60.

The uncertainty of the Centro's standing and the need for continued caution was underlined by events in April. Terracini reported a conversation with Radek in which the latter described Bordiga as "one of the few minds capable of leading the International,"<sup>17</sup> an appraisal in keeping with general opinion within the Communist movement at the time.<sup>18</sup> In that month Gramsci wrote a letter to Togliatti complaining that Pietro Tresso, a secondary level Communist leader, had interpreted Gramsci's intentions to mean that he wanted expulsion of the Sinistra. Gramsci feared that this interpretation would get to the membership in the form of the simple message: "Sardi [Gramsci] wants to expel Amadeo from the party," and that would be "suicidal talk, word of honor."<sup>19</sup> Lastly, Scoccimarro reported that at the April CC meeting even members of the body had difficulty going along with the new line, although it had been dressed up by being presented as a continuation of the old Majority. "Had we asked these comrades," he informed Gramsci, "to sign a body of theses without Amadeo, they would not have agreed and we would have compromised our

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 278-81.

<sup>18</sup>Bordiga, wrote Andreina De Clementi, "had seen his prestige become ever more influential not only in the Italian ranks, but also on an international plane, thanks to his great seriousness and correctness and to his uncommon abilities as a leader and as a theoretician." Amadeo Bordiga, p. 159.

<sup>19</sup>La formazione, 282-83. In the end Tresso's presentiment proved right: the Sinistra was eliminated. Tresso was

future actions."<sup>20</sup> These men were indeed beginning to abandon the principle upon which the old Majority had operated, that agreements be reached through an open and honest discussion. But a Centro now existed--in the leadership.

At the CC session the Minority had raised no objection. Tasca explained this reasonableness to Rakosi. A new faction, the Centro, had come into being at the CC, and he, Tasca, approved.<sup>21</sup> Along with Scoccimarro, Gramsci, and Humbert-Droz, Tasca anticipated that the new formation would sweep a majority of the party into its fold.

The April meeting had been made necessary by the need to prepare for a national conference to be held in secret at Como. The CC had to consider two principal motions, one from the Centro and one from the Sinistra. The first one presented by the Centro<sup>22</sup> ("superfluous" retorted Scoccimarro when Tasca described it as a "new Centro") minimized the PCI's past difficulties with the International, reduced the Rome Theses to a consultative basis, and projected future policy along the lines drawn up by the Fourth Congress and the June 1923

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himself expelled in 1930, along with Leonetti. After Gramsci's death in 1937, Tresso was to charge that Togliatti had abandoned the campaign to free Gramsci, after the latter had begun to indicate disapproval of Soviet actions.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 290-95.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 327-30.

<sup>22</sup>The motion of the Centro may have been penned by Gramsci himself. Some of the phraseology is a replica of lines

ECCI. Factions were not to be tolerated and the collaboration of the Sinistra was sought. No representative of the Sinistra had been present, but a motion had arrived, along with apologies, from Bordiga, who explained that, "since there does not exist in the party any grouping constituting a faction," time had not permitted a full consultation with other comrades who shared his beliefs. This motion made the disagreement with the International a fundamental point. It included a defense of the PCI's policies in the past, arguing that a united front based on the Rome Theses had been in effect during the August 1922 "legal strike," but that subsequent interference by the Comintern had hamstrung and paralyzed the PCI. Bordiga's motion added that the crisis facing the PCI could only be resolved at the international level by the formation of a genuinely international party; failing this, should the International move to the right, a left faction would have to be formed amongst the member parties. In summary, the Centro's motion handled the Rome Theses very gingerly, fearing that a more direct attack on them would arouse the party. In reality, both Gramsci and Togliatti had already abandoned the Theses.

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found in his letter of April 15. Cf. pp. 273 and 322-26 of La formazione.

The Sinistra motion, on the other hand, emphasized the need to rectify policies on the level of the International, whence, in fact, the Centro drew inspiration.<sup>23</sup>

Writing to Tresso again, Gramsci added the need to split the Minority in order to assimilate the Tasca-Vota group and eliminate the Bombacci-Misiano wing.<sup>24</sup> As for Bordiga, perhaps he could be won over. "He is a practical man, not a Don Quixote, and he wants initiatives that give results, not simple gestures." Gramsci was now close to Tasca, but the shock of Como lay just ahead.

## 2. The Conference at Como

As background for the Como conference a few comments may help clarify the changing Italian situation and introduce some of the new elements on the Italian scene in 1924. With the "Manifesto" stone-dead and his refusal to reconsider an offer to sit on the EC, Bordiga turned to Prometeo, a monthly that was not a party organ or, unlike Ordine Nuovo, financed by

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<sup>23</sup>When the minutes of the CC were written up (as they appear in La formazione) Tasca complained to the EC that they had been falsified. In a preface to this complaint, but written several decades later when he was preparing the published volume of documents, Humbert-Droz, who, like Rakosi, connived first with the Minority and then with the Centro, recalled that the "leadership of the PCI did not hesitate to modify, not to say falsify, a set of minutes....These were the inadmissible methods frequently used by Stalin...." Humbert-Droz, op. cit., p. 137. What he meant was that these were the methods used by the Centro.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 333-36.

Comintern subsidies.<sup>25</sup> Its first issue appeared in January, 1924. Invariably, the periodical became a defender of Sinistra views, though the collaboration of Leonetti, soon a founder of the Centro with Gramsci, suggests that it may have had a broader purpose. In March Prometeo reprinted the speech delivered by Bordiga at Rome the month before, the high point of Communist services commemorating the death of Lenin.

As reported in L'Unità Bordiga's remarks had been received with "lively and prolonged applause,"<sup>26</sup> but the definition he gave to Leninism undercut the Comintern tactic of the united front. The Leninist road to power rested on the clash of social classes, on bringing the working class to complete its historic task. "You cannot get there using democratic methods based on the immortal 'principles (for the philistine) of democracy.'" And there was no worse error than "to lead the proletariat to believe that these efforts [the united front] will facilitate the difficulties and economize the efforts and sacrifice." Bordiga assigned the major share of blame for the German Communist failure in the Thuringia-Saxony events of 1923 to the International.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Humbert-Droz, op. cit., p. 126.

<sup>26</sup>"Lenin commemorato," L'Unità, February 28, 1925. Bordiga and Lenin, "two names beloved by the Roman proletariat," eulogized L'Unità.

<sup>27</sup>"Lenin," Prometeo, I, 3 (March 15, 1924), 47-60.

In May 1924, Bordiga used Prometeo to rationalize the right of the Sinistra to dissent from the policies of the International. Bordiga argued that some questions cannot be solved by resort to simple majorities or calls to discipline. In the past, loyalties to party policies had been used to obstruct revolution; who more than Lenin had been attacked as "impudent, as a disruptor, a violator of party laws," only to become the restorer of Marxism. Right was needed, not obsequiousness to leadership. The International was a voluntary association of parties, and "we cannot accept the formula, however rich in some advantages, of absolute obedience to the leadership." In his article, Bordiga alluded favorably to Trotsky, then under attack from the Triumvirate of Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Stalin.<sup>28</sup>

A second publication to appear was the new party daily, the organ L'Unità. Sponsored by the Comintern it was intended to counter Avanti!. At one time, Gramsci spoke of using such a newspaper as a mouthpiece for all views on the Italian political left,<sup>29</sup> but this intention never materialized, and almost from the beginning L'Unità was wielded as a weapon in the hands of the leadership. In the early issues one found,

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<sup>28</sup>"Organizzazione e disciplina comunista," Prometeo, I, 5 (May 15, 1924), 95-97.

<sup>29</sup>"Lettera inedita," Riv. stor. soc., VII, 18 (1963), 115.

nevertheless, an honesty of reporting which would not have been possible a year later. Hence Grieco in Moscow described the rising opposition gathering in the Russian party around Trotsky, Preobrazhensky, and Kollontai, and how the internal life of the party had been paralyzed by the "crude militarization" imposed during the Tenth Congress of the Soviet CP in 1921.<sup>30</sup>

In February 1924, the PCI introduced the united front by inviting the PSI and the PSU (the Reformists expelled from the PSI in 1922) to join together for the election to parliament due in April. Under the 1923 Fascist-sponsored Acerbo Law, designed to eliminate parliamentary opposition to the regime, the bloc winning at least twenty-five per cent of the votes would be assigned sixty-five per cent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The time seemed propitious for the united front, but neither of the two Socialist parties accepted the offer, and when the Terzini, the pro-International wing of the PSI, joined the PCI in forming an electoral alliance of Proletarian Unity, the PSI expelled them.

Many of the Communist rank and file were bewildered by the united-front tactic, and Togliatti was compelled to assuage their fears. There was no contradiction between the past and

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<sup>30</sup>"Discussione...PC russo," L'Unità, February 14, 1924.



the actual policies being pursued by the PCI, he assured. The party had first to be created (at Livorno), which then permitted "unity with the PSI on a new basis."<sup>31</sup>

The failure of the appeal for a united front was re-enacted on May Day, 1924, after the CGL, the PSI, and the PSU refused to accept a Communist suggestion for a one-day work stoppage. One reason for the failure was that PCI policies were contradictory. In the March 5 issue of Avanti! the PSI had published a Communist party circular, 973R of February 25, containing the following statement: "All the action of the Comintern has as its aim the elimination of the PSI from the political scene."<sup>32</sup> The PSI could hardly be expected to enter into an alliance that was to be a prelude to its own destruction. From the beginning in 1921 the PCI had sought to disintegrate the PSI, but the united-front tactic introduced a duplicity not present earlier, in that the party had to simultaneously embrace and destroy the other working-class organizations. This contradiction was at work when a March editorial in L'Unità blasted Lazzari and Vella as "idiots" for criticizing the Soviet policy of seeking a diplomatic modus vivendi with the Fascist government of Italy.

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<sup>31</sup>"Livorno e oggi," L'Unità, February 17, 1924.

<sup>32</sup>Reported by Humbert-Droz, who was fearful that the incident might turn out highly beneficial to the Sinistra. Cf. Humbert-Droz, op. cit., pp. 204-5.

The behavior of the Soviet ambassador to Italy in 1924 had quickly become a point of extreme embarrassment to the Communists and a disservice to the anti-Fascist cause. In seeking to broaden Soviet ties with Italy, the ambassador had begun to lavish praise on Mussolini. In a letter to the Presidium, Humbert-Droz complained of these activities. "After the banquet in July, which completely compromised us, I don't understand why our ambassador wants to repeat the same error. It seems he has completely overlooked the working class, and I am of the opinion that the Russian party must replace Yurenev and send to Italy an ambassador who doesn't court Fascism, but who keeps in mind the interests of the Italian proletariat."<sup>33</sup> The complaint of Humbert-Droz had little effect and Soviet representatives continued to speak highly of Mussolini. In a second letter, the Comintern secretary spoke of the serious political impact the actions were having. "The many interviews granted by Yurenev, Tykov, E nukidze, with photographs, autographs and dedications to Il Popolo d'Italia the Fascist daily organ, interviews in which they speak of Mussolini as a great man, of the law and order in Italy, and the banquet given Mussolini by Yurenev at the most acute moment of the Matteotti crisis has made it so that even amongst the

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 204-5.

working masses there has risen the belief of a friendship and collaboration between Italy and Russia and hence--from the actions of the two governments--between communism and fascism." As a result, "our party," he continued, "has lost much of its influence...."<sup>34</sup>

The coming of the election introduced an additional internal complication for the PCI: Bordiga's refusal to stand as a candidate. This was a problem only because Bordiga was still the most eminent figure in Italian Communist ranks. This political act in defiance of revolutionary discipline mirrored the depth of Bordiga's disagreement with the policies of the party's leading organs. "Let me remain as a simple worker," he told the leadership, "and nothing will be the worse."<sup>35</sup>

At this time Humbert-Droz, who was out to destroy Bordiga politically because of the latter's opposition to Comintern policies, sent a series of reports to Zinoviev depicting the Sinistra leader as truculent, unbending, and vain.<sup>36</sup> In one report of February 15, Humbert-Droz stressed Bordiga's "abstentionist mentality,"<sup>37</sup> Humbert-Droz had not foreseen

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>35</sup>APC, fascicolo 246, Bordiga's letter of February 8, 1924. Bordiga also indicated that similar disagreements over policy had kept him from accepting leadership positions in the PSI.

<sup>36</sup>Humbert-Droz, op. cit., pp. 70-91.

<sup>37</sup>There is reason to believe that Zinoviev discounted

that an article, "Abstentionist Nostalgia," written by Bordiga would appear on the front page of the February 27 issue of L'Unità opposing the return to that tactic.

Some time in April Bordiga got a look at the notes taken down at the June 1923 ECCI. Scoccimarro had spoken there in defense of the "workers' government" slogan. Writing to him now, Bordiga commented that Scoccimarro had been "terribly Muscovite in his reasoning and exposition." Moreover, he felt that Scoccimarro should not have approved a new policy without an earlier endorsement by the party.<sup>38</sup> And to Terracini he spoke of the general slack in the party ranks, the consequence, he felt, of the new line and of new discontent. "It is not a question of introducing coefficients of purity and morality... but of making the party what it should be, and not a useless organization of functionaries seeking a career, which is positively and technically very different from the organic formation of a communist party."<sup>39</sup> Here Bordiga was suggesting that the passivity in the Communist ranks, of which all complained, was political in origin, and not simply due to the earlier terror. Scoccimarro--deeply involved with the formation

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much of what Humbert-Droz wrote, as did the Centro leadership. Copies of the reports from Humbert-Droz were sent back to the Centro by Terracini in Moscow.

<sup>38</sup>APC, fascicolo 246, letter of April 12, 1924.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., letter of April 16, 1924.

of the Centro--answered that he had always been for a government of workers and peasants. "Now I begin to suspect that you are moving to break relations: that would be too bad should it occur."<sup>40</sup>

In summary, events were proceeding on several levels. Gramsci was bringing a Centro into being, though by April these activities had extended to the FGC and must have become generally known to the upper echelons. Humbert-Droz kept urging the International to act with greater vigor against the Sinistra.<sup>41</sup> Bordiga was constructing a means of independent expression, in the process straining the nerves of the Centro which knew that he was more than a match for them. Unaware of the degree of defection at the top, Bordiga's stand contradicted the word he had given a year before when he pledged blind obedience to the International.<sup>42</sup> All this was played out against a variegated backdrop including gambits with the united front, Soviet wooing of Mussolini, the heightened pressures coming from the Fascist regime, and maneuvers in Moscow which would irretrievably suck the PCI into a struggle whose significance the Centro would miss completely.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., Scoccimarro letter of April 14, 1924.

<sup>41</sup>Humbert-Droz, op. cit., 185-88. Humbert-Droz had a pathological fear of the Sinistra.

<sup>42</sup>APC, fascicolo 180, Bordiga's letter of January 8, 1923.

The April election gave the Fascists their expected majority, 4.3 million ballots, but the Alliance for Proletarian Unity did surprisingly well by electing 19 deputies; 14 of these were Communists, including Gramsci, who entered the parliament for the first time, and 5 were Terzini. Moreover, in the north the combined anti-Fascist vote was quite large,<sup>43</sup> a humiliating fact that unleashed the infuriated Black Shirts to vent their rage particularly around Milan. In an unusual example of wry humor, L'Unità stated that Fascist manipulation of votes in the south had reached such levels that Giolitti, a supporter of the National Bloc, was now put to shame. Communist success was made greater by the low party membership--9,694.<sup>44</sup>

The most noteworthy comment on the election was provided by Bordiga in a front-page article in the April 16 issue of L'Unità: "The Value of an Election." He said that violence was an inescapable accompaniment of politics and history, that the Fascists were expressing a measure of their power, and that despite its success the PCI must not return to the bourgeois

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<sup>43</sup>Spriano, op. cit., p. 340. "The first interesting fact," wrote Spriano, "...is that in the north, with all the count in, the lists of the minority the [opposition] had received more votes than the government."

<sup>44</sup>Reported in L'Unità, April 15, 1924. With the "illegal party" added in, the figure was 12,000. Cf. Spriano, op. cit., p. 338.

democracy of pre-1922 but forge a new political concept resting on the proletariat. Only then would Fascism be beaten. Bordiga's words drew angry editorial reactions from Avanti!, from Giustizia (organ of the PSU), and from Mussolini's Il Popolo d'Italia. Although legitimizing violence the thrust of the article had been against the new PCI tactics. Bordiga had again called for a return to the politics of class. Several days later, the awed L'Unità commented, "For a while now every time Comrade Bordiga speaks it's an earthquake."

But for the Centro the "earthquake" was Como. For reasons not at all clear the party had held no congress since the Congress of Rome in 1922. The terror of 1923 provides only a partial explanation for the cancellation of congresses in 1923 or 1924.<sup>45</sup> A congress in 1924 could have been held abroad. This was done in 1926. The conference at Como was, therefore, the deepest and clearest sounding of party opinion since the Rome Congress. This being the case, why, then, were the opinions of the conference termed consultative and not substantive?<sup>46</sup> By being designated as "consultative" the opinions of the participants could be disregarded by the Centro

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<sup>45</sup> Initially a congress had been scheduled for 1923, at which time the decisions of the Fourth Comintern Congress were also to be discussed. These plans were disrupted by the terror of that year.

<sup>46</sup> Spriano is no help in answering the questions about Como, which he describes as a meeting of "an enlarged central committee."

leadership. In the light of the maneuverings and manipulations employed by the Centro, before and after Como, one can guess that the prior designation of the conference as consultative was a deliberate political act by the new leadership.

In the weeks preceding the conference, Lo Stato Operaio, the new Communist theoretical weekly which had begun publication in 1923, published the motions to be placed before the conference by the three factions--Sinistra, Centro, and Minority--as well as the speeches of the Italian delegates to the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in 1922. The extent of the dissent between the former Sinistra leadership and the Comintern was thus rendered public for all in the party to read.

The theses prepared beforehand by the Centro as guidelines for their tactical views were signed by Gennari, Leonetti, Ravera, Scoccimarro, and Togliatti, with the absence of Gramsci's name being noted by Humbert-Droz.<sup>47</sup> After a period of two years, Gramsci was returning to Italy to take up his duties as a deputy and to be at Como. Bordiga, Grieco, Fortichiari and Repossì signed the theses for the Sinistra, while those of the Minority bore the names of 13, the best known being Tasca, Berti, Platone, and Vota. All in all, the

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<sup>47</sup>Humbert-Droz, op. cit., pp. 153-55. In his summary of the Conference sent to Moscow, Tasca was depicted as a "defender" of the International, Togliatti as "opposed," and Bordiga as "hostile."



participants must have numbered about 70, including 11 members of the CC, 5 interregional secretaries, 46 provincial organizers, and one representative of the FGC.<sup>48</sup>

Togliatti was the first to speak in the name of the majority of the CC. His remarks showed that he was far to the left of the motion presented by the Centro and inspired by Gramsci whose name now appeared with it. After tracing the history of the difference between the old and the new CC's, Togliatti depicted the task facing the leadership as that of bringing the whole PCI to the line of the International, which had emerged as a major factor in European politics. He agreed that there was need to guard against opportunism, and he referred to the current slogan, "a government of peasants and workers," as mere propaganda; even the earlier "workers' government" slogan was open to misunderstanding and had led the German Communists and the International to error. Building a left faction in the International would be a mistake. The real problem facing the PCI was posed by the Minority with its shopworn ideological baggage, whereas collaboration of the Sinistra was indispensable for the well-being of the party.

Togliatti had attacked the Minority and sought to induce the Sinistra to cooperate. Conspicuously absent from

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<sup>48</sup>The breakdown is provided by Spriano whose interesting account appears in his op. cit., pp. 352-61.

his remarks were any references to the PCI past.<sup>49</sup>

Bordiga began his speech by defining the Centro as a group that had assigned itself the noble task of seeking an equilibrium between the PCI and the International. The Sinistra was basically in agreement with the International, except on the matter of fusion. Bordiga was nonetheless critical of the Comintern. Recent elections in France, Germany, and Italy had signaled a defeat for the united front and a victory for the proletarian parties. The International must therefore revise its tactic. "We need a few...clear and precise slogans that do not lend themselves to misinterpretation."<sup>50</sup> Only then would the masses understand. After a defense of the old leadership, Bordiga agreed with Togliatti on the program of action but insisted on the political and organizational autonomy of the party. Discipline in the International should remain formal rather than substantive, and the PCI must stand ready to organize against a Comintern shift to the right. While disagreement remained with the

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<sup>49</sup>My account of Como is based on the very detailed report given in L'Unità, June 5, 1924.

<sup>50</sup>The quotations appearing in my handling of the conference are taken from the summary found in L'Unità; hence they are not verbatim accounts of what was said by the speakers. I am using these quotations to highlight and dramatize the comments made at Como.

International, the Sinistra would not accept positions in leadership. Bordiga paid no heed to the Minority.

Next came Tasca, who pointed to the collaboration between Minority and Centro. From this he went on to attack the policies of the past, especially the Rome Theses. So long as they remained, a contradiction with the views of the Centro would persist. The International had wanted a schism on the right at Livorno, and the Sinistra (and the speakers for the Centro) had attacked the PSI frontally while Tasca and his backers had favored a more subtle approach, and opportunities had been lost. Tasca accused the PCI of preferring to remain in "splendid isolation."

Now came the turn of the organizers, who spoke mostly in support of the Sinistra, but at this point Gramsci intervened. He lamented the existence of a tendency amongst comrades to attack the Centro on the basis of loyalty to "nomenclature," that is, out of an attachment to the label Sinistra. Bordiga had built no faction, but his absence from leadership made him guilty of factionalism. The Ordinovista group had always been on the left but had still been able to see the errors of the Sinistra. Today the situation called for new policies that precluded a return to Bordiga's views. The PCI did not have a majority of the working class--

"We would have had them had we not changed our policy

towards the PSI," interjected Bordiga. "Besides we are in no hurry."

"But we are," answered Gramsci. Time was vital. Moreover, Bordiga did not realize, Gramsci alleged, the importance of the International to the party. Here Gramsci projected as a possible occurrence what was already a fait accompli: "Bordiga's attitude can have as its only consequence that of bringing into being a heterogeneous group that will find reason for unity in the fact of declaring themselves for the International." Noting the lessening of difficulties with the Minority, Gramsci paralleled the Centro's difficulties with Bordiga to the conduct of Trotsky in the Russian party.

Then Tasca condemned the Rome Theses for leading the party into isolation and "sterile pessimism." He gave his approval to the recent work of the CC, and saw the need to win millions of workers and peasants. A settlement with the International was an imperative, he concluded.

The word passed to Togliatti, who continued to seek a Centro-Sinistra accord. The Centro, he said, was an extension of the Sinistra, but it wanted all to agree to the decisions of the International on the basis of conviction. "We would not accept after a regular congress [of the International] a party resigned to follow on discipline." Yet the Rome Theses had to be dropped. "We will work openly to achieve our end.

We will not go to the corridors of the International to beg for power...."

Bordiga commented that the Centro was not in alignment with the International, for that body was already to the right of the Minority. "You comrades of the Centro have done very useful work for the party, but you have not done as good a job with your own thoughts." The International would not accept the program of the Centro, concluded Bordiga, "but the Centro would accept without reservation that of the International."

A vote on the three motions followed. These had been the three motions placed before the CC on April 18. By repudiating the Rome Theses and holding the PCI responsible for difficulties with the International, the motion of the Minority was similar to the motion of the Centro.

For the <u>Sinistra</u>	41	(1 member of the CC, 4 inter-regional secretaries, 35 organizers, and the FGC representative)
For the <u>Minority</u>	10	(4 CC members, 1 interregional secretary, and 5 organizers)
For the <u>Centro</u>	8	(4 CC members and 4 organizers) <sup>51</sup>

The hopes expressed earlier by Scoccimarro, Tasca, Humbert-Droz and Gramsci had not materialized. Como had demonstrated that the Centro was only a minority isolated in the leading organs

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<sup>51</sup> Evidently there were some abstentions, Bordiga amongst them.

of the party. Como should have induced a crisis in the Centro, but led to a change of tactics instead. Gramsci had learned much during his stay in Moscow, and he had returned fortified with the knowledge of how a leadership can manipulate its base. "After Como," wrote Galli in 1958, "Gramsci's only ace was the Communist International."<sup>52</sup> This was not completely accurate, for Gramsci would soon display the other means at his disposal. But henceforth the Centro would guard against any uncontrolled expression of membership opinion.

After the delegates of the PCI had left for Moscow to attend the Fifth Congress scheduled to open in mid-June, Giacomo Matteotti was assassinated on June 10, 1924. For the only time before 1943 Mussolini's grip on the regime was shaken. In the hiatus opened by the Matteotti crisis the PCI began to rapidly recoup its membership losses.

### 3. The Fifth Congress

The Fifth Congress of the International, meeting between June 17 and July 8, was attended by an Italian delegation bringing evidence of the changes that had transpired since the Fourth Congress in 1922. At that time the PCI had been an autonomous body, almost homogeneous in its views. The

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<sup>52</sup> Galli, op. cit., p. 100.

delegation to the Fifth was deeply sundered; as the division between Centro and Minority closed, an unbridgeable chasm opened with the Sinistra, which also happened to speak for most of the party base, as the vote at Como had shown. Moreover, the party's autonomy had been ended with the acceptance of the June 1923 ECCI appointments. Although the Sinistra had won at Como, all the levers of control had remained in the hands of the Centro: the top committees (EC and CC), L'Unità and Lo Stato Operaio, and the subsidies from the International. Notwithstanding those advantages, in June 1924 Bordiga was still widely regarded as the undisputed leader of Italian communism, and most certainly by the PCI membership.

The Fifth Congress reflected another change, also long in maturing. From the outset, the congresses of the International had been used to transmit Russian influence into the parties. In the debates of the Comintern congresses Russian analyses invariably won. The domination was understandable, though by no means inevitable, and had been consistently opposed by the Sinistra representatives. With the Fifth Congress a new element was added, in that the congress was caught up in the struggles between the factions within the Russian party.<sup>53</sup> The Russian leaders now introduced even greater distortion

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<sup>53</sup> See Edward H. Carr, The Interregnum (New York: Macmillan Co., 1954), pp. 235-39.

into the vision of the International; for in forcing foreign delegates to accept factional views these delegates had to further disavow any conflicting reality drawn from their own observations.

The Fifth Congress endorsed Bolshevization. An ECCI had decided in February that the "factory cells were to be the foundation of the communist party,"<sup>54</sup> and all parties would soon be asked to restructure themselves accordingly. Bolshevization became just another link in turning the foreign parties into lifeless replicas of the Bolshevik past.

Zinoviev's conduct and comments to the congress were widely interpreted to signal a shift to the left; but some saw in his maneuvers an attempt by Zinoviev to arrogate to himself the mantle of the recently deceased Lenin. After having stressed that the united front meant unity from below, Zinoviev terminated his introductory remarks with words that might have been lifted from the rhetoric of the Italian Sinistra. "And to conclude...the government of workers and peasants is nothing more than a means of agitation, of propaganda and mobilization of the masses, a synonym for the proletarian dictatorship."<sup>55</sup> This move to the left should have helped the

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<sup>54</sup>Degras, op. cit., II, p. 79.

<sup>55</sup>Humbert-Droz, op. cit., p. 175.



Sinistra, except that it was unreal and unconnected with realities outside the congress hall. Apparently the sham nature of much of the proceedings must have been evident even to many of the participants,<sup>56</sup> and after the congress Ercoli (Togliatti) was to explain to the readership of L'Unità that "the move to the left" was a mirage.<sup>57</sup> In fact the Fifth Congress continued the process of extending conformity and bringing about subordination.

The arriving Italian delegation included spokesmen for all three factions: Bordiga for the Sinistra, Togliatti for the Centro, and Rienzi (Tasca) for the Minority. For Togliatti this was his first trip to Moscow. The delegation had to grapple with a series of problems; these included the need to express itself on general tactics, what to do with the political albatross, the PSI, now that the Terzini had been expelled, and how to settle the question of leadership, since that leadership had been designated at an ECCI and not by a party congress.

The debate over the tactics of the International quickly drew out Bordiga as the main Italian dissident. Tasca continued to criticize the Centro while putting the Minority in accord

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<sup>56</sup>Arthur Rosenberg who was there called the congress "an orgy of rhetorical Radicalism that was wholly unmeaning." Bolshevism, p. 210.

<sup>57</sup>"Andare a sinistra," L'Unità, August 24, 1924. The genesis of the later Togliatti can be traced in his writings of 1924. Very early he learned to master obfuscation.

with the Comintern, and Togliatti, explaining the origin of the Centro, said much the same thing in another form, though he continued to believe that the struggle was against the right. Bordiga's remarks were substantially different.<sup>58</sup>

His challenge was thrown first at the International and its policies. At the Third and Fourth Congresses there had been no real discussion of the draft theses and tactics; now debate was not on the general tactics of that body but on the tactics used between the congresses. One never discussed the ECCI but the ECCI set the limits of discussion. After restating old arguments, he came to the heart of his presentation: he demanded not a movement to the left but a rectification of tactics in conformity with majority opinion in the congress. The Bolshevik leadership, stated Bordiga, was not sufficient to guarantee that the International would keep from degenerating. In the early years of the International, the contribution of the Bolsheviks had been unique, but only because these men had been able to synthesize revolutionary experience. They had emigrated to the West and drawn their theory from the Western proletariat, while 1914 had given them the opportunity to apply Leninism. Leninism was an expression of general proletarian theory, not a Russian novelty. The Soviets had

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<sup>58</sup>Reports on the congress are found in IPC, IV, 41, 45, 49, 50, 51, and 52, all from July 1924.

underestimated the revolutionary potential of the Western proletariat, and faith must be placed in that proletariat, not in the Russian party alone.

In his remarks Bordiga had finally come up with an explanation of the phenomenon of Leninism which related that ideology to the development of European Marxism. Further, he had challenged the Russian domination of the International and their use of that organization. Bordiga was seeking an International that would more closely mirror the international character of the proletariat, and his views were based on the belief that neither the Russian Revolution nor Bolshevism could be used as models for revolution in any Western society.

But the Comintern was rapidly becoming a chorus of Russian voices, and the attacks on Bordiga came from nearly all quarters. A leftwing exponent of the Germany party, Ruth Fischer, claimed that he was helping the right, while Bukharin raised the spectre of abstentionism, accusing the Sinistra leader of wanting to turn the PCI into a sect. "The Italian leftwing comrades are brave and splendid," his sarcasm must have been heavy, "courageous enough to deny facts. We won our proletarian revolution with our tactics and they lost theirs with theirs and now accuse us of being opportunists."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>The Bukharin who emerges from the summaries found in the International Press Correspondence seems hardly the man who

In all probability Bordiga's department accelerated the behind-the-scenes effort to substitute him in the Italian party, a move also dictated by the needs of the Centro, if the faction was to survive the rout at Como. The change in attitude toward the Sinistra would become immediately clear after the congress. But by the Fifth Congress the Sinistra had become unique in the International and stood alone. An impassioned defense of Sinistra views by Rossi (Grieco) was to no avail, and Zinoviev recommended that he read twice daily a quotation from Lenin: "The supreme danger, and perhaps the only danger, to the true revolutionary is to exaggerate the revolutionary situation...." The L'Unità of July 2, 1924, reports a last desperate defense of Bordiga also by Rossi: "It is false to accuse Bordiga of elaborating idealistic Nietzschean theories on a philosophical plane." Zinoviev returned to his flippant attitude in his culminating speech, though he may have had a more serious intent in mind. Having teased and amused the congress with the words, "We have Bordiga for dessert," he then addressed himself dramatically to the Italian Sinistra. "I give my word of honor to Comrade Bordiga publicly, that if the International moves to the right and becomes reformist, I myself will form a left faction."

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wrote the brilliant Economics of the Transformation Period. The rapidity with which degeneration raced through the Bolshevik party was a factor which caught the Sinistra unaware.

In the Italian Commission, an ad hoc group set up to handle the Italian question, a 10-point program of fusion between the PCI and the ex-Socialist Terzini was agreed to. Two thousand Terzini, led by Serrati and Giuseppe Di Vittorio, straggled into Communist ranks, where they were received but not with open arms. The International announced that a new Italian CC would contain 9 representatives from the Centro, four from the Minority, and 4 from the Terzini. The EC would consist of Togliatti, Scoccimarro, and Gramsci from the Centro, Gustavo Mersú from the Minority, and Maffi from the Terzini. (Soon thereafter the rejected PSI rejoined the Second International.) After four years, the Italian question had finally been settled! In an appeal to the PCI's membership--whose views had not been taken into account--the Comintern reported that "the Minority and the Centro are in agreement with the International and should constitute a homogeneous group capable of fighting...the extreme right and the extreme left."<sup>60</sup> In flagrant contradiction to what was said at the congress, Bordiga was elevated to the vice presidency of the body. The bribe was too apparent, and in any case the offer remained unanswered.

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<sup>60</sup> "La lettera," L'Unità, August 30, 1924.

#### 4. Breaking the Sinistra

The appeal of the International had the unparalleled effect of making a majority of the PCI's cadre and base the political enemy. Further, in attempting to reduce the Sinistra to the sect-like category designated by the term "extremist," the International revived a usage last associated with the Maximalists and Reformists, who had employed it against the insurgent Communist wing prior to Livorno. The Fifth Congress had formally settled the Italian question, and now responsibility for disciplining the party was transferred to the new leadership.

Firmly in command, this leadership took on the task in earnest. At an enlarged CC in August approval was extended to the decisions of the recent congress, and Gramsci was elevated to the position of General Secretary, a title borrowed directly from the Soviet party; for the first time the PCI was given a ranked, official leader to substitute in the place of Bordiga. At this meeting Gramsci predicted the rapid downfall of Mussolini. "Will there be an armed conflict? No. A grand style fight will be avoided by the opponents and by the Fascists. The opposite of October 1922 will occur; then the 'March on Rome' was choreographed as part of the molecular process in which the real forces of the bourgeois State (the army, the courts, the police, newspapers, Vatican,

Masonry, etc.) had passed to Fascism. Today these forces are in opposition. If Fascism resisted it would be destroyed . . . ."<sup>61</sup> Mussolini was no statesman or dictator, no representative of national life, but a phenomenon out of rural folklore. As a second step against the Sinistra, Prometeo, Bordiga's periodical, was suppressed.<sup>62</sup>

In September L'Unità began to report meetings of local provincial bodies, which, without exception, were attended by representatives from the EC or CC, and where approval was extended to the decisions of the Fifth Congress. Typical of these meetings was one held at Como in the presence of a member of the EC and the interregional secretary; the meeting ended with a condemnation of "the opportunist to the right and to the left."<sup>63</sup> In those instances when the Sinistra was not condemned it was invited to join the leadership. By October 9, L'Unità claimed that the more important provincial congresses had been held.

The only congress reported in detail by L'Unità was the congress at Naples. Both Gramsci and Bordiga addressed the

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<sup>61</sup>L'Unità, August 27, 1924.

<sup>62</sup>APC, fascicolo 241, letter of August 26, 1924.

<sup>63</sup>L'Unità, September 20, 1924. Similar meetings were reported at Turin, Massa-Carrara and Luca, Padua, Umbria, Bologna, Florence, Milan (no vote), Cremona, Alessandria (no vote), Bari, Cosenza (no vote), Verona, etc.

assembled body. Gramsci emphasized the homogeneity of the CC, now that the Minority had been assimilated, and invited the Sinistra to enter, adding that abstentionism by Bordiga was tantamount to factionalism. Bordiga began his analysis by saying that the Centro was now where the Minority had been two years earlier. "Had you wanted the Centrale to be an expression of the party you should have had the leadership picked by the PCI, not by Moscow." After further discussion, Gramsci indicated that a vote on the two views was not necessary. In any case, Naples was a recognized Sinistra stronghold. The report in L'Unità appended an editorial comment that in "the speech of Comrade Bordiga there was no indication of practical work...."<sup>64</sup>

Gramsci's inner feelings about the congress were of a somewhat different order than those reported in L'Unità, and he passed these feelings on to Humbert-Droz (if the emissary is to be believed) who relayed them to the Presidium in Moscow. Gramsci charged that Bordiga had conducted himself "demagogically," and had put the Comintern on trial. Bordiga, Gramsci maintained, had used Trotsky's popularity to win an easy victory without getting to the bottom of the Russian crisis.<sup>65</sup> Within a few

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<sup>64</sup>"Relazioni di Gramsci e Bordiga," L'Unità, October 15, 1924.

<sup>65</sup>Humbert-Droz, op. cit., p. 188.



days Humbert-Droz reported again on these local congresses. "The Sinistra, led by Bordiga, is very unhappy with the action of the Executive [Committee] of the party for limiting the Sinistra's right to expression and for seeking, in the course of the informative congresses, to move the party onto the line of the International. The Sinistra would like a wide debate amongst all the tendencies at every congress, and believes that until that moment the party should be more administered than led by the Executive."<sup>66</sup>

By the fall of 1924 the Centro was employing the leading party organs to manipulate in being the formal majority it had not been able to win through conviction. Writing to the Comintern in October, Togliatti reported appointing 5 new inter-regional secretaries, "comrades who share the beliefs of the Central Committee," while two who were of "the extreme left were substituted."<sup>67</sup> A month later Togliatti confessed to Moscow that despite these and other efforts the party "has not profoundly altered its opinion from the one indicated at the conference of last May."<sup>68</sup> The activities of the leadership

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., pp. 212-13, Humbert-Droz approved of the restrictions placed on the Sinistra.

<sup>67</sup>Letter of October 7, 1924, reprinted in Rinascita, September 15, 1962.

<sup>68</sup>Letter of November 11, 1924, reprinted in Rinascita, September 29, 1962.

had become the subject of an exchange between Naples and Rome. "The International and the present leadership," wrote Bordiga, "want to escape from the situation created by our refusal, and they wish to get the party to accept the International on the basis of discipline and conviction. Not only are they in their right but it is their precious duty. Except that to do this they employ means that are damaging to the movement."

To realize their dream the recent provincial congresses were organized using a curious system that merits being called, more than dictatorial, Giolittian. The right of the congresses to express themselves varied according to what the prognostications were. When possible, support for the Centrale was voted; in other cases approval was extended only to directives of the V Congress, or to the famous invitation to Bordiga to enter the Centrale. When, as happened in the more important congresses, the Sinistra could easily demonstrate that it was the majority, the congresses were not allowed to vote on political questions under the pretext that they were merely consultative.<sup>69</sup>

By the beginning of 1925 the campaign to realign the party had failed to win over the base.<sup>70</sup> Coupled with the ineffectiveness of the anti-Fascist Aventine Opposition, a fact strikingly demonstrated by Mussolini in his brutal January 3, 1925 speech when he assumed responsibility for the

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<sup>69</sup>APC, fascicolo 246, letter of November 2, 1924.

<sup>70</sup>Spriano, op. cit., p. 442.

murder of Matteotti and defied the opposition to impeach him, the failure of the Centro left the leadership in a precarious and politically vulnerable position. Cut off from its political base, blocked in its united-front maneuvers, hemmed in by the threatening violence and restrictions of the regime, the only avenue of maneuver left to the beleaguered Centro was to execute a "retreat to the front,"<sup>71</sup> in this case towards the International.

The leadership had been jostled into moving in this direction by another circumstance, the rising clamor around the Trotsky case. Avanti! had devoted much attention to this affair, seeing in it evidence of the political intolerance within the International. Avanti! warned Bordiga of the fate awaiting dissenters within the ranks of the Comintern, even though the Sinistra represented a majority of the PCI.<sup>72</sup> The problem raised by the Trotsky question had become acute for

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<sup>71</sup>This expression was used in an ironic sense by Tasca to describe how the National Council of the CGL and the directorate of the PSI maneuvered out of the revolutionary situation created by the working-class seizure of the factories in September 1920. See Angelo Tasca, Nascita avvento del fascismo (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1950), p. 121.

<sup>72</sup>"Trotsky e i problemi della rivoluzione," Avanti!, February 1-2, 1925. On the 19 the Avanti! had this to say: "According to information given out by the Central Committee, one group of the party, the majority because it is the Sinistra, has adhered to Trotsky's ideas....Against this faction, which we repeat is the majority, the minority in leadership...."

the Centro, with the arrival at L'Unità of a long analysis of Trotsky's Lessons of October,<sup>73</sup> written by Bordiga, and intended for publication. Having pondered Trotsky's polemic and the Russian situation, Bordiga thought that he had found evidence of the correctness of the policies advocated by the PCI prior to the change of leadership by the International. The lesson of October had become very clear to Bordiga: "WE CAN AWAIT THE MASSES, AND WE MUST, BUT THE PARTY CANNOT, AT THE PRICE OF DEFEAT, EXPECT THE MASSES TO AWAIT IT." In summary, Bordiga wrote, "Our greatest elector is the rifle in the hands of the insurgent worker." In the course of this analysis Bordiga insisted that Trotsky be judged on the basis of what he did and wrote, and not on the basis of factional needs.<sup>74</sup>

The article had possible uses for the Centro, not all negative. Publication would undoubtedly render a disservice to the anti-Trotsky cause in Moscow, and the reasoning of the article tended to expose the claim of the leadership that it remained revolutionary. On the other hand, the article did firmly identify Bordiga with Trotsky. The dilemma was resolved by forwarding the piece to Moscow, which blocked publication

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<sup>73</sup>Issued in late 1924, Trotsky utilized this work to strike at Zinoviev and Kamenev, as well as to generalize against those in the revolutionary party who draw back from the seizure of power on the eve of revolution.

<sup>74</sup>Article in APC, fascicolo 340. Dated "Naples February 8, 1925, "La Quistione Trockij," the back bears a Moscow marking in Cyrillics.

and, at the same time, invited Bordiga to attend the coming session of the ECCI.

Meanwhile the Italian leadership made known its own solidarity with the anti-Trotsky cause in the Russian party. This motion of the Central Committee was, one and the same time, an attack on Trotsky and Bordiga.<sup>75</sup> Proclaiming Trotskyism as "a pessimistic vision" of the world revolution, and declaring that counterrevolution in Russia and abroad [in Italy, the PSI] had gathered to Trotsky's banners, the text elaborated the need for Bolshevization and unanimity of views. The "role of leaders" [Trotsky and Bordiga] was denounced, while declaring counterrevolutionary any attempt to reopen the question of Trotsky. Bordiga was attacked again for not having joined up with the leadership.

Two events in early 1925 illustrate the gulf being created within the PCI. The first was an outburst of rank-and-file feeling in Milan; the other, an ideological reconstruction that was soon to be foisted on Bordiga. At the Università Proletaria, a working-class evening school of long standing, situated in the Castello Sforzesco at the center of Milan, Bordiga delivered a lecture on the role of the middle class in capitalist society. Milan was a well-known Sinistra

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<sup>75</sup>"Mozione sulla bolscevizzazione," L'Unità, February 18, 1925.

stronghold, and earlier in January Repossi, a major figure in the Milanese movement, had been suspended from activity for a number of months.<sup>76</sup> This move by the Centro against the Sinistra had struck at the very core of working-class Milanese Communism. On the evening of March 22 three thousand Communists and sympathizers arrived to greet Bordiga with flowers and "waves of applause." Hundreds ran out after the lecture to surround and delay his departing automobile.<sup>77</sup>

The event was remarkable on more than one count. First, the large gathering represented an act of defiance directed, perhaps, as much against the repressive actions of the Centro as against the regime of Mussolini. Second, this was probably the largest meeting of Communists in the years before the outlawing of all political parties in 1926. The arrangements of the evening had undoubtedly been planned by the local Sinistra and many attending the lecture may have been drawn from the numerous Sinistra strongholds throughout Piedmont, Lombardy, and Emilia. Yet the outpouring of feeling was spontaneous and deep. By 1925 Bordiga had been a recognized leader of the Sinistra for at least a decade, and his stature

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<sup>76</sup> APC, fascicolo 340, document No. 6.

<sup>77</sup> "La conferenza del compagno Bordiga," L'Unità, March 24, 1925.

as a Marxist and as a Communist leader was unmatched by anyone in Italy. Bordiga personified that generation of activists who had come to maturity with the war and il dopoguerra, the postwar years. These revolutionaries had seen their hopes for socialism dashed by the policies pursued by the Maximalists. At the news of the event in Milan, the harried men of the Centro sprang to take counter-measures: the local Communist leadership in Milan was dissolved (this removed Fortichiari), while Terracini sent an explanatory letter to the International.<sup>78</sup> The incident at Milan was to remain the largest and last public show of esteem felt by the rank-and-file for Bordiga--a dernier salut, a final farewell, to their fallen leader.

The second event was the enlarged ECCI session held in Moscow during March and April. Although Gennari had gone on a special mission to Naples to persuade Bordiga to attend,<sup>79</sup> the latter had declined, giving as his excuse "family reasons."<sup>80</sup> Present from Italy were Gramsci, Scoccimarro, Vittorio Flecchia, Telini, and Grieco. The "equation Trotsky-Bordiga,"<sup>81</sup> introduced by Gramsci at Como and further developed by the February CC,

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<sup>78</sup>APC, fascicolo 313, letter of April 7, 1925.

<sup>79</sup>De Clementi, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>80</sup>APC, fascicolo 340, Bordiga's letter of July 19, 1925.

<sup>81</sup>The expression is Spriano's.

was now carried to completion. In remarks to the ECCI Scoccimarro attributed Bordiga's mistakes to a methodology that was both "too abstract" and "foreign to the living dialectics of Leninism"; Bordiga saw the party as an entity unto itself and not "as part of the working class"; between Trotsky and Bordiga there existed affinities; both relied on a mechanical articulation of dialectics; both were opposed to the application of Bolshevization to Western Europe. "Truthfully Bolshevism has given us tactics that have universal applicability." Scoccimarro hinted that Bordiga held Lenin responsible for the German fiasco of 1923. Bordiga had never abandoned abstentionism as shown by his refusal to capture a majority of the working class. Bordiga stood for inflexible tactics and a party of leaders. "All this to show that Bordiga's concepts of the party are mistaken."<sup>82</sup>

Scoccimarro's attack on Bordiga had been massive and, by being delivered before the leading body of the Comintern, bore the imprimatur of the International. All the pressure of that body was now being turned against the Sinistra. Results were soon forthcoming, and a number of minor incidents now indicated what was going on inside the Italian leadership. Humbert-Droz reported to the Italian Commission that Grieco had begun to weaken and was detaching himself from the Sinistra.

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<sup>82</sup>L'Unità, April 18 and June 28, 1925.



Scoccimarro's remarks were reprinted in L'Unità, becoming another thrust against the party's left wing. After Scoccimarro's speech before the ECCI, Stalin met Gramsci and Scoccimarro in the hall and asked them to attack Trotsky; they agreed, and upon returning Scoccimarro promptly did so.<sup>83</sup>

#### 4. Trial by L'Unità

In Volume II of his Socialism in One Country, E. H. Carr covers the methodological campaign undertaken against Trotsky in the fall of 1924, the time of the appearance of Lessons of October, and the early months of 1925, when the International was harnessed to the task, as we have just seen with the use of Scoccimarro. Carr describes how the "lower party organs were mobilized to express detestation of Trotsky's heresies and new confidence in the party leadership," while mobilization of the press was "equally intense."<sup>84</sup> What had happened earlier in the Soviet Union now was repeated in Italy.

Sometime in the spring of 1925 the Centro decided to crush the Sinistra at whatever cost, an extreme move made necessary by the failure of earlier efforts. The stubbornness of the membership combined with the difficulties pressing in

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<sup>83</sup> Berti, op. cit., pp. 218-19.

<sup>84</sup> Socialism in One Country (New York: Macmillan, 1958-64), II, pp. 3-35.

from the outside seem to have induced an intense desperation and paranoia amongst the leaders. As before, the central figure remained Gramsci, though abetted by a number of lieutenants who helped him form a transmission belt over which Soviet practice was fed into the Italian party.

At a meeting of the Central Committee Gramsci renewed his attack on the Sinistra, using Lenin as his testimony. The maximum weakness of our party, said Gramsci, "is that characterized by Lenin--the love of revolutionary poses and superficial phrases being the most revealing trait not of Bordiga but of his followers." Bordiga had crystalized, he maintained, a permanent state of pessimism and sectarianism. "The line needed to control this weakness is Bolshevization."<sup>85</sup> The ominous note in the statement by Gramsci was that the attack had been directed against the Sinistra base, the rank and file of the party.

By 1925 Bordiga was back at his profession as a construction engineer,<sup>86</sup> which probably meant the cutting off of party

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<sup>85</sup>Comunicato del CC," L'Unita, July 3, 1925. From a comparison of the text of this motion with the remarks made by Zinoviev at the Fifth Congress (which Gramsci did not attend), it is clear that Zinoviev not Lenin was the author of the "testimony." Cf. IPC, IV, 52 (July 30, 1924).

<sup>86</sup>Report of the prefect of Naples (number 346), March 23, 1925, ACS, VCPC, busta Amadeo Bordiga.

subventions. On May 26 L'Unità announced the beginning of preparations for the third party congress. Scoccimarro wrote to Moscow on June 4 to complain that a charge made by Zinoviev at the Enlarged ECCI, that Bordiga had gone over to the extreme right, was boomeranging. "Naturally no worker believes us. The charge becomes a polemical argument against us." In the same letter he assured the Comintern that there was no danger of a schism in the Italian party.<sup>87</sup> In a few days a press campaign was unleashed in L'Unità which was without a precedent in the history of Italian radicalism.

L'Unità of June 7 contained a communique from the Central Committee which declared that some Communists "styling themselves as the Italian Sinistra" had mistakenly taken 1925 for 1919-20, the period preceding the Livorno schism. Having been rejected by "the masses of the party," these elements were rendering a disservice to the PCI by their use of "extreme phrases and poses," at the very time when the party was engaged against Fascism and the semi-Fascism of the Aventine Opposition. As a consequence, Onorato Damen, M. Manfredi, Carlo Venegone, Mario Lanfranchi, Repossi, and Fortichiari--all political leaders of the Sinistra--were being suspended from the party. Moreover, these men were also accused of having

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<sup>87</sup> APC, fascicolo 313, letter of June 4, 1925.

founded a factional Committee of Understanding.<sup>88</sup>

Along with the communique appeared a letter from the suspended leaders addressed to the Executive Committee. Dated June 1, that is, several days after the announced opening of preparations for the party congress, the group requested that the EC permit free expression of all views during the preparations for the congress and at the congress. Further, they asked that the Sinistra be present at all provincial congresses of the party, and that the columns of L'Unità be opened to views held by the left wing. The letter was followed by an editorial comment expressing doubts concerning the good intentions of the signers.

The same issue of L'Unità printed the bodies of two letters, dated April 25 and May 22, that had fallen into the hands of the Centro. The letters described how a group of the Sinistra had formed a Committee of Understanding to defend their views and to prove that Bordiga was not alone. One letter was enumerated "Circular No. 1" and bore the seal of the Committee of Understanding. With the letters was the reaction of the Executive Committee. The EC called on the whole party to mobilize against the group, for the Committee of Understand-

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<sup>88</sup> Not only does much of the phraseology of the communique appear in the earlier writings of Gramsci, but the wording used to describe the period of 1925 is an almost word-for-word repetition of lines found in the editorial written by Gramsci for the March 15, 1924 issue of Ordine Nuovo. See La formazione, p. 359.

ing, it alleged, was the entering wedge of a new schism, while the absence of the name of Bordiga was nothing less than a sinister maneuver. The EC asked all members to display their political loyalty and to remain steadfast to their revolutionary duty, even to the point of breaking the most profound personal ties.

Once the revelations of June 7 are extracted from charges surrounding them, it becomes clear that by the spring the Sinistra had made finally the first organizational moves in its own defense. The existence of the seal--which was never denied--and the beginning of enumeration were evidence that the left wing was preparing to stand and fight a long factional battle to regain control of the party in which it was the majority. In all likelihood, Scoccimarro was aware of the campaign about to be launched when he wrote the June 4 letter denying the possibility of a schism in the party. The evidence suggests, thus, that the charge of schism was a deliberate falsehood, a means of panicking and mobilizing the membership. While the existence of a seal was to be cited time and time again as proof of a plot to split the party, the fact was that the annihilation of the Sinistra by the Centro had begun.

The leadership made it clear on June 8 that there would be no open discussion in the party. Under a masthead "Against Schism, Factions, For the Iron Unity of the Party," L'Unità ridiculed the Committee of Understanding, charging

that its purpose was "to lay in the party a foundation for the permanent process of disintegration." The Committee members were compared to the "traitorous" Paul Levi and Frossard. Article 27 of the Theses of Bolshevization also appeared in the issue: "The Bolshevik party does not consider internal democracy of the party as an absolute principle."

The campaign was now a daily feature in L'Unita. Zinoviev was quoted in the June 12 issue as having said that the Bolsheviks had acquired their political character by fighting against "the liquidators on the left." And Bukharin is said to have confirmed that Bordiga "had obeyed as long as Lenin lived; now he says: Lenin is dead, I can form a faction." Both remarks had been made before the earlier ECCI session, and they indicate the extent of the coordinated political assault against Bordiga.

The L'Unita of June 12 also scoffed at the request for free discussion found in the June 1 letter. "We can state without being authoritarian (giolittismo) that the masses of the party are not the only arbiter and do not decide independently on the soundness of various political opinions. One opinion and current must always prevail." That opinion was identified with the views of the group siding with the International. Luigi Longo repeated the same message on June 17: in discussions preceding a congress the EC has a right "to assign privileges to its backers."

On June 13, L'Unità reported that Vicenza had rallied to the leadership; on June 16 it was Como, and Bologna on the seventeenth. By the twentieth, Venice, Milan, and Bergamo had also sworn allegiance.

On June 19 a short note from Bordiga appeared which had been written on June 8, the day following the opening of the press campaign against the Sinistra. Bordiga confirmed his association with the Committee of Understanding and requested time to answer to the many "false accusations" made in the press.

His letter was followed by a commentary charging that the haste Bordiga had demonstrated in ranging himself with the Committee was evidence of his opposition to the EC. L'Unità rejected Bordiga's insinuation about the absence of a free debate. The formation of a faction raised the danger of a schism, and that was why the Central Committee had not opened the debate, proceeding instead to mobilize the party. "The letter [ of June 1 ] to the EC was an attempt to give the Committee a legality...an attempt to hoodwink the leadership of the party."

On June 21 L'Unità printed a letter criticizing the press campaign. The correspondent wrote that the campaign was having a disastrous effect on the ranks, and that it was being directed against a current which had wanted nothing more than "to intervene in the discussion in a democratic sense." What

better proof of Sinistra loyalty, the correspondent continued, than that, when the Sinistra found itself in disagreement with the International, it surrendered leadership and returned to the ranks.

The answer of L'Unità is both typical and revealing: "There can be no discussion between violators of discipline and the party, but we publish this letter of MV because it reflects-- and not accidentally--the simple-minded attempts of a few partisans of the left faction to pass off the Committee of Understanding as a merely honest matter, and the Centrale-- which enjoys the approval of the International--as a group of perverted and fanatical factionalists...."

Repeatedly during the campaign, L'Unità drummed into its readers that the Centro was justified in its actions by the loyalty it gave to the International. The Gramscian thesis of the party's origin--loyalty to the International--was the rationale used to legitimize the Centro's campaign in 1925.

On June 23, L'Unità reported the support of Parma, Vimercate, and Monza. When the left stronghold of Novara announced that it had suspended judgment until all the documents appeared in L'Unità, the leadership interpreted this to mean that Novara was accusing the Centrale of fabricating evidence. The meeting of the Committee in Naples on May 12--the very day of a meeting of the Centrale-- was proof,



L'Unità insisted, of a nation-wide conspiracy against the party and the International.<sup>89</sup>

On the twenty-sixth, after three weeks of intense press campaigning, the EC announced that the danger of factionalism had been reduced and contained. The attacks on the Sinistra continued, followed by the publication of the speeches and decisions of the March-April ECCI. Bordiga's suppressed article on Trotsky appeared on July 4, now that the latter had been twice condemned by the Soviet party and the International. For good measure, Scoccimarro's attack on Trotsky was also thrown in. "Fighting Trotskyism," concluded Scoccimarro, "means to oppose deviation in the defense of Leninism." No one could possibly miss the message that opposing Trotsky abroad meant fighting Bordiga at home. Meanwhile, L'Unità announced the support of Reggio Calabria, Sondrio, Pavia, Biella, Novara, Padua, Lecce, Rome, Avellino, and Pesaro.

Evidence of the backing given to the leadership by the International was shown with the publication in the July 2 L'Unità of a telegram from the Presidium ordering the immediate dissolution of the Committee of Understanding. A refusal to comply would have given the Centro another issue

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<sup>89</sup> L'Unità, June 24, 1925.

with which to bludgeon the Sinistra. The order was therefore executed under protest, but, with the disbanding of the Committee, the Sinistra was left without any organized defense. With the aid of the International, the Centro leadership had outmaneuvered the Sinistra, and the latter's last hope remained the loyalty of the party base.

In the same issue of July 2 appeared an undated letter from Bordiga,<sup>90</sup> in which he denied that the Committee had ever thought of leaving the party, and he accused the Centrale of having mounted a virulent campaign. He alleged that the Committee had been formed only after representatives of the Centro had begun to commandeer the provincial congresses and remove the Sinistra leaderships, including Fortichiari at Milan and Bordiga at Naples.

Following what was now the customary editorial practice, Bordiga's letter was prefaced by a statement from the CC: "...the Central Committee deems it necessary to correctly answer Comrade Bordiga, who refrains from using in his letter the insane and provocative language characteristic... of the other documents [of the Sinistra]." Below the letter an accompanying note recapitulated the Gramscian version of the PCI's origins: the mass of the party had always been with

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<sup>90</sup>The letter had been written on June 17 and publication delayed two weeks.

the International.

A second letter from Bordiga, written on July 12, appeared on the twenty-second. He asked for an end to the charges and countercharges, pleading that the time had come for a serious discussion of the problems facing the PCI. These difficulties did not stem from the continued presence of Bordiga, and his expulsion would not remove the problems facing the PCI. "My own expulsion, which Comrade Humbert-Droz courteously indicates as the only foreseeable end to the crisis, would solve nothing, because I am sure that my spectre would not cease to revolve about the triumphant leaders of the party disturbing their much sought-after sleep." He contested the explanation given for his removal from the leadership of the Neapolitan section--and first made known to him through L'Unità--namely, the continued police surveillance; the move was in reality just another blow against the Sinistra.

In the closing days of July, on the twenty-sixth and twenty-eighth, there appeared in L'Unità a rare exchange in print between Bordiga and Gramsci. The issue was Bolshevization. Amongst his many arguments Bordiga stated that Bolshevization seemingly belittled the role of revolutionary intellectuals to the advantage of the party's working-class membership, but, in reality, by confining the proletarians to narrow factory cells Bolshevization increased the likelihood that they would

be manipulated by a careerist bureaucracy. Under the Centro only intellectuals and no proletarians sat in the Executive Committee, whereas under the Sinistra this body had included two members from the working-class (Repossi and Fortichiari). Bordiga maintained that the International had changed after the 1921 congress in violation of what Lenin had intended, and he repeated his criticism of the old Ordinovista view. Gramsci used a series of citations to prove that Bolshevization was in keeping with Leninism, and he denied that there had been any moving away from original goals by the International. He recalled once again the praise Lenin had given the Ordine Nuovo editorial of May 8, 1920. Gramsci then accused Bordiga of having referred to the Ordinovisti "with malevolent remarks, full of hatred, rancor, not intending to cancel the differences but to deepen and render them unbridgeable." Bordiga had actually written, "The contrary error is that of syndicalism, of which the doctrine of the Ordinovisti is a special case. In the beginning the latter found the magic formula to be organizational: the factory councils, and all was reduced to this--party, economic revolution, the workers' state. In all these manifestations, there is an anti-Leninist and anti-Marxist survival...."

While the public campaign against the Sinistra occupied the columns of L'Unità, Bordiga addressed an anguished letter

to the Central Committee on July 19. For the first--and possibly the last--time he dropped his guard and spoke of his family's condition. The occasion for this was the explanation Bordiga had given for not attending the spring ECCI, namely "family reasons," a phrase which was then used by L'Unità to taunt him repeatedly and publicly, insinuating that Bordiga had placed personal needs ahead of party obligations. In his letter Bordiga turned the phrase around and applied it to those who went to Moscow "for reasons of family." The meaning was double-edged: it could apply to the Centro, which had obtained its mandate from the Comintern, or, more likely, to Gramsci, who had married and started a family during his stay in Russia. Bordiga mentioned the personal sacrifice he had forced his family to undergo, while he had attended to party matters. "If anyone sacrificed his family it was I: on many occasions they were hungry at home and the consequences are, unfortunately, very evident. When I was permanently at the head of the party, I did not go to see my young son,<sup>91</sup> who was declared mortally ill by a doctor, who will still testify.<sup>92</sup>"

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<sup>91</sup> Sickly as a boy, Bordiga's son grew up to be a mystic.

<sup>92</sup> APC, fascicolo 340, letter of July 19, 1925.

The letter also contained a defense of the Sinistra, and Bordiga indicated a willingness to accept the Centro's proposal of sending all charges and documents to a Control Commission in the International for adjudication.

The answer from the Centrale came following a month of silence, with the arrest of Terracini cited as reason for delay. Bordiga was informed by the EC of their decision not to publish his letter. "The reason? They are obvious (intuitive)." A two-page declaration was appended elaborating why party needs dictated suppression.<sup>93</sup>

Writing again on August 30 Bordiga accepted the explanation given for the EC's decision, but at the same time he backed out of the agreement to send the charges against the Centro to the Control Commission. Bordiga argued that the move to refer matters to that body was just a means to evade discussion at home. He pleaded, though, that L'Unita print a short, enclosed letter, wherein Bordiga informed the party that he had not remained silent concerning the charges. His letters had simply not been published.<sup>94</sup> After another month, Bordiga received a brief communication from Ercoli (Togliatti). "Dear Comrade, We inform you that the Executive

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<sup>93</sup> APC, fascicolo 341, letter of August 18, 1925.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., letter of August 30, 1925.

Committee of the party has decided not to publish the letter [of August 30] in question. Instead L'Unità will print a statement by the EC, a copy of which is included."<sup>95</sup>

Ottorino Perrone informed the leadership in September that in light of the coming party congress the leading members of the Sinistra intended to meet for discussion and requested the presence of a representative from the EC. The response was forthright: "We inform you that the Executive Committee has denied your request for the meeting of the Sinistra. The reasons are so obvious that had you thought about it no letter would have been written."<sup>96</sup>

These incidents sounded the death knell of the Sinistra, and the agony of that crisis found expression in a letter from Repossi to Zinoviev. He reminded the President of the International of the promise made to the Sinistra at the closing of the Fifth Congress. The fact was that the truth about Bordiga was not being told to the party, seventy per cent of which supported the Sinistra.<sup>97</sup> Let the party know the truth, that the Sinistra was not opposed to the

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid., letter of September 22, 1925.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., letter of September 17 and answer of September 27, 1925.

<sup>97</sup>This estimate of the Sinistra's strength is in keeping with statements made by the Avanti! and acknowledgments made by Togliatti.

International, and one would see the fur fly. "And here lies the dishonesty, for the majority is with us." The Centro would succeed because the party was now a mass of workers led by obedient bureaucrats; "not love, no line, none of that, but bureaucracy and spying amongst the comrades...that is the Italian party."

Repossi deserves to be quoted further, for he was a representative of the proletarian movement that had created the party, but which was now being destroyed to make way for another genre of Communism. "Pardon my frankness, dear Comrade, but you know it already. I'm not accustomed to diplomatic subtleties. The first time I spoke with you, you asked if I was against fusion with the Terzini. I answered clearly, No! Umberto [Terracini] urged me sotto voce to hide the fact. Well, I tell you honestly all pretense disgusts me. Those who live or have lived in the factory and have felt in their souls the passion of the proletariat's struggle cannot simulate; they know how to call a spade a spade...." Repossi's final words have since acquired an arresting--even a mocking quality not originally intended: "When the International will have returned to its origin, I hope, Comrade Zinoviev, that it will be able to count on you."<sup>98</sup> Following a mock trial, a

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<sup>98</sup>Repossi's letter to Comrade Zinoviev (number 3287), August 28, 1925, ACS, VCPC, busta Luigi Reposi.



screaming Zinoviev was shot to death in 1936, while the Centro leadership he had brought to power nodded its approval.

#### 5. The End of the Sinistra

Jointly with the campaign in the press and the use of the International,<sup>99</sup> the leadership tore at the Sinistra through the party network. The changes of interregional secretaries, the removal of Bordiga and Fortichiari,<sup>100</sup> and the manipulation of the provincial congresses had been merely introductory steps in this direction. From the archival papers of 1925 enough evidence can be obtained to get a glimpse of how the party was being ripped apart all over Italy to fit into the image being sent down from above. The attack here was directed against the party base, the last holdout of the Sinistra.

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<sup>99</sup>During the months when the Sinistra was being destroyed no indication of this was given by Humbert-Droz. Indeed his silence and that of the International signalized where sympathy lay. Given the dependence of the Centro it is likely that their plans were first discussed with the Russian leadership; this would account for the silence in Moscow. However, since the published volume of Humbert-Droz represents a selection from his archives, the possibility remains that some day we may see his reports documenting the agony of the Sinistra. Humbert-Droz died in 1971.

<sup>100</sup>There is a report that the CC suspended Perrone, Damen, Repossi, and Fortichari in August on charges of being "followers of Bordiga." See reports: number 34792, 1926, and number 24 660/ 484 34, April 15, 1932, ACS, VCPC, busta 3403.

The operation turned into the first significant purge in the history of the PCI. A letter from Rusconi, evidently a functionary in the Neapolitan region, referred to the dissolution and reconstruction of the party at Salerno. Speaking of a Nicola Fiore, a man described as being "very harmful to our movement," Rusconi added, "his being part of the Sinistra has nothing to do with it."<sup>101</sup> Renzo De Felice's study of the Italian parties in 1926 found evidence that the Pavia section had been dissolved, and that the Milan section "overturned."<sup>102</sup> One enthusiastic interregional secretary spoke of the "extremist fortresses falling one at a time." Novara was for the Centrale, and Alessandria had "spontaneously" discharged its organizer.<sup>103</sup>

A letter from yet another functionary, Landuzzi, in the south contained these lines. "If [Francesco] Marabito is liquidated, as I hope, no one will think of factionalism, which should not exist." The report continued, "Almost sure I will pursue the same line with [Fortunato] La Camera."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Letter of July 29, 1925, ACS, PS, busta 1903, fascicolo Bolletini e Circolari.

<sup>102</sup>"La situazione dei partiti anti-fascisti alla vigilia della loro soppressione secondo la polizia fascista," Riv. stor. soc., IX, No. 25/6 (1966), 79-96.

<sup>103</sup>Letter of August 5, 1925 (number 4975-4976), ACS, PS, busta 1902, fascicolo Bolletini e Circolari.

<sup>104</sup>Letter of August 6, 1925 (number 5011), ACS, PS, busta 103, fascicolo Bolletini e Circolari.

Both men had and been arrested and put on trial with Bordiga and the others during the famous court case of 1923. Landuzzi added, "You know I prefer to obey and not to lead; if you give the organizer of Naples the power over Sicily, the problem of organizational accommodation will be solved." During the course of one such accommodation, Bordiga was substituted in the leadership of the Neapolitan section. The explanation given for this action was that continuous police surveillance prevented the carrying out of his responsibilities. In November, two months before the Lyons Congress, the Neapolitan section was dissolved. "We believe you will agree with us," the Centro wrote to Bordiga, "that it is preferable to have a small group in Naples which might initially undertake simple propaganda, rather than a section of 400 which is unreliable in doing systematic party work." The reorganization meant a revision of the membership, and Bordiga was told that matters would be improved if the membership was halved.<sup>105</sup>

A prefectural report from Trieste in July noted that members who had supported the Committee of Understanding had been expelled and their readmission refused.<sup>106</sup> In answering to the charges raised by a member in the same general area.

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<sup>105</sup>APC, fascicolo 341, letter of November 19, 1925.

<sup>106</sup>The report of the prefect of Trieste (number 33533), September 2, 1925, APC, PS, busta 107, fascicolo Trieste.

namely that the leadership of the PCI was guilty of expelling those disagreeing with it, the interregional secretary answered, "And in the good name of comrades who are functionaries of the Party...we are going to shove the insinuation down your throat."<sup>107</sup> From Venice came news that the Communist section was dissolved in January 1925.<sup>108</sup>

Resistance did not always fold easily in the grass-roots. A report from Genoa in December indicated that provisional committees had voted 4 for the Centro and 2 for the Sinistra. But the "situation at the base is more unfavorable to us." One sector had gone to the left, and another did not show up. At meetings "a member of the provincial level always intervenes for us." Will we have a majority? "It is difficult to say." From this report one suspects that Alessandria had not been tied down securely. "We will have to make another attempt in that city."<sup>109</sup> A circular laying down rules for the election of delegates to provincial congresses introduced a differential; the votes of absentee members of the Sinistra would not count for that faction unless delivered in writing; otherwise these votes were delivered to the "theses of the Centrale."<sup>110</sup> Without indicating the sources of his informa-

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<sup>107</sup>APC, fascicolo 340, document dated September 1, 1925 (number 00259).

<sup>108</sup>Report of the prefect of Venice (number 27300), July 19, 1925, ACS, PS, busta 107, fascicolo Venezia.

<sup>109</sup>Report dated December 24, 1925, ACS, PS, busta 102, fascicolo Preparazione Congressuale.

<sup>110</sup>PCI circular, November 28, 1925, ACS, PS, busta 102, fascicolo K-1.

tion, in 1958 Galli named Rome, Turin, Aquila, Cosenza, Alessandria, Biella, Novara, Trieste, Cremona, Pavia and Foggia as cities where Sinistra majorities had been dismembered by the leadership. During the trial by L'Unità campaign many of these had been listed as having supported the Centrale. "From the spring of 1925 the functionaries of the Centro prepared and dominated the congresses, and it was no longer possible to get an idea of the feelings of the PCI base."<sup>111</sup>

As a result of the crisis of regime induced by the assassination of Matteotti, 1924 had seen the rapid expansion of Communist membership to over 20,000. Andreina De Clementi has suggested that the large number of new arrivals, being less politically sophisticated than the older membership, were more easily manipulated, thus facilitating the triumph of the Centro. There is much merit in this view, but alone it does not account for the large number of party sections dissolved by the leadership in the course of 1925. The chances are that a new member entering the party through a Sinistra section ended by adopting the views of the majority with whom he was now associated. This helps account for the survival of a Sinistra majority in the Turin section until 1925. There is also the possibility that, having dissolved an existing section, the

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<sup>111</sup> Galli, op. cit., p. 105.

leadership proceeded to establish a new and more reliable one in its place, and this may have occurred at Venice.

In January 1926 some seventy delegates journeyed across the Alps to attend the Third Congress of the PCI, held at Lyons, France. Representing a party whose membership, a short year before, had been overwhelmingly loyal to Sinistra views--as it had been from the origin of the party--these delegates voted 90.8 per cent for the Centro, 9.2 per cent for the Sinistra. At the congress of the FGC the results were even more astonishing--94.6 per cent for the Centro! This victory of the Centro rested on the prior destruction of the Sinistra.

In his study of Fascism, Tasca (who withdrew from leadership by September 1924 citing poor health and personal needs) said of the Socialist party's conduct between 1919 and 1922: "The fate of Italian Socialism was indeed tragic, for it suffered as much from the insight of some of its members as from the obtuseness of others."<sup>112</sup> If one substitutes "Communism" for "Socialism" Tasca's epigraph would apply to the Communist movement between 1921 and 1926, the very movement he had helped first to create and then to destroy. After expulsion from the PCI in 1928 (along with Graziadei) Tasca wrote prolificly on Communism, but the story of the deeds against the Sinistra he carried to his grave.

The epilogue to the Fourth Congress of the International had taken place in Italy, with the arrests of 1923

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<sup>112</sup>Tasca, Rise of Fascism, p. 73.

and the refusal of the Socialists to fuse with the PCI. The follow-up to the Third Italian Congress came in Moscow. Again Bordiga and Togliatti were merely the foremost members of a larger Italian delegation going to attend the ECCI of February 1926. In his opening remarks to that body Zinoviev reported with satisfaction that the Italian party had liquidated the problem of its "ultra-left."<sup>113</sup>

Bordiga had gone to Moscow to get the International to abrogate the results of the Lyons Congress, though why he should have thought this possible remains a mystery. Unable to move the leadership of the Comintern into taking such a step, he renewed his criticism of aspects of the international movement.

Bolshevization offered no hope to the Western parties. "For us it is essential to know how to attack a modern bourgeois democratic State which on the one hand is more efficient in the field of armed struggle than the czarist autocracy." The Russians were deluding themselves into thinking they could handle the problem of building socialism by retreating within the confines of a national socialism. "The problems of Russian policy cannot be solved within the narrow precinct of the Russian movement. The entire proletarian international

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<sup>113</sup> My handling of this ECCI is based on IPC, VI, 17, 20, 26 (March-April, 1926).

would have to do its share."

Bordiga alluded to what was happening in the national parties. "Lately a kind of sport has been indulged in by the parties; a pasttime which consists in hitting out, intervening, breaking up, ill-treating, and it very often happens that very good revolutionaries get it. I think this terroristic sport within the movement has nothing in common with our work." So dishonest had been the Centro's conduct, Bordiga claimed, that his vote had been given to the theses of the Central Committee. His remarks closed with an expression of deep pessimism.

At this time no delegate rose to discuss the merits of Bordiga's charges. One quotation from Togliatti will indicate the quality of his delivery. "You have heard Bordiga and it appears you have a certain sympathy for him. He presents his questions and seems to have the qualities of a leader. But we do not think he is a revolutionary leader. Why? Because if for two years we had followed in Italy the policy Comrade Bordiga advised us, we would have smashed the Communist Party." Togliatti asked for a condemnation of the Sinistra leader.

The real compliment to Bordiga at this session came from an unexpected source. After an all-night meeting with Trotsky, Bordiga had an extended but ineffectual encounter



with Stalin. "I can respect Bordiga," said the Secretary General of the Soviet party, "...I believe him because he says what he thinks...." In closing Zinoviev listed seven cardinal sins of Bordiga. Looking back, the most ironic remark was dropped by Bukharin. "Comrade Bordiga, in his arguments, brought up twice or thrice the problem of party democracy in its national and international aspects. It is superfluous to deal with this at any length here."<sup>114</sup>

Three months after the close of the Enlarged ECCI, on June 27, 1926, there appeared in L'Unità an account of the event written by Grieco, who now displayed his new political loyalty. Bordiga's voice had been the only serious opposition at the ECCI, noted Grieco, adding, "He was more temperate in presenting the criticisms known to us and heard by us in a more savage style at our recent congress....Bordiga broke a lance in favor of internal [party] democracy." No one would guess that three years before Grieco had written in admiration, "Bordiga prefers to command armed battalions...."

Returning from Moscow, which he was never to see again, Bordiga devoted himself to making a living.<sup>115</sup> "After

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<sup>114</sup>IPC, VI, 31 (April 22, 1926).

<sup>115</sup>At Lyons Bordiga had been coopted into the leadership as a symbolic figurehead, but he refused to play the role.

the dissolution of the provincial and Neapolitan bodies of the Communist party," recounted a prefectural report, "Bordiga refuses visits by any party comrades, except for Tarsia and the lawyer Michele Bianco."<sup>116</sup>

Sometime in the course of 1926 the Black Shirts arrived and ransacked Bordiga's residence, and later in December the police came, and Bordiga spent the next three years in exile on an island in the Tyrrhenian Sea. One day in that December Togliatti rose before another Enlarged ECCI. "We will tell the parties that we intend to wrap ourselves around the Russian party; before the entire world proletariat we again stress that the Russian party must lead the International, and that this role is for us the most serious guarantee of victory for the revolution."<sup>117</sup>

Bordiga was freed in early 1930. Shortly thereafter the exiled Central Committee expelled him. Bordiga was charged with conduct not becoming a Communist, with having defended Trotsky, and being guilty of factionalism.<sup>118</sup> What the action really meant was that Togliatti, taking no chances

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<sup>116</sup>Report of the prefect of Naples (number 11568), April 4, 1926, ACS, VCPC, busta Ludovico Tarsia.

<sup>117</sup>Berti, op. cit., p. 285.

<sup>118</sup>Reported in Il Lavoratore of New York, May 3, 1930.

now that Bordiga was free, had him expelled.

A year after the arrest of Bordiga, the exiled and morally footloose Grieco surveyed the Italian political scene, beginning with the recent past. Yes, there had been an Abstentionist Bordiga at the Bologna Congress, and he had come to the Second Congress of the International in 1920 following an invitation from the ECCI, but to be a "killjoy" (guastafesta).<sup>119</sup> And so fell the second of many spadefuls of earth dropped by Grieco upon the truth.

Ten years afterwards, Gramsci lay dead. "The first Marxist, the first Leninist, the first Bolshevik of the Italian working class movement," declared Togliatti. Soon Gramsci would be venerated as the sage, all-knowing founding father of Italian Communism. Before the end of another decade, with the coming of Liberation, there rose the Myth of Gramsci.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Lo Stato Operaio, I, 9-10 (November-December, 1927), pp. 985-94.

<sup>120</sup> At the end of the documented study of the political role of Amadeo Bordiga, it is apropos to show how the Myth of Gramsci persists in the United States: "Antonio Gramsci... was a militant in the ranks of Italian socialism, but it was the Leninist Revolution in Russia in 1917 that acted as a catalyst in his thought and action. In 1919 he founded at Turin the Marxist organ Ordine Nuovo, and in 1921, at the Livorno Congress of the Italian Socialist Party, Gramsci inspired the separation of the 'Leninist' group from the Socialist Party and created the Italian Communist Party (PCI), which was officially a member of the Third International. Gramsci's uniqueness of ideological education and preparation

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(there was perhaps in him a sort of fusion of voluntaristic and reflective tendencies that, in a sense, never fully made him into an 'orthodox' Marxist-Communist) and the exceptional intellectual resources that he possessed made him the undisputed leader of Italian Marxism. Only for a time was this leadership 'threatened' by the ultra-activist positions assumed by Amadeo Bordiga. Gramsci's opposition to Fascism was personally profound, but from 1922 to 1926, chiefly in deference to the official position taken by the Third International vis-a-vis Fascism in Italy, Gramsci did not join the 'underground' resistance but chose rather to work openly, under the aegis of the Chamber of Deputies, to which he was elected and of which he was a member when arrested." Quoted from Antonio Gramsci, Il Risorgimento, by A. William Salomone in his Italy from the Risorgimento to Fascism (Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., Inc., Garden City, New York, 1970), pp. 397-98.

CHAPTER VIICONCLUSIONS AND A VIEW TO THE FUTURE

Any conclusions drawn from the events of the nineteen twenties must begin with the Third Congress of the PCI which met at Lyons, France, in January 1926, to escape harassment and possible arrest by the Fascist authorities at home. The results of that congress were not "the product of the most mature theoretical Leninism developed by Gramsci and Togliatti";<sup>1</sup> on the contrary, they represented the culmination of processes that were premature forms of Stalinism. The 90.8 per cent majority of the Third Congress and the 94.6 per cent of the FGC were early precursors of the 98.9 or 99.8 plebiscitary majorities that have characterized Soviet-style elections in Eastern Europe, and were about as honest.

Lyons may be associated with Leninism only if one believes that Leninism and Stalinism are coterminous. Now, the deformation of the Third International began during Lenin's lifetime, and perhaps that result was inevitable following the interpretations given to the change of tactics adopted in 1921, but there is on record Lenin's last attempt<sup>2</sup> to reverse the

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<sup>1</sup>Spriano, op. cit., p. 497.

<sup>2</sup>Moshé Lewin, Le dernier combat de Lénine (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1967).

bureaucratization, centralization, and degeneration that had seized the Bolshevik party by 1922-23; as he was now on the eve of his final paralysis and death these efforts died with him. "Lenin--and I with him--feared most of all," asserted Trotsky later in exile, "that the C.P.S.U. [Communist Party of the Soviet Union], armed with the powerful resources of the state, would have a stifling and excessive influence upon the young parties of the West that were being organized. Lenin warned tirelessly against the excesses regarding centralism....The changes began in 1924 under the slogan of Bolshevization!" (And further on in the text) "The Bolshevization of 1924 completely assumed the character of a caricature."<sup>3</sup>

More to the point, what happened in the Soviet party in the early twenties raises serious questions about the nature of Bolshevism, which is related to but nonetheless separate from the ideology of Leninism. The failure of Bolshevism points up the limitation of voluntarism: all the will of the best of these revolutionaries could not substitute for the material aid and proletarian discipline which would have come to the aid of the Soviets had the revolution spread to the West. Without this additional support, Bolshevism

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<sup>3</sup>Leon Trotsky, The Strategy of the World Revolution (New York: Communist League of America (Opposition), 1930), pp. 75-6.

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quickly degenerated to the level of Russian conditions. In recent years many Western historians have popularized the notion of the triumph of old Muscovy over the "Western import," Marxism, but only few have related the process of decay to the broader political failure of 1919--the absence of proletarian revolution in the West. The triumph of a proletarian revolution in peasant Russia heightened not lessened the need for Western revolution. The "weaker link" tactic in the Russian circumstances--in any peasant society--was nothing more than a primer, and the carrying out of socialist reconstruction was dependent on the subsequent revolutions in the advanced countries. This required another set of tactics than those implemented after the Comintern congress of 1921. The absence of this tactical change opened the door to national socialism, which succeeded under the slogan "socialism in one country."

The degeneration of proletarian internationalism after 1921 followed its own inner logic, and one could cite endless examples from the history of Communist parties other than the Italian. There was a parallel to the Centro's activities in the PCI between 1924-26 in those same years in the Russian party, from which Stalin would rise supreme.<sup>4</sup> One is tempted to suggest that the defeat of Leninism in the Russian party

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<sup>4</sup>Carr, Interregnum, pp. 324-5.



and of Bordiga in Italy heralded the rise of Stalinism over all the European working-class vanguards. In point of precedence, Russian practices were introduced into the Italian party, but if the maturation of Stalinism in the 1930's brought with it the removal (and physical extermination) of the original Leninist guard, this later apogee had its equivalence in the earlier razing of the Sinistra, the precondition for the victory at Lyons.

The key figure in the transformation of the PCI was the unfortunate and self-deluding Gramsci. Much has been written about him, all laudatory, and his influence will be indelibly associated with the change in Italian historiographic views following Liberation.<sup>5</sup> This impact resulted from his prison Quaderni,<sup>6</sup> the posthumous volumes compiled from his prison writings.

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<sup>5</sup>Rosario Romeo was one of the few who realized that much of this Gramsci-influenced Marxist historiography was Marxist in name only. These writings were closer to Togliattian populism than to analytical Marxism.

<sup>6</sup>It is impossible to believe that Gramsci, sensing the degeneration overtaking both the PCI and the USSR, did not begin to have doubts about his role after 1923. One would have to consult the original manuscripts to find out. But we know now that the original Lettere dal carcere (1947) was edited to delete evidence of "friendly relations with Amadeo Bordiga during their years spent together in prison." Cf. A. Pozzolini, Antonio Gramsci An Introduction to His Thoughts (London: Pluto Press, 1970), p. 23.

But the image of Gramsci's intellectual development as a linear rise from a lower to a higher Marxism<sup>7</sup> was just another postwar myth, and the appraisal of Gramsci as a Marxist must be subject to a new consideration. Looking at him from the perspective of a more complete documentary review, one sees a somewhat different and, one suspects, truer Gramsci. Joining the PSI in 1912, he agreed with Mussolini's stand on intervention in 1914, in the process writing an article for Il Popolo d'Italia which Mussolini chose not to publish.<sup>8</sup> A "utopian" period followed culminating in his famous editorial "The Revolution Against Kapital," where Gramsci drew the incredible conclusion that Bolshevism was the child of Italian philosophical idealism. A closer inspection of Gramsci's 1914 interventionist writing and his 1917 editorial reveal that Gramsci was attracted to the Bolsheviks, as earlier to Mussolini, not from an understanding of social reality, but because both seemed to signal the triumph of the will, which Gramsci identified as the motive force of history. Within two years, Gramsci had associated the proletarian revolution with a spontaneous, molecular, and subterranean process (the factory

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<sup>7</sup>This is implied by Pozzolini, and is one of the major defects in his work.

<sup>8</sup>Berti, op. cit., p. 48.

council phase), as distant from Bordiga as from Lenin.<sup>9</sup> With the collapse of the April strikes, Gramsci turned toward the Sinistra and the need to build the revolutionary party.

The May 8, 1920, editorial in Ordine Nuovo,<sup>10</sup> praised at the Second Congress of the International, confirmed the change. The accent in the writing is on the need to turn the PSI into a revolutionary instrument; this view was associated with Lenin internationally but with Bordiga and the Sinistra in Italy. Little is said in the editorial of Gramsci's earlier views--which were later condemned by Lenin<sup>11</sup>--except to indicate a clear distinction between council and soviet. By moving to the left, Gramsci caught up with the Turinese Socialists who were with the Sinistra and were to remain with the Sinistra until shattered by the Centro during 1925.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Writing in the sixties, Berti put it this way: "The warning of Lenin to the Turinesi is evident: the party is the decisive and essential force, not the autonomous working-class bodies." P. 59.

<sup>10</sup>The May 8 editorial represented the views of the Abstentionist majority in the Turin section. Cf. Bordiga, L'Unita, September 30, 1925.

<sup>11</sup>Indicated by Silone in his preface to Tasca's Nascita e avvento del fascismo, p. vii. "In fact," wrote Silone, "when Lenin was later informed of Gramsci's council theories, he condemned them outright as a gross syndicalist deviation...." The preface also contains an informative, though uncritical, account of Tasca's political life.

<sup>12</sup>Sinistra majorities were equally large in sections of Turin, Milan, and Naples. Cf. Bordiga, IPC, VI, 20 (March 20, 1926).

Finally, having worked on and defended the Rome Theses, Gramsci went to Moscow, where his impressionable mind was converted by the Russian leadership to their Marxism. His belief in voluntarism makes this change comprehensible. But in so doing he missed one of the central themes of Marx's thinking, the subordination of form to content, and the stress that human activity must be freely motivated but based on the presence and understanding of a necessity. Returning to Italy Gramsci introduced practices already evident in the Soviet party: deception, coercion, manipulation, and spying<sup>13</sup>--all to compel a reluctant party to accept the line coming from the International. Once begun, these activities could not be stopped halfway or disclosed and were justified by appeals to a higher morality. Marx had seen morality resting on the class; Lenin and Bordiga had introduced considerations for the political party as an auxiliary to the class; the Soviet leaders, followed by Gramsci-Togliatti, equated morality with the needs of the leaders themselves. Without a doubt the problem is a subtle one, but to mask the stark reality of the new actions, Marxism was eviscerated and the party and the International turned into fetishes, idols that could do no wrong.

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<sup>13</sup>A PCI document, NP 4896 from 1925, reads, "We are aware of the reunion of the followers of Bordiga. Continue the surveillance and keep us informed." ACS, PS, busta 1903.

We know the political rationale used by Gramsci to justify this turn, but it is not clear what inner psychological drive impelled him to oppose Bordiga. Rivalry? Ambition? Nonetheless, the impact of the change was enormous, for the party was dismembered, ideologically reconstructed, and the origin of the PCI shifted from Italy and the birth pangs of the Sinistra to inspiration coming from the International.<sup>14</sup>

Gramsci's final act was to put the party on the road to Stalinization, a process he may not have understood in the mid-twenties. But to concede this is to ask again how and why he came to leadership over the political corpse of Bordiga, who saw the direction taken by Soviet developments. In another much-cited letter of Gramsci from late 1926, he cautions the Soviet leadership against the dangers to the international movement posed by the internecine struggles pitting Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Kamenev against Stalin and Bukharin. Indicative

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<sup>14</sup>In I primi dieci anni a "de-Stalinized" Berti described Leninism as the Marxism of the epoch of imperialism, a phrase giving off a familiar ring. Looking into Stalin's Foundations of Leninism (New York: International Publishers, 1939), p. 10, one reads, "Leninism is Marxism in the era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution." Berti also traces the origin of the PCI to the Bolshevik Revolution, not to the earlier Sinistra. By 1971 a "democratic" Berti was telling Italian readers of the weekly L'Espresso that the Soviet regime still does not trust its working class. Berti, of course, has never publicly admitted to false charges against Bordiga.

of this political Gramsci is that he identifies with Stalin against the opposition, seeing in that opposition the rebirth of a "social democratic and syndicalist" tradition. Indeed he avers how after the Fifth Congress "our parties were developing a Leninist stability by means of painful experiences, through painful and exhausting crises; they were becoming real Bolshevik parties."<sup>15</sup> These "painful experiences" included the breaking of the Sinistra.

The incorrectness of Gramsci's analysis of the struggle in the Russian party is another example of the opaque confusion found in his mind then.<sup>16</sup> Commenting recently on the appearance of the last of the volumes of Gramsci's collected works, the writings from 1923-26, Spriano indicated that after the svolta Gramsci accused Bordiga of "being a Maximalist."<sup>17</sup> Knowing as we do how Bordiga had spent the years of 1914-21 opposing

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<sup>15</sup> Scritti scelti, pp. 713-19.

<sup>16</sup> Berti, op. cit., p. 51. Berti writes that in 1918-19 Gramsci mistakenly substituted his wishes for the actual reality of life in Russia. But Gramsci's illusions did not stop with 1919, that Berti will not admit.

<sup>17</sup> "Gramsci e....partito," Rinascita, September 17, 1971.

Maximalism, this charge must be placed on the par with the accusation made by Serrati at the Lyons Congress--that Bordiga had never been truly revolutionary! The defamation of Bordiga from the 1930's to the 1950's--by which time it had become clear that there would be no postwar revival of the Sinistra--had as a precedent the gross charges made by Gramsci in the twenties. The only conclusion possible after scanning Gramsci's analyses from 1914-26 is that Gramsci, like Serrati, never understood the forces with which he had to contend. By placing his unusual skills at the disposal of a gathering Thermidor, rather than contribute to defending of the native Sinistra, Gramsci helped deliver a blow to the political movement of the working class from which it has yet to recover.

In Italy where critical historiography of Gramsci is growing, the myths of Gramsci as the founder of the party or as the associate of Italian soviets have been riddled, and recent studies by two women, Alcara and De Clementi, have begun the long overdue reevaluation of Gramsci as a Marxist thinker. Along with these must be added a conclusion from this study: the role of Gramsci in the formation of the Italian Communist movement is relative small, but his influence became major and decisive with the transformation of the Italian party through the steps begun in 1924 under his leadership.

None of my comments applies to the Gramsci of the Quaderni. Gramsci's great accomplishments, the dignity of his anti-Fascist resistance and the range of his prison writings, represent superb human achievements. But that Gramsci must be separated from the remnants of the political myth in which he was enveloped after death. However painful is this ordeal, it has to be undertaken.

The quote from Gramsci's letter of 1926 does indicate the real point of origin of the present PCI. The Bordigan party had grown out of native traditions. The party emerging from Lyons was well on the way to becoming a different breed: the name remained but the inner fibers were being torn out and replaced. The allegiance to the International dictated the purge between 1924-26, leading the PCI's Centrale to identify more closely with the Russian leadership and to becoming apologists for Stalinist power soon thereafter.

It bears repeating that beyond the changing of the guard, Bordiga, Fortichiari, Repossi, Grieco, and Terracini, by Gramsci, Togliatti, Grieco, and Scoccimarro, the long-term significance in the changes of 1924-26 lay in two related areas. The first was tactical. The Bordigan party had been geared to a revolutionary conquest of power. As the party was turned away from this stance by stages,<sup>18</sup> tactical steps were

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<sup>18</sup>Berti, op. cit., p. 29. The "extreme left platform" of 1921 was modified in 1923-24, and attenuated further by Lyons; in 1927-28 Togliatti, Tasca, and Grieco completed the transformation.



subordinated to the requirements of the Soviet state. Once the Russian Revolution had been institutionalized into a bureaucracy whose international need became coexistence, the PCI was made to abjure revolution and to turn back to the line of reformist politics. The deal, the promise, the reform, the lack of vision and insight, were joined in the parliamentary tactic of 1910. With this went the need for working-class passivity, except when the call went out at election time. The interregnum of the Centro has cost the Italian working class fifty years of marking time.

The second main result of the changes in the PCI in the mid-1920's was the destruction of the Sinistra, a thin stratum of several thousand men and women who had with them a heritage of a quarter century of struggle. This grouplet of souls was numerically small in a population of 40 million, but in question was the leadership of the future working-class organizations, and their roles in Italy would be crucial. If Italian radicalism began before 1912 to move along lines of class action and revolution, after 1926 that radicalism was turned about and headed back to parliamentarianism. One can trace a major cause of the absence of revolutionary perspective in the national liberation struggles of 1943-45--becoming a factor leading to the defeat of the Communist-Socialist bloc in the 1948 election--back to the point of origin in the Third Congress of Lyons.

In mentioning the liberation struggles one cannot overlook a repetition of one of the ironies of modern Italian history. Earlier in the text mention was made of Gramsci's and Bordiga's criticism of the left wing of the Risorgimento for having fought for the monarchical state of Victor Emanuel. In his brilliant study, Cavour and Garibaldi, 1860, Denis Mack Smith confirms how the southern middle class looked to Garibaldi for protection against their own peasantry.<sup>19</sup> Both Lenin's and Bordiga's refusal to support proletarian involvement in bourgeois wars was in keeping with this criticism. The proletariat, they argued, must fight for its own aims, and guns in its hands must be used to equalize the struggle leading to a workers' state.

Assessing the 1943-45 national liberation struggle, Roberto Battaglia, the foremost Communist historian of the Resistance, noted the findings made by Salvemini, who said that motivated by a national and social consciousness the Italian peasantry had fought against reaction for the first time since the thirteenth century. Discussing one area in particular, the Region of the Friuli in the northeast, Battaglia wrote,

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<sup>19</sup> Denis Mack Smith, Cavour and Garibaldi, 1860. (New York: Kraus Reprints, 1968), pp. 159-61.

One sees even more clearly the adventurous character of the resistance in the Veneto or, to be more exact, that resistance as experienced in the mountains of the Friuli, with its continuous and audacious surprises, its victories and terrible losses: this was perhaps the most tragic of all resistances, for in the background lay an impoverished peasantry that was unable, though actively participating in the resistance, to find a way out of the problem (after Liberation, as with the passage of the storm, the zone would be depopulated, with most partisans emigrating).<sup>20</sup>

Supported widely by the sacrifice of the working class and the peasantry, the Resistance had been largely a leftwing and Communist affair. One may legitimately ask why, having given the most to free the nation, this Resistance was not building the proletarian state in the postwar period, instead of being lost to emigration, to the dead end of a party bureaucracy, or given some routine leftwing task? Battaglia is here admitting that the liberators of the nation never gained control over the state, and precisely that abuse of the working masses was what the Rome Theses had been drawn to guard against. Here is a lesson for all to ponder.

The defeat of the Resistance could not but follow from Togliatti's svolta at Salerno. Returning from the Soviet Union

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<sup>20</sup> Roberto Battaglia, Risorgimento e resistenza (Rome: Riuniti, 1964), p. 181. An older but still keen-eyed Salvemini noticed that the partisans had "lost the political struggle after winning the military."

in 1944, he raised the banners of a national union government and put off considerations for reform until after the war,<sup>21</sup> compelling the other parties on the left to follow suit. Such illusions do not survive long after hostilities, and within two years both the PCI and the PSI had been expelled from the government.

Looking over the rhetoric of the postwar PCI leaders one is struck by its emptiness. The writings of Grieco, Platone, D'Onofrio, and Togliatti disclose an endless mediocrity. These men had to combine a revolutionary stance with a reformist conduct and the result was a literature that obfuscated more than it enlightened. From a tool for analysis Marxism became an adornment. This is best seen with Togliatti, whose political conduct was designed to cover the past, nip any incipient leftist trend rising from the clash of class forces, appear revolutionary, and meet the needs of Soviet aims--all in the name of Marxism.

Typical of the pseudo-revolutionary language used by Togliatti in the immediate postwar was this remark. "The Resistance has marked the first appearance and indication of a new ruling class, the working-class."<sup>22</sup> Such an assembly of

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<sup>21</sup>One recalls the promise of land reform made to the peasant soldiers by Salandra in 1916, with delivery at the end of the war.

<sup>22</sup>Battaglia, op. cit., 23.

words is dazzling, until one learns about the past. A class to become a ruler must first seize the "commanding heights" of wealth and power, and under Togliatti the Italian working class never even entertained that as a practical possibility. And herein lay one of the hidden ambiguities of 1945. Many of the hundreds of thousands of men and women who had supported resistance, acting perhaps as surrogates for millions, looked to the PCI as an instrument of revolutionary renovation, not knowing that the party had quietly abandoned that means more than a decade earlier. Only in the last decade has it become clear that political immobilism and snailpace reform are part of the environmental requisites needed by a reformist PCI to maintain the image of itself as a revolutionary party or as a party of change.

These thoughts bring us back to Bordiga and to the "crisis of Communism" gnawing at the vitals of the electoral-oriented PCI, much as a similar crisis had bored into the PSI in the years before the Great War. The central thread of this study has been the political activity of Bordiga. Enough has been presented to indicate a second major conclusion, namely, that Bordiga was the most significant Italian Marxist between 1912-26, with the numerous encomia paid to him remaining as recognition of the fact. Bordiga was destroyed because he would not submit his mind or the PCI to the dictates of the

Soviet leadership. All the subsequent abuse and the rewriting of his role in history were deemed necessary precisely because of his extraordinary qualities and the loyalty demonstrated to him by the party. While reviewing the record from 1912-26, one cannot repress a suspicion that Bordiga was then what Communist historiography would have wanted Gramsci to be.

Had Bordiga finally surrendered to Soviet policies in 1924, it is not difficult to imagine an Amadeo Bordiga Institute in Rome and a cascade of commentaries, monographs, collected works, analyzing and eulogizing the genius (ingegno) of the founding father, with the real Bordiga being overlaid by a political myth. The Centrist party will never understand that the anonymity in which Bordiga preferred to live and work the closing decades of his life, laying no claim to the major part he had played in the formation of Italian Communism, was closer to the spirit of Marxism and to the ubiquitous, often inarticulate, role exercised by the working class than is the hagiography built around the figure of Gramsci.

An example of how Bordiga was reconstructed by a vindictive historiography comes by way of a curious coincidence. Trotsky published in 1924 his Comintern speeches. Within some supplementary biographical notes this description of Bordiga appears:

A. Bordiga--founder of the Italian CP who led the Communist opposition while still in

the Italian SP (Turin section). After the formation of the Italian Communist party Bordiga is its principal leader (glavnii rukovoditel'), at the same time the head of the "left" majority. At the second congress of the Comintern Bordiga emerged as an abstentionist.<sup>23</sup>

The description is fully correct, but for one error--the association of Bordiga with Turin. Twenty years later, in 1945, Pioneer Publishers of New York issued a translation of one part of Trotsky's speeches. An addition to "Explanatory Notes" found at the back of the volume reads: "These notes are based on material collected by the Marx-Engels Institute under [D.B.] Ryazanov. [the Marxist scholar,] for the first edition of Lenin's Collected Works." The Marx-Engels Institute used, one would have to surmise, the same source of information on Bordiga utilized earlier by the compilers of Trotsky's volume of speeches, but the information now came out somewhat modified:

A. Bordiga--founder of the Italian Communist party who headed the Communist opposition while still in the Italian SP (Turin section). After the formation of the Italian CP, he became its leader and thereby head of the "left" Communist majority. Bordiga remained a sectarian after his expulsion from the CI [Communist International] on the charges of "Trotskyism."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Leon Trotsky, Piat Let Komintern (Five Years of the Comintern) (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1924), p. 596.

<sup>24</sup> Leon Trotsky, The First Five Years of the Communist International (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1945), I, p. 346.

The metamorphosis of Bordiga into a "sectarian" was the work of the 1930's, the years of the Stalinist rewriting of history. Soon "Fascist" would be added, as a prelude to Bordiga's deletion from Communist annals.

A deeper study will substantiate that Bordiga was merely the advanced figure of a current, the Sinistra, whose existence was a political fact of the first order; for within that current was found the embryonic stirrings of the future proletarian state. Just as Bolshevism is inconceivable without Lenin, so Bordiga would not have been able to operate without the sympathetic support from the Sinistra. The elimination of one inflicted a mortal blow upon the other. The hopes of future proletarian revolution centered in the nineteen twenties on Bordiga and the Sinistra, as they had in October 1917 on Lenin and the Bolsheviks. The analogue to revolutionary Bolshevism was the Sinistra, never the Centro. The Centro was indeed inspired by the Russian leadership, but at the time Lenin was already dead (or dying) and Bolshevism had entered a precipitous and irreversible decline. Destroying both the Sinistra and Bordiga the Centro consolidated its long tenure over Communist politics with an act of political parricide.

In the ways of politics it is a common occurrence for sons to rudely displace the fathers, but there is a world of difference between the means used by the Intransigent Revolutionaries in 1911 to become the victors of 1912 and the



methods of the Centro. In reaching its goal, the Centro first broke that "phalanx of steel," thus leaving an isolated Bordiga impotent. That such was the fate of several thousand men and women living within the shadow of an increasingly dictatorial regime meant that the world little cared about their private tribulations. But the trauma of these deeds seems to have left the leaders of the Centro with a permanent need to justify their acts long after Bordiga had vanished from the political scene. Their hands, like those of Lady Macbeth, seemed never to come clean.

Scanning the record of the Sinistra one is struck by its alertness. The Sinistra was realistic in refusing to be sucked into responsibility for defensive wars; for insisting that the proletariat fight only on its own terms; in declaring that PSI involvement in the electoralism of 1919 meant fore-swearing revolution; in pointing out that the International was rapidly degenerating, and in insisting that the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik party were no models for Western movements. Lastly, the Sinistra was right in insisting that only the advance to a proletarian state, and not a retreat to bourgeois democracy, would destroy Fascism irrevocably.

What happened to Bordiga after 1945, why he was unable to successfully challenge the postwar PCI leadership, belongs to another account, one which must be compiled taking into

consideration the political possibilities existing at the time. The treatment that Bordiga had received at the hands of the Centro would have been enough to break the political will of even an extraordinary man, yet by the early 1950's Bordiga was active in the Partito comunista internazionalista. That it has taken Italian leftwing historiography so long to sense the deeper meaning of Bordiga's defeat in the mid-twenties is, on the surface, astounding, unless here is another manifestation of the opposition to hard bedrock reality pervading the political ambience of leftwing circles.

In defending the Sinistra one must speak to some of the many charges raised against it. What about abstentionism? Enough has been said about this issue not to have to repeat all the circumstances leading to the espousal of this tactic. An immediate insurrection by the PSI in 1919 was out of the question, but the situation was nonetheless revolutionary, and as the Italian state began to dissolve in the fever of that year avenues opened before the PSI. Who is to say what the results would have been if the PSI, backed as it was by the overwhelming majority of the proletariat, had called on that class to abandon the parliament and build the alternative political organs, the soviets, a process bringing about mass involvement on many levels and that would have compelled the working class to leave the factories and to act as well as

think politically? In this connection an observation by Sylvia Pankhurst, the English observer at the Bologna Congress of 1919, is most relevant. After remarking that the revolution was expected in the spring, and how she would have wanted to hear more discussion on how to introduce the soviets, she advised the Socialists: "Hence you must have your plans ready soon. And this is another reason to maintain that the most logical position is that of the Abstentionists. I find it difficult to understand how you can carry out propaganda to win mandates in parliament--in a body you propose to abolish in a few months--while you are absorbed in the task of preparing revolution, and when, in my opinion, it is extremely urgent to diffuse the conviction amongst the workers that the time of parliaments is over."<sup>25</sup> Mussolini, too, felt constrained to support direct working-class action as late as the occupation of the factories. The Abstentionists were the only group in Italy who had readied a new tactic for the seizure of power. Those leftwing critics who deny that abstentionism was practicable in revolutionary 1919 have yet to answer to the question: What other means was open to the PSI? (Of course, one can deny that il diciannovesimo was revolutionary.)

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<sup>25</sup>"Impressioni sul congresso di Bologna," Comunismo, I, 5 (December 1, 1919), 336-37.

Lenin justified in "Left-wing" Communism. An Infantile Disorder the Bolshevik boycott of the Duma in 1905 "because we correctly estimated the objective situation that was leading to a rapid transformation of the mass strike into a political strike, then into a revolutionary strike, and then into insurrection."<sup>26</sup> This description could have been the scenario for Italy in 1919. Just how well was Lenin acquainted with Italian reality? At the Third Congress of the International in 1921, Lenin told Lazzari that Bordiga had "honestly declared that he had abandoned all anarchism and anti-parliamentarianism" after the Livorno Congress.<sup>27</sup> Only those profoundly unacquainted with the history of the Sinistra could have associated Bordiga with anarchism. Lenin had no first hand knowledge of the Italian scene, but his ignorance was shared with epigones not enlivened by his geniality.

Leninism has been the basis for another charge against Bordiga. After 1919 Bordiga gave little evidence of having assimilated Leninist thought, and hence the mantle belongs to Gramsci. The argument overlooks the existence of the Sinistra, a local manifestation of a broader proletarian resurgence. The

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<sup>26</sup>V. I. Lenin, "Left-wing" Communism. An Infantile Disorder (New York: International Publishers, 1940), p. 20.

<sup>27</sup>Collected Works, XXXXII, p. 466.

Sinistra knew of its kindred relationship to Leninism, and saw both faced with the task of leading the working class to revolutionary Marxism. Moreover, in Bordiga the Sinistra found its native theoretician, to whom it gave loyalty despite the Centro's claim of backing from the International. If more evidence of that fact is needed, one has only to point to the publication in Lo Stato Operaio during the early months of 1924 of the range of dissidence between Sinistra and International. Had Gramsci's new history been true, the Sinistra would have collapsed at this point. The Como meeting followed instead. The banner of the International was a huge ace in the deck of the Centro, but the mangling of the party in 1925 was evidence of extreme disappointment. The weakness of the Sinistra lay co-mingled with the source of its greatest strength, within Bordiga himself.

Bordiga's power lay in his keen ideological mind, in his maturity as a Marxist, and in his honesty. But he placed too much faith in his visionary view of the International.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Nowhere was the faith more displaced than in the figure of Zinoviev. Carr termed him "sinister." Balabanov thought him "the most despicable person I ever met." E. H. Carr, Revolution in One Country, I, pp. 154-57. Zinoviev may have been the most influential Soviet leader in conditioning Gramsci's svolta.

and this myopia betrayed him. Furthermore, the strength of the Sinistra was conditioned by the inescapable historical weakness found within the inheritance of the Italian left, a "genetic" weakness dating back at least to the Risorgimento--if not earlier.<sup>29</sup> A strong ideological defense proved insufficient.

Isaac Deutscher in his Unfinished Revolution asserts that only decades of revolutionary ferment "could produce the moral-political climate, the leaders, the parties, and the methods of 1917."<sup>30</sup> Deutscher implies the accumulation of a political know-how, which gathers within the heritage of movements. If true, then a major weakness of the Sinistra must be ascribed to the influence of movements within the peninsula. Nations do have a way of redefining themselves in terms of their own pasts; old themes are raked up and woven again until they become emblematic of national characteristics. One of these has been the Italian left fighting for aims not its own at the price of abandoning revolutionary alternatives, the obverse of the rivoluzione mancata theme bedeviling modern

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<sup>29</sup>That la rivoluzione mancata syndrome may antedate the Risorgimento is suggested by a reading of Renzo De Felice, Italia giacobina (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1965).

<sup>30</sup>The Unfinished Revolution. Russia in 1917-1967 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 13-4.

Italian history.

Without bogging down in the question of whether a Jacobin phase in the Risorgimento was possible, we can agree that the absence of a left-democratic alternative in the unitary struggles has helped shape all subsequent Italian history. These struggles would have involved the peasantry in the unitary wars by means of a social and economic program tailored to their demands. The power in the hands of the inarticulate peasant masses was well understood by bourgeois moderate and bourgeois democrat, by socialist and reactionary.<sup>31</sup> Knowledge that the peasantry could either open the door to revolution or shore up conservative reaction was one of the widely shared secrets of the mid-decades of the nineteenth century,<sup>32</sup> even though most revolutionaries along with Marx concentrated their attention on the urban classes. Indicative of this knowledge was Chernyshevsky's criticism of the democratic

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<sup>31</sup>Franco Della Peruta, Democrazia e socialismo nel Risorgimento (Rome: Riuniti, 1965), pp. 63-79.

<sup>32</sup>For skillful use of peasantry by conservative forces in the Germanies after 1848, see Theodore Hamerow, Restoration, Revolution, Reaction: Economics and Politics in Germany, 1815-71 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967). After the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars no one could possibly overlook the peasantry, though assessing its role was something else.

wing of the Risorgimento: "You, Italians, who long for reform and freedom, you must know that you will only be able to defeat reaction and obscurantism by making yours the aims of the poor, peasant compatriots and those of the simple townsmen."<sup>33</sup> Had the democratic left seriously concerned itself with the peasant question, no post-unitary socialism would have been likely to omit the peasantry as a matter of special concern. The absence of such a socialism left the peasantry largely to the mercies of ministerial conservatism and to the Popolari in 1919. Lack of revolutionary perspective has shown through modern Italian radicalism from the Action party of Mazzini to Maximalism, and in 1924-26 it helped the Centro come to power. Like Salvemini earlier, the Centro saw the guarantor of their success in an external force, this time the International. All this may bode ill for the future of Italian radicalism. La rivoluzione mancata may be no aberration at all, but merely the surface indication of a deeper phenomenon. If the working class is unable to break that tradition, socialism will come to Italy in the manner of national unification--a flawed gift delivered by a foreign bayonet.

Could Bordiga have survived an open clash with the International? Any answer moves us deeply into the realm of

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<sup>33</sup>Quoted in Franco Venturi, Roots of Revolution (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1964), p. 164.



speculation, but this step is justified inasmuch as it helps make clear the significance of an aspect of the past. Given the long history and maturity of the Sinistra, had Bordiga remained in the Executive Committee along with Grieco, Repossi, Fortichiari, and Terracini, any move by Gramsci (who might not have agreed to act if space on the top had remained closed) to insinuate an alternative leadership would have been checked. Bolshevization, with its control of the party base, required a willing leadership.<sup>34</sup> Without Bordiga's withdrawal there would have been no purge of the Sinistra, and by the late 1920's Europe might have witnessed the appearance of a dissident Communist movement, one sparking much sooner a resurgence of Marxism in the West. But what we do know as a matter of record is that the Bordigan party had the most clear-sighted leadership of any Western party in the International.

Such a party might have met the crisis leading to the collapse of Fascism by bringing to Italy a genuinely revolutionary alternative. A Sinistra-led PCI would have raised in 1943 the banner of social revolution at a time when the conservative old regime was completely discredited and twenty years of war and Fascism had demonstrated to the working-class that there is no alternative to proletarian revolution. Both the Action party

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<sup>34</sup> Angress, op. cit., p. 470.

and the PSI were to the left of the PCI during the Resistance, and there is no reason to believe that they would not have followed. No one was there to recall the warning given by the Sovietisti in 1919 or the words of Bordiga in 1925: "Our greatest elector is the rifle in the hands of the insurgent worker." Togliatti instead turned to the union government, and thus entrapped the working class in the vise of bourgeois political institutions. When a constituent assembly was finally held in 1946 the reforms were paltry.<sup>35</sup> Is it too far-fetched to suggest that the political behavior of Togliatti between 1943-46 was in the tradition of Francesco Crispi and Garibaldi in 1860; or that the PCI's behavior in 1945, with its stress on revolutionary rhetoric, was close to the Maximalism of 1919?

Would the Western Allies have permitted social revolution in the shadows of national liberation? Surely the welcome mat would not have been out, but never was absolute control of the situation entirely in their hands. In the writings of Marx and Lenin revolutions--even lost ones--are justified as valuable learning for a class striving for its historic goal.<sup>36</sup> In 1943

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<sup>35</sup>Norman Kogan, A Political History of Post War Italy (New York: Praeger, 1965), pp. 38-40.

<sup>36</sup>"They were right," wrote Bukharin justifying revolution. "The concept of a transition to socialism apart from collapse, without disruption of the social balance, without bloody battle, is a miserable reformist illusion." For in the revolution "the proletariat unites itself to an enormous extent, re-educates itself, organizes itself. The Russian Revolution with its relatively weak proletariat...offers the empirical proof of this." Op. cit., pp. 65-6.

the PCI would at least have been responsive to its constituency, the working class and the poor peasantry. Sponsoring revolution in the north meant a revolutionary solution to the peasant question in the south; reducing that matter to reform, the Togliattian PCI strengthened postwar Christian Democracy in the south. The latter used the reform agencies of the 1950's to establish a paternalistic relationship with the peasants based on the control of the state handouts.<sup>37</sup> On the morrow of the liberation of the north, the Committees of National Liberation endeavored to include workers' factory councils as part of the factory administration, and, for a moment, the lines of an old debate from 1919-20--the polemic between Ordinovisti and Sovietisti: Power at the factory level or the level of the state?--seemed about to return to life. But the move was defeated at the political level by Christian Democratic opposition<sup>38</sup> and PCI-PSI ineptness, and the issue from the past returned to the shadows, followed by the factory councils and the Committees of National Liberation. The sacrifice paid by the Resistance was indeed heavy.

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<sup>37</sup> Sidney Tarrow, Peasant Communism in Southern Italy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), reviews and criticizes PCI policy in this area. For Bordiga's views see La questione agraria (Milan: Industrie Grafiche Moderne, n.d.).

<sup>38</sup> Neufeld, op. cit., pp. 458-62.

Social revolution and national liberation were successful in Yugoslavia, and if Italy was not Yugoslavia neither was it Greece, where a revolution was crushed to the indifference of the USSR.<sup>39</sup> Stalin's (and Togliatti's) opposition to social revolution help explain the near absence of proletarian action at the end of the Second World War, with the contrast to 1917-23 being so striking.<sup>40</sup> The influence of the Soviet party on the Western European working classes has been from the right from the mid-twenties on, becoming, with the aid of its captive Communist movement, the first major obstacle to proletarian revolution in the West. (Leadership of revolution was thus deflected to an underdeveloped world devoid of a literate and socialized proletariat.) "By his crimes [and policies]," wrote the Soviet historian Roy A. Medvedev whose manuscript on Stalin was smuggled out for publication in the West, "Stalin did not help, he hindered, he did not accelerate, he slowed the people's movement to socialism and communism in the Soviet Union and in the whole world. In some respects Stalin turned this movement backward."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Milovan Djilas, Conversations with Stalin (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1962). Whether a centrist Communist party can lead revolution needs study. The question arises from reading two anti-Communist studies: D. George Kousoulas, Revolution and Defeat (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1965) and Edgar O'Ballance, The Greek Civil War, 1944-49 (New York: Praeger, 1966).

<sup>40</sup>Deutscher, op. cit., 73.

<sup>41</sup>Let History Judge (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. xxxi.

What possibilities would have been opened to the European working-classes, if Europe in 1945 had seen lined together a revolutionary Italy, flanked by successful revolutions in Yugoslavia, Albania, and Greece? PCI defenders will argue that impossibility. It is not without interest that to their right bourgeois historians concur in denying a Jacobin phase to the Risorgimento.

The present PCI, in the final analysis, is the direct offspring of the illegitimate group meeting over the broken remnants of the Sinistra at Lyons in 1926. Enrico Berlinguer, the heir apparent to Luigi Longo, the aging PCI chieftan, summarized this point rather succinctly to a 1969 PCI congress: "Allow me to cite a brief passage from Togliatti, which, to me, constitutes one of the highest points reached by Marxism in Italy; that Marxist vision belonging to [Antonio] Labriola, and through Lenin, passed on to Gramsci and Togliatti."<sup>42</sup> The knowledge that the PCI foreswore its revolutionary past in 1926 clarifies much of the mystery behind its behavior in the last forty years.

If Bordiga represented the apogee of revolutionary Marxism in Italy, then he would have to stand or fall as a serious theoretician by a judgment based on the Rome Theses. One cannot accept the proposition that Bordiga was a great Marxist, whereas the Rome Theses were an aberration. Do these

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<sup>42</sup>Quoted in L'Unità, February 16, 1969.

Theses have any contemporary applicability? The Rome Theses were based on the need to build a model for revolution in the conditions of Western bourgeois democracy. The tactics stressed the moments of great crises in the advanced countries as the key to proletarian victory. But to build to that moment, proletarian parties had to eschew political deals leading to patchwork reform and blunted class consciousness. Tactical moves had to remain subordinated to strategic goals, and the party had to be ready to stand on principle in those times of mass emotion when popular opinion moves away (as happened during the chauvinist wave engulfing Europe in 1914). Lastly, that nothing be undertaken by the party to halt the growing feeling in the working-class that its revolution alone would put an end to international conflict and to the degradation of class society. The Rome Theses were intended to serve the needs of an industrial proletariat, and they mean little to the underdeveloped world where the guerrilla and the peasant army are said to be substitutes for the proletariat of the West.

Indications have begun to appear that an era of exacerbated class struggles has returned to the West. Perhaps the most dramatic example of renewed proletarian action were the May strikes of 1968 in France. In his study and commentary

on the event Daniel Singer<sup>43</sup> presents a number of findings, and he details how the French Communist party and the Communist-led CGL, the most powerful labor body in France, did all in their power to obstruct a student-worker fusion and keep the potential of the May strikes from flowing into a revolutionary denouement, forcing the strikes back into reformist channels leading to temporary economic improvement.

That the ideological elder sister of the PCI, the PCF, acted in such fashion--the "negative hero," in Singer's words--comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with the rise of the Centro over the Sinistra, a victory heralded as a gain for world revolution. Most significant, however, is that the crisis of 1968 was of the very kind anticipated by the Rome Theses.

After years of the talk of the backwardness and apathy of the masses, the French crisis which laid bare the apathy and backwardness of the bureaucratic leadership, this crisis was a natural vindication of spontaneity. Yet....it also pointed out the many limitations. First, the strikers had no clear idea of where they were going. The lack of purpose was a lack of political consciousness, which in turn reflected a failure of years of theoretical and practical education in socialism. Second... there was nobody to channel the forces to give a lead, to suggest a direction.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Prelude to Revolution (New York: Hill & Wang, 1970). Singer quotes from Les Temps Modernes, "We knew we could not make a revolution without the Communists. We know now we cannot make it with them."

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

The elements found missing by Singer were the very ingredients the Rome Theses would have provided to the working class. For the PCF the lesson of October had been in vain.<sup>45</sup>

Singer's study of the PCF during the May 1968 crisis and the knowledge of how the PCI was transfigured after 1924 provide an adequate, if still incomplete, explanation for the collapse of Marxist thinking in the West. Western Marxism fell victim not to absolescence but to the institutionalization of the October Revolution, following that first proletarian success. A clear case was the Italian party. What mountains of literature were turned out by these two Western parties elaborating Marxist studies which in the end turn out to be obfuscations of reality! How many original minds were driven away from the vision of a classless society by the need to justify obscurantism--or working-class spontaneity smothered before it could lead to independent class action?

Extant Marxism is, moreover, largely that spurious reinterpretation worked out by the Communist movement in the middle twenties. This Marxism and its movement bear a relationship to social democracy in the manner that all three manipulate the working class in the name of socialism. When a Western

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<sup>45</sup> In all fairness one should mention that the PCI was critical of PCF conduct in May.



Stalinist party finally does break down--the PCI in Italy-- it remains on the right, never moving to the left, thus disclosing again the nature of its genesis. In short, Western capitalism has not been confronted by a major Marxist-led working-class opposition since the early twenties.

If Singer is right in his belief that proletarian insurgencies will return to France and Italy within the decade, a revolutionary crisis in Italy will range the PCI alongside the upholders of the present order, with the party reenacting the anti-revolutionary roles of the CGL and the PSI in 1919-20. For the PCI to identify with bourgeois democracy at a time when that system is unable to resolve the problems it has brought into being or to discredit bourgeois democracy without advancing the proletarian state will, in either case, feed the neo-Fascists on the right, who are only too ready to swoop down and pick apart the body of the republic. With a return to an era of civil conflict, a new Sinistra would have to do to the PCI what the PCI attempted with the PSI in 1921--draw out the revolutionary element and leave the rest to history.

Whether the working class, drawing upon the aid of left-wing intellectual allies, will succeed in reconstructing a new Sinistra remains an open question. The traditions of Italian history do not favor the development, and the Centrist party would react to the mortal threat with all its means. Without

a Sinistra Italy may experience great proletarian agitation, perhaps even a bloodier repetition of Red Week 1914, but no revolution.

Nothing appeared more certain at the end of the last century than that in the coming years Europe would witness a seizure of power by the working classes, an expectation seemingly confirmed by the Russian events of 1917. In the past half decade working-class agitations in France, Czechoslovakia, Italy (the "hot autumn" of 1969), and Poland have underscored the power remaining in the hands of that class. Half a century after the October Revolution the working classes of both East and West rise from time to time to shake society, but their challenge now assumes the form of a question mark.

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