

9 The “Partito Comunista Internazionale”

Despite the repression acted out by Mussolini, the “Bordigist” current had not disappeared. Even if Bordiga was no longer active and had withdrawn into a prudent silence, many of the rank and file militants had held on to the positions of the Livorno Congress. But they found it impossible to maintain any organised activity, even in clandestinity. It was above all in the prisons, in the island gaols (*galera*) and places of exile (*confini*) that the Bordigist left preserved its identity and kept up its organisational links. When the last core of intransigents like Damen, Repossi and Fortichiari were excluded from the PCI in 1943, the Bordigist militants did not abandon the struggle. Far from it.

It was natural that these militants should find in Onorato Damen their most resolute spokesman and also their most effective organiser. Born in 1893 in the province of Ascoli Piceno, he adhered directly to the left wing of the PSI around 1910. Conscripted during the war with the rank of sergeant, he was demoted in 1917 and condemned to two years in prison for ‘incitement to desertion’ and for denouncing ‘the imperialist character of the war’. Once released, he was with the Abstentionist Fraction in Bologna, then in Imola and Livorno. In 1921 he was secretary of the Camera del Lavoro in Pistoia and director of the communist paper *L’Avvenire*. In 1921, on returning from an electoral meeting supporting his candidature for parliament, he was arrested by the fascists, but immediately released after workers’ protest strike. Some time afterwards, in company with armed communists, he came up against the *Squadristi* — a confrontation which ended with the death of a fascist. Accused of homicide, he had to take refuge in Paris, where he stayed for three years as a director of the weekly Italian edition of

L'Humanité. Returning in 1924, he was elected as a deputy for the Florence constituency. Hostile to Gramsci and Togliatti, in 1925 he founded the 'Entente Committee' with Repossi, Fortichiari, then Perrone, with the aim of creating a Left Fraction in the party. In November 1926 he was exiled to Ustica; in December a special tribunal condemned him to 12 years confinement. In 1933 he led the revolt of political prisoners in Civita-Vecchia. Released at the end of that year, he was sent to Milan where he lived under surveillance. He was arrested again in 1935 and 1937. Then, after the declaration of war, he was only released under the Badoglio government (1).

The birth of the PCInt: Damen and Prometeo

Despite the tight surveillance he was subjected to, he managed to form a small nucleus which in 1943 was to give birth to the Partito Comunista Internazionale. Around him regrouped Mario Acquaviva, Fausto Atti, Bruno Maffi, Luciano Stefanini, Guido Torricelli and Vittorio Faggioni, 'cadres' of the new party. All these militants came both from the Italian Fraction in Belgium and from the PCI which had expelled them, with the single exception of Bruno Maffi who had been a member of *Giustizia e Libertà*, before moving away from it under the influence of Damen, who was his 'mentor' in prison. Hardened by prison, clandestinity, and long years of militancy, all these men were ready to struggle to the end for the revolution, whose first stirrings they saw in the events of March 1943, then in the strikes in September in the North.

On the 1st November, the PCInt brought out the first issue of *Prometeo*, clandestinely of course. The fact that the country was cut in two, occupied by the German army on the one hand, and the Anglo-American armies on the other, limited its distribution to the north of the country. Up until 1945, the PCInt had practically no contact with the Bordigist groups which had formed in the Mezzogiorno.

Struggling against the Partisans' war and any enrolment of the workers under the banner of Italy or of

Togliatti, the PCInt waged a difficult, rigorously clandestine struggle, while being denounced by the PCI as “an agent of Germany and of fascism” .²

An exceptionally interesting document — the reports on the clandestine press sent to Mussolini between 1943 and 1945 — makes it possible to sweep away these accusations, which were fabricated by the Stalinists:

“The only independent paper. Ideologically the most interesting and most prepared. Against any compromise, defends a pure communism, undoubtedly Trotskyist, and thus anti-Stalinist.

“Declares itself without hesitation an adversary of Stalin’s Russia, while proclaiming itself a faithful combatant for Lenin’s Russia.

“Fights against the war in all aspects: democratic, fascist or Stalinist. Even struggles openly against the ‘partisans, the Committee of National Liberation and the Italian Communist Party.’”

We can see here the confusions made by Mussolini’s spies and informers between the “pure communism” of *Prometeo* and Trotskyism. But on the front page of the paper was written “*anno 22*” (since the Livorno congress), “*Serie III*” (third series after 1924, then 1928 to 1938), “*sulla via della sinistra*” (a reference to the Italian Left). In practice there was no confusion possible between the PCInt and the Trotskyist groups. For example, *Bandiera Rossa* considered the USSR to be “the most solid rampart of the proletarian revolution”. An ardent defender of the ‘partisan’ war, this group, like the PCI, poured out anti-German, even anti-“teutonic” nationalism:

“... let us remember that our sons, our brothers, our houses are still subjected to the shame of teuton ferocity; our wives, our cities are still subject to the carnage it creates” (Bandiera rossa, no. 6, 17 March 1944, ‘Partecipare alla guerra’).

When Rome fell *Bandiera Rossa* (no. 18, 9 June 1944) saw the American victory as a “triumph for the forces of civilisation”. It is not hard to see why, from August 1944, this paper was able to appear legally. The second Trotskyist group, *Stella Rossa*, was little different from the first, except that it exalted ‘Stakhanovism’ and defined the war waged by the Russian state as ‘proletarian’.³

Prometeo was on the contrary indirect ideological continuity with Bordiga’s Communist Party and the Italian Fraction in France and Belgium.

The paper insisted that there was no difference in class content between fascism and democracy, and that if “fascism is dead, its inheritance has passed to democracy”. (1/3/44, ‘How and where to combat fascism?’). It pointed out the general tendency towards state capitalism (called ‘socialisation’ in the text):

“Through the fascist or democratic regimes, socialisation not only does not represent a deviation from this capitalist system, but even constitutes an extreme reinforcement of the system; not only is it not socialism, it is the expedient of the ruling class to bar the way to the proletarian revolution”. (*Prometeo*, 1/4/1944, ‘Socialisation and Socialism’).

While it made no distinction between fascist Italy and Stalinist Russia, which had both installed a form of state capitalism, it nevertheless considered that the Russian state was still ‘proletarian’.

The PCInt was very clear on the partisan war (*partigiani*): no support, no participation, calling for fraternisation between the workers in uniform in both camps; agitation for a revival of class struggle on its specific terrain, the factories:

“Against the slogan of national war, which aims to pit the Italian proletarians against German and English proletarians, put forward the slogan of the communist revolution, which unites the workers of the whole world across frontiers against their common enemy: capitalism.”(*Prometeo*, 1/11/1943)

“How to crush Nazism? To overthrow the war machine that oppresses the German proletariat, do not call on the aid of another war machine (Anglo-Saxon or Russian) but sow among the ranks of the German troops the seeds of fraternisation, antimilitarism and the class struggle.” (Prometeo, 4/3/1943, ‘Death to the Germans or death to Nazism?’)

“To centrism’s call to join the partisan bands, we must reply by being present in the factories, whence will arise the class violence that will destroy the vital centres of the capitalist state.” (Prometeo, op. cit., ‘Sulla guerra’).

The PCI developed rapidly amongst the workers, and by the end of 1944 it had formed several federations, the most important being in Turin, Milan and Parma. It developed its activity in the factories by forming ‘internationalist communist factory groups’, advocating the formation of factory councils instead of the ‘internal commissions’ created under Badoglio, and in which the PCI took part. It also promoted a ‘proletarian united front’ for the struggle and against the war, in order to prevent “the workers being poisoned by war propaganda”. The only groups to join this front were the revolutionary syndicalists and the libertarian communists (like *L’Azione Libertaria* and *Il Comunista Libertaria*). *Prometeo*’s propaganda seems to have gained much support in the factories, among the workers who refused to join the partisan groups.

>From June 1944 however, the PCI began to orient itself towards a work of agitation among the partisan organisations not linked to the left parties, particularly in Piedmont. While confirming its refusal to participate, the PCI had its writings distributed within them. This policy was to read *Prometeo* to make concessions on the non-proletarian, imperialist nature of a war integrated into the military fronts:

“The communist elements sincerely believe in the necessity to struggle against Nazi-fascism and think, once this obstacle

has been overthrown, that they can march towards the conquest of power and the overthrow of capitalism.” (Prometeo no. 15, August 1944).

The PCInt carried out more and more agitation against the war, in the factories and in the groups of partisan workers. In June 1944 it published its *Manifesto* to the Italian workers which incited them to desertion from the war “in all its forms” and called for “the physical defence of the class against reaction, deportations, requisitions and forced enlistment.” Its initial position on the partisans became more ambiguous since the *Manifesto* called for “the transformation of the partisan formations, where they are composed of proletarian elements with a healthy class consciousness, into organs of proletarian self-defence, ready to intervene in the revolutionary struggle for power”.

Grasping the change which had taken place in *Prometeo's* activity, which was trying to develop at the price of weakening positions of principle, Mussolini's spies noted, not without finesse, that “here the communist left has adapted the language of other subversive groups, undoubtedly with the intention of creating its own mass of manoeuvre” (underlined in the report, 086713 to 087130).

Up till then the PCInt had no programmatic platform; the extension of its influence led it in 1944 to edit an “outline programme”. This outline affirmed first of all that “...the crushing victory of the Entente powers will enormously strengthen the resistance front of world capitalism and reduce the objective possibilities of the proletarian revolution”. It definite its attitude towards the parties and the new ‘democratic state which would arise after the war:

“...the socialist and centrist parties have acted and are acting towards this war not as forces of the right wing of the proletariat, but as real and conscious forces of the bourgeois left.

“...In the face of the democratic state the tactic of the party of the proletariat does not change: we believe neither in its elections, nor in its constitution, nor in its freedom of the press, speech and organisation.”

As for Russia, which was still referred to as a 'proletarian state', it had ceased to be "the country of the first great revolutionary achievements of the proletariat". This somewhat cautious position was similar to Bordigas, who hesitated to talk about 'state capitalism' (see below).

Despite the absorption of the unions by the state and the PCI's hold over the 'internal commissions', the PCInt's position on this question was rigorously the same as in 1926:

"Our party will pose as soon as possible the problem of the unitary reorganisation of the workers' movement, rebuilding its network of union fractions of the communist factory groups (composed of communists and non-party workers) into a national communist union committee." ("Schema di programma del Partito comunista internazionalista", 1944, republished in *Prometeo*, January 1974).

Prometeo admitted however that "the vestiges of the old clandestine union organisations have shown that they served more as a conveyor belt for political agitation linked to the war than as authentic organs of the workers' struggle". It was for this reason, which contradicted the idea of forming union fractions, that the PCInt continued to call for the formation of 'factory councils'. In 1945 it began to publish an agitational sheet *I Consigli di Fabbrica* which made propaganda in the factories around this theme.

Much bolder was the position that the PCInt took up on the question of the state in the period of transition, where it was visibly influenced by *Bilan* and *Octobre*. Damen and his comrades rejected the assimilation of the dictatorship of the proletariat with the rule of the party, and in the face of the 'proletarian state' called for the widest democracy in the councils. They did not rule out the hypothesis, verified at Kronstadt, of confrontations between the 'workers state' and the proletariat, in the which case the communist party should be on the site of the latter:

"The dictatorship of the proletariat can in no sense be reduced to the dictatorship of this party, even if this is the party of

the proletariat, the intelligence and guide of the proletarian state.

“The state and the party in power, as organs of such a dictatorship, bear the seeds of the tendency towards compromise with the old world, a tendency which as the Russian experience shows develops and strengthens through the momentary inability of the revolution in a given country to spread, by linking itself to the insurrectionary movement in other countries

“Our party...

“a) would have to avoid becoming the instrument of the workers’ state and its policies... would have to defend the interests of the revolution even in confrontations with the workers’ state.

“b) would have to avoid becoming bureaucratized, by making its directive centre or its more peripheral centres a field of manoeuvres for the careerism of functionaries.

“c) would have to prevent class politics being thought out or carried out through formalist and administrative criteria.”

Taken as a whole, these positions, and the ambiguity of some of them, inevitably gave rise to disagreements within the party at the end of the war. But the bases for the constitution of the PCI were more elaborated and thought out than those of the Bordighist groups of the Mezzogiorno.

In 1944, in the south, which was occupied by American troops, several groups claiming descent from the communist left were quickly formed, and began to distribute their press illegally.

Bordigha and Renato Pistone: the *Frazione di sinistra dei comunisti e socialisti*

In Naples a group was formed, around Renato Pistone and Bordigha, that took up the tradition of the

Abstentionist Communist Fraction of 1919. In this town, the new fraction had a big influence, and despite the presence of Togliatti and the PCI centre, there were many PCI militants in the south who, completely isolated from the 'centre' in exile, still held to the positions of the left, and were not fully aware of the party's evolution. The term 'Frazione' adopted by Pistone and Bordiga seemed to imply that they had not given up hope of winning over the militants of the PCI and PSI by eliminating their leaderships. This is why the Bordigist fraction did not constitute itself into a party before being absorbed by the PCInt in 1945. Its publications were, in Naples, *La Sinistra Proletaria*; in Salerno, *L'Avanguardia*; and in Rome *Il Proletario*. This last group was composed of old comrades of Bordiga, but also of former partisans, members of the PCI who had participated in the war in Spain, and a split from *Bandiera Rossa* (Movimento comunista d'Italia). Federations and sections of the PCI in Calabria and Puglia also declared for Bordiga (see below) (4). These Bordigist groups proposed:

“1) to bring the parties back onto the terrain of class politics, as long as there is still a possibility of doing so.

“2) to transform themselves into an autonomous party, when the regeneration of the existing parties shows itself to be completely impossible, and when the situation imposes a clear separation between revolutionary and reactionary forces.” (*Il Proletario*, 'La situazione dopo Roma', 15 July 1944).

This is why up until the beginning of 1945 the Bordigist militants practised 'entrism' within the PCI. A militant like La Camera, a future leader of the PCInt, was for a long time at the head of the Cosenza Federation of Togliatti's party (*La Sinistra Proletaria*, 19 Feb. 1945, 'Nella federazione di Cosenza').

Equally ambiguous were the relations with the partisan groups and the Trotskyist parties, despite their total opposition to Bordigist positions. On 6 and 7 January 1945, the fraction held a conference in Naples. *Bandiera Rossa* and *Stella Rossa* were represented at the meeting. The conference proposed to work towards the "constitution of the real party of the working class". In March/April Bordiga, Libero

Villone (who afterwards joined the Trotskyist party) and Pistone elaborated a series of theses 'For the constitution of the Communist party'. These theses referred to the Italian Left's critique of the 'United Front' in Germany (1923), to the critique of the French and Spanish Popular Fronts and of the 'Resistance' in Europe. Admitting the impossibility of 'redressing' the Socialist and Communist parties, the text still considered it necessary to "develop from the inside a continuous work of ideological clarification, the means through which those elements not totally corrupted by centrist degeneration can find the right path." The end of the war, however, which the probable opening up of a revolutionary situation, "would prepare the favourable conditions for the transformation of the fraction into a party". On this question, which had been clarified by the Italian Fraction in France and Belgium (*Bilan*), the position of Bordiga's and Pistone's 'Frazione' remained hesitant, sometimes using the word 'fraction', sometimes the Trotskyist term 'left opposition' (*La Sinistra Proletaria*, 19 Feb. 1945). The publication of letters from partisans and texts by Trotsky in its columns did not distinguish these Bordigist groups very clearly from the others.

On the question of the war, the position of the Frazione was unambiguous. It put forward the necessity for "proletarian internationalism" and for "the transformation of the imperialist war into a revolutionary civil war". It thus attacked the 'antifascism' of the PCI, which was simply a cover for those who were "working for the internationalisation of Nazi-fascist methods" (*La Sinistra Proletaria*, op. cit., April 1945). Vis-à-vis Togliatti's National Liberation Committees (CLN), the Frazione announced its opposition to participation in the partisan groups:

"These represent a compromise with bourgeois forces and thus a weakening in the class life of the proletariat." (*Il Proletario*, 28 May 1944, "Dichiarazione programmatica", probably written by Bordiga) (5).

It was over Russia that the Frazione was least decisive. It came out not against the USSR but against the policies of the "present Russian ruling class, because they are inimical to the development of the

proletarian revolution”. Nevertheless, the *Dichiarazione programmatica* defined the USSR as an integral part of the new capitalist organisation. According to this text, Russia was composed of three classes: the privileged, exploiting class, allied to which were the rich and middle peasants, and the exploited and oppressed class, “constituted once again by the industrial and agricultural proletariat” (ibid.). In the face of Stalinism, the ‘Bordigists’ proposed the foundation of a new Communist International.

On the unions, the Frazione’s attitude was as uncertain as that of the PCInt. Under Bordiga’s influence, it proposed the resurrection of the “glorious Camere del Lavoro”.

It was not only the political attitude of the Frazione, that was uncertain and ambiguous, but also some dirigent, like Matteo Renato Pistone. This last one seemed to have “worked” for a long time for the Fascist State. During the war, in contact with the Mussolini’s diplomatic offices, he acted in France - under the nickname of Jean Ollivier - as Collaborator of the German Authorities, et wrote playdoyers in defence of the Collaboration in the newspapers of Seine-et-Marne. (see Archivio centrale dello Stato, Roma, Casellario Politico Centrale, busta 4015 : Pistone Matteo Renato). How explain the brutal political change in the life of Pistone, since 1943, after leaving France, it is difficult to give clear explanation?

The Frazione continued to exist in an autonomous manner until July 1945, when it fused as a group, and not through individual adhesions, with Damen and Maffi’s PCInt. This fusion between organisationally and theoretically heterogeneous groups would soon be revealed as very fragile.

The Puglie Federation and the 'Partito Operaio Comunista' (POC) .

The Puglie Federation of the PCI had taken Bordiga’s side in 1926. Under fascism its evolution paralleled that of the Italian Fraction in exile. In 1944, while claiming adherence to the ‘Lyon Theses’, it declared itself in favour of a 4th International, being unaware of the 4th International founded by

Trotsky. Discussions conducted by Nicola Di Bartolomeo led the group into a rapid fusion with the small Trotskyist nucleus under the leadership of Mangano. It seems that the Puglie Federation wanted to carry out 'entrism' inside the Trotskyist International. The new 'Partito Operaio Comunista' was recognised as the official section of this International. For two years, the orientation of the party was in the hands of Di Bartolomeo (Fosco) and was essentially Trotskyist. The Puglie Federation stayed on the sidelines. When Fosco died, Mangano joined the party leadership, which had moved to Milan. In 1947, Mangano and his comrades, at a national conference in Naples, nominated a new central committee and a political bureau from which the leaders of the Trotskyist tendency were excluded. The new leadership rejected any entrism in the Socialist and Communist parties and expelled those who were practising this policy. In its organ *4a Internazionale* the POC more and more openly defended Bordigist positions. It considered that only the first two congresses of the Komintern were valid. It rejected any support for 'national liberation struggles' and defined the left parties as parties of the bourgeoisie: "The forces of the right and those of the so-called left are not antagonists; both, though using different methods, have the same objective function, that of repairing bourgeois society" (*Bulletin of the International Secretariat*, no. 17, 1947). Like the 'Bordigists', the POC argued that the USSR was just as much imperialist as the USA.

On the 'tactical' questions of Trotskyism, the POC was also in total disagreement. It rejected the 'Transitional Programme': "Against the plans of Marshall and Molotov, the world proletariat must put forward the plan of Marx: the socialist revolution" (*4a Internazionale*, 16/7/1947). It also opposed the United Front as being "counter-revolutionary", and was against the Trotskyist slogan of support for a republic and for the abolition of the monarchy. On the union question, it refused to work with the CGIL (Communist-Stalinist trade union) and at Foggia it set up its own economic organisation: 'Soviet'. Like the Bordigists, it replaced democratic centralism in the POC with 'organic' or 'revolutionary' centralism. During the elections of 1948, it denounced the "electoral carnival": "On 18 April, the electors will be called on to vote for war, for the third world conflict, and will have the right

only to choose whether they will fight for American imperialism or Russian imperialism” (*4a Internazionale*, 10 March 1948) (6).

Romeo Mangano and his tendency were prepared to stay for as long as possible in the 4th International, even to the point of pretending to agree to its injunctions. But in 1948, the POC and all its militants were expelled. From 1949 to 1951, the POC published its own organ from Foggia: *L'Internazionale*. After that the POC seems to have dissolved, its militants joining the Bordigist party. In the 1950's, Mangano became editorial secretary of *Prometeo*, the organ of the Damen tendency after the split in 1952 (see below).

The constitution of the Mangano's group in Puglie was so uncertain as it was ambiguous. The opening of the fascist archives gave the proof that Mangano was at the end of the 20s a fascist agent in the communist clandestine milieu. under the nickname of Achille Violino. (See Raffaele Colapietra's book, *La Capitanata nel periodo fascista (1926-1943)*, Foggia, 1978, that gives all archival references.). As in the Pistone's case, it is difficult to explain the evolution of Mangano or the return to his old political bordigist positions.

In the Mezzogiorno, the numerical expansion which went on during 1947 did not take place on a very clear basis. In particular, it included former partisans and PCI militants. There were very strong local, even localist tendencies in the Mezzogiorno, where, under the leadership of Francesco Maruca, Mario Soluri and Nicola Turano, the Calabria Federation had its own weekly, *L'Internazionale Comunista*, in Catanzaro. The numerous party factory groups, made up of members and sympathisers, also seemed to have their own life.

The PCInt's Turin national Conference (December 1945)

It was in these conditions that the first national conference of the whole party was held in Turin on 28th

December 1945 and 1st January 1946. Bordiga was absent from this conference, since he did not become a member of the party until 1949, although he made individual contributions to it. Coming from Belgium, Vercesi found himself thrust directly into the PCI's ideological leadership, which did not ask him to give any account of his activities in the Brussels anti-fascist committee. In the conference he acted as the official spokesman for the thoughts of the conspicuously absent Bordiga. But the most outstanding figures were undoubtedly Damen, Maffi and Stefanini, who had rejoined the members of the Italian Fraction, Danielis and Lecci.

It is interesting to note that — after a salute to the memory of Mario Acquaviva and Fausto Atti who had been gunned down by members of the PCI — the conference emphasised and did not reject the contribution of the Fraction in France and Belgium. The reporter on organisational questions, Bruno Maffi, declared that:

“In 1928, the Left Fraction was formed at Pantin. From then on it expressed the historical continuity of the Italian Left until the outbreak of the Second World War. The party was born towards the end of 1942 on the basis of this precise historical tradition” (7).

Maffi then showed that the activity of the PCI — which constituted “one of the most brilliant periods in the life of the party” — was from the end of 1943 oriented essentially towards the partisans:

“This organic life of the party began, however, on 8 September 1943. In an atmosphere poisoned by the war, it was a matter of reuniting the healthy forces of the revolution against all the political formations acting in the framework of the conflict... at the same time as trying to orientate the proletarians amongst the partisans back towards a class position, we made an overt critique of the ideological policies of ‘partisanism’, as an arm of capitalist war against this resurgence of the class struggle.” (Intervention of Bruno Maffi at the Turin Conference, 28.12.45).

This intervention in the partisan groups, because it had cost the lives of Acquaviva and Atti, and had

shaken the very life of the PCInt, was violently criticised by an old member of the Fraction in France, Luigi Danielis, who had become secretary of the Turin Federation (which, after Milan, was the most important in the PCInt). This was two years later, at the Florence congress. We quote his intervention at some length here because of the clear light it on the life of the PCInt in 1945:

“One thing must be clear for everyone: the party has suffered badly from a facile extension of its political influence - the result of an equally facile activism - on a purely superficial level. I must recount a personal experience which will serve as a warning against the danger of the party exerting a facile influence on certain strata of the masses, which is an automatic consequence of the equally facile theoretical formation of its militants. In the last months of the war I was a party representative in Turin. The Federation was strong numerically; it had a lot of young activist members; it organised many meetings, leaflets, the newspaper, a bulletin, contacts with the factories; there were internal discussions which always had an extremist tone when differences on the question of the war in general and the Partisans in particular came up; there were also contacts with deserters. The position on the war was clear: no participation in the war, refusal of military discipline by elements who called themselves internationalists. One might think therefore that no member of the party would have accepted the directives of the ‘Committee of National Liberation’. Now, on the morning of 25 April (the day Turin was ‘liberated’) the whole Turin Federation was in arms, insisting on taking part in the crowning of six years of massacre, and some comrades from the provinces - still under military discipline - came to Turin to take part in the whole thing. As for myself, I should have declared the organisation dissolved, but I found a way of compromising and got a resolution passed, in which comrades agreed to participate in the movement only as individuals. The party no longer existed; it had liquidated itself.” (Resoconto del primo congresso del PCInt, Firenze, 6-9 maggio 1948, intervention of Luigi Danielis. p. 20-21).

This point provoked no debate at the conference. Disagreements crystallised around Damen, Vercesi and Stefanini, on the question of the function of the party, on the union question, and the question of the party’s participation in elections.

Vercesi, without saying openly, thought that the creation of the PCInt had been premature and that it was necessary to exclude “the perspective of a development of the party such as took place in the pre-fascist period, i.e. of an extension of our influence in the present situation”. He also continued to defend the idea that the “crisis of the war economy ‘ would today lead to a “peace economy”. However, he made an implicit act of contrition for his anti-fascist activity in Brussels: “We are not anti-fascists, but proletarians who fight capitalism in all its social forms” (8). Unlike the rest of the party, he did not think that the new period was revolutionary: “... the conditions for the victorious affirmation of the proletarian class are not there. Therefore, one can only describe the present phase as one of reaction”.

Damen criticised these statements by Vercesi, declaring that “A party which limits itself to criticism and the ideological demolition of the adversary is only carrying out a part of its tasks”. He rejected the idea of the “so-called peace economy”, because “the economy that is being rebuilt will be characterised by the continuing necessity to produce (and even more intensely than before) for military needs”. Here Damen represented the ‘orthodox’ tendency in the party, but he himself moved away from the traditional one when he envisaged the possibility of participating in elections, something the Italian Left in exile had always rejected: “we remain irreducibly anti-parlamentarian, but the sense of the concrete which animates our policies leads us to reject any a priori abstentionist position”.

The conference was most divided on the nature of the unions and on whether the PCInt should participate in them. Supported by Danielis, the reporter on the union question, Luciano Stefanini, underlined the party’s incoherence: “On the one hand we recognise the unions’ dependence on the capitalist state; on the other hand, we invite the workers to struggle within them in order to take them onto a class position”. By contrast, the reporter declared “that the present unions cannot change their physiomy as state organs, except through the definite destruction of this state itself... the idea of winning leading positions in the present union organs in order to transform them must be definitely

liquidated”. This fact, he argued, was the product of the “decadence of capitalism”.

The report met with opposition from the majority of delegates. For Aldo Lecci (Tullio), it was a question “...not of destroying the unions or replacing them with other organisations... but of struggling to demolish the superstructure which is smothering the unions, like all the superstructures of the capitalist state”. This was also the position of Bordiga who had drawn up the ‘Platform of the PCInt’ submitted to the conference. For him the Italian trade union movement had to “return to its traditions of close and open support for the proletarian class party, by basing itself on the rebirth of its local organs, the glorious Camere del Lavoro...” This was also Vercesi’s view.

The Bordigist current, made up of the Italian party, the Belgian Fraction and the French ‘Fraction bis’, did not envisage the formation of an international bureau of the fractions, as had been the case in 1938. For Vercesi, who made a report on this question, “In the present world situation, characterised by the non-existence of revolutionary movements, the PCInt considers that no more is possible than the formation of an international bureau of fractions of the world communist left”. Such a bureau would forbid any relationship which Trotskyists or similar currents account of their participation in the war. The French delegation (Véga and Frédéric) was in favour of forming a bureau, while Lecci asked that “it should be shielded from a preponderant influence by the Italian party and should be based in Paris” - no doubt he was haunted by the unfortunate precedent of the Comintern in Moscow.

Theses on the agrarian question concluded the conference. The PCInt had in fact developed considerably in Calabria, where it had a by no means negligible influence on the agricultural proletariat and even on farmers. There had been big strikes in the countryside after the war, in Sicily, Basilicate and Puglia. This was an opportunity for the reporter to criticise Lenin’s theses on “land to the peasants” and “the alliance between the proletariat and the poor peasants”. Against these slogans, the conference adopted the call for the poor peasants to support the proletariat. It did not foresee the peasant forces

being organised into the party, only the agricultural proletariat, and rejected any idea of a political alliance with peasant based groupings. While excluding any possibility of “mass work in the countryside”, the PCInt retained the necessity to co-ordinate its agitation and propaganda among the rural masses, and to this end created an ‘agrarian section’ linked to the central committee, no doubt to fight against the localist tendencies of the Calabria Federation.

The Conference ended by accepting the principle of an international bureau of liaison between the different fractions. It rejected Stefanini’s theses and called for “the conquest of the leading organs of the unions.”

The Turin conference had thus simply skimmed over the political divergences. The new party, in a situation correctly defined as counter-revolutionary, could hardly justify its existence as a party. Had the Italian Fraction flac insisted strongly that the party could only arise in a revolutionary period? It was clear that the PCInt lacked theoretical and organisational unity: whereas the militants of the old fraction had joined the PCInt as individuals, the Bordigist groups of the Mezzogiorno had fused with the ‘Party’ as groups (9). For this, it was criticised by the Gauche Communiste de France, which was in fact excluded from any discussion which the PCInt. Emphasising that the constitution of a revolutionary party can only take place “in a period of resurgence, of an ascendant course towards revolution”, it made the most sombre prognosis about the future of the Italian ‘Party’:

“This new party is not a political unity, but a conglomerate, an addition of currents and tendencies which cannot fall co show themselves and cash. This present armistice can only be very temporary. This elimination of one or other current is inevitable. Sooner or later there will be a political and organisational demarcation.” (Internationalisme n° 7, Feb. 1946, ‘A propos du premier congrès du Parti Communiste Internationaliste d’Italie’, by Marco [Marc Chirik]).

At this point the PCInt gave an impression of strength, having become virtually a ‘mass party’ with 13

federations, 72 sections, numerous public meetings, its implantation in the main industrial centres, its factory press, etc. In fact it was very fragile. In 1947 a number of semi-Trotskyist elements left the 'Party'. Others were excluded for political divergences, without this appearing clearly in the PCIInt's press. Soon the whole Turin Federation declared itself 'autonomous'; it even looked for international political confrontation, since it took part in the 1947 conference in Brussels organised by the Dutch Left, the GCF and the CR group *Le Prolétaire*.

It was above all the question of parliamentarism which precipitated the formation of tendencies in the PCIInt. The PCIInt had in fact put up candidates at local elections in 1946 and national ones in 1948. Other divergences were grafted on to this one. On the one hand there was the Damen tendency advocating a voluntarist development of the 'Party and participation in elections, but opposed to any support for 'national liberation' movements; on the other hand, the Vercesi-Maffi tendency, hostile to 'revolutionary parliamentarism' and supported by Bordiga, who thought that the work of the PCIInt had to be essentially ideological, aimed at the formation of future 'cadres.

Bordiga's entry into the party in 1949 (this was the year his chronicle 'Sul Filo del Tempo' began to be published in *Battaglia Comunista*) was to precipitate the formation of opposition 'blocs'. Although Bordiga distrusted the new party, he at least accepted its existence. But for him what was needed was a return to Lenin and the theses of the Italian Left before 1926, which meant a rejection of *Bilan's* contributions on the national question, the unions, and the transitional state. Contrary to the Damen tendency he also considered that Russian imperialism was less dangerous than American imperialism, enemy number one' (10).

It was on all these questions (and not on the question of elections which Damen in turn rejected) that the split took place between on the one hand Maffi, Bordiga and Vercesi; and on the other Damen, Stefanini, Bottaioli and Lecci. In 1952, it seemed that a majority followed Damen, who rejected any

hope of conquering the unions, any support for ‘the coloured peoples’ (Bordiga’s terminology). This tendency considered the CPs to be not opportunist or centrist, but bourgeois. It did not accept a substitutions view of the party: the Communist party should not take power and exercise it in the name of the proletariat, because the latter “cannot delegate to others its historical mission... nor even to its political party” (Theses of the PCIInt, Congress tendency) (10).

In 1952, in Italy, there were therefore two Internationalist Communist Parties, both laying claim to Lenin and the Italian Left. The Bordiga-Maffi group soon began publishing *Il Programma Comunista*, which is still the organ of this current in the Italian language. The Damen group held onto *Prometeo* and *Battaglia Comunista*, which are also still published today.

Outside Italy, the shock of these divergences led to serious upheavals in the Belgian and French Fractions. In 1949, the Belgian journal *L’Internationaliste* ceased to appear; the Fraction in Belgium disappeared soon afterwards. The same year, most of the militants of the French Fraction left to join the newly-formed *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. After two years of eclipse, the official FFGC resurfaced under the name ‘French group of the international communist Left’ (1951). It published first a *Bulletin*, then in 1957 *Programme Communiste*; in 1964, it published a paper *Le Proletaire* which still appears today as the organ of one out of the actual Bordigist currents.

The Damen group went in search of international contacts, some very eclectic (*Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Raya Dunayevskaya’s *News and Letters* in the USA, libertarian Communists in Italy, the Munis-Péret group, even some Trotskyists). In 1977, it initiated a series of international conferences of groups coming from the left communist tradition. Not long after the collapse of these conferences in 1980, it formed along with the Communist Workers Organisation (whose organ is *Revolutionary Perspectives*) from Britain, the ‘international Bureau for the Revolutionary Party’, today still composed of the PCIInt and CWO.

The *Programma Comunista* current has been through a number of splits. In 1964, in Italy, *Rivoluzione Comunista* (Lanza's group) also proclaimed itself the Internationalist Communist Party, obliging the Bordigist party to take the name International Communist Party. One of the most important splits was in 1974, with the Florence group also taking the name International Communist Party and publishing *Il Partito Comunista* and *Comunismo*, no without having today a small influence in France and Great Britain. In France in 1967 Dangeville's *Fil du Temps* and Jacques Camatte's *Invariance* came out of the ICP. In Scandinavia, in 1972, the whole ICP section split on positions close to those of the KAPD and provoked another split in the French section. The Scandinavian section, actively led by Carsten Juhl, published for no long time the review *Kommunismen*. Other less important splits gave rise to small groups trying to return to a 'pure' Bordigism, while others, especially in Italy, moving towards neo-Trotskyism (*Nuclei comunisti internazionalisti*). In 1982, after a period of rapid international expansion in the seventies, the ICP internationally was decimated by further splits, particularly in France, Germany and Italy, when its predilection for supporting national liberation struggles (Palestinian nationalism) gave birth to openly nationalist formations like the Algerian *El Oumami*. The Bruno Maffi's group *Il Programma comunista* survived in Italy, searching to maintain the old Bordigist "Orthodoxy". Microgroups survived too in France: *Le Prolétaire* group; *Les cahiers du marxisme vivant*, etc.

The French Communist Left "Internationalisme"

In France itself, the Gauche Communiste de France, which published *Internationalisme* and had been expelled from the Italian Left, continued to publish its journal until 1952, the date of its dissolution. While in its most fundamental positions it did not abandon the traditions of the Italian Left, through contact with the Dutch Left, but also through its own process of reflection, it reappropriated certain analyses of the German Left. In particular, it took up the theory of the decadence of capitalism since 1914, which had been outlined by Rosa Luxemburg and defended by the KAPD. State capitalism, which was manifesting itself in all countries, in the form of nationalisations or complete specification, had

nothing to do with socialism but expressed a universal trend in 'decadent world capital'. The proletariat in the backward countries had neither bourgeois tasks to realise nor 'national liberation struggles' to support; it had to go straight to the seeking up of its own class dictatorship, as had been shown by the Russian revolution, which was proletarian, not bourgeois. World War I had also marked the integration of the unions and Socialist parties into the state apparatus, and by the early 30's the CPs had also become agents of capitalism in the workers' milieu. These parties were not 'agents of Moscow' but the defenders of their own national capital with a pro-Russian foreign policy (12).

Concerning the form of workers' struggle and the role of the party in the period of the decadence of capitalism — which was characterised by cycles of crisis, war and reconstruction - the GCF called for the formation of non-permanent economy organs that would disappear when the struggle died down, with the exception of the revolutionary period where the workers had to organise permanently in unitary economic and political organs: the workers' councils. The role of the party in these struggles could not be to substitute itself for the workers' own action, but to push them as far as possible in a political direction, through the generalisation of struggles and a direct confrontation with the state, opening up a perspective of revolutionary conflicts. In this spirit, the GCF took part in the strike committee at Renault in 1947- through the intervention of one militant: Goupil - and tried to gain a hearing for its position, which was that the strike must not get bogged down in the Billancourt factories (outskirts of Paris) but must extend to all sectors of the working class, raising unifying political slogans (13).

The GCF was particularly concerned with the period of transition. It argued that only the workers councils could be the unitary organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale, and neither the party, nor the state, which was by nature foreign to socialism, could substitute for them. There could be neither a proletarian party at the head of the state, nor a proletarian state. The period of transition from capitalism to socialism could only take place on a world scale and through the

permanent vigilance of the proletariat towards the state, the conservative guardian of relations of production that were still marked by capitalism.²⁴

While the GCF held a joint conference with the Dutch Left in 1948, expressing its concern for an international confrontation and clarification of ideas, it still preserved its specificity, insisting on the necessity both for the workers' councils and for the communist party, defined as an organ with a necessary and decisive role to play in the process through which the working class becomes conscious of its historic goals.

The profound isolation it suffered, the common law of all the groups coming out of the all Italian and German lefts, its dispersal at the beginning of the 50's - but too the magnetic attraction of Castoriadis group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* within the "Ultra-Left" milieu - brought the GCF to an end, and *Internationalisme* ceased publication. It was only at the beginning of the 60's that this current resurfaced, in Caracas (Venezuela), under the leadership of Marc Chirik, defining itself in opposition to the guerrillas. From 1964 it published *Internacionalismo*, which took up the tradition of *Internationalisme*. The end of what it defined as "50 years of counter-revolution" led to a numerical development of this current after 1968, first in France with *Révolution Internationale*, then in other countries. In 1975 a number of these groups formed themselves into the "International Communist Current" (ICC), which at the end of the 90's claimed (generally very small) sections in Italy, Sweden, the USA, Spain, Britain, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Venezuela, Mexico, India and France. But this current never escaped from the sectarian state, without obtaining so much political interest than the Dutch-German and Italian Communist Lefts, as historical currents. Caught between both antagonistic currents, involving in Leninist positions and claiming its "unconditional defence of the Russian Revolution" as "Proletarian Revolution", it plunged finally into political contradictions. It had to be affected by series of splits (between 1977 and 1997).

Since the period opened up by May 1968, there has been a revival of interest in 'ultra-left' ideas. While all the above mentioned currents are descended more or less - either organisationally or politically - from the Italian Left in particular, they are in a more general sense heirs of the entire Left Communist tradition of the 20's, the current which Lenin described as 'infantile leftists'. Their evolution has not been 'ideological' but has been profoundly marked by the whole period from 1927 to the Second World War.

NOTES

(1) On Damen, apart from his biography in *Dizionario del movimento operaio italiano*, 1975, see the issue of *Prometeo* devoted to his militant life, following his death in October 1979 (no. 14, Oct. 1979).

(2) In *La Fabbrica*, January 1944, organ of the PCI in Milan, we read: "And while the best sons of our land, our best Communists are - on the partisan Fronts of Gorizia, Udine, Lecco, San Martino, Val d'Ossola and many other parts of Italy - heroically waging the war against the Germans and the fascists, while the Italian workers, peasants and intellectuals are shedding their blood in the struggle against the invader, the shady editors of *Prometeo* spew out their incongruities under the heading 'The Trap of Partisanism'. According to them anti-German partisanism is a weapon used by the bourgeoisie to blind the workers; according to them the workers must refuse to join the partisan formations, must 'desert the war'". This article ends with a real incitement to murder, which was concretised in March and July 1945 by this assassination of Mario Acquaviva and Fausto Atti: "The criminal, infamous activity of these dirty individuals must be unmasked and denounced. It is an insult to and a betrayal of the heroic fighters. They must be put in quarantine, treated as spies and traitors, as agents of the Gestapo. And their press must be burned".

(3) For the history of these groups consult, with caution: R. Luraghi *Il movimento operaio torinese durante la Resistenza romana*, Rome, 1968.

(4) On these movements, see same elements in Danilo Montaldi, *op. cit.*

(5) In the platform of 1945, published in 1946 and written by Bordiga, the latter remained very ambiguous on the partisan movement: “Concerning the partisans, patriotic struggle against the Germans and the fascists, the party denounces the manoeuvres of the international and national bourgeoisie who, with their propaganda for this rebirth of official state militarism (a propaganda which can have no meaning), are aiming at the dissolution and liquidation of the voluntary organisations of this struggle. In a number of countries these organisations have already been subject to armed repression.”

(6) In the ‘Documents et résolutions du II^e congrès mondial de la 4^e Internationale’, Paris, 1948; in *Quatrième Internationale*, March-May 1948, there are some elements on the history of the POC.

(8) However, in a public meeting in Paris on 6 October 1945, Vercesi continued to defend his ‘anti-fascist’ point of view. According to *Le Prolétaire*, organ of the CR, Vercesi continued to defend his participation in the Coalizione, presented as being limited to “aid, culture, and the denunciation of the fascists” (no. 5, June 46). Again according to *Le Prolétaire* (no. 4, May 46), Vercesi even said “I took the initiative in the formation of the committee”. Vercesi’s attack on anti-fascism at the Turin conference thus seems purely circumstantial and lacking in conviction.

(9) There is an account in French of the conference in a pamphlet of the ‘Gauche Communiste Internationale’, published in 1946.

(10) The exchange of letters between Damen and Bordiga on the question of ‘imperialism n° 1’ can be found in Onorato Damen, *Bordiga, validità e limiti d’una esperienza nella storia della sinistra italiana*, 1977.

(11) Damens “theses” presented to the 1952 congress of the PCInt were translated by Véga (Alberto Maso) and published in *Socialisme au Barbarie* n° 12, Sept. 1953.

(12) cf. ‘L’évolution du capitalisme et la nouvelle perspective’, by Marco (Marc Chirik), *Internationalisme* no. 46, 1952, text republished in *Bulletin d’étude et de discussion*, n° 8, July 1974, and in the ICC’s *International Review* n° 21.

(13) Bookshop “La Vieille Taupe” republished in June 1972 n° 22 of *Internationalisme*, devoted to the strike at Renault, where a militant of the little group - Goupil - played a role in the Strike Committee

(14) Cf. ‘Sur la nature et la fonction du parti politique du prolétariat’, by Marco (Marc Chirik) *Internationalisme*, n° 38, Oct.

1948, republished in *Bulletin d'étude et de discussion* n° 6, April 1974. Similarly, 'La nature de l'Etat et la révolution prolétarienne', by Marco, in *Bulletin d'étude et de discussion* n° 1, Jan. 1973; published in English in the ICC pamphlet *The Period of Transition from Capitalism to Socialism*.

(15) This conference was prepared by 'Bulletins d'information et de discussion internationales', edited in French by Communistenbond Spartacus, from Nov. 1947.