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After the Fall: Politics, the Public Use of History and the Historiography of the Italian Communist Party, 1991–2011

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Abstract

Traditionally, historians described the Italian Communist Party (PCI) as primarily a national party whose strategies had always been largely, if not exclusively, determined by the Italian socio-political environment. Scholars tended to emphasize the merits of the PCI in the construction of Italian democracy and its abiding commitment to the defence of the republican government throughout the postwar period. This view was seriously challenged after the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the dissolution of the PCI (January 1991), when a strand of 'revisionist' literature questioned the PCI's national character and its democratic credentials. At the same time, the polemical use of these new interpretations in the political arena, along with a new range of historical evidence from the Soviet archives, contributed to turn the debate about the role of the PCI in Italian democracy into a never-ending diatribe. This article is aimed at chronicling the politicization of PCI history and discussing how this affected historiography, in a period characterized, more than ever before, by the political and public use of history.

Keywords

Italian Communist Party, Palmiro Togliatti, Public use of history, Salerno Turn, Stalinism

At the end of the 1970s, the Italian Communist Party (PCI), under the leadership of Enrico Berlinguer, seemed to be at the final stage of an uninterrupted march

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towards legitimacy within the Italian political system. After reaching the peak of its electoral popularity, in 1975–6, it was considered by both Italian and foreign experts to be placed, to quote the title of a well known book, ‘on the threshold of government’.¹ Far from being regarded as a dangerous lair of subversives, it had acquired a reputation as the guarantor of the Italian Constitution, even in some sectors of conservative public opinion.² This positive perception of the role of the PCI within the democratic system was mirrored by a historiography which was generally favourable to the party. It has been argued that the Marxist cultural formation of most Italian historians accounts for this.³ Although such a claim is true in some respects – the historiography of the PCI was principally compiled by scholars who were not only Marxists but also members of the party⁴ – the description of the PCI as a democratic force was not the consequence of a lopsided historiography, but rather rested upon historical events which were interpreted as concrete evidence of Italian communists’ constant commitment to the defence of peace and democracy. Palmiro Togliatti, leader of the party from 1930 to 1934, and then uninterruptedly from 1938 to 1964, was one of the Fathers of the Italian Constitution and the Minister of Justice who, in June 1946, promoted national reconciliation by drafting an amnesty which was extended to both partisans and to fascists who had committed atrocities during the civil war.⁵ The PCI had been a supporter of the cause of world peace throughout its postwar history, as championed by, for example, the so-called ‘partisans of peace’ movement;⁶ and a firm opponent of all political violence, a policy coherently maintained under the leadership of Enrico Berlinguer, who had been among the most staunch defenders of democracy during the *Attacco al cuore dello stato* (attack on the heart of the state) led by the Red Brigades in the second half of the 1970s.⁷ The image of the PCI as a solid pillar of Italian democracy rested, above all, upon Togliatti’s so-called *Svolta di Salerno* (Salerno turn) policy, which will be discussed later in this article. Today the judgment of historians, along with public opinion, has dramatically changed,

1 J. Ruscoe *The Italian Communist Party, 1976–81. On the Threshold of Government* (London 1982). The expression is taken from the PCI’s 1978 congressional theses. The book records the failure of the PCI’s attempt to get into the national Government. However, the author stressed how: ‘... the PCI is one of the most stable factors in Italian life. Its permanence is assured, and, given its tradition and structure, it has a freedom of manoeuvre which other fixed constants in Italy, such as the Roman Catholic Church or the Fiat Company, must envy’, 4.

2 N. Ajello *Il lungo addio. Intellettuali e PCI 1944–1958* (Bari 1979), 110.

3 E. Aga Rossi and G. Quagliariello (eds), *L’altra faccia della luna. I rapporti tra PCI, PCF e l’Unione Sovietica* (Bologna 1997), 17–19.

4 A. Agosti ‘L’età dell’oro della storiografia sul partito comunista (1960–1989)’, *Revista de Historia Actual*, 6, 6 (2008), 103–13.

5 On the Togliatti amnesty see M. Franzinelli, *L’amnistia Togliatti. 22 giugno 1946: colpo di spugna sui crimini fascisti* (Milan 2006).

6 On the *partigiani della pace* movement see R. Giacomini, *I partigiani della pace. Il movimento pacifista in Italia e nel mondo negli anni della prima guerra fredda* (Milan 1984). See also A. Mariuzzo ‘Stalin and the dove: Left pacifist language and choices of expression between the Popular Front and the Korean War (1948–1953)’, *Modern Italy*, 15, 1 (February 2010), 21–35.

7 According to Giovanni De Luna, the PCI engaged in a ‘lotta senza quartiere’ (relentless fight) against terrorism: G. De Luna, *Le ragioni di un decennio. 1969–1979. Militanza, violenza, sconfitta, memoria* (Milan 2009), 96.

and a new vision has emerged of the PCI as a non-democratic, Stalinist and subversive force: in short, a fifth column. This remarkable shift was partly due to the collapse of the Eastern European communist regimes, at the end of the 1980s, but it was also a consequence of a major crisis, at the beginning of the 1990s, of the political parties which had historically been the backbone of the Italian political system.⁸ The sudden and dramatic dissolution of virtually all of these, in the wake of the *Tangentopoli* scandals, urged many scholars to formulate a general reconsideration of the republican period and engaged the interest of a wider audience in recent Italian history. This curiosity was nourished by mass media and politicians, as many historical facts and interpretations, above all those concerning the history of the Italian Communist Party, were exploited in the fierce political struggle which redefined the parameters of the political system.⁹ As never before, historical interpretations of the actual contribution of the PCI to the development of the Italian democratic system became matters for public discussion. In the meantime, new documents that might shed light on the issue were becoming available to historians, thanks to what has been defined as 'the archive revolution', namely the progressive opening up of the Soviet and Comintern archives that began in 1991.¹⁰ This new evidence, however, made the debate even harsher and more ideologically grounded. This was due to the fact that the interpretative framework had already been established by journalists and politicians. Every new book and essay, therefore, was doomed to be read, and advertised by the mass media, almost exclusively for its relevance to the evolving political struggle. As Stuart Woolf writes in his recent and compelling investigation of this phenomenon, 'it is quite uncommon for a Western scholar to witness such an unscrupulous public use of history like the one currently displayed in Italy'.¹¹ The public and political use of history by journalists and politicians eventually affected historiographical research. This often occurred

8 P. Scoppola, *La repubblica dei partiti. Evoluzione e crisi di un sistema politico (1945–1996)* (Bologna 2006); see also D. Sassoon, 'Tangentopoli or the democratization of corruption: Considerations on the end of Italy's first republic', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 1, 1 (1995), 124–43.

9 A. Agosti, 'La nemesi del patto costitutivo', in A. Del Boca (ed.) *La storia negata. Il revisionismo e il suo uso politico* (Vicenza 2009), 261–92.

10 The expression 'archive revolution' is from G. Vacca, 'Togliatti e la Storia' in R. Gualtieri; C. Spagnolo and E. Taviani (eds) *Togliatti nel suo tempo* (Rome 2007), 5.

11 S.J. Woolf, 'Introduzione. La storiografia e la Repubblica italiana' in S.J. Woolf (ed.) *L'Italia repubblicana vista da fuori (1945–2000)* (Bologna 2007), 47. The issue of the public use of history has aroused the interest of several Italian historians over the last two decades, see for example N. Gallerano, *L'uso pubblico della storia* (Milan 1995); G. Santomassimo (ed.), *La notte della democrazia italiana* (Milan 2003) which contributed to an analysis firstly initiated by J. Habermas in 'Concerning the public use of history', *New German Critique* 44 (Spring – Summer 1988) (Special Issue on the Historikerstreit), 40–50. The present article adopts the definition of 'public use of history' offered by Nicola Gallerano in 'History and the Public Use of History', *Diogenes*, 42, 4 (Winter 1994), 85: 'Public use of history includes not only the various means of mass communication, each with its own particularities... but also the arts and literature; public places such as schools, history museums, monuments and urban spaces etc.... which, with more or less clearly partisan objectives, endeavour to promote a more or less polemical reading of the past as compared to the generally accepted common sense of history and historiography, a polemical reading based on the memory of their respective groups.' Within 'the public use of history' falls the 'political use of history', which occurs when 'history is used above all as an instrument of day-to-day political battle'. *Ibid.*, 100.

independently from the professional ethics of the scholars, being a side effect of the highly charged political context. Because they were aware that their findings were going to be read through the lens of the ongoing political debate, historians were inevitably driven to take sides, either emphasizing or glossing over some of their conclusions. On the other hand, some right-wing historians engaged more openly with political polemics, and showed a blatant tendency to brandish facts and interpretations concerning PCI history as a club with which to beat the post-communist Italian left. The Italian historiographical debate on the PCI's democratic nature over the last 20 years is therefore, in many respects, a mirror of the tensions which run through the political system, and is a reflection of a country incapable of coming to terms with its past and reaching a shared interpretation of its recent history.

Contextualising the historiography on the Italian Communist Party since 1991 by locating it in the framework of Italian political debate, this article is aimed at bringing together two related threads. It will chart how the history of the PCI became a political issue and how the PCI's historiographical reassessment intertwined with other highly controversial topics such as the moral and political legacy of the Italian resistance and the re-evaluation of the fascist regime. Meanwhile, the article will analyse the key moments of the PCI historiographical revision of the 1990s, focusing particularly on the issues which contributed to the shaping of the current perception of the PCI as a non-democratic political party: the Stalinism of Palmiro Togliatti and his subordination to Moscow, the real impetus behind the *Svolta di Salerno* policy. The final section will draw some conclusions, discussing how the politicization of PCI history fundamentally affected the historiographical debate surrounding the Italian Communist Party, over the last 20 years, and will suggest new approaches for research into PCI history.

The historiographical reassessment of the PCI of the nineties assumed a political character because it originated in the political field, and its roots can be traced in the ideological and political friction between the PSI (*Partito Socialista Italiano* – Italian Socialist Party) and the PCI of Enrico Berlinguer at the end of the 1970s. Aiming to reverse the progressive political marginalization of the PSI caused by Berlinguer's policy of the *Compromesso storico*, the socialist leader Bettino Craxi challenged the PCI on the ideological plane, denouncing the totalitarian character of every form of communism as being opposed to the libertarian and non-Leninist tradition of the kind of socialism embodied by the PSI.¹² This provoked an ideological skirmish which coincided with the deterioration of political relations between the two historic parties of the Italian left.¹³ In March 1988, the polemic shifted from an ideological to a historical level, following the conference on

12 On the publication of the so-called *Vangelo socialista*, attributed to Craxi but actually written by Luciano Pellicani, in the magazine *l'Espresso* in 1978, see L. Musella, *Craxi* (Rome 2007), 155–66.

13 For a general overview about the PCI-PSI quarrel in the 1980s see S. Colarizzi, 'I duellanti. La rottura tra il PCI di Berlinguer e il PSI di Craxi alla svolta degli anni ottanta' in F. Barbagallo and A. Vittoria (eds) *Enrico Berlinguer, la politica italiana e la crisi mondiale* (Rome 2007), 107–18.

Stalinism and the Italian left organized by *Mondo Operaio*, a well established journal on culture and politics of the Italian Socialist Party. This conference, boycotted by communist historians, was explicitly aimed at bringing to historians' attention the issue of the Bolshevik–Stalinist roots of the PCI as a pathway for future research.¹⁴ A few months later, in June 1988, Achille Occhetto was elected secretary of the PCI. In an attempt to arrest the haemorrhage of votes the Italian Communist Party had been experiencing since the middle of the decade, the new leader committed the party to a process of revision, both of its ideological roots and of its history. In order to initiate such a process, shortly after his election, Occhetto gave a speech during the inauguration of a monument dedicated to Palmiro Togliatti in the town of Civitavecchia. While reaffirming the merits of Togliatti in the construction of Italian democracy, he also openly denounced Togliatti's support, during the early period of his political activity, for Stalin and his policies.¹⁵ Occhetto could not have been unaware of the symbolic relevance of the occasion he chose to make his statement. Symbolic, too, was the date that *l'Unità*, the official newspaper of the Italian Communist party, chose to publish an article by Biagio De Giovanni, Principal of the *Università Orientale* of Naples and one of the most prominent of Occhetto's advisors, entitled 'Once upon a time there was Togliatti and real communism': 20 August 1989, the eve of the 25th anniversary of Togliatti's death. This was a dramatic transitional period for the international communist movement: the Berlin wall was still up, but the blood of the Chinese students had already been spilled in Tiananmen Square, and the crisis of the Eastern European communist regimes had clearly entered its final phase. In this context De Giovanni claimed that Togliatti's political thought and praxis were to be judged as jointly responsible for the political, economic and social disasters of *comunismo reale*, and therefore invited the Party to put behind it, without further delay, Togliatti's cultural and political heritage. The communist leadership was clearly trying to redefine the political and cultural background of the party. However, De Giovanni's strong statement, instead of being praised by non-communist politicians and intellectuals as a positive development, was harshly criticized in several articles published immediately afterwards, especially by the official newspaper of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) *Avanti!*.¹⁶ It was not De Giovanni's argument which provoked discussion, but the communists' attempt to reassess autonomously their historical heritage. The large majority of non-communist intellectuals, be they journalists or politicians, could not allow the PCI to get rid of its past in such an easy and, in their view, painless way,

14 The audio files of the discussions at the conference 'Lo stalinismo e la sinistra italiana' can be heard at <http://www.radioradicale.it/scheda/26347/26374-lo-stalinismo-nella-sinistra-italiana-organizzato-dalla-rivista-mondoperaio> (accessed 5 June 2014).

15 'Occhetto: ecco il percorso di Togliatti', *l'Unità* (9 July 1988), 1.

16 See, for example, G. Baget Bozzo 'Dimenticare Togliatti per rimanergli fedeli', on the front page of *Avanti!* (22 August 1989). The article provoked a trenchant exchange of views in the pages of *l'Unità* and *Avanti!* over the following days.

without paying in full the political and electoral price for their past ideological mistakes. Significantly, the Socialist Party, still led by Bettino Craxi, was at the forefront of this polemical offensive against the PCI, hoping to take advantage and fill the traditional electoral gap between the two principal parties of the Italian left. The criticism against the PCI and its history was grounded in the assumption that the PCI, being a communist party, was at least morally responsible for the crimes perpetrated by communists all over the world. Nonetheless, the end of the Italian Communist Party, which turned into the Partito Democratico della Sinistra (PDS) during the congress held in Rimini (30 January – 3 February 1991),¹⁷ did not mark the end of this battle over the past and, very soon, it would become clear that the political legitimacy of the post-communist Italian left could be jeopardized. Achille Occhetto, a few months after the new party was established, showed he was aware of this danger and, in an article published in *l'Unità*, vigorously requested an end to the quarrel, and that the matter be left to historians:

Our position over the past is clear: it is now a matter for archives, documents and a job for historians. From a political point of view we have made the greatest possible changes. We have squared our accounts with the past. But if there is anybody who says that we no longer have the right to exist as a party because of our past, then our answer is: you are not looking for historical truth; you are instigating a shameful campaign of persecution.¹⁸

Occhetto's assumption that historical research had to be, almost by definition, free from political concerns proved to be ill-founded: the historical reassessment of the PCI did begin, but with an unmistakable political character. Initially, the interests of historians fell on the figure of Palmiro Togliatti. This was rather predictable since the leadership of the Italian Communist Party had drawn attention to Togliatti when, at the end of the 1980s, Occhetto had made a clear-cut attempt to distance the PCI from the Stalinist period of its past. Togliatti's biography was, however, scrutinized far more deeply than Occhetto would have wished. The 18 years Togliatti spent in exile in Moscow raised questions about his role during Stalin's purge of the 1930s, which he had survived, unlike the majority of the foreign communist leaders living in the Soviet Union at the time. As early as 1991, the historian Gianni Corbi had compiled an accurate account of Togliatti's complicity in endorsing Stalin's persecution of the USSR's foreign communities, including Italians, in the 1930s.¹⁹ This did not prevent the publication of many

17 For a sociological analysis of the PCI in the period 1988–91, which represented in many respects a traumatic phase for the grassroots level as well as for the leadership of the party, see P. Ignazi, *Dal PCI al PDS* (Bologna 1992), especially 169–76.

18 A. Occhetto 'Rispettate Berlinguer e misuratevi con questo PDS', *l'Unità* (27 October 1991), 1. Occhetto stressed how the PSI, under the leadership of Pietro Nenni, had supported, not unlike the PCI, Stalin and his policies up to 1956.

19 G. Corbi *Togliatti a Mosca* (Milan 1991). Actually, this issue dated back a long time, see for example the investigation by R. Mieli, *Togliatti 1937. Le responsabilità del leader del PCI nel terrore*

essays on this topic, some well documented and balanced,²⁰ others written for purely political purposes, such as the prolific production of anti-communist pamphlets by Francesco Bigazzi and Giancarlo Lehner, conspicuous for their provocative titles as well as for their factionalism.²¹ The question was whether the complicity in Stalin's purge was, for Togliatti, a matter of personal survival,²² or rather a genuine adherence to a ruthless praxis judged to be necessary in that particular historical phase.²³ The issue certainly served, to quote Elena Dundovich, 'to question the democratic legitimacy of the PCI and its heirs, attaching to them an indelible stigma'.²⁴ Virtually every episode of Togliatti's period in Moscow has been remorselessly investigated, leading to an almost morbid interest among the media in any new sensational revelations about Togliatti. The end result was an inevitable and regrettable tendency among Italian historians to search for the historical scoop, like the famous (or notorious) case of the publication of the letters between Togliatti and Vincenzo Bianco by the magazine *Panorama*, in February 1992.²⁵

The polemical reappraisal of PCI history was consistent with a parallel historical revisionism questioning the anti-fascist character of the Italian Republic and the *Resistenza*, the military resistance against Nazi occupation and the RSI (*Repubblica Sociale Italiana* – the fascist Government) in the years 1943–5.²⁶ The Italian Constitution, which was the concrete outcome of the so-called *Patto costituzionale*, the pact among the anti-fascist political parties which had established democratic

staliniano (Milan 1964). Mieli's book was republished in 1988, and this is quite meaningful as the PCI had started in that year that process of self-detachment from Togliatti's heritage that has been described above.

20 E. Dundovich, *Tra esilio e castigo: il Komintern, il PCI e la repressione degli antifascisti italiani in URSS, 1936–38* (Rome 1998); E. Dundovich and F. Gori, *Italiani nel lager di Stalin* (Bari 2006).

21 F. Bigazzi and G. Lehner, *Dialoghi del terrore* (Milan 1991); F. Bigazzi and G. Lehner, *La tragedia dei comunisti italiani* (Milan 2000); F. Bigazzi and G. Lehner, *Carnefici e vittime. I crimini del PCI in Unione Sovietica* (Milan 2006).

22 This is what Paolo Pombeni argues in 'Sul retroterra politico di Palmiro Togliatti. Note in margine alla formazione di un leader', in R. Gualtieri; C. Spagnolo and Emilio Taviani, *Togliatti nel suo tempo*, 182–92.

23 E. Dundovich 'Nel grande terrore. Togliatti dirigente dell'internazionale comunista tra le due guerre', in R. Gualtieri; C. Spagnolo and Emilio Taviani, *Togliatti nel suo tempo*, 124–57.

24 *Ibid.*, 152.

25 In February 1992, at the beginning of the electoral campaign, the weekly magazine *Panorama* published a selection of the correspondence between Palmiro Togliatti and the PCI delegate at the Comintern, Vincenzo Bianco, about the conditions of Italian war prisoners in Soviet Union. The letters, written in Russian and dated January–February 1943, were found in a Soviet archive by the journalist Francesco Bigazzi and the historian Franco Andreucci. Due to several mistakes in the translation, in one of the letters Togliatti seemed to endorse the mistreatment of the Italian prisoners. For a couple of weeks the affair monopolized the political debate. Eventually Andreucci admitted the mistake and resigned from the office of scientific advisor to the Ponte alle Grazie publishing house. See Agosti, 'La nemesi del Patto costituyente', 276–9. Togliatti's letters, correctly translated, are in E. Aga Rossi and V. Zaslavsky, *Togliatti e Stalin. Il PCI e la politica estera staliniana negli archivi di Mosca* (Bologna 1997), 165–6.

26 On this issue see F. Focardi, *La Guerra della memoria. Le Resistenza nel dibattito politico italiano dal 1945 ad oggi* (Rome–Bari 2005), 57–62; P. Pezzino, 'The Italian Resistance between history and memory', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 10, 4 (2005), 396–412, and especially P. Cooke, *The legacy of the Italian Resistance* (New York, NY 2011), 149–89.

government, was also challenged, because it was regarded by many as responsible for what was defined as the *degenerazione partitocratica* of the First Republic, in which parties tended to enjoy greater influence than the parliament and the government.²⁷ The Italian Communist Party had grounded its democratic legitimacy in its participation in the *Resistenza*, and the defence of the Constitution had been its most distinctive political commitment throughout the republican period: as a consequence, it was evidently affected, together with its political heirs, by such revisionism. On a historical level, there were some good reasons to embark on a reconsideration of the political genesis of the republic and to investigate whether the *Resistenza* had fulfilled its role as the moral foundation of Italian democracy.²⁸ Much of the polemic surrounding these issues in the nineties was, however, driven by clear political motives, and was a direct consequence of the entrance into politics of the media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi and of his blatant use of anti-communism as a political weapon. In January 1994, Silvio Berlusconi announced, through his television stations, the formation of a brand new political party, Forza Italia!, and his decision to run in the forthcoming elections, in order to counter a potential victory by the PDS, which appeared inevitable after the political earthquake provoked by the *mani pulite* (clean hands) judicial investigations and the consequent disappearance of both the PSI and DC (Democrazia Cristiana).²⁹ In the nine-minute message he issued to moderate public opinion traumatized by the dramatic and inglorious end of what would be called the first republic, Berlusconi claimed that left-wing politicians, defined as 'orphans and nostalgics of communism', did not have true democratic feelings:

Left-wingers pretend they have changed, they claim they are liberal-democrats now, but it is not true, they are the same as before, their mentality, their culture, their deepest beliefs and their behaviour are just the same as before.³⁰

The battlefield was the past, the history of the PCI and its role in the development of Italian democracy: to deny the PCI any democratic credentials was a pretext for weakening the very political legitimacy of the post-communist Italian left at the beginning of the second republic.³¹ Because the right wing coalition had little chance of winning the election without the decisive contribution of the post-fascists, in 1994 Berlusconi associated Forza Italia! with the post-fascist Movimento

27 Agosti, 'La nemesi del patto costituyente', 280–1.

28 E. Galli della Loggia, *La morte della patria* (Rome–Bari 2008).

29 On *mani pulite* see N. Tranfaglia, *Anatomia dell'Italia repubblicana (1943–2009)*, (Città di Castello 2010), 154–7.

30 The PDF file of Berlusconi's 'Discorso della discesa in campo' (literally 'Taking the field' speech) of 26 January 1994 is available at <http://docenti.unimc.it/docenti/maria-amalia-barchiesi/linguaggio-politico/i-discorso>. (accessed 5 June 2014).

31 Berlusconi repeatedly used anticommunism in his propaganda, for example, he promoted *The Black book of Communism*, edited by Stéphane Courtois in 1997, during the 2001 electoral campaign, see Agosti, 'La nemesi del patto costituyente', 263.

Sociale Italiano (MSI), soon to become Alleanza Nazionale (AN).³² If the PDS had found itself in the awkward position of having to prove its democratic credentials, for the MSI the question could not even be posed: it had none. The MSI had, in fact, constantly opposed the Constitution, which it did not contribute to writing, throughout the republican period. The only way to provide some historical legitimacy to the presence of a post-fascist party in the republican government was thus, on the one hand, to devalue anti-fascism, presenting it as outdated and, on the other, to downgrade opponents, namely the post-communist left, to the same status of historical illegitimacy which characterized the post-fascists. As far as the former tendency is concerned, the way had been paved, on the historiographical plane, by the work of the historian Renzo De Felice. His monumental and rather controversial biography of Mussolini, published in eight volumes between 1965 and 1997, had somewhat weakened in public opinion the perception of antifascism as a fundamental value of the postwar republican regime, and De Felice himself ended up conferring to his studies a political direction when, at the end of the 1980s, he claimed that antifascism had historically served the purpose of legitimizing the PCI as a democratic party, and that this had eventually turned into an obstacle to much-needed political reforms.³³ The right-wing historiography of the second republic, in turn, strived in particular to prove that the post-communist left had no more historical right to govern than had the post-fascist right. The rhetorical technique deployed by several authors to achieve such a result has been defined as *Rovescismo* (Reversism),³⁴ and consisted in charging the communists with the same allegations historically ascribed to fascists: if fascists had fought for the triumph of Hitler, the communist partisans had fought for a scarcely better cause: the supremacy of communism, that is Stalinism, over Italy. Because many fascists had been involved in several plots against democracy, with at least one attempted military coup in 1970,³⁵ a number of right-wing historians, with the aim of maintaining the parallelism described above, sustained *tout court* the subversive nature of the PCI and, in order to prove the point, alleged the existence of a secret paramilitary structure within the party. The existence of a communist *apparato di riserva* (reserve apparatus) – the definition is Giulio Seniga's³⁶ – is confirmed by the historiography.³⁷ The *apparato* seems to have been established in order for the party

32 C. Ruzza and S. Fella, *Re-inventing the Italian Right, Territorial politics, populism and 'post-fascism'* (London 2009), 27–9.

33 B.W. Painter, Jr., 'Renzo De Felice and the historiography of Italian Fascism', *The American Historical Review*, 95, 2 (April 1990), 391–405. De Felice, in particular, stressed the difference between being antifascist and being democratic, denying a direct correlation between the two positions. On this point see R. de Felice and P. Chessa, *Rosso e nero* (Milan 1995), 24–25.

34 A. d'Orsi, 'Dal revisionismo al rovescismo. La Resistenza (e la Costituzione) sotto attacco', in A. Del Boca, *La storia negata*, 329–72.

35 C. Arcuri, *Colpo di stato. Storia vera di un'inchiesta censurata* (Milan 2004).

36 M. Caprara, *Lavoro riservato. I cassette segreti del PCI* (Milan 1997), 78.

37 P. di Loreto, *Togliatti e la "doppiezza". Il PCI tra democrazia e insurrezione (1944–1949)* (Bologna 1991), 65; A. Guerra, *Comunismi e comunisti. Dalle "svolte" di Togliatti e Stalin del 1944 al crollo del comunismo democratico* (Bari 2005), 144–8. V. Zaslavsky, *Lo stalinismo e la sinistra italiana* (Milan 2004).

to have at its disposal a structure ready to react to a putative military coup by anti-communist or anti-democratic forces. There is no definitive proof, either in the PCI's archives or in the Government's, that this structure was conceived in preparation for an insurrection. It therefore seems more the response to a sense of insecurity than evidence of an intention to strike. This *apparato* must not be confused with the historical fact that many partisan brigades autonomously decided to be prepared for the eventuality of a future insurrection, hiding the best of their military equipment at the end of the war.³⁸ Interpreting all of this in various, and frequently imaginative ways, several journalists and right-wing historians tried to suggest the presence of two separate levels of organization within the Party. Besides the legal and official structure, there was an underground layer of well-trained paramilitary troops, awaiting the order to engage in civil war. The curious aspect of this affair is that the only Italian paramilitary organization, whose existence was proved beyond any doubt, because it was confirmed by the Italian Government in 1990, was the anti-communist *Gladio*, a NATO 'stay behind' operation.³⁹ Therefore a large part of the interest generated by the communist *apparato* – promptly labelled *Gladio rossa* (Red Gladio) by the media – ultimately seems to have been a polemical reaction to the revelations regarding this right-wing structure which recruited many former fascists and others whose democratic credentials were, at the very least, questionable. The issue of the PCI apparatus is probably the most striking example of the public use of the history of the PCI in the second republic. It was initially brought to the attention of the wider public by a scoop in the magazine *L'Europeo*, in May 1991, then investigated for three years by the Public Prosecutor's office in Rome (with no tangible results), while also being boosted by several publications⁴⁰ and countless articles in different newspapers. It was even discussed in the *Commissione stragi* of the Italian Parliament, a Committee formed by MPs to investigate, with the input of historians, the causes of terrorism in Italy.⁴¹ The Committee was not able to come to any

38 It has been argued that, while Togliatti was urging communist partisans to hand back their weapons, other sectors of the party, under the influence of the powerful deputy secretary of the party Pietro Secchia, were secretly establishing opposite directives. This is the much debated issue of the so-called *doppiezza* (duplicity) of the PCI, namely the tendency of many cadres and comrades to believe that the PCI's struggle for democracy was only a veil hiding the real aim of the party's activity, which was the preparation of the Communist revolution. The expression *doppiezza* is by Palmiro Togliatti who, in a speech delivered in 1956, invited once and for all the Party to get rid of 'a certain atmosphere of *doppiezza*', see Di Loreto, *Togliatti e la "doppiezza"*, 7. On the issue of the *doppiezza* see also R. Martinelli, *Storia del Partito comunista Italiano. Il 'partito nuovo' dalla Liberazione al 18 aprile* (Turin 1995), 257; F. Andreucci, *Falce e martello. Identità e linguaggi dei comunisti italiani fra stalinismo e Guerra fredda* (Bologna 2005), 51–5; A. Guiso *La seconda guerra mondiale nella 'memoria storica' del PCF e del PCI (1945–1956)*, in P. Craveri and G. Quagliariello (eds), *La seconda guerra mondiale e la sua memoria* (Catanzaro 2006), 560–6.

39 P. Craveri, *La Repubblica dal 1958 al 1992* (Turin 1995), 981–3.

40 For example G.P. Pellizzaro *Gladio Rosso – Dossier sulla più potente banda armata esistita in Italia* (Roma 1997).

41 R. Turi, *Gladio Rosso. Una catena di complotti e delitti dal dopoguerra al caso Moro* (Venice 2004), 274–82, according to the author the *mani pulite* investigation was a smoke screen set up in order to divert the attention of public opinion from the *Gladio rossa* affair which could embarrass both the former communist leaders and the Christian democrat ones, who had tolerated the presence of this

shared conclusions on this particular matter, and eventually presented to the Parliament conflicting reports. In 2001, the historian and adviser to the committee Gianni Donno published one of the above-mentioned reports bearing the less than imaginative title of *La Gladio rossa del PCI*. This book does not actually contain any evidence of the existence of the PCI's paramilitary structure, unless we are to consider as evidence the paranoid reports of the local prefects during the 1950s, replete with revelations, 'from an anonymous source', of plans for insurrections that, it is worth reiterating, never actually took place, to be carried out using weapons 'which were impossible to find'.⁴² In the presentation of the book, the former military officer and vice president of the *Commissione stragi* Vincenzo Manca frankly admitted that only the retrieval of the PCI's 'secret archive' – the existence of which was assumed even though its whereabouts was (and still remains) unknown – could have represented a smoking gun in order to prove the PCI's subversive activity. Nonetheless, Donno judged the available documentation as solid enough to argue the complicity of the PCI with the Red Brigades.⁴³

Although the discussion surrounding Togliatti's responsibilities in the 1930s and the issue of the Gladio rossa represented a political embarrassment for the PDS, the PCI's democratic reputation was not irreparably compromised, as it was principally founded on the *Svolta di Salerno* policy. It is worth recalling the outlines of the *Svolta* policy according to traditional left-wing historiography. In April 1944 Palmiro Togliatti, who had just arrived in the south of Italy from Moscow, declared that the Italian Communist Party was ready to cooperate with the king in the name of the common struggle against the Nazi-fascist forces which were still occupying the centre and the north of the country. He thus proposed to the other political parties of the C.L.N. (Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale/National Liberation Committee) to join the Badoglio Government, which was the political expression of the conservative establishment compromised by fascism. This move was interpreted as clear proof of Togliatti's patriotism: instead of endorsing a political shift to the left, the communist leader, showing a great sense of responsibility, proposed cooperation with the very figures and institutions that had persecuted the communists for years. This reading of the *Svolta di Salerno* was promoted by the PCI itself as a key propaganda tool and was, by and large, accepted by historiography: for a trenchant statement of this view there is no better example than Donald Sassoon's classic text, *The Strategy of the Italian Communist Party*.⁴⁴

structure. The *Gladio rossa* case was re-opened by judges in 2001 and definitively closed the following year, Turi, *Gladio Rosso*, 342–3.

42 On the use by historians of Italian police reports concerning the activity of the left-wing parties in the fifties see the acute remarks by A. Ballone 'Storiografia e storia del PCI', *Passato e Presente*, 12, 33 (September–December 1994), 129–46, which urged caution in dealing with such documents which were evidently affected by the Cold War political climate.

43 G. Donno, *La Gladio Rossa del PCI (1945–1967)* (Soveria Mannelli 2001), 133.

44 D. Sassoon, *The Strategy of the Italian Communist Party. From the Resistance to the Historic Compromise* (London 1981). The same claim is made by Paolo Spriano in *La Resistenza, Togliatti e il Partito Nuovo*, vol. 5 of the *Storia del Partito comunista italiano* (Einaudi 1975), 282–313.

As was the case with other publications,⁴⁵ the central thesis of this book was that the European communist parties, and especially the PCI, enjoyed a relative degree of autonomy from Moscow in the years 1943–7. Togliatti had thus been able to take some important autonomous decisions and to develop the ‘Italian road to socialism’ policy which, after a parenthesis due to the flare-up of the Cold War, between 1947 and 1956, allowed the Italian Communist Party to develop a democratic and pluralist vision of communism, increasingly distant from the Soviet model. Once adopted, this interpretation led to further conclusions: Togliatti’s political strategy was consistent with Antonio Gramsci’s thought, particularly in relation to his concepts of ‘cultural hegemony’ and ‘war of position’⁴⁶, and both had been physically embodied, in the postwar period, by the so-called *partito nuovo*, another remarkable Togliatti invention. No longer a platoon of professional revolutionaries, according to the Leninist model of the vanguard party, the *partito nuovo* was rather a mass-based party, designed to encourage people’s peaceful participation in the political life of a fledgling democracy. The *Svolta di Salerno* policy was therefore a sort of mainstay on which a comprehensive and coherent historiographical tradition was established. There were also alternative readings of the *Svolta* which contested the mainstream interpretation from both a left-wing and a right-wing perspective, but these had enjoyed significantly less influence. One of the most authoritative was by the left-wing political scientist and historian Giorgio Galli who, in opposition to the theory of the PCI’s autonomy from Moscow, claimed that no understanding of the nature and the history of the Italian Communist party was possible by disregarding the so-called *legame di ferro*, the iron link, which indissolubly bonded the Italian communist party to its elder brother, the PCUS, and the Soviet Union. Galli accused Togliatti of having worked to restrict the social and political aspirations of the Italian workers, in the years 1944–7, in order to conform to Stalin’s wish to avoid jeopardizing relations with the USA, whereas the Italian working class was in actual fact politically ready and strong enough to achieve much more in terms of political gains.⁴⁷ Similar conclusions, but from a right-wing perspective tending to depict Togliatti as Stalin’s agent, were expressed by Sergio Bertelli.⁴⁸ The book that, in the 1990s, re-opened the debate around the *Svolta di Salerno* was *Sul Pci. Un’interpretazione storica*, by Nicola Gallerano and Marcello Flores. Published in 1992, this work represents a sort of watershed, invariably quoted by subsequent publications, as the two left-wing historians set in motion a process of dismantling the political myths surrounding the history of the PCI, an approach which would characterize the

45 See P. Spriano *I comunisti europei e Stalin* (Turin 1983), 258–68; J. Bart Urban, *Moscow and the Italian Communist Party, from Togliatti to Berlinguer* (London 1986), 184–224.

46 An analysis of the literature on Togliatti’s elaboration, or rather exploitation, of Gramsci’s thought is beyond the scope of the present essay; see S. Gundle, ‘The legacy of the prison notebooks’ in C. Duggan and C. Wagstaff, *Italy in the Cold War. Politics, culture and society (1948–1958)* (Oxford 1995), 131–47.

47 G. Galli, *Storia del PCI*, the first of many editions of this classic was published by Schwarz in 1953, the most recent by Kaos Edizioni, in 1993.

48 S. Bertelli, *Il gruppo. La formazione del gruppo dirigente del PCI, 1936–1948* (Milan 1980), 197–202.

historiographical debate for the next decade. While many of the interpretations within the book – like the claim that the real aim of the *partigiani della pace* campaign was to grant the USSR enough time to reach a military parity with the US before an eventual confrontation⁴⁹ – may have troubled former communists, the most potentially damaging with respect to the PCI's democratic reputation concerned the *Svolta di Salerno*. The two historians argued that the *Svolta*, not unlike the rest of Togliatti's policies of the period, should have been primarily interpreted as related to Soviet foreign policy: in all likelihood the mastermind behind the *Svolta di Salerno* was Stalin, with Togliatti no more than the executor of orders designed to consolidate the anti-Nazi coalition, dispelling any suspicions about the Soviet Union's intentions for postwar Italy. The adoption of the new political strategy by the PCI's leaders in Italy, a policy which was in stark contrast with what the PCI had professed until the return of Togliatti, was unequivocal evidence of the communists' subjection to Soviet tactical design. The authors spoke of 'a sort of schizophrenia' of the Italian communist leaders: claims of political autonomy and effective subordination to Moscow coexisted without significant contradictions, 'two sides of the same coin', to quote the expression used in the book. Even eminent figures of the PCI's Italian leadership who had firstly opposed the *Svolta*, including Giorgio Amendola, eventually endorsed it because, not unlike the other party leaders politically formed in the third international, he considered the international dimension of every political question as prominent, and the defence of the interests of the Soviet Union as a priority.⁵⁰ Gallerano and Flores did not present any new evidence supporting their claims, which seemed to develop organically from the precise historical moment in which they published their work, a time characterized by the collapse of the democratic paradigm which had been associated with the PCI since 1944. It was therefore surprising that the first document from the Soviet archives, which had appeared at the end of 1991, seemed actually to corroborate the theory of Togliatti's autonomous elaboration of the *Svolta di Salerno*. This was the so-called memorandum *Sui compiti attuali dei comunisti italiani* (On the current duties of the Italian communists), by Palmiro Togliatti, dated 1 March 1944. The memorandum was divided into two parts: one containing the well known formulation of the *Svolta di Salerno* and the other (undoubtedly the first draft) its complete antithesis, namely a political platform centred on a request for abdication by the Italian king as a precondition for communist cooperation with a national government, as well as a firm opposition to the leadership of Badoglio. According to Aldo Agosti, who discovered and first published the document,⁵¹ it proved that all options were explored by the Soviet leadership until the very last moment, and that Togliatti had to work hard to make Stalin finally accept his point of view, which corresponded to the final draft of the

49 N. Gallerano and M. Flores, *Sul PCI. Un'interpretazione storica* (Bologna 1992), 75.

50 A first hand account of the debate about the *Svolta* in the Roman and Milan centre of the PCI is in G. Amendola, *Lettere a Milano. Ricordi e documenti, 1939–1945* (Rome 1973); cf L. Longo, *I centri dirigenti del PCI nella Resistenza* (Rome 1977).

51 A. Agosti, 'Salerno '44: I dubbi di Togliatti', *l'Unità* (28 October 1991), 11.

document. In 1994, however, the Russian historian Michail M. Narinskij challenged this interpretation and claimed that Stalin was the real and sole mind behind the *Svolta di Salerno*, which was probably imposed on a reluctant Togliatti after a meeting between the two during the night between 3 and 4 March 1944, proved beyond reasonable doubt by then newly available documents.⁵² The increasingly accessible Soviet documents fed into the publications of Elena Aga Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky, both of whom seriously questioned the traditional interpretation of the PCI's autonomy from Moscow. In their essay *The Soviet Union and the Italian Communist Party 1944–48*, the PCI was defined as 'a major instrument of Soviet geopolitical interest'.⁵³ According to the authors, who largely based their research on the reports sent to Moscow by Kostylev, the Soviet ambassador in Rome, the Italian communist leaders were continuously seeking advice from the Soviets, with whom they had meetings on a regular basis, discussing virtually every aspect of their political activity, including the PCI's economic programme for the reconstruction of the country. Rossi and Zaslavsky concluded that:

The documents demonstrate that the degree of Soviet control over the PCI leadership was very high, and undoubtedly higher than previously recognized by historians. All major initiatives on the part of the PCI had to receive Soviet authorization.⁵⁴

Togliatti, 'a moderate Stalinist',⁵⁵ committed the leadership of the party to a relentless effort to contain, moderate and eventually halt Italian workers' revolutionary spirit, preventing any insurrection in order to meet Stalin's desires. The authors thus endorsed the *gauchiste* interpretation of the historic function of the PCI within Italian democracy, which had been proposed by Giorgio Galli and, more recently, by Arturo Peregalli.⁵⁶ The theory of Togliatti's submissiveness to the Soviets was reiterated in two books published the following year by Aga Rossi: *L'altra faccia della luna*, conference proceedings edited in collaboration with Gaetano Quagliariello, which represented the first attempt to reach a new comparison between the French Communist Party and the PCI, an excellent example of comparative historiography, in the light of the newly available documents;⁵⁷ and

52 M.M. Narinskij, 'Togliatti, Stalin e la Svolta di Salerno', *Studi Storici*, 35, 3 (July–September 1994), 657–66. Shortly after the same claim was made in a paper by Elena Aga Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky entitled 'La politica estera di Stalin e il caso Italiano', presented at the conference 'Unione Sovietica e l'Europa nella guerra fredda' organized by the Fondazione Istituto Gramsci in Cortona, in 23 and 24 September 1994, and whose anti-Togliatti character was deliberately advertised in the media, see for example D. Messina, 'Salerno 1944, La Svolta di Stalin', *Corriere della Sera* (17 September 1994), 29.

53 E. Aga Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky, 'The Soviet Union and the Italian Communist Party 1944–48', in F. Gori and S. Pons (eds) *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War 1943–1953* (New York, NY 1996), 161.

54 *Ibid.*, 170.

55 *Ibid.*, 179.

56 A. Peregalli, *L'altra Resistenza. Il PCI e le opposizioni di sinistra. 1943–1945* (Genoa 1991).

57 Aga Rossi and Quagliariello, *L'altra faccia della luna*. The central thesis of the book is that the ideological and political difference between the PCI and the PCF had been overestimated by the

Togliatti e Stalin, written with Victor Zaslavsky, which developed their essay of the previous year.⁵⁸ In the latter, the authors engaged in a merciless analysis of the traditional historiography of the PCI, effectively rejecting the validity of past interpretations because of the ignorance on the part of their authors of the Soviet documents. They claimed that most of the research into the PCI was essentially 'based on Togliatti's official statements'⁵⁹ and revealed particular hostility towards more recent works, such as the biography of Palmiro Togliatti by Aldo Agosti,⁶⁰ defined as 'obsolete – one last homage to the Cold War'⁶¹, and Roberto Gualtieri's *Togliatti e la politica estera italiana*.⁶² To some extent this polemical approach was a hint of a showdown within Italian academic circles. Many of the most illustrious historians who occupied prestigious positions within the major Italian universities had left-wing political orientations, and were very often former members of the communist party. For many less famous, non-communist scholars the new political climate, coupled with such remarkable abundance of new evidence emerging from the Soviet archives, represented a unique and long-awaited occasion to hit the headlines with sensational claims, while taking revenge against colleagues who had ruled the roost for decades. This does not necessarily mean that their works lacked historical accuracy, an accusation that could not be levelled at Aga Rossi and her fellow writers, for example, but it may account for the harsh tone of some of their historiographical remarks. On the other hand, the polemical use of PCI history by the right-wing historiography was preceding relentlessly and it widened to new issues such as, for example, the so-called *Oro di Mosca*, namely the Soviet funding to the PCI.⁶³ Right-wing revisionism probably reached its pinnacle in 2001,

historiography: the subordination to the Soviets was a common feature of the two parties. Five years before Marc Lazar, in the first comparative history published after the eclipse of European communism, had stressed how the political differences between the Italian communist 'Giraffe' and the 'Incorruptible' PCF were due to environmental factors rather than to ideological distinctions. M. Lazar, *Maison Rouge. Les Partis communistes français et italien de la Libération à nos jours* (Paris 1992).

58 Aga Rossi and Zaslavsky, *Togliatti e Stalin*, a book promptly advertised by mass media, see for example G. Corbi, 'Stalin ordinava e Togliatti eseguiva', *Repubblica* (18 November 1997), 40.

59 Aga Rossi and Zaslavsky, *Togliatti e Stalin*, 76.

60 A. Agosti, *Togliatti* (Turin 1996). In order to counter the allegations Agosti made his own personal investigation in the Soviet archives. The new documents he acquired were collected in A. Agosti, *Togliatti negli anni del Comintern (1926–1943)* (Rome 2000). In the introduction the author claimed he could not find any reason to modify the conclusions of his 1996 biography, 34. Agosti published an English version of his biography of Palmiro Togliatti in 2008: A. Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti. A biography* (London and New York, NY 2008).

61 Aga Rossi and Zaslavsky, *Togliatti e Stalin*, 21.

62 R. Gualtieri, *Togliatti e la politica estera italiana* (Rome 1995). Gualtieri had proposed an alternative interpretation of the origins of the *Svolta di Salerno* policy in order to overcome both the classic attribution of its paternity and the new Stalinist one. According to him, the turn was Togliatti's personal elaboration, and he engineered it because he believed it was the best option to promote the development of the international communist movement. While Stalin was mostly concerned with the consolidation of the Eastern bloc, Togliatti hoped for a future Europe not divided in blocs as he considered it the best possible scenario for both for the USSR and the PCI.

63 The first book published on this issue was G. Cervetti, *L'oro di Mosca* (Milan 1993). Cervetti, a member of the party, graduated in economics at Moscow University, and was entrusted by Enrico Berlinguer to put an end to the Soviet funding, which ceased completely in 1981. The existence of such financing was revealed by Cervetti himself in 1991, see V. Ragone, 'Enrico mi disse: basta con quei soldi,

when Sergio Bertelli and Francesco Bigazzi edited what could be defined as the ultimate anthology of ready-for-political-use facts and interpretations on the Italian Communist party: *Pci, la storia dimenticata* (the forgotten history). The essays in the book sketched a comprehensive history of the PCI that could be briefly summarized as follows: the Italian communist party was originally created by Bolshevik agents and, having weakened the Italian Socialist party, was ultimately responsible for the advent of Fascism. The military activity against the Nazi occupation and the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* was a 'private war' waged by a communist minority with the purpose of establishing a Stalinist dictatorship imposed on the other groups of the Italian resistance, which would rather have waited for liberation by allied troops. At the end of the war communist militiamen killed thousands of innocent people because 'this was the logic of Katyn'.⁶⁴ The PCI not only conspired against democracy in the republican period, but also infiltrated the judiciary, and the *mani pulite* investigation was nothing more than a communist plot.

These various polemical motivations aroused what has been defined as a 'historiographical Cold War' among Italian historians.⁶⁵ It was, on the other hand, inevitable that the expansion of the revisionist literature that had characterized the 1990s would eventually provoke a polemical reaction by left-wing historians intent on defending the memory of the PCI and thus the democratic legitimacy of its political heirs. A large group of scholars associated with the Fondazione Istituto Gramsci⁶⁶ took the task on, organizing two conferences: *Il PCI nell'Italia Repubblicana*,⁶⁷ in 2000, and *Togliatti nel suo tempo*,⁶⁸ in 2004. In the preface to the 2000 conference proceedings, Giuseppe Vacca explicitly polemicized with Aga Rossi and Zaslavsky, openly accusing them of political speculation:

The thesis of their book is very clear: the history of the European communist parties is nothing more than the history of Soviet foreign policy, what is more such an interpretation is based on simplified and mono causal schemes. . . . One could object that the journalistic success of a thesis, elaborated for political purposes, is not sufficient reason to discuss it among scholars.⁶⁹

l'Unità (16 October 1991), 5. This issue was polemically exhumed years later with the aim of demonstrating the strict dependence of the PCI by the USSR during the Berlinguer era, see F. Bigazzi and V. Riva, *Oro da Mosca. I finanziamenti sovietici al PCI dalla rivoluzione d'ottobre al crollo dell'URSS* (Milan 1999).

64 S. Bertelli and F. Bigazzi (eds), *PCI. La storia dimenticata* (Milan 2001), 268.

65 The expression is from Guido Formigoni, and appears in R. Gualtieri, (ed.), *Il PCI nell'Italia repubblicana* (Rome 2001), 329.

66 On the scientific board of Fondazione Istituto Gramsci of Rome were many of the most important Italian historians, including Francesco Barbagallo, Nicola Tranfaglia, Silvio Pons, Roberto Gualtieri, Giuseppe Vacca, Fiamma Lusanna, David Bidussa and Albertina Vittoria.

67 Gualtieri, *Il PCI nell'Italia repubblicana*.

68 Gualtieri, Spagnolo and Taviani, *Togliatti nel suo tempo*.

69 Gualtieri, *Il PCI nell'Italia repubblicana*, XXVI.

Whatever the reasons behind the revisionists' theses, they nevertheless merited discussion and, indeed, the conference was organized in order to contest them in the historiographical arena. The main bone of contention was the alleged subordination of Togliatti's PCI to Moscow. In the face of the trenchant use of the Soviet archival evidence by the new historiography, the traditional vision of the PCI as an independent and purely national political party was no longer tenable. The only way to face the revisionists' challenge was thus to rewrite partially the history of the PCI, applying new interpretative criteria in order to overcome the dilemma of autonomy versus subordination to Moscow. This is why Giuseppe Vacca suggested the adoption of *doppia lealtà* (divided loyalty) as a key interpretative criterion for analysing the political panorama of postwar Italy. Firstly proposed by the historian Franco De Felice,⁷⁰ *doppia lealtà* was a sort of leitmotiv during the 2000 conference. Its intention was to express the historical awareness that every decision taken by the PCI's leadership was necessarily influenced by the political framework of the Cold War and it could therefore always be interpreted as the outcome of the interaction between national and international factors. *Doppia lealtà*, far from being an exclusive feature of the PCI, was a common condition of any political leadership in any European country during the Cold War era. This was the case, for example, for the Democrazia Cristiana, whose loyalty was divided between Italy and the Atlantic pact. In his intervention, Ernesto Galli della Loggia trenchantly challenged the historiographical validity of this theory: if employed so widely, *doppia lealtà* was no longer useful in order to describe the specific and very tight bond of Togliatti and the PCI with the Soviet Union. Besides, the loyalty of the Democrazia Cristiana to the Atlantic pact was absolutely coherent with both the democratic values on which the Italian Republic was established, and the will of the majority of Italians. This was not the case with the PCI, whose 'half loyalty' was for the Soviet Union, which was to be considered an enemy power. According to Galli della Loggia, the criterion proposed at the time by Giorgio Galli, the *legame di ferro*, remained the most useful to understand the relationship between the PCI and the Soviet Union. A central element of the PCI's connection to the Soviet Union, one which had been neglected during the conference, was the strong ideological link. The fidelity to the USSR was first and foremost a fidelity to communism, namely the conviction that communist ideology was right despite any possible failure and error in political praxis.⁷¹ The historiographical fortune of the *doppia lealtà* approach ended with that conference. Four years later, in the 2004 conference, the climate had changed. Elena Aga Rossi had been invited, and it was clear that the new historiography, meanwhile, had gained full legitimacy among left-wing historians too. Nonetheless this conference represented a further attempt to break, so to speak, the iron link, without resorting to the traditional theory of autonomy.

70 F. De Felice 'Doppia lealtà e doppio stato', *Studi Storici*, 30, 3 (July–September 1989), 493–563.

71 Gualtieri, *Il PCI nell'Italia repubblicana*, 340–1.

The declared purpose of the paper by Carlo Spagnolo, *Togliatti e il movimento comunista internazionale*,⁷² as well as of the introduction to the conference proceedings by Roberto Gualtieri, Carlo Spagnolo and Ermanno Taviani, was to divert the focus from the relationship between Togliatti and Stalin, or Togliatti and Moscow, to that between Togliatti and the communist movement as a whole. Because Togliatti was one of the most important and respected leaders in the communist world, his political activity could not be read as mere obedience to his Soviet masters. As far as the acceptance of democracy by the PCI was concerned, the existence of the *partito nuovo* provided sufficient evidence that the Italian Communist Party had endorsed, if not liberal democracy, at least the Italian democratic system, and since 1944. Within this interpretation the *partito nuovo* was in fact to be regarded as:

The principal and most original of Togliatti's gifts to...the Italian peasants and industrial workers, advancing their integration into a democratic and parliamentary system from which the Italian masses had been historically excluded due to the anarchist tradition.⁷³

Moreover, the famous Yalta Memorandum, the document compiled by the PCI leader shortly before dying in Crimea, and addressing the problems of the international communist movement, revealed that Togliatti, towards the end of his life, engaged in an ambitious attempt to revitalize the international communist movement, whose signs of crisis he gradually acknowledged before anyone else, encouraging a democratization of the communist regimes, to be carried out following the example of the Italian Communist Party.⁷⁴ This reading actually seems an anachronism, as such a political project, if we are to accept the interpretation of Silvio Pons,⁷⁵ should be ascribed instead to Enrico Berlinguer, more than a decade later. As far as the *Partito nuovo* as an original model within the communist movement was concerned, Giovanni Gozzini, in his conference paper, showed how Stalin had endorsed Togliatti's decision to create a mass-based party, judging such a decision as inevitable in a nation characterized by a multi-party political system.⁷⁶ Pons, in another paper entitled *Togliatti e Stalin*, tried to reach a position of compromise on the specific issue of the *Svolta di Salerno*, within the more general question of the Stalin–Togliatti relationship. His conclusions were, overall, balanced and well grounded in both previous literature and archival evidence. Togliatti's subordination to Stalin was to be considered absolute in the period he was in Moscow. The *Svolta di Salerno*, therefore, was to be interpreted as having

72 C. Spagnolo 'Togliatti e il movimento comunista internazionale', in Gualtieri, Spagnolo and Taviani, *Togliatti nel suo tempo*, 239–66.

73 Gualtieri, Spagnolo and Taviani, *Togliatti nel suo tempo*, XX.

74 Cf. C. Spagnolo, *Sul Memoriale di Yalta. Togliatti e la crisi del Movimento comunista internazionale (1956–1964)* (Rome 2007).

75 S. Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo* (Turin 2006).

76 G. Gozzini, 'La democrazia dei partiti e il "partito nuovo"', in Gualtieri, Spagnolo and Taviani, *Togliatti nel suo tempo*, 298.

been engineered by the Soviet dictator. The classic representation of the Stalin–Togliatti link was to be revised: it was Togliatti who had sought a tight political relationship with the Soviet dictator, rather than the other way round, as such a relationship represented the real source of legitimization of the PCI in the eyes of Italian workers.⁷⁷ Once Togliatti had established his undisputed leadership over the party, his degree of autonomy from Moscow progressively increased. In 1951, Togliatti was eventually strong enough to refuse, against Stalin's wishes, the leadership of the Cominform, implicitly questioning the political line of the Soviet dictator. In her intervention as conference discussant, Aga Rossi, though expressing appreciation for Pons's paper, contested the pro-Togliatti and ideological nature of the conference, and claimed that no real progress had been made towards a more balanced judgment since the previous conference organized by the Fondazione Istituto Gramsci.⁷⁸ As had been the case with the original Cold War, no peace treaty was signed to mark the end of the historiographical version. Nonetheless, it decreased in intensity in the following years due to the fact that, as time passed, the communist origins of the Italian left was losing its value as a propaganda tool. The reciprocal positions on single questions, like the *Svolta di Salerno*, did not mutate significantly in the publications which followed,⁷⁹ but the overall perception of the role of Togliatti in Italian postwar history was certainly no longer as positive as it had been at the end of the 1980s, even among left-wing historians. Claims by the right-wing historiography have also deeply influenced public opinion and are currently used, *ça va sans dire*, by many politicians in their public activity. To cite just one recent example, in 2010 the President of the Province of Salerno issued a poster marking the annual celebration of 25 April (Liberation day) in which he expressed gratitude to the US troops, and exclusively to the US troops, for having liberated Italy and Europe from communism.⁸⁰ Such a restricted, to say the least, reading of the Second World War is clearly the consequence of the above-mentioned historical interpretations which configure an altogether different history of Italy which is not only anti-communist but essentially anti-republican and implicitly, albeit often involuntarily, pro-fascist.

Public and political use of history has had remarkable consequences on the PCI's historiographical reassessment over the last 20 years. It has seen the perpetuation of a historiographical tradition which had always privileged the ideological and

77 S. Pons, 'Togliatti e Stalin', in Gualtieri, Spagnolo and Taviani, *Togliatti nel suo tempo*, 195–214. On the 'Soviet myth' in postwar Italy and its exploitation by the leadership of the PCI see P.P. D'Atorre (ed.), *Nemici per la pelle. Sogno Americano e mito sovietico nell'Italia contemporanea* (Milan 1991).

78 Gualtieri, Spagnolo and Taviani, *Togliatti nel suo tempo*, 267.

79 See A. Vittoria, *Storia del PCI* (Rome 2006), 55, who claims that, although Togliatti's Salerno turn was functional to Soviet foreign policy, 'it was, at the same time, the result of a long autonomous political elaboration'; cf. R. Gualtieri, *L'Italia dal 1943 al 1992. DC e PCI nella storia della Repubblica* (Rome 2006), 28, who affirms Togliatti's 'ability to elaborate a specific vision of the role of the PCI in Italy within a personal interpretation of the interests of the USSR and the International Communist movement'.

80 M. Zegarelli, 'Piazze e memorie negate, la Resistenza fa ancora paura', *l'Unità* (24 April 2010), 14.

political dimension of PCI history, especially in the 1960s and 1970s.⁸¹ Ideological issues, as well as the PCI's international links, were indeed the most easily exploitable topics in the political arena. As a consequence, and regrettably, a different line of research which had begun in the 1980s, focused on the relationship between the PCI and Italian society,⁸² has not developed since. Moreover, the nonchalant political use of history which characterized the Italian historiographical debate from the collapse of communism onwards has induced a loss of historical perspective. Both left-wing and right-wing historians have been debating the history of the PCI within the highly charged framework of the current political situation. Right-wing historiography has obsessively focused on a few specific features of the Togliatti's *partito nuovo*, such as its Stalinist imprint, in order to damage the PDS, the only party to have survived the end of the first republic, albeit following a change of the party's name.⁸³ Left-wing historiography, on the other hand, has accepted the challenge on such a treacherous battlefield and has stubbornly strived to prove that the PCI was a sincere supporter of the Western democratic model. The paradoxical result is that Palmiro Togliatti, a communist leader, has been positively judged by left-wing historiography for what he did in order to consolidate a Western-style democratic system he did not appreciate and wanted to surpass, albeit in the long term.

The long debate to determine the exact grade of Togliatti's autonomy in developing the political strategy of the *Svolta di Salerno* has been important, on the one hand, in order to definitively dismantle some of the traditional historical myths surrounding Togliatti's PCI: its autonomy from Moscow and its supposed ideological uniqueness within the international communist movement. On the other hand, it is difficult not to conclude that such research, having been focused principally on the Party leadership and on its ideological and international dimension, has not significantly improved our understanding of the PCI as a political phenomenon in postwar Italian society. Such an approach is inadequate in order to give a full explanation of some of the PCI's most remarkable features: the motivations for militancy of so many workers and intellectuals, the political, social and even psychological expectations the party was able to nourish and to fulfil. As far as the Stalinism of the PCI is concerned, it would probably be much more profitable, as Maurizio Bertolotti suggests, to view Stalinism through an anthropological approach and, therefore, to study it as a 'relevant cultural phenomenon, that affected the thought of millions of farm labourers and workers',⁸⁴ rather than as a personal tendency in a few political leaders. It is therefore time for a new era of

81 A. Agosti, 'L'età dell'oro della storiografia sul partito comunista', 103–13.

82 See, for example, A. Ballone, 'Il militante comunista torinese (1945–1955). Fabbrica, società, politica: una prima ricognizione', in A. Agosti (ed.) *I muscoli della storia* (Milan 1987), 88–213, and a few publications with a sociological approach: M. Barbagli and P. Corbetta, *Dentro il PCI* (Bologna 1979); A. Accornero and M. Ilardi, (eds), *Il Partito comunista italiano. Struttura e storia dell'organizzazione* (Milan 1982).

83 On this point see the compelling analysis by D.I. Kertzer, *Politics and symbols. The Italian Communist Party and the Fall of Communism* (New Haven, CT 1996), 64–83.

84 M. Bertolotti, *Carnevale di massa. 1950* (Turin 1991), XV.

research which can benefit from interdisciplinary methodologies as well as from oral history, addressing the social and cultural motivation of communist militancy.⁸⁵ Furthermore, a new era of study of the PCI could develop from an analysis of other little-studied aspects of its history, such as the economic, social and cultural reasons for the impressive and longstanding electoral success of the PCI in the so-called *regioni rosse* (red regions).⁸⁶ Lastly, a new trend of research on the PCI's cultural production, which deeply influenced the Italian postwar cultural panorama, would be welcomed. Some important books on this topic have already been published. Authors have focused particularly on the relations between the PCI and Italian intellectuals, and on how communist culture evolved in response to the modernization and industrialization of the country.⁸⁷ More research could be carried out on specific aspects, such as the visual culture of the PCI and its cinematographic and television production,⁸⁸ in order to develop a complete reconsideration of the role of the Italian Communist Party, 20 years after its end, in the history of Italy.

To some extent, the historiographical debate on the Italian Communist Party will never be entirely free of political concerns, at least not in the short term. However, this does not necessarily represent an obstacle. The public and political use of history have to be considered as part of the PCI's legacy, and therefore analysed and discussed as historical phenomena.

Biographical Note

Gianluca Fantoni is a lecturer in Italian at Nottingham Trent University. He has previously worked at the University of Strathclyde where he completed a PhD thesis concerning the cinematic propaganda of the Italian Communist Party.

85 An interesting analysis of the characteristics of Communist militancy in the late 1940s and early 1950s is G.C. Marino, *Autoritratto del PCI staliniano, 1946–1953* (Rome 1991). The author stresses how the PCI partially shaped the fundamental values of communist militancy according to the Catholic cultural tradition of the Italian population. A book which investigates the social dimension of the PCI is S. Bellassai, *La morale comunista. Pubblico e privato nella rappresentazione del PCI* (Rome 2000).

86 An attempt to initiate a new season of research about the PCI at local level is M. Battini 'Per una storia della Toscana rossa' in E. Fasano, G. Petralia and P. Pezzino (eds) *Storia della Toscana* (Bari 2001), 22–43. Some articles on this issue have been also published, see for example R. Forlenza, 'The Italian Communist Party, local government and the Cold War', *Modern Italy*, 15, 2 (May 2010), 177–96. Giorgio Galli, in the preface of the 1977 edition of his *Storia del Pci* had already mentioned the need to write a history of the PCI 'different from those so far published' that would consider 'its social impact, unique to the history of Italian parties – and the abundant material that documents it (from the labour struggles... to the minutes of meetings from the grassroots organizations)', Galli, *Storia del PCI*, V.

87 N. Ajello, *Il lungo addio. Intellettuali e PCI dal 1958 al 1991* (Bari–Roma 1997). See also S. Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943–1991* (Durham and London 2000).

88 A. Medici, M. Morbidelli and E. Taviani, *Il PCI e il cinema tra cultura e propaganda 1959–1969* (Rome 2002); E. Novelli, *C'era una volta il PCI. Autobiografia di un partito attraverso le immagini della sua propaganda* (Rome 2000).

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