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Chronicle of a Transition: Human Experiences and the Prehistory of Italian Post-Communism

Supervisor

Prof. Rosario Forlenza

Co-Supervisor

Prof. Lorenzo Castellani

Candidate

Marco Martino

Student ID. 645082

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*A Serafino e Vittorio,
il cui ricordo indelebile vive,
e vivrà, sempre, nella mia memoria*

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	1
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	3
INTRODUCTION.....	5
CHAPTER ONE	16
Ashes and Ruins of a Failed Revolution: The PCI in the Early 1980's	16
1.1 The Beginning of the Silence: Moro, PCI, and the Equivocal Essence of Red Brigades	22
1.2 The Manifest of <i>Vissuto</i> : Guido Rossa and the Human Experience of Communism	29
1.3 The Age of Fractures: Communists' Dilemmas in International and Domestic space	35
1.4 The Soviet Drive Is Over: the PCI Discourse in the Wake of Polish Crisis	41
1.5 Awakening from the Illusion: the Return to ' <i>Operaismo</i> ' in a Changing Italy	48
CHAPTER TWO	57
In the Storm, Without a Compass: Communists' Lives in Mid-1980's	57
2.1 The Pursuit of Modernity: Communist Openness to the Contamination of 1980s Novelties..	64
2.2 The Last Duel: Berlinguer, Craxi and the Defense of the Underdogs	70
2.3 The Death of the Master: Berlinguer's Stroke and the Days of a Commune Agony	75
2.4 In Name of the Father: the Communist Funeral and the Farewell to Berlinguer.....	81
2.5 What is Next? Natta's PCI between the Old Legacy and an Unavoidable Destiny.....	86
2.6 Global Communism on the Move: the PCI and the Rise of Gorbachev	93
CHAPTER THREE	101
A Left Palingenesis: Italian Communism Facing the 1989 Conundrum	101
3.1 Ending History: the New Communist Pedagogy for a Reforming Party	108
3.2 The After Morning: Material and Spiritual Reactions to Real Socialism Collapse.....	116
3.3 The Long Agony: the Twilight of Utopia	124
3.4 Addio Compagni, the Hammer and Sickle Rusts while an Oak Grows	133
CONCLUSION.....	142
BIBLIOGRAPHY	151
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	164

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAMOD	Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico
ADN	Archivio Diaristico Nazionale
AGCPJ	Archivio Gian Carlo Pajetta
APC	Archivio Partito Comunista
ART	Archivio Rai Teche
AU	Archivio l'Unità
BR	Brigate Rosse (Red Brigades)
DC	Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democracy)
DDR	Deutsche Demokratische Republik (German Democratic Republic)
DS	Democratici di Sinistra (Democrats of the Left)
FG	Fondazione Gramsci
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PCF	Parti Communiste Français (French Communist Party)
PCE	Partido Comunista de España (Spain Communist Party)
PCI	Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party)
PCUS	Partito Comunista dell'Unione Sovietica (Soviet Union Communist Party)
PSDI	Partito Socialista Democratico Italiano (Italian Democratic Socialist Party)
PDS	Partito Democratico della Sinistra (Democratic Party of the Left)
PLI	Partito Liberale Italiano (Italian Liberal Party)
PRI	Partito Repubblicano Italiano (Italian Republican Party)
PSI	Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party)
SPD	Sozial-Demokratische Partei Deutschelands (Germany Social Democratic Party)
US	United States of America
USSR	Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic

INTRODUCTION

On November 9, 1989, Egon Krenz ended the meeting of the DDR government just before lunch. Several issues were discussed, the new arrangements for East Germany's citizens travels. The matter was thorny, as well as inescapable after the wide spreading protests of the precedent weeks. Günter Schabowski, the chief spokesman of the DDR government, gave the press conference for the western news correspondents, as usual, in the immediate afternoon.

For some time, the Italian National Agency of Associated Press (ANSA) had there an expert reporter, Riccardo Ehrman. Some minutes before he asked his question, Schabowski had precisely mentioned the governmental choice to liberalize travels toward the West. Ehrman thus could not refrain from asking when these regulations would take effect. The Italian journalist's question was almost predictable. However, the DDR chief spokesman seemed completely unprepared, or perhaps frightened, by the answer he had to deliver.

Schabowski begun to scratch his head and quickly looked around, seeking for a sign of approval by his colleagues. Then, he put his hands in the jacket pockets and pulled out some papers, looking between the lines for something safe to say. The DDR spokesman seemed to not encounter anything. At that point, facing the waiting room, he said: "From what I know, immediately"¹. Ehrman and his colleagues were surprised and confused. Not everyone understood the historical significance of those few words, at least until 11 o'clock that evening, when thousands of East Berliners gathered in front of the checkpoints and were allowed to pass through without any authorization document. The next morning the world would wake up with the images of the collapse of the greatest Cold War symbol: the Berlin Wall. Under the blows of German citizens, communism also started to breakdown worldwide. This occurrence meant happiness, freedom, and democracy for someone, despair, disillusion, and grief for some others.

The fall of the Berlin Wall threw states, parties, and people in the East as well as in the West in a post-communist time. The Italian Communist Party lived through such experiences, sharing with the rest of the former communist world the same mixed feelings of mutual political mistrust and apathy. Soon, Italian communism started to experience a transformational transition toward a new "thing" at the structural as well as at the socio-cultural level. The emergence of a new political entity, however, was not accompanied with a translation of the party's ideals and traditional markers of certainty to a new body politic.

¹ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War. A World History*, (New York: Basic Book, 2017), pp. 591-592; The memory of that announce were also reported in an Italian documentary tv show, see Andrea Purgatori, "9 Novembre 1989, l'annuncio a sorpresa di Günter Schabowski, funzionario della DDR: 'si può attarversare il muro, anche da oggi'", in *Atlantide*, 14/04/2019.

The incumbent leadership wanted to manage that event to begin a total transformation, extremely necessary after the endless decline. Indeed, the political path of the “Greatest Communist Party of the West” was rough by wrong political strategies, human tragedies, generational turnover, and electoral decline during 1980s.

The Italian communists were overtaken by events. Despite the 1976 electoral success, the party was prevented to access the government. The following years had been dominated by the shortcomings of communists’ political proposals. Moreover, Berlinguer's sudden death took away an essential point of reference for the communist people in an increasingly challenging, and changing, world. The party augmented its generational turnover and new young leaders took much power. However, those women and men decided that communism was an outdated thing, that it should be archived, and a new way found.

1989 appeared unconfutable as a catalyzing moment, capable of accelerating already existing dynamics, after resulted in post-communism. Thus, the transition of the Italian Communist Party cannot be seen as just one historical moment, but rather it must be understood like a dilated pre-historic age. Within it, each event assumes a new value.

Many actors were protagonists in the transformational transition. Party’s leaders went easily down in history. This unidirectional attention had often generated an underestimation of grassroots militants’ crucial role. The history of a mass party – as the communist one was – cannot be pieced together ignoring emotions and human-experiences of those who were the party’s lifeblood. Ordinary communists rejoiced under the party headquarters in the 1976 elections, they despaired at Berlinguer’s funeral, and they were bewildered when real socialism crushed. The comrades were an integral part of Italian Communist Party’ history, always playing a decisive role.

This dissertation wants to examine how the PCI militants experienced the transition toward post-communism from an existential and emotional point of view. Indeed, scholarship on Italian politics and parties has been frequently dominated by mere structural and institutional approaches. Such approaches have focused on the organization of the party, the role and action of leaders, ideology, and on the relations of power that political organizations can have with its peers, both in the national and international scenarios.

This way, the established interpretations have problematically neglected human experiences and the symbolic formation of meaning in the political processes. In the 20th century, many political parties, worldwide, were structured around grassroots militancy. The Italian Communist Party was pioneer in it. Furthermore, political ideologies were lived and experienced in term of fideistic attachments. The communist people pursued politics and militancy with a sort of religious devotion, typical of who is searching for the salvation, or the utopia of a more equal and fair society. The

Communist Party was one of the main actors of Italian history, because of the role and vision of its leaders. Nonetheless, it is also undoubtful that those visions arrived at a vast number of people through militants' political and social activities. Therefore, it is crucial to reconstruct the party's experience of those people who were not directing it politically, but that lived the organization humanly, as well.

The existing literature on the Italian Communist Party transition and dissolution centers on the systemic and structural features. Conversely, this dissertation wants to examine the deeper symbolic and ritual aspect of this critical juncture: how did the militants experience the transition? What did they feel during the dissolution of their home party? Did they abandon communism ideals, culture, and history? When? Could the communist identity have disappeared overnight?

Finding a proper answer to these questions is crucial to piece together the Italian left-wing coalitions' trajectories in the history of the, so-called, Second Republic, which was inaugurated in Italy after the political-party system general collapse of 1992, exactly a year after the PCI disappearance. Indeed, understand what happen to the communists' culture and ideals, when they leave militancy to become merely voters, will give us new lenses to assess the shift of Italian left parties toward the model of the third way, opened by Clinton and Blair, and destined to be followed by leftist parties everywhere in Western Europe. It will also allow us to grasp why post-communist personalities are now empathic, and sometimes aligned, with post-ideological and populist movements. In 1991, the dissolution of the party left behind a divided community, deprived of markers of certainties and divested of the real opportunity to oppose this choice and achieve a reshaped political identity. This ended up generating in the lives of thousands of former comrades a sense of emptiness, of abandonment – the experience of orphanage. The post-communist leadership did not perceive this void, and perhaps did not want to fill it. In fact, they were determined to make a caesura with communism, renouncing to its heir, despite it was not the main desire of thousands other comrades all along Italy.

This dissertation is inspired by Istvan Rev's masterpiece, "Retroactive Justice. Prehistory of Post-Communism"², which examines traumatic experience of the Hungarian socialist regime transition. The Hungarian historian wrote about the need to realize a reconstruction of "concomitant fragments"³, derived from Hungarian women and men's stories, that would offer "a tangible experience of life beyond the party-state"⁴. To this end, the construction of a causal nexus between all those fragments of life is required. However, that nexus becomes visible only at the conclusion of a specific stream strand of events, and hence it remains obscure to its contemporaries.

² István Rév, *Giustizia Retroattiva. Preistoria del postcomunismo*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2005).

³ *Ivi*, p. 22.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

In the Italian case, the reconstruction of fragments of the lives of communist militants will instead allow to explore deeply their human experiences, within the party, thus filling the serious gap in the existing literature. Nevertheless, it is essential – as Rev did – the re-construction of a pre-historic nexus, or an outline, even for Italian post-communism. This will serve to outline a meaningful timeframe in which the long communist transition is detectable. Such a timeframe, or a proper post-communism prehistory, goes from 1979 to 1991. Furthermore, the idea to use a post-communist prehistory, in combination with the principle of *straniamento*⁵, is going produce the reduction of any residual political nostalgia over the time in which the events discussed took place. In fact, many were contemporaries of the crisis, and dissolution, of Italian communism, and, not to establish an adequate temporal distance albeit artificially pre-constructed, would risk creating analysis bias. Memory could turn into history, and history into memory, undermining a boundary that is necessary, if not always indispensable.

In his book about nine reflections on distance, Carlo Ginzburg started from Victor Sklovskij's *straniamento*⁶. It is a conceptualization of a literary process, which helped to distance the vision, and the perception, of what it is been observing. According to Ginzburg, it is “a tool for overcoming the apparencies and achieve a more profound understanding of the reality [...] a tentative to present things as they were seen for the first time”⁷. Rethinking the Italian communists' epic through the lenses of a prehistory, based on the *straniamento*, can display a new interpretation for some events which are consolidated in thousands of people's memories. However, precisely because personal and individual memory takes on enormous specific weight in contemporary history perceptions, a kind of “moral self-education” is needed to erase “misrepresentations, postulates thought to be obvious, and acknowledgments that our perceptual habits have rested trite and repetitive”⁸.

In other words, to see occurrences for what they really were, we must approach them, emptying our entire perceptual and cognitive baggage. It is necessary to look at political events as if they were a meaningless riddle, the answer and meaning of which we must reconstruct. This applies, in the most absolute way, to Italian Communist Party's transition, to observe which historians should necessarily opt for a new detached approach. It is unavoidable to dive into the depths of the political values communism transformation and in the human reaction of those who had to face it, sharing a mutual personal-collective communist identity till that moment.

In line with Ginzburg, “the *straniamento* appeared such as an effective antidote against the risk to which everyone is exposed: taking reality for granting”⁹. Here, it was right the committeemen not to

⁵ Carlo Ginzburg, *Occhiacci di legno. Dieci riflessioni sulla distanza*, (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2019), p. 16.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Ivi*, p. 35.

⁸ *Ivi*, p. 21.

⁹ *Ivi*, p. 40.

take anything for granted, regarding the Italian communism reality, to move this dissertation towards an original theoretical approach, that might offer a new interpretation for the party history. It came out of a research field diverse from the historical one, but inextricably linked to it: the political anthropology.

From the political anthropology this dissertation borrowed the concept of liminality, introduced by Arnold van Gennep. The French anthropologist developed it to analyze the middle stage in the rites of passages, however, it is “now considered to be by some a master concept in social and political science writ large”¹⁰. The first appearance of liminality conceptualization dated back to 1909, when van Gennep published his “Rites of Passage”, a book which became “his post-mortem claim to fame”¹¹. This work proposes a classification of all existing rites from a conceptual point of view. The anthropologist realized a clear-cut distinction between those rituals which mark the passage of an individual, or social group, from one status to another. He did not study just the transition in the passage of time, such as new year, but also focused the attention on the “basis of characteristic patterns in order of ceremonies”¹². The ritual transition in any society, according to van Gennep, could be distinguished, namely, in rites of separation, transition rites and rites of reincorporation¹³. The middle phase was also named liminal period, while for the final stage it is valid also the term postliminal rites¹⁴. Apparently, van Gennep’s categorization can describe transition, universally. In fact, according to Thomassen, “all the societies use rites to demarcate transition”¹⁵. The term liminality is derived by the Latin – *limen* – and indicate a situation in which all limits were removed ritually and temporarily. This removal facilitates the “passing through” and results in a very suspension of the society structure for some time.

Arnold van Gennep’s liminality was revisited by Victor Turner. In 1964, the English anthropologist during a conference presented a paper entitled: “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passages”. Some years later, it was re-visited to fit also into his classic, “The Forest of Symbols”¹⁶. For Turner, the engagement with van Gennep lecture was a crucial “reading experience”¹⁷, which accompanied him for the rest of his career. According to Szakolczai and Thomassen, Turner had the merit to “liberate van Gennep’s framework from both functionalist and

¹⁰ Bjørn Thomassen, “The uses and meanings of liminality”, in *International Political Anthropology*, No. 1, Vol. 2, (2009), p. 5.

¹¹ Arpad Szakolczai, Bjørn Thomassen, *From Anthropology to Social Theory. Rethinking the Social Sciences*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), e-book version, pos. 814.

¹² Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960), p. 10.

¹³ Bjørn Thomassen, *The uses and meanings*, cit., p. 6.

¹⁴ Arpad Szakolczai, Bjørn Thomassen, *From Anthropology to*, cit., pos. 821.

¹⁵ Bjørn Thomassen, *The uses and meanings*, cit., p. 6.

¹⁶ Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols. Aspect of Ndembu Ritual*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp. 93-112.

¹⁷ Arpad Szakolczai, Bjørn Thomassen, *From Anthropology to*, cit., pos. 6682.

structuralist straight jacket”¹⁸. The successful achievement of this goal was not predictable due to the fact that van Gennep’s work was marginalized by the academia of his times, which was more attached to Durkheim’s studies. However, Turner’s re-reading of liminality gave him a better understanding of moments of passage, especially regarding his focus on Ndembu ritual¹⁹. The English anthropologist was able to present the ritual of passage like a creativity *momentum* and to demonstrate how rites cannot be considered just an “elaboration of social structure”²⁰. Both the liminality and the re-elaboration of van Gennep’s framework were essential for allowing Turner to reinforce his concept of “social drama”.

More recently, the concept of liminality has been updated by Bjorn Thomassen, who indicates both spatial and temporal dimensions to which it can be related. Spatially, the liminality can be applied to specific places, areas or zonas, and countries, larger regions, or rather continents. Instead, for what concerns temporal dimension, it can relate to moments, periods, and epochs²¹, which can be experienced by three different types of subjects such as individuals, social groups, and entire populations. Thomassen shows also how, together with the notion of “hybrid culture”²², the concept of liminality has crossed the boundaries between different research fields, passing from psychoanalysis to political sciences. Obviously, each field used it, piking one subject and designing the temporal and/or spatial dimension in which is seemed to develop itself.

For instance, Arpad Szakolczai made use of liminality for assessing the crisis of modernity. Starting from here, the Polish scholar argued that the liminality could became permanent under certain conditions, that can be originated in each of rites of passage’s three phases. Szakolczai wrote: “Liminality becomes a permanent condition when any of the phases in this sequence [of separation, liminality and reaggregation] becomes frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular frame”²³. In his work, he offered a series of examples which are related to the permanent liminality: the monasticism, court society, and Bolshevism. The latter one is, of course, the more interesting for the aims of this dissertation. For Szakolczai, the Bolshevik society was imprisoned in the final stage of ritual passage. In communist regimes, the fault of reaggregation has generated the undeniable idea that “the Second World War never ended”²⁴ and, for this reason, the self-sustainment of those regimes was guaranteed

¹⁸ Arpad Szakolczai, Bjørn Thomassen, *From Anthropology to, cit.*, pos. 6682.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ivi*, pos. 6692.

²¹ Bjørn Thomassen, *The uses and meanings, cit.*, p. 16.

²² *Ivi*, p. 18.

²³ Arpad Szakolczai, *Reflexive Historical Sociology*, (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 220.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

by the continuous sentiments of revenge, suffering and negative emotions. In these conditions, according to Thomassen, “without a proper re-integration, liminality is pure danger”²⁵.

Therefore, based on the assumption that liminality can be employed to understand certain part of the history of communist regimes, it seemed a suitable tool for the purpose of comprehending the human experiences of militants during the transition, and dissolution, of the Italian Communist Party. The thousand comrades, forming the body politic of the communist party, represented indeed a community, which in a temporal space of a decade – 1980s – experienced the decline of their home political organization. Here, the objective is to display that the party’s decline could be associated with a long transition of the communist body politic toward an un-defined future, aggravated by the disintegration of revolutionary utopia and socialist horizons, after the Berlin Wall collapse.

The use of van Gennepe’s liminality to explain Italian communists’ transition led to divide it in the threefold sequence of separation, liminal moment, and re-aggregation. Each phase is linked to a specific time-lap of communist prehistory temporal arch and to decisive historical events in Italian communists’ experience. Evidently, this partition is also detectable in each chapter. They will describe historical events, associating them to van Gennepe’s three passage moments.

The first chapter will examine the phase of separation that started within the communist body politic between 1979-1981. The early 1980s’ were crucial for three main occurrences: Guido Rossa’s assassination, the party’s last attempt to revival the *operaismo*, and the relations with the Soviet Union after two international crises. The Italian Communist Party had appeared at the beginning of a new decade defeated by its own initiative. The politics of Historical Compromise had collapsed under the blows of far-left terrorist groups. The Red Brigades, by kidnapping and killing Aldo Moro, had wanted to strike Berlinguer’s project, depriving him of his most important interlocutor. The governments of National Solidarity, which were the offspring of that tense period, were unable to guarantee the political demands that the communist people were clamoring for after their success in 1976 elections.

An initial separation was hence generated by the party’s body politic appreciation of leadership’s chosen politics. The extremists themselves began to gather a fair amount of support, which evaporated with the murder of communist unionist Guido Rossa. The Red Brigades, though that assassination, struck at the heart no longer the state, but the working class itself. These ruptures were compounded by two other moments of communist social base’s separation, marked by the failure of the 1980 Fiat-Turin strikes and Berlinguer’s rift with Soviet comrades in the aftermath of Afghanistan invasion and

²⁵ Bjørn Thomassen, “Revisiting liminality: the danger of empty spaces”, in Hazel Andrews, Les Roberts, eds., *Liminal Landscapes. Travel, experience and spaces in-between*, (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 20.

Polish military coup d'état. This growing series of internal separation moments was the trigger for the start of van Gennep's second phase: the liminal period.

The second chapter will deal with the liminal moment experienced by Italian comrades between 1983-1986. The mid part of the decade was indeed a critical moment in the human experiences of many communists. The moments of separation had caused the dissolution of many markers of certainties that had defined the collective and personal identity of communists. For example, the party's choice to distance itself from the USSR meant for many militants – first-hour comrades mostly – the loss of a deep-rooted part of their sense of belonging both to the party and the international communism framework. In an ever-changing global realm, the only certainty for the communist militants was the beloved secretary Enrico Berlinguer. The stroke that affected the communist leader, during an election rally in Padua, marked a decisive moment in the communist transition. It was not simply “death of the father”, as it has been written, but also the disappearance of the sole recognized master of ceremony of the communist community, the personality who could have bring the liminal passage to a successful completion, recreating a post-communist identity. His death opened an emptiness, which no one would ever again be able to bridge.

The third, and final, chapter of this thesis will deal with the final stage of the rite of passage lived through by Italian communists. For van Gennep, Turner and Thomassen, the final moment corresponds to the re-aggregation of the community, in our case, into a new entity. In the case of the Italian communists this last step seems to not be accomplished. As the reconstruction of historical facts between 1988-1991 points out, following Berlinguer's passing, the party remained stuck in the ford until the appointment of the young leader Achille Occhetto, as new secretary. Occhetto and his leadership, by the way, were convinced that communism had to be definitively overcome, finding new paths, symbols, and liturgies.

The fall of the Berlin Wall was in this sense the definitive signal that the transition had to turn into real transformation of communists' identity. Such project definitively divided the communist people, above all around the party's symbols and name issues. The chapter will hence focus on the analysis of the last fifteen months of Italian communism's life, ended with the birth of the Democratic Party of the Left. That times were dominated by grief and desperation of those who were not ready to the last farewell. Meanwhile, other comrades rediscovered the political passion and appreciated the contamination with new ideas.

Thus, not the entire communist community was enthusiastic about the transformation in something new. The debates within local party's section became the most evident counterproof. Moreover, the transformation was not widespread appreciated as evidenced by the comrades' refusal to recognize Occhetto, like a new entitled master of ceremony capable to close the transition. The lack of re-

aggregation ended up leaving open the process, which took on even more the connotations of Szakolczai's permanent liminality.

The dissertation's main goal is to point out that the combination of liminality and the re-elaboration of the post-communist prehistory's idea is an innovative key to read the end of Italian communism. Through its application to militants' human experience, the party's transition can hence be seen both as the result of a long run without a way out and the failure to re-integrate, in the last liminal stage, the communism body politic in a new strong identity. Furthermore, this type of approach could make it possible to revisit, or rather expand, the historical narrative of various Italian political parties during the "First Republic". Taking an interest in using the theoretical tools of political anthropology, it might also broaden the framework of transnational analysis for the future, perhaps in the countries of Southern Europe.

Methodologically, this research employed the use of several sources, coming partially from the branch of micro-history. The intention to reconstruct the emotions and behaviors of grassroots militants during the temporal arch of 1980s cannot rely only on the existing literature.

However, the latter was certainly needed to acquire the broader knowledge possible on PCI's stories. It seems important to emphasize three of the books both fundamental for the drafting and for rethinking Italian communism from a frequently hidden perspective. The first one is Nello Ajello's volume²⁶ dedicated to the influence exerted by various intellectuals around the party initiatives. He made available a series of unique historical-journalistic sources that proves paramount in understanding what communists' public representation was.

The second publication is signed by historian Andrea Possieri²⁷ and analyzes the role, and the significance, that history had on the identity and organizational evolution of the party. He traces in the pedagogical use of this discipline, an unparalleled tool capable of rooting communist ideals in part of national social base, and making it remain an object of worship in the lives of comrades. Possieri also displays how, from a certain point on, history became a deadweight in the PCI modernization. It became de facto a solid anchor for grassroots militants. While the leadership did not deprive itself of it because they should incur deep ideal redefinition and, perhaps, a loss of electoral consensus.

A third critical reference was Silvio Pons' very recent publication on the international relations of the Italian communists²⁸. Although, the dissertation does not have the topic of the party's global relations at its center, the PCI tendency toward internationalization demanded a reflection on the

²⁶ Nello Ajello, *Il lungo addio. Intellettuali e PCI dal 1958 al 1991*, (Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 1997).

²⁷ Andrea Possieri, *Il peso della storia. Memoria, identità, rimozione dal Pci al Pds (1970-1991)*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007).

²⁸ Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri. Visioni e legami internazionali nel mondo del Novecento*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2021).

external events' influence on the transition. Italian communists were born internationalists and, in a sense, remained so right down to the end.

In addition to the literature, extensive work was required on archival sources, mainly from the *Fondazione Gramsci* in Rome and the *Archivio Diaristico Nazionale* in Pieve Santo Stefano. At the *Fondazione Gramsci*, several files belonging to two different collections were examined: the Archive of the Italian Communist Party and the personal one of Gian Carlo Pajetta. In both cases, the material was searched mainly within the letters sent by grassroots militants, or rather those arrived from the regional and provincial federations. In the case of the *Archivio Diaristico Nazionale*, meanwhile, manuscripts and typescripts, signed by comrades during the time frame analyzed or immediately after 1991, were reviewed. From this variety of documentation, it was possible in many cases to reconstruct not only the political activity of the diarists, but also how it intersected with interests and events related to their personal lives.

Moreover, it is notable the great importance also of materials found in the online catalogs of the *Archivio Audiovisivo Del Movimento Operaio e Democratico* (Audiovisual Archive of the Workers' and Democratic Movement) and the online archives of the communist newspaper *l'Unità*. Perhaps most of all, in the case of the reconstruction of events and sentiments related to the deaths – and funerals – of Guido Rossa and Enrico Berlinguer, the footage from the Audiovisual Archive of the Workers' and Democratic Movement has been of absolute importance.

Two documentaries directed by Italian filmmaker Nanni Moretti and Belgian filmmaker-journalist Hugues Le Paige were critically instrumental in reconstructing militants' reactions to Occhetto's decision to start the process of changing the name and form of the Communist Party after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Both made two outstanding products by observing through the camera the lives of communist activists. Nanni Moretti did it during the fifteen months leading up to the last party congress, filming debates in the municipal sections of several Italian cities. Whereas Hugues Le Paige followed a group of friends/comrades from Mercatale, the hamlet of a small country town in Red Tuscany, for more than two decades, since 1982 until 2004. These sources have represented a decisive contribution, which, mainly in the third and final chapter, made it easier to give the most accurate description of how the transition was experienced by the communist ordinary women and men.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the use of an ethnographic source that assumed extraordinary value in this re-reading of the communists' happenings. During the month of July 2022, an interview was conducted with Mr. Bruno Ceroli, a CGIL trade unionist and communist militant. Ceroli's direct testimony became the file rouge that construct an ideal map of the human experience which were here analyzed. His words allowed to insert every remark, coming from the archival

sources and ego documents, in the framework of what signify being a militant in the prehistory of Italian post-communism.

Capturing the emotions, fears, dreams, expectations, and aspirations of grassroots comrades at the terminal moment of their history, as communists, was an arduous but extraordinarily compelling task. The hope now is to success in conveying not only a historical reconstruction, with political-anthropological traits, of the Italian communist transition, as well as, to substantiate the never-ending passions, that accompanied thousands of communists up to the moment of the dismantling of their party. And maybe even beyond that.

CHAPTER ONE

Ashes and Ruins of a Failed Revolution: The PCI in the Early 1980's

*Qualcuno era comunista perché era
così ateo che aveva bisogno di un altro dio.¹*

“Aveva ragione anche Pasolini”². Miriam Mafai, communist comrade, wrote this sentence in 1996. After seven years from the fall of the Berlin Wall and Achille Occhetto’s decision to change name and identity of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), with the so-called “*la svolta della Bolognina*”, Mafai pointed out that one of the first crucial moment in the deep social transformation of Italian society, including the communist voters, was the 1974 referendum on divorce. This ongoing transformative process was the manifestation of “the adherence [...] to the values of hedonistic ideology and consumerism”³. Indeed, the victory of pro-divorce coalition, not to abrogate Fortuna-Baslini’s law⁴, seemed to be the first embodiment of secular changes and modernization, which were permeating Italy and the West since 1968. Thousands of Italians embraced values, consumes and culture coming from the American model of capitalism. This new attitude generated a secularization of the political sphere and the hegemony loss of the two major parties⁵: Christian Democracy (DC) and Italian Communist Party. Therefore, the divorce did not modify just families, but it was the prelude for others irreversible separation between citizens and politics, believers and parishes, militants and parties.

The main purpose of this chapter it is to explore the transformation of the communist body politic in the years of passage from 1970s to 1980s. This moment represented a critical juncture for the successive transformation of the PCI. Starting from the failure of the two foremost political projects

¹ “Someone was a communist because he was so atheistic that he needed another God.” – Giorgio Gaber, Sandro Luporini, “Qualcuno era comunista”, in Benedetta Tobagi, eds, *C’era una volta il PCI*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2007), p. 123.

² “Pasolini also was right” – Miriam Mafai, *Botteghe Oscure, addio. Com'eravamo comunisti*, (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1996), p. 87.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ It was the law which introduced the rules for regulating divorce practices in the Italian legal system. The bill was promoted by the socialist deputy Loris Fortuna and the liberal one Antonio Baslini. Their draft was signed into law No. 898, on December 1, 1970. In the same year was approved also the request for an abrogative referendum, promoted by the conservative and catholic forces. For a general overview see, Giambattista Sciré, *Il divorzio in Italia. Partiti, Chiesa, società civile dalla legge al referendum (1965-1974)*, (Milan: Mondadori, 2007); for a specific insight on the divorce public debate also see, Paolo Savarese, “Il divorzio e la svolta antropologica: gli interventi di Sergio Cotta ed Augusto Del Noce in occasione del referendum del 1974 sul divorzio”, in *RIFD – Rivista Internazionale di Filosofia del Diritto*, Vol. 3 (2019), pp. 433-451.

⁵ Miriam Mafai, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

– the Historical Compromise and Eurocommunism – the party was overwhelmed by the disappointment of militants and supporters. In many of them there was the collapse of illusions which opened deep rifts. The following pages will specifically focus the events that engendered multiple instances of separation within the PCI social base: firstly, the heyday of red terrorism and its ambiguous relation with the communist tradition; secondly, the impact of the passage from the ideological centrality of the party to that of human-life experiences. Afterward, the analysis will focus on the profound impact of international issues and the consequent traumatic demise of Soviet myth. Finally, the chapter will explain how the industrial restructuring of 1980s would entail the ultimate use of *operaismo* as the ideal communist resource. Each section will be supplemented using different keys of interpretation including the fundamental one of the generation gaps. The meticulous reconstruction of whole elements and events will bring to the light the separation process, experienced by the communist people, giving rise to a liminal period decisive for the PCI ultimate transformation.

In those years, the PCI emerged like the more appropriate political actor to curb new aspirations, youth desires and the research for unknown horizons toward equality, social justice, and peace. However, the task of mediating such disruptive social and political thrusts proved difficult even for a vanguard party, such as the Communist party, because the necessity to consider “renewal as part of continuity”⁶, in accordance with the typical historicist communist culture, turned out to be complex for allowing the different souls of the party to proceed at the same pace toward the future. Frequently, the PCI was portrayed as a monolithic organization that hinged on *centralismo democratico*⁷ and *operaismo*. Such a representation hides a multiform layer’s essence, in both leadership and grass-root membership. Camillo Martino, a doctor at the *Botteghe Oscure* clinic⁸ and son-in-law of leader Giorgio Amendola⁹, in his autobiography offered an explicative definition of the widespread perceived nature of PCI, within its militancy:

Non è quindi vero che il PCI è stato soltanto il partito della “classe operaia”, o almeno della sua avanguardia che doveva, secondo la “vulgata” tradizionale, egemonizzare e guidare le lotte per la trasformazione; il PCI è stato invece un partito essenzialmente polimorfo, di “massa”, al quale

⁶ Valentina Casini, “Tra continuità e rinnovamento. Il Sessantotto”, in Silvio Pons, eds., *Il comunismo italiano nella storia del Novecento*, (Rome: Viella, 2021), p. 448.

⁷ The *Centralismo Democratico* is a peculiar and pre-established principle in communist culture with Leninist origins and “historically justified, according to Gramsci, by the fact that only that kind of organization allow to proceed “*nella ricerca critica di ciò che è uguale nell’apparente disformità, per organizzare e connettere tutto ciò che è simile*”. See Giuseppe Vacca, *Vent’anni dopo. La sinistra fra mutamenti e revisioni*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), pp. 24-25.

⁸ In the PCI Headquarters was present a clinic, directed by Mario Spallone, where Camillo Martino worked as a doctor and presiding over a special commission with the task to examine requests to require specialistic medical assistance in socialist countries, especially USSR. – Miriam Mafai, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁹ Archivio Diaristico Nazionale, from this moment ADN, Camillo Martino, *La vita a Botteghe Oscure al tempo dei comunisti*, Prot. No. 6993, MP/06, 2005, p. 20.

guardavano non solo operai e contadini ma anche i ceti medi emergenti, i piccoli imprenditori e, in gran numero, intellettuali, artisti, uomini di cultura, tutti coloro cioè che, emotivamente e razionalmente, riconoscevano la necessità di profonde, radicali “riforme di struttura” (come si usava dire) capaci di affrancare la condizione umana dagli errori del passato¹⁰.

During the 1970s, the social magma, described by Martino using the term *polimorfo*¹¹, integrated a new mob of militants and sympathizer, including an increasing number of young people and women. They get in the Italian Communist Party following the “long wave of Sixty-Eight” even in those areas where the movement had not been particularly vibrant or had not appeared at all¹². The new generation, forged by 1968, embodied the necessity and request of radical reforms, without severing ties with the generation of the fathers, but radicalizing their experiences¹³. Being part of this generation, Massimo De Angelis outlined it such a strange, transitional, narrow and a leftist generation under communism aegis¹⁴. It was caught in the between the older generation of the immediate post-war years, and the new generation one of 1980s. Hence, a community – a “tribe”¹⁵ – where the dominant idea was the Marxist one.

The encounter between “fathers and sons” created the perfect platform for the communist electoral successes of 1975 and 1976, when the PCI reached the 34,4%¹⁶ its highest percentage of consensus in national elections. Commenting on this point, historian Aldo Agosti stated: “the great electoral result of June 20, 1976, was thus together, the highest point reached by the party and the beginning of a difficult phase”¹⁷. Certainly, the two-faced result had the primary effect to block the political system, already agonizing and worn out by the *conventio ad excludendum* toward Italian communists settled in the international scenario of the Cold War¹⁸. Indeed, the possible entry of PCI in the

¹⁰ “It is therefore not true that the PCI was only the party of the “working class”, or at least of its vanguard that was, according to the traditional “vulgate”, to hegemonize and lead the struggles for transformation; the PCI was instead an essentially polymorphic party, of “mass”, to whom looked not only workers and peasants but also the emerging middle classes, small entrepreneurs and, in large numbers, intellectuals, artists, men of culture, that is, all those who, emotionally and rationally, recognized the need for deep, radical “structural reforms” (as they used to say) able to free the human condition from the mistakes of the past.” – ADN, Camillo Martino, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

¹¹ “Polymorphous” – *Ibidem*.

¹² Claudia Cappelli, *Memoria comunista e memoria del comunismo in Italia dopo il 1989: il caso dei militanti bolognesi*, (Milan: University of Milan – PhD Thesis, 2009-2010), p. 93.

¹³ Massimo De Angelis, *Post. Confessioni di un ex comunista*, (Milan: Edizioni Angelo Guerini ed Associati, 2003), p. 119.

¹⁴ *Ivi*, pp. 103-104.

¹⁵ *Ivi*, p. 104.

¹⁶ Simona Colarizi, *Storia politica della Repubblica. 1943-2006*, (Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 2018), p. 127.

¹⁷ Aldo Agosti, *Bandiere Rosse. Un profilo storico dei comunisti europei*, (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1999), p. 284.

¹⁸ On the PCI role and relations with the Cold War and international scenarios see, Silvio Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2006); Silvio Pons and Michele Di Donato, “Reform Communism”, in Julian Fürst, Silvio Pons, Mark Selden, eds., *The Cambridge History of Communism. Volume III. Endgames? Late Communism in Global Perspective, 1968 to the Present*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, *cit.*; and Odd Arne Westad, *op. cit.*

government of NATO's country was unfeasible and opposed by both blocs, mainly because the materialization of this circumstance, such as the cumbersome project of Eurocommunism¹⁹, could constitute a deleterious motif of tensions between United States and Soviet Union, right at the zenith of détente process on the ground of the conclusion of Helsinki Conference. Nevertheless, the 1976 electoral achievement had also a secondary impact on the mutual relation between party hierarchies' decisions and electorate corps aspirations.

On the one hand, Enrico Berlinguer, secretary of the PCI, and the Communist leadership made use of the ballot box spoils for rolling out the factual realization of the *Compromesso Storico*, dialoguing with Aldo Moro's DC, to bring communists representatives into the government. On the other hand, the electorate that had trusted in the PCI to break the Christian Democrat power-order remained dissatisfied precisely because the historical enemy was about to become the preferred interlocutor, even to the detriment of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI).

Evidence of the latent dissatisfaction of militants can be found in several letters sent to the party leadership. For example, one of them, noted:

*[...] abbandonare definitivamente la via del compromesso storico, per imbracare decisamente, e con ardore, l'unica strada giusta, leale e sicura, che ci rimane: quella della riforma costituzionale. [...] previo accordo con PSI per poter affrontare con successo le prossime elezioni*²⁰.

Thus, the relationship between communist leaders and militants, party and social body, political force and electorate experienced a tipping point. The urgency of these issues forced the PCI to employ the mighty force of communism pedagogy and its party's schools²¹. The latter developed the renewal of their activity on two main pillars: "the need to merge the new generations of party members with the older ones and the urgency to explain the political line – in particular that of the *Compromesso Storico* and the strategy of the governments of National Solidarity"²². As matter of fact, the skepticism, for the PCI coexistence and alliance with the Christian Democracy, was the glue between two generations of militants: those who kept well alive the memories of the first political struggles in the aftermath

¹⁹ Silvio Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine*, cit., e-book, pos. 6574.

²⁰ "[...] abbandonare definitivamente la via del compromesso storico, per imbracare decisamente, e con ardore, l'unica strada giusta, leale e sicura, che ci rimane: quella della riforma costituzionale. [...] by agreement with the PSI to be able to face the next elections successfully." – Fondazione Gramsci, Archivio PCI, from this moment FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0400, 1506, 03/02/1979.

²¹ "[...] especially between 1979 and 1982, many educational structures were definitively closed and the "system of party schools" was reduced to only three [...]" – Andrea Possieri, op. cit., p. 148.

²² *Ivi*, p. 143.

of World War II²³, and those, much younger, who had fought for modernity and radical changes in society with, and after, 1968.

Nicla Ghironi, a militant from Lombardy, in her manuscript "*I comunisti non volano*"²⁴ gave a short, but helpful, definition for Berlinguer's strategy:

Il Compromesso Storico

Aspro nel cuore

*Bello nel cervello*²⁵

The three lines captured in a nutshell what many other militants thoughts, as shown in their letters.²⁶ The controversial vision of the *Compromesso Storico* that emerges by scrutinizing the views and attitudes of the militants, finds confirmation in the words of historian Andrea Possieri, who underlines that "it was no longer necessary only the literacy of the militants and the ideological orientation of the cadres but there was a growing need for clarification of the *Compromesso Storico* strategy, reluctantly accepted by the social body of the party"²⁷.

As never before, the PCI struggled in this new pedagogical action and in the capacity to defend its own historical patrimony. Both party's pedagogy and history had served to produce an identity glue that was a material of undoubtedly importance for a large mass party like the communist one²⁸. The "disappearance of fireflies"²⁹, in the understanding of Pasolini's anti-modernist fury, fostered those party's ineptitude during 1970s. Italy and the world moved towards the new horizons of modernity, ideals, myths, and revolutions, but not in the way that Berlinguer and the PCI wanted³⁰. As Miriam Mafai remembered, in that decade, the communist militants "passionate and restless are not insensitive to the fascination of individual sacrifice but reject any reference to the iron discipline and

²³ Rosario Forlenza, "In Search of Order: Portrayal of Communist in Cold War Italy", in *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2, (May 2020), p. 6; For a memorial reconstruction of communist families experience of 1948 election see also, Segio Staino, *Storia sentimentale del PCI. (anche i comunisti avevano un cuore)*, (Milan: Piemme, 2021), pp. 9-29.

²⁴ ADN, Nicla Ghironi, *I comunisti non volano*, Prot. No. 248, MP/89, 1982.

²⁵ "Historical Compromise/Harsh in the heart/Beautiful in the brain" – ADN, Nicla Ghironi, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

²⁶ Roberto Bruno Bossio: "[...] When I said that we were encountering difficulties in answering the questions of the peasant comrades regarding the line followed by Berlinguer and the historic compromise, they told me to say, "... one must have faith." At that time, I did not retort because I thought perhaps, I was not a good comrade, but I realized the absurdity of that sentence: how could one ask that from people who have faith only in their own hands and the sweat of their own brow!!!? People who are forced for 11 months of the year to work outside because the job in the country is reserved for those who vote DC: where 'was then the great party, the great organization? [...] just promises in the wind! It was precisely from these assumptions that my party crisis was born [...] One thing is certain, however: in these two years of atrocious violence of phantom crises, of despicable cover-ups, the party has emerged debilitated and has lost a lot of credibility." – FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0400, 1534, 12/02/1979.

²⁷ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 150.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

the severity of the customs that had been, until then, essential features of the communist”³¹. Consequently, both the launch of Berlinguer’s concept of austerity – which was later said to have been misunderstood – and his encounter with the positions of Moro, also on rejection and distrust in modernity³² as the ideological engine of the *Compromesso Storico*, could only be rejected by the changing social base of the PCI, increasingly close to the atomization process of 1980s.

This was the background for the process of a separation that began within the Italian Communist Party. Leadership and militants started moving at different paces to different ends. The old comrade Antonio D’Amico denounced the blindness of the party in front of the “*immane sfacello*” represented by the 1970s PCI political projects³³. Meanwhile, the 1968 activist Massimo De Angelis detected in the death of Aldo Moro and in the Solgenicyn’s epiphany the watershed for his generation³⁴. He underlined that “after that, no one will be the same as before. After that, none of us was able to go left as before. [...] if the end of the sixties was the moment of the fusion of a generation [...] the end of the seventies is the moment of the diaspora”³⁵.

This diaspora seems to be a direct emanation of the double-face illusionary electoral result of 1976. In fact, that vote started to reveal PCI multiplicity of faces and identities. They remained hidden under the mask of unity until the death of Moro, waiting for a horizon of victory and revolution, symbolically invoked by Berlinguer’s statement³⁶ on the election night of June 20, 1976. The hoped-for victory did not come. The socialist revolution did not take place. The transformation of the party into a governmental force did not happen. For this reason, during those years, the militants had been searching for a renegotiation of their membership into PCI³⁷, asking to themselves and to the leadership: what does it mean to be still a communist in Italy? Who are we?

The search for an answer to these crucial political and existential questions was squarely at the center of the Italian communism political agenda in the 1980s. Finding an answer was crucial in order to overcome, as the literary critic Alberto Asor Rosa said, the “condition of political, cultural and ideal stagnation which characterized the last period of Berlinguer’s leadership and his legacy”³⁸. Perhaps, the impossibility to achieve this result was the consequence of the unexpected profound transformation in the political landscape, after the end of the age of movements, which the communist community of faith³⁹ define as *riflusso*. This term, omen of misfortune⁴⁰, will assume the signify of

³¹ Miriam Mafai, *Botteghe Oscure*, cit., p. 124.

³² Miriam Mafai, *Dimenticare Berlinguer. La sinistra italiana e la tradizione comunista*, (Rome: Donzelli, 1996), p. 47.

³³ FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0467, 1147, 13/05/1980.

³⁴ Massimo De Angelis, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ Pino Santarelli, *Rosso è il cammino. Un’autobiografia militante*, (Rome: Bordeaux, 2019), e-book, pos. 2794.

³⁷ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ *Ivi*, p. 166.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

decline for the communism ideas, considering the triumph of private sphere over the public one, the valorization of individuals over the whole society, and the rise of a neoliberal culture, typical of the last decade of PCI annals.

To fully understand this historical process, it is first necessary to reconstruct a series of national and international events, and how them were lived by militants and party leadership. During the early 1980s, different circumstances in Italian communist history contributed to deeply separate and disrupt the social linkages, within the social body of the PCI. This analysis will be crucial to understand the beginning of the transformation of the PCI in a new and different entity.

1.1 The Beginning of the Silence: Moro, PCI, and the Equivocal Essence of Red Brigades

Maria Giovanna Pagano, discussing the communist militancy experience in her diary, wrote:

*Gente come me, che viene dalla media borghesia, non si sente comunista a quindici anni perché “è tradizione di famiglia”. [...] C’era intorno a me molto idealismo [...] Soprattutto c’era il bisogno di intelligenza [...] Il marxismo come dottrina dell’immanenza realizzava anche il desiderio di trascendenza: la sua era una forza incredibile, consentiva di uscire fuori da sé stessi, pensare il mondo e trasformarlo. Penso che ancor prima del 1977, la fase propulsiva, catalizzatrice delle lotte politiche nate 10 anni prima, si fosse già esaurita.*⁴¹

To a great extent, Pagano captures exactly what happened in 1977: the closure of the revolutionary horizon that had been opened by 1968. However, she also underestimates the chameleon-like capacity of Marxism. It is true: Marxism was ceasing to be catalyzing and propelling thrust of the general struggles but remains instead a totem of incredible force for some ideal-utopistic projects. An ideological totem capable to disrupt moral behavior and self-consciences, such as it happened to the violent groups’ members of ‘77 movements who espoused the terrorist cause, starting from an alienation generated by a sense of betrayal for their ideals.

The 1977 protesters – *Indiani Metropolitani* and *Autonomi*⁴² – identified the PCI and the strategy of *Compromesso Storico* as a betrayal of Marxist ideals. Those ideals consequently assumed an

⁴¹“People like me, who come from the middle class, do not feel communist at the age of fifteen because ‘it’s family tradition.’ [...] There was a lot of idealism around me [...] Above all, there was the need for intelligence [...] Marxism as a doctrine of immanence also realized the desire for transcendence: it was an incredible force, it allowed one to go outside oneself, think the world and transform it. I think that even before 1977, the propulsive, catalyzing phase of the political struggles born 10 years earlier had already been exhausted”. – ADN, Maria Giovanna Pagano, *Nella pelle dell’asino*, Prot. No. 10005, MP/95, 1994, p. 6.

⁴² With these two terms were indicated two different faces of 1977 movements. The *Indiani Metropolitani* had roots in a mixture of ideas coming from 60’ hippies’ way of life and the 77’ revolutionaries’ aspirations. Their activities were

existential scope even before a political one. Probably, as Miriam Mafai remembered, there was a gap, between the engagement with the direction of a society and idea of a total transformation of such a society, difficult to fill for a party without, or just little, culture of government⁴³. Therefore, the Italian Communist Party risked to being crushed between the willingness to prove itself as force of government and the necessity not to lend its side to the resentment of who considered the PCI an accomplice of the Christian Democracy, especially in economic choices, after communists' entrance in the majority. In fact, starting from the Nixon's decision to end the Bretton Woods system to the second oil shock – provoked by the Iranian revolution and its consequent embargo – the international crisis of the long 1970s had a devastating impact over Italian economy, already tested by low productivity and modernization problems at national level.

From that moment, there was the first misperception which led the PCI and Berlinguer to bet on a definitive crisis of capitalism and an immediate achievement of the transition toward a revisited socialist system. This misreading of the political, economic, and social environment fomented requests that refused to consider the given economic condition⁴⁴. Moreover, the communist leadership's road to socialist transition embedded the concept of austerity – presented by Berlinguer at Teatro Eliseo⁴⁵ – which, on February 17, 1977, brought the students of the University of Rome La Sapienza to demonstrate violently, against the comrade and secretary of the communist trade unions (CGIL) Luciano Lama, with the rallying cry “*Sacrificatevi Voi*”⁴⁶.

1977 was indeed the first manifestation of the separation between the leftist political forces and their potential membership. Three major signs that something was going wrong: the 1400 indiscriminate terrorist attack – with 23 murderers and 38 wounded – claimed by red groups; the views of militants who defined the *Compromesso Storico* an abortion, raped by the same people who proposed it⁴⁷: indeed, the PCI militants did not want to mix their historical honesty and diversity “with a party like the Christian Democrats composed of men guilty of all the worst crimes, thefts and murders”⁴⁸; finally, the communists silence which will become thunderous – time after time – until the painful hushed scream of post-communist years.

characterized by creative tools which came from Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism and gave life to cultural initiatives such as theatral performances. Conversely, the *Autonomi* represented the more violent side of the 77' movements which opened the doors to the terrorism. The increasing radicalization started from the assassination of Francesco Lorusso – a *Lotta Continua* student – who was killed by *Carabinieri* in March 1977 during an imponent manifestation in Bologna. For a general overview on 1977 see, Monica Galfré, Simone Neri Serneri, *Il movimento del 1977: radici, snodi, luoghi*, (Rome: Viella, 2020).

⁴³ Miriam Mafai, *Dimenticare Berlinguer*, cit., p. 38.

⁴⁴ *Ivi*, p. 39.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ “*Sacrifice yourselves*” - *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ ADN, Nicla Ghironi, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁴⁸ FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0400, 1603, 14/02/1979.

*[...] nel silenzio dei comunisti si possono leggere anche altre cose. Per esempio, la cancellazione di ricordi sgradevoli [...] oppure il disagio per avere cambiato varie volte le idee nel corso della propria storia e quindi di essere stati incoerenti. [...] Ancora un aspetto del silenzio: l'espressione dell'inesprimibile. Non c'è bisogno di essere filosofi per capire che al di là delle parole che spiegano, che definiscono c'è qualcos'altro a cui non riusciamo a dare risposta. È un'esperienza che viviamo tutti ed è silenzio. Vi sono momenti in cui si avverte acutamente che la storia sta cambiando [...] e allora avvertiamo che le parole usate normalmente sono prive di senso. E arriva il silenzio.*⁴⁹

In a letter directed to Miriam Mafai and Alfredo Reichlin, Vittorio Foa used these sentences to nail down the characteristics of post-communist silence. However, Foa's thought puts down roots in the past and for this reason seems appropriate to define various silence that the PCI had opted for during its story.

The first act of communist silence *mise-en-scene* it was, precisely, based on the phenomenon of separation, from the party, of who felt betrayed by the government agreement with DC, in 1977. Indeed, as Chiara Valentini reported, when Enrico Berlinguer knew what happened to Luciano Lama, during his political meeting at La Sapienza University, the PCI secretary seemed to have lost the words. He asked to Lama a record of the events and at the end commented with a blunt "that's alright"⁵⁰. The seriousness of this first expression of communist silence was also evident in Luciano Lama's memories of his meeting with Berlinguer:

*Certo, Berlinguer era un tipo schivo, introverso, qualche volta anche gelido. Ma quando ti dava una prova d'affetto si capiva che era sincera. E venendo da un carattere come il suo si capiva che aveva ancora più valore. Quel giorno non mi diede niente.*⁵¹

⁴⁹ "[...] in the silence of communists one can also read other things. For example, the erasure of unpleasant memories [...] or the discomfort at having changed ideas several times during one's history and thus being inconsistent. [...] One more aspect of silence: the expression of the inexpressible. One does not need to be a philosopher to understand that beyond the words that explain, that define there is something else to which we cannot give an answer. It is an experience we all have, and it is silence. There are times when we acutely sense that history is changing [...] and then we sense that the words we normally use are meaningless. And there comes the silence." – Vittorio Foa, Miriam Mafai, Alfredo Reichlin, *Il silenzio dei comunisti*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2002), p. 4.

⁵⁰ Chiara Valentini, *Enrico Berlinguer*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2014), e-book, pos. 4545; see also Miriam Mafai, *Dimenticare Berlinguer*, cit., p. 40.

⁵¹ "Of course, Berlinguer was shy, introverted, sometimes even frosty. But when he gave you proof of affection you could tell it was sincere. And coming from a character like his you could tell it was even more valuable. That day she gave me nothing" – Chiara Valentini, *Enrico Berlinguer*, cit., p. 4545; see also Luciano Lama, Giampaolo Pansa, *Intervista sul mio partito*, (Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 1987).

Perhaps, that day, the silence and coldness, rushed down over Lama were the same that had fallen among the crowd the year before, during the festival of *l'Unità* in Naples, when Berlinguer pronounced the term “government of abstention”⁵².

In the critical juncture of between 1970s and 1980s silence contributed to erect walls of separation within the PCI body politic and between the party and the external world. However, silence became the mask⁵³ that hide the dogmatic Manichean position, that the PCI shared with the forces of the revolutionary left. The expression “*album di famiglia*”,⁵⁴ by Rossana Rossanda, suggested that red terrorism was part of the working-class culture and tradition. The ghost of complicity wandered on the back of the silence – cultivated by the PCI – around old Leninist clichés, which now were exhibited, distortedly, in the Red Brigades (BR) public statements⁵⁵. Henceforth, many comrades asked themselves if the actions of those criminals had could really be inspired by wild syndicalism, scholastic freedom or *doppiezza togliattiana*⁵⁶. The criticisms spread at various level of the Italian Communist Party and civil society becoming manifestly harsher in the aftermath of Moro’s affair.

In the early morning of March 16, 1978, a BR commando kidnapped the Christian Democracy president, Aldo Moro, and killed his bodyguard. Moro was in his way to the parliament when he was assaulted in Via Fani. Meanwhile, the Chamber of Deputies was ready to accord the confidence vote to the one-party government of Giulio Andreotti which was going to receive the communist support: a prelude of the eventual admission of PCI to the governmental power. The fifty-five days of Moro's imprisonment – ended with the discovery of his dead body in Via Caetani, a street connecting Botteghe Oscure and Piazza del Gesù⁵⁷ – changed forever the political landscape of the Italian Republic. All the parties came out battered⁵⁸, especially because of the clash between two strategies adopted to save the life of the DC President: either firmness or dialogue with the terrorists.

Immediately after the kidnap, the Italian Communist Party opted for the firmness with the purpose to avoid any kind of possible recognition of the terrorist group. Nevertheless, the suspects did not

⁵² Miriam Mafai, *Dimenticare Berlinguer*, cit., p. 37.

⁵³ For an understanding of the sociological signify of the mask see, Alessandro Pizzorno, *Il velo della diversità. Studi su razionalità e riconoscimento*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2007) and Alessandro Pizzorno, *Sulla maschera*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008).

⁵⁴ “*Family Album*” – Rossana Rossanda, “Il discorso sulla DC”, in *Il Manifesto*, 28/03/1978.

⁵⁵ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem* – For a broader vision of this concept see also, Pietro Di Loreto, *Togliatti e la “doppiezza”. Il PCI tra democrazia ed insurrezione*, (Bologna: Il mulino, 1991); Guido Panvini, “Violenza politica e terrorismo”, in Silvio Pons, eds., *Il comunismo italiano*, cit., pp. 465-484; Carlo Spagnolo, “Il partito di massa”, in Silvio Pons, eds., *Il comunismo italiano*, cit., pp. 151-170.

⁵⁷ Botteghe Oscure and Piazza del Gesù are the name used for indicating, respectively, the headquarters of Italian Communist Party and Christian Democracy.

⁵⁸ On this regard, it is exemplificative what Emanuele Macaluso and Claudio Petruccioli underlined: “*After Moro was killed, no one had a strategy. The crisis of the Republic starts from there. The DC and PSI return to the center left: a reheated soup. The PCI finds itself isolated and, like all the other parties, without a strategy. Berlinguer in my opinion loses political lucidity in that period. [...]*” – Emanuele Macaluso, Claudio Petruccioli, *Comunisti a modo nostro. Storia di un partito lunga un secolo*, (Venice: Marsilio, 2021), p. 247.

cease around the communist silence on the terrorist origins. On the matter, Nello Ajello retains that those “critics were not so much concerned with the firmness, shown by Berlinguer’s party, as with its structural responsibilities in the birth of terrorism”⁵⁹. This alleged original sin had such a great weight that not even the broad, inflexible, and severe⁶⁰ shoulders of Giorgio Amendola seemed able to handle. In April 1978 – one month after Moro’s kidnap – the weekly magazine, *L’Espresso*, interviewed scholars, intellectuals, and important political figures precisely on the nature and origin of terrorism. Amendola, recognized that the PCI had not done enough to prevent a contrast between formal and substantial democracy, as it had embraced a tendency to corporatism/or better corporativism⁶¹.

The responsiveness to corporatism was a transversal concern of the communist leadership in various sector. In fact, it was indicated like widespread evil to straggle and eradicate for the good of the country and not just because it was a fertile ground for terrorism expansion. On this matter, the memories of Bruno Ceroli, communist militant, CGIL trade unionist, and *delegato di fabbrica*⁶² of Cartiere Meridionali in Isola del Liri – a small town in center Italy – are useful to understand how corporatism was historically a chronic plague also for the working class itself. In 1974, Ceroli delivered a speech during a CGIL regional meeting, denouncing the bad conditions of work in his factory, and defending his workmates productivity and interests. Later, right at the end of the meeting, Fernando Di Giulio – PCI parliamentarian and future president of the communist parliamentary group – took Bruno Ceroli aside and told him few words, which changed dramatically Ceroli’s perception of labor and its class:

*Quello che non capite, Bruno, è che il mondo sta cambiando, che facciamo parte di un mercato comune e di un sistema sempre più globalizzato. E soprattutto, mi accorgo, che la nostra classe operaia è corporativa, e, forse, mai è stata rivoluzionaria*⁶³.

⁵⁹ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

⁶⁰ A sincere and unprecedented description of Giorgio Amendola is the one we find in the manuscript by Camillo Martino, son-in-law of Amendola, which reminds him as follows: “A few years later Giorgione (Amendola) was to become my father-in-law and it was also my turn to directly record, and sometimes suffer, his severity, his rigor, his intransigence. [...] I remember that often before returning home we would stop at a well-stocked rotisserie in the center of Naples where Amendola would voraciously swallow a fair number of “arancini alla napoletana” [...] Amendola was, in short, an executive “of weight”, in every sense of the word” – AND, Camillo Martino, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁶¹ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

⁶² “Factory delegates” – it was the term used to indicate the workers’ representatives who had been elected to manage the relationship with the employers, under the protective wing of trade unions.

⁶³ “What you do not understand, Bruno, is that the world is changing, that we are part of a common market and an increasingly globalized system. And above all, I realize, that our working class is corporate, and, perhaps, never has been revolutionary.” – This quote is from an interview which the author conducted directly with Bruno Ceroli, a PCI militant until 1991 and trade unionist at Cartiere Meridionali in Isola del Liri (FR) until 1984. The interview was recorded on June 27, 2022.

In a similar vein, at the speech for the 1980 GCIL General Council. In that occasion, the CGIL secretary put the focus on the danger that, without a renewal of the relationship with mass, the fragmentation of the society could create a terrible army of marginalized people – millions of jobseekers and temporary employee – totally disconnected by the working movements, perhaps antagonists of the working class itself, which were going to boost corporativism, sectarianism, and “*l’ideologia del sommerso*”⁶⁴.

Admittedly, there was something submerged in the working class and the social basis of Italian Communist Party. It was another deep, silent, division. From one side, the sixty-eight generation of educated, schooled, petty bourgeoisie militants looked Moro’s affair, such as a decisive crisis for Italian politics, from which the PCI comes out stunned and without a strategy for the present and the future. The party of the Italian way to socialism was emerging unable to pronounce the words “socialism” and “revolution” without these appear to be marked by taste and stench of dead language⁶⁵. On the other side, in the factories, not everyone was willing to condemn the kidnapping of DC president. Bruno Ceroli remembers when some workers, responding to the call for the anti-BR leaflet, said that what was happening to Aldo Moro was the right counterreaction for the violence that the DC had committed in the years of government thorough the monopoly of public force. In fact, the repressions carried out by the policemen of Minister Mario Scelba⁶⁶, during the 1950s strikes, remained alive in many workers' memory as incurable wounds⁶⁷.

Thus, Aldo Moro’s kidnap, reopened a generational gap within the communist community, which the vote of 1976 had only masked. Paradoxically, the young communists of the ‘68 generation – who for their age, spirit of change, love for revolutionaries, like Mao and Che Guevara, could be considered closer to Mario Moretti⁶⁸ and his terrorist mates – remained faithful to the line of firmness of the PCI and National Solidarity. Francesco Riccio highlighted this attitude narrating the spontaneous descent through the streets of Bologna on the day of the kidnapping with the red and

⁶⁴ FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0487, 2623, *Relazione di Luciano Lama Consiglio Generale CGIL*, 25-26/11/1980.

⁶⁵ Massimo De Angelis, *op. cit.*, p.107.

⁶⁶ For a further notes on Mario Scelba actions, as Minister of the Interior in post-war Italy see, Mario Del Pero, *L’alleato scomodo. Gli USA e la DC negli anni del centrismo*, (Rome: Carocci, 2001); Rosario Forlenza, “The Italian Communist Party, local government and the Cold War” in *Modern Italy*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2010); Giuseppe Carlo Marino, *La Repubblica della forza. Mario Scelba e le passioni del suo tempo*, (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2013).

⁶⁷ Bruno Ceroli’s interview (Isola Liri: 27/06/2022).

⁶⁸ Mario Moretti was one of the Red Brigades main exponents. He was considered by many historians the head of BR Roman column that put in place the kidnapping of Aldo Moro, despite he has often denied covering such role apical. See, Gius Gargiulo, “Moro, Morucci, Moretti. Oxymoron and the Prison of Political Language”, in Ruth Glynn, Giancarlo Lombardi, eds., *Remembering Aldo Moro. The cultural legacy of the 1978 kidnapping and murder*, (London: Routledge, 2012); Guido Panvini, “Cattolici e violenza politica”, in Vincenzo Schirippa, eds., *L’Italia del Vaticano II*, (Rome: Aracne, 2012), pp. 81-95; Richard Drake, “Il delitto Moro trent’anni dopo” in Salvatore Sechi, eds., *Le vene aperte del delitto Moro. Terrorismo, PCI, trame e servizi segreti*, (Florence: Mauro Pagliai Editore, 2009); Archivio Rai Teche from this moment ART, Sergio Zavoli, *La notte della Repubblica*, Part. II.

white flags, next to each other⁶⁹. Conversely, the older militants – grown up with Togliatti's constitutionalism, with Pietro Secchia's *doppiezza* and, always, waiting the *revolutionary*⁷⁰ – could not put up with the expectation of a progressive less concrete horizon of revolution and the agreement with the historical enemy of Christian Democracy, which had caused so much suffering to the Italian communist workers. This impatience is manifest in a letter to Gian Carlo Pajetta, written in June 1978, by Enrico Granero, an elderly militant, who was about to leave the party:

*Caro compagno Pajetta, mi rivolgo a te prima perché ti conosco e poi perché sei l'unico in cui abbia ancora fiducia con uno sfogo che sento il dovere di fare in virtù di trentasei anni di partito dieci anni in segreteria di sezione per la prima volta ho rifiutato la tessera non mi riconosco più in questo partito pur restando comunista convinto. Spiegarti tutti i motivi forse abuserei del tuo prezioso tempo ma penso che tu capirai che se avessi condiviso subito la politica DC la mia vita sarebbe stata più facile, e allora dopo tanti sacrifici perché devo dividerla adesso perché un qualunque Berlinguer mi dice che va bene? Consigli non ho la pretesa di darne a nessuno ma credimi la classe operaia è disorientata al massimo. [...]*⁷¹

Pajetta was recognized as an elderly and brave strong comrade. He never questioned the Togliatti's party heritage of democratic centralism and renewal into continuity embodied now in the Historical Compromise. For this reason, he received many appeals from grassroots comrades to thwart the party line fell into the void, as in the case of the militant Luciano Consarino, who wrote:

[...] Alleandovi con la Dc voi avvallate trent'anni di ruberie, di intrallazzi, di clientelismo, e volete che la gente "onesta" non se ne ricordi al momento del voto? Avete undici milioni di elettori, ma quanti iscritti? [...] ecco continuate così anche perché l'altro facile pronostico se il PSI dovesse ulteriormente irrobustirsi, la vecchia bagascia, che vi ha introdotto nelle cucine per farvi sentire l'odore (ma solo l'odore, beninteso) dell'arrosto, non avrebbe alcuna esitazione a stritolarvi senza

⁶⁹ White was the color which indicate the DC flags. – Francesco Riccio, *Lo rifarei. Vita di partito da via Barberia a Botteghe Oscure*, (Settevene: StrisciaRossa, 2021), p. 37.

⁷⁰ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

⁷¹ “Dear Comrade Pajetta, I am addressing you first because I know you and then because you are the only one in whom I still have confidence with an outburst that I feel the duty to make by virtue of thirty-six years in the party ten years in the section secretariat for the first time I refused the membership I no longer recognize myself in this party while remaining a convinced communist. Explaining to you all the reasons would perhaps abuse your precious time, but I think you will understand that if I had shared DC politics right away my life would have been easier, so after so many sacrifices why do I have to share it now because some Berlinguer tells me it is okay? Advice I don't pretend to give anyone but believe me the working class is disoriented at best. [...]” – Fondazione Gramsci, Archivio Gian Carlo Pajetta from this moment FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 68/50, 27/06/1978.

*tanti complimenti il piede (ma soltanto il piede, beninteso) che avete introdotto nella porta del Palazzo [...]*⁷²

The words of detachment, of separation, perceivable in both militants' quotes, shows the generational and ideal disengagement, internal to the communist social base; precisely at the moment when Italy and the PCI, closing the 1970s decade and opening the new one, were facing a country fall prey to a ruthless terrorism, and perhaps for this very reason, fall in the vortex of the decline of ideologies for the benefit of the "*vissuto*"⁷³.

1.2 The Manifest of *Vissuto*: Guido Rossa and the Human Experience of Communism

It is just this *vissuto* that will be personified by a man who, with his sacrifice – in the cold night of February 24, 1979 – will mark a turning point in the demolition of walls of silence that communist ideology had created, and of which terrorism take advantage. The name of that man was: Guido Rossa. Often, the historiography of *Anni di Piombo*⁷⁴ has suffered contaminations from journalism creating around the tragic protagonists of those years almost intangible characters, stripped of their real lives, and loaded with an ideological aura, which often did not correspond to the reality of everyday life.

Starting from a similar consideration, Sergio Luzzato proposes an accurate and comprehensive portrait of Guido Rossa: a mountaineer, an explorer and eventually a worker-syndicalist, killed by the Red Brigades for having denounced their infiltration in his factory – the Genoa Italsider.

Rossa perfectly embodies the passage from ideology to human experience. His own *vissuto* evolves into an instrument capable of bringing to light, from the depths of his own life story, moral rectitude and civil attention. Those para-ideological elements lead him to go along with the

⁷² "[...] By allying with the DC you endorse thirty years of thievery, scheming, clientelism, and you want "honest" people not to remember this when they vote? You have eleven million voters, but how many registered voters? [...] here you go on like this also because the other easy prediction if the PSI were to harden further, the old whore, who introduced you into the kitchens so that you could smell (but only smell, mind you) the roast, would have no hesitation in unceremoniously crushing your foot (but only your foot, mind you) that you introduced into the Palace door. [...]" – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 68/50, 29/06/1978.

⁷³ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

⁷⁴ With the term "*Anni di Piombo*" is indicated the period of the Italian Republic history characterized by the spread of extreme right and left terrorism, started with the Strategy of tension of Piazza Fontana and concluded, approximately, with the last great action of Red Brigades: the Dozier's kidnap. For an overview see, Marc Lazar, Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, *Il libro degli anni di piombo. Storia e memoria del terrorismo italiano*, (Milan: Rizzoli, 2010); for more specific topics see also, Ruth Glynn, "The 'turn of victim' in Italian culture: victim-centered narratives of *anni di piombo*", in *Modern Italy*, Vol. 18, No. 4, (2013), pp. 373-390; Nicola Guerra, "Il linguaggio degli opposti estremisti negli anni di piombo. Un'analisi comparativa del lessico nelle manifestazioni di piazza", in *Italian Studies*, Vol. 75, No. 4, (2020), pp. 470-486; Alan O'Leary, "Italian cinema and the 'anni di piombo'", in *Journal of European Studies*, Vol. 40, No.3, (2010), pp. 243-257.

communist cause through an autonomous process compared with the pedagogical indoctrination of many workers. Guido Rossa joined the party at 32-years-old, getting the card in 1967 when he walked through the door of PCI section in Cornigliano Italsider⁷⁵. At that time Guido Rossa, still divided his life between private and political, but things were about to change. The 1968 movements, the *Autunno Caldo*⁷⁶, the Piazza Fontana massacre, with the consequent beginning of the strategy of tension, the approval of workers statute, the birth of factory council, the death of his first son Fabio⁷⁷, the journey through the poor east toward the Himalaya, the Tibetan little girl with “blushed eyes”⁷⁸ – that the parents make-up because they think to protect her from disease – the climbing partners died there, all these events between February and March 1970 drove the pen on the blank sheet of a letter to Ottavio Bastrenta⁷⁹, in which Guido Rossa wrote:

*Ottavio carissimo, l'indifferenza, il qualunquismo, e l'ambizione che dominano nell'ambiente alpinistico in genere [...] sono tra le squallide cose che mi lasciano scendere senza rimpianto la famosa “lizza” della mia stagione alpina. Da ormai parecchi anni mi ritrovo sempre più spesso a predicare agli amici che mi sono vicino l'assoluta necessità di trovare un valido interesse nell'esistenza [...] Che ci liberi dal vizio di quella droga che da troppi anni ci fa sonare e credere semidei o superuomini chiusi nel nostro solidale egoismo, unici abitanti di un pianeta senza problemi sociali, fatto di lisce e sterili pareti [...] per poi raggiungere un paradiso di vette pulite perfette e scintillanti [...] dove per un attimo o per sempre possiamo dimenticare di essere gli abitanti di un mondo colmo di soprusi e di ingiustizie, di un mondo dove un abitante su tre vive in uno stato di fame cronica [...] Per questo, penso, anche noi dobbiamo finalmente scendere giù in mezzo agli uomini a lottare con loro, allargando fra tutti gli uomini la nostra solidarietà che porti al raggiungimento di una maggiore giustizia sociale, che lasci una traccia, un segno, tra gli UOMINI di tutti i giorni e ci aiuti a rendere valida l'esistenza nostra e dei nostri figli. Ma probabilmente queste prediche le rivolgo soprattutto a me stesso; perché [...] sin ora ho speso pochissime delle mie forze per attuare qualcosa di buono in questo senso.*⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Sergio Luzzatto, *Giù in mezzo agli uomini. Vita e morte di Guido Rossa*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2021), p. 115.

⁷⁶ For an overview of this period see, Pietro Causarano, Luigi Falossi, Paolo Giovannini, *Il 1969 e dintorni. Analisi, riflessioni e giudizi a quarant'anni dall'Autunno Caldo*, (Rome: Ediesse, 2010)

⁷⁷ Sergio Luzzatto, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁷⁸ *Ivi*, p. 84.

⁷⁹ Rossa's old friend for a narration of their friendship see Sergio Luzzatto, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72.

⁸⁰ “Dearest Ottavio, the indifference, political apathy, and ambition that dominate in the mountaineering milieu in general [...] are among the squalid things that leave me descending without regret the famous “lizza” of my mountaineering season. For several years now, I find myself more and more often preaching to the friends close to me the absolute necessity of finding a valid interest in existence [...] that we be freed from the vice of that drug that for too many years has made us sound and believe demigods or superhumans enclosed in our sympathetic selfishness, the only inhabitants of a planet without social problems, made of smooth and sterile walls [...] and then reach a paradise of clean perfect and sparkling peaks [...] where for a moment or forever we can forget that we are the inhabitants of a world filled with abuse and injustice, of a world where every third inhabitant lives in a state of chronic hunger [...] That is why, I think, we too

Starting from this awareness, born from the mixture between the Rossa's two lives one as climber and one as worker, he will implement his personal transition to social activism, always, guided by the human experience and less by the ideology. The communist worker will not shy away from the commitment of the union representation when asked by his colleagues; he spared no criticism of the "all or nothing"⁸¹ inherent in the concept of social revolution, always foretelling him the democratic search for the hegemony of the working class. Rossa would always renounce "to be part of the Italian *claque* of Marcuse"⁸². Far from pursuing vague revolutionary objectives, he would have embraced the idea of a concrete policy of reform, beginning with those that he diligently listed to Bastrenta: school, urban planning, agrarian, and health care reforms⁸³.

The most extreme and violent young people of this movements, to which Guido Rossa turned his back, were exactly those who decided to condemn him to death. The Italsider worker had to atone for two sins: the tangible shame to have been a trustee PCI informer and to bring to justice his colleague Francesco Berardi⁸⁴; the spiritual blame to have understood the nature and the misperception on the expansiveness of red terrorism. On this second point, Rossa took some notes during the summer 1978, the last before his death, the first after Moro's one: "Yes, there are BR in some factories [...] they found their social base even though in a narrow strip of technical workers [...] the fascination of clandestinely and arm struggle didn't attach on the workers – but – there was not an efficacious surveillance"⁸⁵. Indeed, he thought that without a powerful link between the development of economic objectives and the democratic State transformation, any kind of vigilance against the BR proliferation among workers was deflectable. For Guido Rossa, "the real issue at stake today is the transformation of the State [...] the fight against terrorism comes from here, because it is here, in the space that separates the working class from the State, that terrorism insinuates itself. We must fill this space. And this is ultimately the most valuable form of vigilance"⁸⁶.

Rossa could not know that to fill the space of separation, which he delineated, will not be the democratic and progressive transformation of the country, but his tragic death: the personal sacrifice

must finally descend down among men to fight with them, enlarging among all men our solidarity that will lead to the achievement of greater social justice, that will leave a trace, a mark, among everyday MEN and help us to make our and our children's existence worthwhile. But I probably address these sermons mostly to myself; because [...] so far, I have spent very little of my strength to implement something good in this sense." – Sergio Luzzatto *op. cit.*, pp. 111-114.

⁸¹ *Ivi*, p. 116.

⁸² For a personal memory of the role that Marcuse had on young Italians on that years see ADN, Anna Avallone, *Il mio '68 (Ricordi di una madre e insegnante)*, Prot. No. 621, DP/89, 1989.

⁸³ Sergio Luzzatto, *op. cit.*, p.118.

⁸⁴ Guido Rossa was a trustee PCI informer within Cornigliano Italsider carefully observing many workmates behavior. For this reason, he discovered and denounced soon that Francesco Berardi was the BR postman into the factory, who distributed terrorists' statements and propaganda among other colleagues.

⁸⁵ Sergio Luzzatto, *op. cit.*, 156-157.

⁸⁶ *Ivi*, p. 157.

of a man for the sake of democratic institutions, as has often happened in the history of Italy. Moreover, the rhetorical image of the personal sacrifice – using also by Giorgio Amendola in a letter to Rossa's daughter Sabrina after the attack – was subject of another separation in the narration of the event and reconstruction of Guido Rossa's portrait as an exceptional hero rather than a common citizen, who do his duty of denunciate the State's enemy. The tension between these two poles was explained by two factors.

On one hand, the renewal difficulty of PCI to deal with the family album, intended as communist common origins of Rossa's killers. Proof of this intra-party trouble is the draft of the letter that Enrico Berlinguer wrote to the wife of Guido Rossa after the assassination:

*[...] lo sdegno che infiamma l'animo di ogni comunista per l'assassinio del tuo, del nostro caro Guido. La condanna e il disprezzo di tutti i democratici si levino contro quei criminali che vigliaccamente sfogano la loro impotenza politica e il loro isolamento dalla coscienza civile degli italiani compiendo atti sanguinosi così abominevoli. [...] ogni comunista, ogni compagno di Guido, ogni operaio, ogni persona di sentimenti democratici è consapevole del dovere di agire, oggi più che mai, con la massima decisione e unità, con tutti i mezzi costituzionali perché sia difesa e rinnovata la nostra Repubblica dimostrando lo stesso impegno, la stessa determinazione, la stessa dedizione di quanti, come il nostro compagno Guido Rossa, da combattente antifascista, ~~da partigiano garibaldino~~, da dirigente sindacale, da militante comunista l'hanno voluta, l'hanno fondata e per essa hanno dato la vita.*⁸⁷

In the draft, the PCI secretary used the expression “*partigiano garibaldino*” to define the heroic behavior of Rossa. However, it was cancelled in the final version probably because Berlinguer is aware that this expression, full of resistance meanings for elderly militants, now took on a whole other value. In fact, during *anni di piombo*, the Garibaldi Brigades had entered in the founding mythology of the red terrorism. On the other hand, according to Luzzato, a second factor of tension was created by the jointness between the cliché of working-class unity in the struggle – also against

⁸⁷ “[...] the outrage that inflames the soul of every communist at the murder of your, our dear Guido. Let the condemnation and contempt of all democrats rise against those criminals who cowardly vent their political impotence and their isolation from the civil conscience of Italians by carrying out such abominable bloody acts. [...] every communist, every comrade of Guido, every worker, every person of democratic sentiments is aware of the duty to act, today more than ever, with the utmost decisiveness and unity, with all constitutional means so that our Republic may be defended and renewed by demonstrating the same commitment, the same determination, the same dedication as those who, like our comrade Guido Rossa, as an anti-fascist fighter, as a Garibaldian partisan, as a union leader, as a militant communist wanted it, founded it and gave their lives for it.” – FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0400, 0781.

the BR – and the evidence that Guido Rossa was left alone, in his complaint against Berardi, and right for this reason easily identified and hit by his executioners like a spy⁸⁸.

Everyone, including the communist leaders, knew that Rossa had been left alone. With a desperate voice of an Italsider worker said during the funeral procession:

*Parecchi di noi lavoratori ... così ... per un fatto che ... il fare la spia, così come si crede, a volte ... ecco, forse non eravamo tutti completamente d'accordo con Rossa, col fatto ... ed è stata una ... una incomprensione nostra, ecco. Non abbiamo capito che aveva ragione lui. E siamo un po' tutti qui con ... un po' di rimorso di coscienza, per non essere stati completamente d'accordo con lui. E la ... la partecipazione a questa manifestazione ... mi pare che sia anche un ... un dire a Rossa: eravamo con te anche prima, e siamo con te anche adesso. Avevi ragione tu. Scusaci tanto.*⁸⁹

The voice of this worker seemed to be broken like all the communist working class and communist party social base. The space of separation, where Guido Rossa thought the terrorism insinuates itself, was fulfilled by the human wave arrived for the climber's funeral. In the rainy morning of January 27, 1979, Piazza De Ferrari⁹⁰ became the theater of two funerals: the one of Guido Rossa and the second of the Red Brigades, dead with him in Via Fracchia at the "hour of the workers"⁹¹.

And yet that morning, unbeknownst to many of those present in the symbolic space of Genoa square, that seemed to fill with all the people arrived to participate even the metaphysical space cited in Guido Rossa's notes, another tragedy was taking place that would torment the communist people and the working-class world until 1991. That morning, a worker apologized for betrayed his comrade, as had never happened before. An admission of unprecedented guilt, because it was not an apology for having supported the wrong side – the BR never took completely the support of factories, before or after Rossa⁹² – but apologized for having preferred indifference, personal convenience, silence over solidarity, justice, and the support of poor people exactly the convictions for which Guido Rossa had descended among men and he had chosen communism, for which – contrary to what was professed and assured by the PCI secular church – he had found himself dying alone, in a dark street of a city symbol of resistance, at the hands of a "brother" too violent, too angry and visionary, while he was preparing to go to the factory to work and hopefully for trying to change the world.

⁸⁸ Sergio Luzzatto, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

⁸⁹ Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico from this moment AAMOD, Ansano Giannarelli, *Guido Rossa* (Rome: Unitelefilm, 1979), TCR: 00:19:11:00 – 00:19:58:00; see also, Sergio Luzzatto, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

⁹⁰ With this expression is indicated the fact that Guido Rossa was killed in the dark of an early morning of 24 January, 1979 when he was leaving his house and go to work – Sergio Luzzatto, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

⁹¹ *Ivi*, p. 170.

⁹² *Ivi*, p. 156 – The idea of a never completed penetration of the factories by the Red Brigades is sustained also by Bruno Ceroli when he was questioned on this issue, and more in general, on the period of terrorism.

The tragic story of Guido Rossa provoked a deep separation in communist social body, party, trade union that would not be filled in an increasingly atomized body politic. Other stories, gives further evidence on this point. For example, Giovanni Mandato, a southern metalworker in a state-owned aeronautic industry in Naples' district, received menaces from the BR for being a trade unionist member of the vigilance corps in his factory. Fortunately, in the case of this southern worker the same tragic events of Genoa were not repeated. Although, what is most striking and allows to understand the real detachment of working class and communist militants are the words, which Mandato will reserve for the description of his colleagues' reactions when they become aware of what was going on:

*La mia meraviglia è stata quando andai in fabbrica il giorno successivo, mi resi conto ormai che non era più un segreto la mia situazione; tutti sapevano, notai un atteggiamento diverso di tutti quelli che mi conoscevano ed erano miei amici; vidi che nessuno si avvicinava e nessuno più mi chiedeva informazioni sui problemi di fabbrica come di solito facevano. Mi mancò la solidarietà e mi sentivo come uno che avesse una malattia infettiva, ero contagioso e dovevo essere assolutamente isolato per evitare di creare problemi ad altri dipendenti. A questo punto mi sentivo tanto mortificato, non potevo reagire per non compromettere le indagini in corso, decisi, quindi di fermarmi per un poco, chiesi alcuni giorni di ferie per riflettere, aspettai che qualcuno mi chiamasse per dirmi come comportarmi, ma questa chiamata non venne da nessuno né dall'autorità competenti né dalla CGIL né dal PCI. Per fortuna non successe niente e dopo un po' di tempo tutto tornò come prima, ma in me è rimasto un'amarezza e tuttora c'è una domanda che mi gira: per quale ragione fui isolato da tutti?*⁹³

Words that echo those of the worker interviewed during Rossa's funeral procession. Where was the communist solidarity? Where was the mutual support among comrades? How was it possible to fight the silence, the disinterest, the fragmentation of a body that began to disintegrate long before the concrete blocks of the Berlin wall? Those questions perhaps crossed the minds of militants such as Guido Rossa, Giovanni Mandato, the anonymous Genoese comrade, but they seemed not to emerge

⁹³ "My astonishment was when I went to the factory the next day, I realized now that my situation was no longer a secret; everyone knew, I noticed a different attitude of everyone who knew me and was my friend; I saw that no one approached me, and no one asked me about factory problems anymore as they usually did. I lacked solidarity and felt like someone who had an infectious disease; I was contagious and had to be absolutely isolated to avoid creating problems for other employees. At this point I felt so mortified, I could not react so as not to jeopardize the ongoing investigation, I decided, therefore, to stop for a while, I asked for a few days off to reflect, I waited for someone to call me to tell me how to behave, but this call came from no one neither from the competent authority nor from the CGIL nor the PCI. Fortunately, nothing happened and after a while everything went back to the way it was before, but a bitterness remained in me and still there is a question swirling around: for what reason was I isolated from everyone?" – ADN, Giovanni Mandato, *Biografia di un metalmeccanico meridionale*, MP/Adn2, 2009, p. 38.

in the cadres and leaders of the party, too committed to ideological, governmental, and international relations problems to understand that communist men and women, increasingly disoriented, were starting to experience the collapse of their world.

On January 24, 1979, Rossa died. The BR died. One of the last dreams of Marxists-Leninist revolution died. The veil of silence fell and the self-criticism, of those who had helped to stretch it up, rose. This silence of communists was replaced by blindness in front of a changing world, the abyss of the unbridgeable modernization, and the removal and separation among militants, workers, cadres, and party; while, for the first time, many comrades, after filling the symbolic space of Piazza De Ferrari for commemorating the sacrifice of one of them, chose to not return to the party sections but to their homes, closing the door behind, with a pouring and roaring rain and a dark sky – soon a thunderstorm – from which the sun of the future no longer penetrated.

1.3 The Age of Fractures: Communists' Dilemmas in International and Domestic space

On September 17, the last Sunday of the summer of 1978, also Guido Rossa was among the food stands at the *Festa de l'Unità*⁹⁴, being held in Genoa. The frenetic hustle and bustle of those festivities was interrupted by Enrico Berlinguer's arrival on stage for the concluding speech of that liturgical celebration, which like all its twins was presented as a reassuring communal, peaceful, joyous moment⁹⁵. The speech, that the PCI secretary gave, would turn out to be one of his most controversial. In Genoa, he seemed to re-establish a link with the Leninist October Revolution matrix, and consequently with the PCUS' model, affirming:

[...] *“Se non rinunciate a Lenin dall'A alla Zeta, se non rompete i vostri rapporti con il PCUS, non siete occidentali, ma asiatici”. E credete che si fermino a questo? No. Perché dal ripudio di Lenin si dovrebbe passare a quello di Marx; dalla rottura con il PCUS si dovrebbe passare a riconoscere che la Rivoluzione proletaria d'Ottobre o stata un puro errore e magari - risalendo nella storia - che la Rivoluzione francese sarebbe stato meglio se l'avessero fatta i soli girondini, e se non vi fossero stati i giacobini. E tutto questo ancora non basterebbe. Perché alcuni nostri critici pretendono che noi buttiamo a mare non solo la ricca lezione di Marx e di Lenin, ma anche l'elaborazione e le innovazioni ideali e politiche di Gramsci e di Togliatti. E poi — di passo in passo — dovremmo giungere fino a proclamare che tutta la nostra storia (che ha anche le sue ombre) è stata solo una*

⁹⁴ For an overview on this collective celebration during, and after, the PCI long history see, Anna Tonelli, *Falce e tortello. Storia politica e sociale delle Feste dell'Unità. 1945-2011*, (Rome–Bari: Editori Laterza, 2012).

⁹⁵ Marco Fincardi, “Simboli e immagini sociali”, in Silvio Pons, eds., *Il comunismo italiano*, cit., p. 241.

*sequela di errori, che più generazioni di comunisti hanno lottato invano e che invano hanno pensato e lavorato per interpretare e cambiare la realtà italiana e mondiale. [...]*⁹⁶

Reading this word, it is undeniable the need to defend the obfuscated identity of Italian communists from external attacks and, also, from an increasing internal disillusion caused by the simultaneous collapse of Historical Compromise and Eurocommunism⁹⁷. Both the projects were at the center of Berlinguer's PCI strategy for overcoming the problem of blocked democracy⁹⁸ and introducing some socialist elements into the Italian society. According to Silvio Pons, the two objectives were also directed to two different sectors: the first one toward electors, the second to militants⁹⁹. For the first time, the communist leadership appeared vaguely conscious of the split present in the PCI electoral base of the 1976: not everyone was firmly communist. Therefore, the local elections, held in May 1978, gave an evident proof that something was broke within the voters then two years ago.

The quoted part of Berlinguer's speech can be read such as a retreat – a return to the past – for reconquest the militants' sympathies. They were worn out by the government of National Solidarity, the ideological bound with their *album di famiglia*, and the escalating turning away from the USSR. While many PCI electors had appreciated Berlinguer's decision to distance the party from the Soviet Union, particularly with the 1976 interview on NATO membership¹⁰⁰ and the resounding declaration on "universal value of democracy"¹⁰¹. Conversely, many militants, especially the elderly, had harshly

⁹⁶ "If you don't renounce Lenin from A to Zeta, if you don't break your relations with the PCUS, you are not Western, but Asian. And do you think they stop at that? No. Because from repudiation of Lenin one would have to move on to repudiation of Marx; from breaking with the PCUS one would have to move on to recognizing that the October Proletarian Revolution was a pure mistake, and perhaps – going back in history – that the French Revolution would have been better if the Girondins alone had made it, and if there had been no Jacobins. And all this still would not be enough. Because some critical tapes demand that we throw overboard not only the rich lessons of Marx and Lenin, but also the ideal and political elaborations and innovations of Gramsci and Togliatti. And then – from step to step – we should go so far as to proclaim that our whole history (which also has its shadows) has only been a sequence of mistakes, that several generations of communists have struggled in vain and have thought and worked in vain to interpret and change Italian and world reality". – Archivio Online l'Unità from this moment AU, *Il discorso di Berlinguer a conclusione del Festival di Genova*, in l'Unità, 18/09/1978, p. 3.

⁹⁷ Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, cit., p. 248.

⁹⁸ Summarily, the expression blocked democracy is referring to the Italian party system based on the DC centrality and PCI's convention *ad excludendum*; see Giuseppe Vacca, *L'Italia contesa. Comunisti e democristiani nel lungo dopoguerra. 1943-1978.*, (Venice: Marsilio, 2018).

⁹⁹ Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, cit., p. 248.

¹⁰⁰ Five days before the 1976 elections, on June 15, Berlinguer would give an interview to Giampaolo Pansa in which he said he was "safer under the NATO umbrella" for the realization of the PCI's political projects. It was a statement that shook the party leadership, many militants but especially the Soviet ally, but it was part of Berlinguer's strategy of preserving field alliances, preserving détente and thus the fertile ground necessary for historical compromise and Eurocommunism – Giampaolo Pansa, "Berlinguer conta 'anche' sulla Nato per mantenere l'autonomia da Mosca", in *Corriere della Sera*, 15/06/1976.

¹⁰¹ At the highest possible ritual moment, namely the 1977 celebration of the October Revolution, Berlinguer decided to sign a further lunge against the Soviet regime by declaring, in front of Moscow and international leaders, the absolute sanctity of democracy. He received the shortest applause in Communist history and permanently, or almost permanently, soured his relationship with Brezhnev and the Soviet top leadership. – Giuseppe Chiarante, *La fine del PCI. Dall'alternativa democratica di Berlinguer all'ultimo Congresso. 1979-1991*, (Rome: Carocci, 2009), p. 49.

attacked the choice of PCI leader to loosen the relationship with the mythological Soviet ally for launching both Historical Compromise and Eurocommunism projects. On this point, it was paradigmatic the short telegram sent by the militant Dante Fontana in disagreement with Berlinguer's programs:

*Il vostro eurocomunismo. Vita da borghesi lontanissimi. Dai proletari che soffrono veleno sputato sulla gloriosa Unione Sovietica et su Lenin. Trasformazione dell'avanguardia della classe operaia in avanguardia della piccola borghesia. Vergognatevi non insultate la memoria dei compagni che hanno costituito il Partito. Non insultate la memoria di mio padre che l'ha costituito in Umbria sotto il manganello fascista*¹⁰².

Fontana's expression of discontent was comprehensively in line with the fact that the Europeanization of communism, the ambition to use the distention between the two superpowers for giving the birth to a communist western pole, and the openness toward a disentanglement with Moscow challenged not just the PCI political orientation, but the proper identity of the Italian communism¹⁰³, such as known till that moment. Thus, the critical issue quickly was the choice of the defense strategy for Italian communist identity that became extremely vulnerable to international responses and domestic attacks before the strategies applied.

Internationally, at the end of February 1977, the Madrid Eurocommunism meeting between the three main attendees of the project – PCI, PCF, PCE¹⁰⁴ – become a space of tensions rather than the final act¹⁰⁵ of an operating and functional alliance. The detonator of these explosive tensions between George Marchais, Santiago Carrillo, and Enrico Berlinguer it was both the threat of Moscow excommunications¹⁰⁶ and the profound diverse conception of Europe. After all, Berlinguer's idea of Europe, as a new space of action for parties and states that were increasingly interdependent¹⁰⁷, contrasted with the strongly anti-European view of the French Communists. In fact, Marchais saw Brussels' institutions as an obstacle to the national and PCF interests.

¹⁰² “Your Eurocommunism. Life of the distant bourgeoisie. From proletarians suffering poison spat on the glorious Soviet Union and Lenin. Transformation of the vanguard of the working class into the vanguard of the petty bourgeoisie. Shame on you do not insult the memory of the comrades who formed the Party. Do not insult the memory of my father who formed it in Umbria under the fascist baton.” – FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0466, 3332, 04/1980.

¹⁰³ Silvio Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine*, cit., pos. 6639.

¹⁰⁴ The acronyms PCF and PCE indicate in order the French Communist Party and the Spanish Communist Party.

¹⁰⁵ Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, cit., p. 241.

¹⁰⁶ For the Soviet threats to Eurocommunism project see, Silvio Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine*, cit., cap. III; Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, cit., pp. 234-269, for a more related specific issue on Eurocommunism and Eastern bloc see also, Laura Fasanaro, “Myth and Perceptions of Europe in the German Democratic Republic, 1975-1985: From Italian Eurocommunism to European Integration”, in *Historie Politique*, online, No. 46 (February 2022).

¹⁰⁷ The interdependence issue was also recall in Bruno Ceroli's interview talking of the personal meeting with Fernando Di Giulio, reported before.

Domestically, the attack on communist identity became increasingly bitter at the hands of PSI leader Bettino Craxi and the Radical Marco Pannella. On the one hand, Bettino Craxi lays the foundations of left new course through the pages of *L'Espresso* on August 27, 1978. Signing *Il Vangelo Socialista*¹⁰⁸, Craxi opted for a definitive break with socialists' cumbersome younger brother offensively substituting Proudhon¹⁰⁹ for Marx and Lenin. On the other hand, the “*taumaturgo da baraccone*”¹¹⁰, Pannella, bet heavily on the attraction PCI electors who had been disillusioned by the communists' failure to realize the 1976 electoral program. The Radical leader also attracted some educated militants and communist intellectuals, like Leonardo Sciascia, sensing that a neo-liberal and individualistic culture was gaining ground in an even more atomized social space.

Gianni Baget Bozzo described it as “a right-wing culture that is based on the rejection of history, that criticizes the value of the idea of revolution, and that rejects the thesis that politics can positively and meaningfully affect human existence [...] Pasolini had already foreshadowed this phenomenon and gave it a leftist reading”¹¹¹. Once again, Pier Paolo Pasolini – who still shared with Enrico Berlinguer the same fear of modernity – posthumously highlighted the erroneous reading key that the PCI secretary had with respect to the West crisis. Namely, it was not only a crisis of the capital system and but also of the revolutionary horizon of socialism.

This tremendous misperception underpinned the erroneous choice to use the “dual rejection”¹¹² as instrument to defend the identity of Italian communism. The idea of the dual rejection lied in indicating both the western social-democratic model and the eastern real socialism as incomplete; by contrast, in Berlinguer's mind, it will be the union between the two to forge the new Italian and western communist identity. Indeed, the unification of the two system could guarantee the respect of liberty, taken by the social democratic ideas, and contemporarily the overcoming of a depressed and decadent capitalist system, introducing aspects of pure socialism. According to Pons, “Berlinguer defined it as the project of a European socialist renaissance which did not aspire just to heal and innovate the Italian society, but it had to have also a worldwide importance”¹¹³. It was precisely through the presentation of this therapeutic plan for Italian communism, but also trans-national European and global one, that Berlinguer closed his speech at the Festival of *l'Unità* in Genoa:

A questo punto è evidente la necessità di una programmazione nazionale e anche, per certi aspetti, sopranazionale, e al limite — in qualche misura e in una lunga prospettiva — mondiale. Noi

¹⁰⁸ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

¹⁰⁹ *Ivi*, p. 189.

¹¹⁰ *Ivi*, p. 201. – Guttuso's expression for indicating the Radical leader Marco Pannella.

¹¹¹ Gianni Baget Bozzo, “Il partito radicale da Pasolini a Sciascia”, in *La Repubblica*, 12/05/1979.

¹¹² Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, *cit.*, p. 248.

¹¹³ *Ivi*, p. 249.

*pensiamo a un tipo di programmazione che sia democratico, scientifico, economicamente razionale, socialmente giusto.*¹¹⁴

Few apologetic words pronounced by the most entitled ceremony master¹¹⁵ during one of the more institutionalized rites of “Italian Communist Church” in front of illuminating disciples – thousands militant believers – like Rossa, who had the time a few weeks before his death to witness another event that, as his assassination, would have marked further moment of separation in the PCI: the Euromissiles’ crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Many ambiguities of Genoa’s speech had emerged definitively in the first weeks of January 1979. In those weeks, the PCI confronted contemporarily: Guido Rossa’s symbolic and material death; the governmental crisis which closed the unsuccessful experience of National Solidarity; the controversy over the deployment of intermediate-range missiles in Europe; and the starting of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The last two events – also fomented by the Soviets’ nightmare of Chinese American dialogue and Third-Worldist Iranian Revolution¹¹⁶ – led toward a rude and free-fall deterioration of the bipolar relations. As Aldo Agosti wrote: “after the parenthesis of a long relative distention, in few months, the two superpowers came back to a frontal contraposition”¹¹⁷. A contraposition, that within two years, was exasperated by the emergence of the new US leadership of Ronald Regan and the Leonid Brezhnev’s decaying one.

The Italian Communist Party lived a time of constant agitation. There were many internal discussions within the main party currents¹¹⁸. The directorship maintained the tendency to defend the distention – beyond its double interpretation of change or *status quo* – and to consider the Soviet Union such as the necessary counterbalance to American imperialism. However, Moscow was no longer associated with the gravity center of world socialism¹¹⁹. Here again, it was proposed a USSR dual-face description that could permit to keep the party into a helpful limbo indicated by the expression “nor orthodoxy, nor heresy”¹²⁰, then providing Berlinguer with a sort of justification for not admitting that also the socialist world was part of the global crisis.

However, the PCI secretary declared during the directorship meeting that the party cannot be representative of soviet policies. Before the parliamentary vote on the allocation of NATO missiles

¹¹⁴ “At this point there is a clear need for national and even, in some respects, supranational, and at the limit - to some extent and in the long view - world-wide programming. We think of a type of programming that is democratic, scientific, economically rational, socially just.” – AU, *Il discorso di Berlinguer*, cit., 18/09/1978, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ Bjørn Thomassen, *The Uses and Meanings*, cit., p. 17.

¹¹⁶ Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, cit., p. 255.

¹¹⁷ Aldo Agosti, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

¹¹⁸ Term banned in the communist lexicon of the time and cleared in the second half of the 1980s, when the presence of different schools of thought was not more a tabu for PCI leadership.

¹¹⁹ Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, cit., p. 256.

¹²⁰ Silvio Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine* cit., pos. 482.

in Italy, Berlinguer harshly criticized Moscow positions such as not credible and suspected worldwide¹²¹. The parliament approved the installation without communists' votes, but this decision entailed for them a drastic isolationism. For instance, at European stage, the two major PCI interlocutors opted for different ways: the PCF organized anti-American manifestations, financed directly by the Soviets, while the SPD did not make a step back in front of a positive vote. The flattery between Europeanism and Atlanticism – generated by the Euromissiles crisis – was self-defeating for to Italian communist strategy. Indeed, the image of a new pan-European space threatened by the superpowers, which had strengthened a wide support for Eurocommunist, seemed to fall back on traditional alignments after the re-composition of the social-democratic line-up. The latter had commenced at the beginning of the crisis and Enrico Berlinguer had tried to insert his party through the dialogue with Olaf Palme and Willy Brandt¹²² with the high hope of being involved in the project of a new European left¹²³, which quickly foundered on the grandeur of the Second Cold War.

The Euromissile crisis had thus initiated a further moment of separation in Italian communism, which was furthermore aggravated by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The USSR military operation officially was decided to protect the socialist government of Kabul, but there were also two hidden reasons: the desire to take advantage of USA weak presence in the region and prevent the contagion of Islamic integralism in the Soviet Republic of central Asia, both caused by the Khomeini's revolution in Iran¹²⁴. The PCI condemned immediately the Politburo decision, fracturing its relations with all the other communists' European parties, especially the French one. George Marchais and others, such as Portuguese Alvaro Cunhal, openly and proudly supported Moscow choice in what increasingly looked, according to Silvio Pons, “a parody of the internationalism of yesteryear – and – a tombstone over the Eurocommunism alliance”¹²⁵. The Afghan invasion generated the implosion of an already frayed planning system and uncovered the Pandora's box of communist mythology, showing the Soviet Union for what it was: a power player in the Cold War and not a bulwark of international pacifism. Within the PCI, the contrasts between Paolo Bufalini and Giorgio Amendola were paradigmatic. Bufalini thought that the invasion was “the inevitable end point of a wrong track”¹²⁶ while Amendola justified the Soviets raving about an imminent new world war. Nonetheless, Enrico Berlinguer took no step backward. The secretary condemned the mistake of Moscow in front of the entire Italian parliament: a *unicum* in the International Communist Movement.

¹²¹ FG, APC, Direzione, Verbali, 16/10/1979.

¹²² Giuseppe Chiarante, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

¹²³ Michele Di Donato, “Idee di Europa e politiche europee”, in Silvio Pons, eds., *Il comunismo italiano cit.*, p. 621.

¹²⁴ Aldo Agosti, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

¹²⁵ Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri, cit.*, p. 257.

¹²⁶ Franco Calamandrei, *Le occasioni di vivere. Diari e scritti 1975-1982*, (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1995), p. 161.

On March 30, 1979, during the PCI XV Congress, Berlinguer made explicit the new ideal tool, elaborating to defend Italian communist identity on the bases of dual rejection: *la terza via*¹²⁷. The communist secretary summarized in this expression to new pattern to fallow toward a system which could overcome social-democracy and real socialism, for uniting democracy and liberty with social justice and equality. As Silvio Pons reported, Berlinguer “inserted this notion in a historicistic vision that assigned to the working-class movement of western Europe the duty to open a new epoch after the ones marked by the Second International and October Revolution”¹²⁸. Opposingly to the first part of Genoa’s speech, the leader of the largest western Communist Party appeared to use the grammar of the national path to socialism, so dear to Italian Communists, not only to break ties with the Social Democrats, already tilted in Italy and beyond, but even more to sever a link with Soviet Communism, which had become too difficult to bear without revision, largely after Afghanistan.

1.4 The Soviet Drive Is Over: the PCI Discourse in the Wake of Polish Crisis

The latent tension between the need to renew the communist identity and the desire not to stray from its origins, in front of other progressive subjects and audiences, it radically weakened the defensive strategy that the PCI had been trying to implement – at least since the death of Moro – to not admit that both the season of the Historical Compromise and Eurocommunism had closed in an almost total failure, without leaving in dowry any programmatic cue for a future horizon of reforming socialism. The Communist leadership proved unwilling to immediately acknowledge the failure of its two projects.

Moreover, the blindness in understanding the changes at the gates of the new decade, made impossible to follow simultaneously both new ideological strategy and pedagogic defenses¹²⁹ of PCI identity. However, Possieri’s conceptualizations and militants’ experiences documentation¹³⁰ attest that slow change of the political culture in communist ruling class did not correspond to the same process in cadres and militants. This contradiction created a deep separation – a “hiatus”¹³¹ – between the ongoing communist leadership elaboration, even more conscious of historical, ideological, philosophical, and economic limits of socialism, and the party social base which continued to be

¹²⁷ Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, cit., p. 251.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁹ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

¹³⁰ An additional example is the letter of an emigrated militant, Luigi Cacchione, who wrote: “*I am an emigrant living in England, in recent years I had been disappointed with our communist party starting with the election defeats of recent times, to its statements on Afghanistan, (moreover not shared by many communists like me) to Italy's non-withdrawal from NATO in case of communist success, to the almost non-opposition to American nuclear missiles and of the non-speech on that horrible organization called the European common market that everyone benefits from except the workers [...]*” – FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0487, 3302, 02/12/1980.

¹³¹ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

brought up in democratic centralism, venerating famous fathers' pantheon¹³², and to hope in a palingenetic future, such as the PCI militant Oliviero Ricci gave evidence in his letter to Gian Carlo Pajetta:

[...] Io vivo fra i compagni di base non fra i funzionari che prendono il salario dal partito [...] e tutto il partito di base guarda con simpatia all'Unione Sovietica, ai compagni che seppur fra errori anche grandi, con inenarrabili sacrifici hanno operato e portato il loro paese se non superiore alla pari dell'imperialismo [...] Per me la stella polare è e resterà l'Unione Sovietica. Il socialismo trionferà, il riformismo e il liberalismo [...] finirà sconfitto. [...] Io non ho fretta che si vada al potere, il potere per noi oggi vuol dire autodistruggersi; perché ci troveremo davanti all'ostacolo dell'egoismo potenziale, e faremo la fine dei socialisti francesi, dei comunisti francesi e di quelli spagnoli. [...] Ma il calore che il nostro partito emanava, si è inceppato dopo la grande vittoria del 1976. Le sezioni hanno cominciato a perdere i giovani [...] siamo diventati un comitato di sezione più di 70enni che di 60enni da allora abbiamo cominciato a sentire, compromesso storico, prima delusione, poi è venuta la solidarietà, poi è venuta l'oppressione socialista dell'est [...] se il comitato centrale siete tutti convinti che questa è la via del socialismo, io ti dico che non ci credo [...] sono un compagno di base e abbastanza ignorante, ma non scemo. Nel partito comunista ci resto e continuerò a votarlo finché non ci sarà un partito migliore. [...]]¹³³

These words are a genuine statement of belief in communist precepts and they show how vigorous was the communist pedagogical force and how difficult would be to refashion the PCI identity in a new form, compatible with the political changes that Italian communist leadership was adopting.

Due to the difficulties of establishing a dialogue with disoriented militants, Berlinguer and the PCI did not abandon the ambiguous language while maintaining straight line the elements of innovation

¹³² Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

¹³³ “[...] I live among the grassroots comrades not among the officials who take the salary from the Party, and I am sure that out of 10 comrades of the rank and file 9 they think it is contrary to you, and the whole grassroots party looks with sympathy to the Soviet with unspeakable sacrifices have operated and brought the country lotus if not superior to imperialism your ally, but not ours, remember it. [...] No, my friend, I do not accept these murderous allies and I regret that the American people have been deceived, and I admit that the Americans are a great people, but not their lying leaders who often out of pride have sent their children to slaughter. [...] I will always remain in the party because I believe that one day not far off that you and those who think as you see your mistake. For me, the North Star is and will remain the Soviet Union. Socialism will triumph, reformism and liberalism [...] will end up defeated. [...] I am not in a hurry to go to power, power for us today means self-destructing; because we will face the obstacle of potential selfishness, and we will end up like the French socialists, the French communists and the Spanish. [...] But the heat that our Party emanated, has jammed after the great victory of 1976. The sections have begun to lose young people and many of us have lost that today we have become a committee of section more than 70 years of age that 60 years since then we began to feel, historical compromise, first disappointment, then came solidarity, then came the socialist oppression of the East [...] if the central committee are all convinced that this is the way of socialism, I tell you that I do not believe, I do not want to offend you, I am a comrade base and quite ignorant, but not stupid. I will remain in the Communist Party and continue to vote for it until there is a better party. [...]]” – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 73/66, 21/12/1984.

of Italian communism policy introduced gradually from 15th Congress and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Indeed, on January 14, 1980 – during a meeting with the Alfa Sud workers – the PCI secretary answered in a very critic way to the audience questions regarding the USSR behavior:

*Noi abbiamo preso quella posizione che voi sapete sull'Afghanistan, intanto per ragioni di principio, che voi sapete non possono essere ... ignorate ... nel senso che noi riteniamo che la liberazione di un popolo debba essere opera del popolo stesso ... la rivoluzione non può essere esportata dall'esterno e che quando viene esportata dall'esterno non regge. Non risulta che nell'Afghanistan fosse in atto una vera rivoluzione popolare [...] l'Unione sovietica [...] ha persino compromesso ... quell'autorità, quel prestigio che si era guadagnata in anni passati [...] anche da questo punto di vista la situazione ci preoccupa.*¹³⁴

Continuing his speech, Berlinguer shifted the focus on the world peace inserting, albeit implicitly, the Soviet Union among the actors who were triggering an escalation since the Euromissiles crisis. What is striking, like the vigorous invective against the Soviet Union, is the puzzled silence of the comrades who listen to him. A silence that was broken by applause only after the question of demonstration, to which the secretary answered as follows:

*È stata posta anche la questione se dobbiamo fare delle manifestazioni di massa [...] io penso che bisogna fare delle manifestazioni di massa ma che queste [...] non possono essere promosse dal partito comunista o non possono vedere la partecipazione del partito comunista se hanno un obiettivo unilaterale ... se tanto per intenderci devono essere rivolte soltanto a condannare l'intervento sovietico ... a questo punto faremo nostra la linea delle forze di destra ... certo che chiediamo la cessazione dell'invasione sovietica in Afghanistan però al tempo stesso ci pronunciamo su quello che ho detto prima: le ritorsioni americane, i tentativi di affossare le politiche di distensione, la riduzione degli armamenti [...] manifestazioni che comprendano l'insieme dei nostri obiettivi di pace e disarmo [...]*¹³⁵

¹³⁴ “We took that position that you know about Afghanistan, meanwhile for reasons of principle, which you know cannot be ... ignored ... in the sense that we believe that the liberation of a people must be the work of the people themselves ... revolution cannot be exported from outside and that when it is exported from outside it does not hold. It does not appear that there was a real people's revolution going on in Afghanistan [...] the Soviet Union [...] has even compromised ... that authority, that prestige that it had earned in years past [...] even from this point of view the situation worries us.” – AAMOD, *Incontro tra Enrico Berlinguer e gli operai dell'Alfa Sud*, fasc. 154/14, 14/01/1980, TCR: 00:19:14:00-00:25:00:00.

¹³⁵ “The question has also been raised as to whether we have to have mass demonstrations [...] I think that we have to have mass demonstrations but that these [...] cannot be promoted by the Communist Party or cannot see the participation of the Communist Party if they have a unilateral objective ... if for the sake of argument they have to be aimed only at condemning the Soviet intervention ... at this point we will make the line of the right-wing forces our own ... of course we are calling for an end to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan however at the same time we are pronouncing on what I said

Therefore, the head of the PCI needed to soften his criticism of the Soviets while launching one against the foundational enemies of Italian communism: the Right and the Americans. This choice awakened the soul of those melancholic militants who – like the child who regains joy seeing his hero get up in front of the attacks of the villain – were excited again, clapping their hands loud.

After seven months from that meeting, Enrico Berlinguer replied harshly, without half measure used at Alfa Sud, to the letter of Peppino Spataro, who addressed the secretary to express his opinion on Poland situation:

*Caro Enrico, dove la vita è attività, vale a dire amore e fratellanza veri, ovvero dove il potere lo abbiamo noi, lo sciopero non può essere libero (non occorre), qualunque cosa accada; dove la vita è “lotta”, come quella che si svolge in tutto il mondo occidentale e tra le bestie feroci della giungla, lo sciopero deve essere libero totalmente. Questo è il mio pensiero inerente ai fatti avvenuti in Polonia (illusione!) e alle nostalgiche forze reazionarie che li hanno generati. [...]*¹³⁶

*Caro compagno Spataro, il tuo interesse per i casi della Polonia ti avrà indotto a seguire gli sviluppi degli avvenimenti. Lo stesso compagno Gierak ha ammesso davanti al C.C. del POUP che all’origine degli scioperi vi sono errori gravi della direzione economica che devono essere superati e non, come tu dici, “le nostalgiche forze reazionarie”. Queste, caso mai, utilizzano gli errori che sono commessi dai loro avversari. [...]*¹³⁷

During the summer 1980, the Polish workers’ strikes shocked Danzig, carrying in Europe the global crisis – opened in third world scenarios like Iran and Afghanistan – and turning the spotlights on the real socialism and Soviet bloc crises. After ten years of cyclical protest for the low conditions of life and economy, the Polish working class built an independent trade union, named Solidarity and guided by the charismatic syndicalist Lech Walesa. The protest movements led by Solidarity

earlier: U.S. retaliation, attempts to scuttle détente policies, arms reduction [...] demonstrations encompassing the whole of our goals of peace and disarmament [...]” – AAMOD, *Incontro tra Enrico Berlinguer e gli operai dell’Alfa Sud*, cit., TCR: 00:31:00:00-00:33:00:00.

¹³⁶ “Dear Enrico, where life is activity, i.e., true love and brotherhood, i.e., where we have the power, the strike cannot be free (no need), no matter what happens; where life is “struggle,” such as that which takes place throughout the Western world and among the ferocious beasts of the jungle, the strike must be free totally. This is my thought inherent in the events that took place in Poland (illusion!) and the nostalgic reactionary forces that generated them. [...]” – FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0485, 1257, 21/08/1980.

¹³⁷ “Dear Comrade Spataro, your interest in the cases in Poland must have led you to follow the development of events. Comrade Gierak himself admitted before the C.C. of the POUP that at the origin of the strikes are serious errors of the economic leadership that must be overcome and not, as you say, “nostalgic reactionary forces.” These, if anything, use the mistakes that are made by their opponents. [...]” – FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0485, 1258, 26/08/1980.

disclosed all the fragility of eastern communism establishment¹³⁸. For this reason, the Head of State Edward Gierek was replaced by Stanislaw Kania who seemed conscious of the possible dissolution of power structures and, consequently, incline to find an agreement with Lech Walesa's workers.

The PCI operated a diplomatic mediation, with the Vatican, to attenuate the Polish crisis impact in the center of Europe. Bufalini and Pajetta were the two representatives of the communists, while cardinal Casaroli – close collaborator of the Polish Pope Wojtyla – was the delegate of the Holy See. It was in the landscape of this peculiar collaboration which in 1981 it was organized Walesa's visit to Rome. While on the one hand, the commitment of the top leadership of Italian communism was relentless and pointed the finger of suspicion at Moscow, which continued to portray Poland as a country on the brink of counterrevolution like it had been making with Hungary and Czechoslovakia; on the other hand, the communist social body, that was not understanding the new orientations of the PCI leadership, was left alone in the assimilation of the historical link severing with the Soviet Union, as evidenced by dissenting letters sent by many militants:

*[...] non passa una volta che non si parla della Polonia, ma a quel paese ci sta proprio succedendo la fine del mondo? Ogni volta i nostri cronisti dicono del pericolo delle truppe sovietiche, come aspettassero che quelle truppe dovrebbero proprio entrare e poi non entrano mai, noi abbiamo tante cose di casa nostra si nominano una volta e basta, ma non sarebbe meglio che si lasciasse la Polonia del Papa viaggiatore? Se le truppe sovietiche entrano, gli americani già sono entrati con i suoi sabotatori, io sono comunista e resto comunista però non mi si deve dire di essere o diventare antisovietico, dite ai responsabili della nostra televisione che Cuba un paesino comunista ha una grande base americana cosa aspettano che non vadano via? Poi il Brasile, l'Argentina, il Cile ecc. ecc. Poi delle volte c'è anche la vostra predica antisovietica i democratici cristiani non fanno la predica antiamericana. [...] sono iscritto al partito dal 1944 e ho ottantacinque anni, e abito in località S. Donato (Galluccio) che si lasci la Polonia e si viene a vedere lo specchio di questa zona. [...]*¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Silvio Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine*, cit., pos. 4620.

¹³⁹ “[...] not a time goes by that Poland is not mentioned, but is the end of the world really happening to us there? Every time our reporters say about the danger of the Soviet troops, as if they were waiting that those troops should really enter and then they never enter, we have so many things at home they are mentioned once and that's it, but wouldn't it be better to leave the Poland of the traveling Pope? If the Soviet troops enter, the Americans already entered with its saboteurs, I am a communist and I remain a communist however I should not be told to be or become anti-Soviet, tell the people in charge of our television that Cuba a communist small town has a big American base what are they waiting for them not to leave? Then Brazil, Argentina, Chile, etc. etc. Then sometimes there is also your anti-Soviet preaching Christian Democrats do not preach anti-American. [...] I have been a party member since 1944 and I am eighty-five years old, and I live in S. Donato (Galluccio) that you leave Poland and come and see the mirror of this area. [...]” – FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0487, 3767, 27/12/1980.

Sentences which found a bigger echo in the epistolary exchange between one of the PCI diplomatic mediators for the Polish affair –Pajetta – and Gianni Berardi, an older militant well known at *Botteghe Oscure*:

*[...] attaccare troppo spesso la Russia è controproducente. Un recente studio pubblicato dall'Unità ha dimostrato che più del 60% dei nostri iscritti ha più di 40 anni. Ebbene, tu non puoi credere quanto sia difficile a costoro staccarsi dalla fedeltà più completa all'URSS. Per essere più precisi ancora, quel terzo abbondante di iscritti è assai filosovietico e drasticamente antiamericano. Pertanto è gravissimo errore parlare così frequentemente di quanto accade in Polonia e in Afghanistan e non denunciare invece, se non in rare occasioni, il comportamento di Reagan e dell'Amministrazione USA per quel che sta avvenendo in nazioni di America Latina, dell'Asia e dell'Africa [...] Presto, molto probabilmente, andremo a elezioni. E se non si galvanizzerà la base dicendo quello che vuole sentire dire dei meriti della Russia per la liberazione dei popoli e delle colpe degli Stati Uniti, perderemo voti a favore dei Democrazia Proletaria e molti nostri elettori non andranno a votare.*¹⁴⁰

Berardi captured precisely one of the sore points of the Afghan and Polish events, but especially of the change in Italian communists' strategy and their attack on the mythological Soviet ally: the fact that the PCI was appealing to an increasingly older militant base¹⁴¹.

Indeed, if researcher digs deep into the biographies of those who disagreed with the changing strategy brought about by Berlinguer, they discover that the angry authors of the cited letters were mostly very elderly militants, who had been always loyalty to the party line. To the rift between the PCI base and the leadership, must also be added the new generational separation, that was increasingly widening in this phase of "ritual disassociation"¹⁴² from Moscow and from the debris of the communist past; a ritual that the PCI secretary hoped could be able to bring his party back to success and to regain a pool of support that would allow the start of a political planning towards the *terza via*.

¹⁴⁰ “[...] attacking Russia too often is counterproductive. A recent study published by Unity showed that more than 60 percent of our members are over 40 years old. Well, you cannot believe how difficult it is for them to break away from the most complete loyalty to the USSR. To be more precise still, that abundant third of the membership is very pro-Soviet and drastically anti-American. Therefore, it is a very serious mistake to talk so frequently about what is happening in Poland and Afghanistan and not to denounce instead, except on rare occasions, the behavior of Reagan and the U.S. Administration for what is happening in nations of Latin America, Asia, and Africa [...] Soon, most likely, we will go to elections. And if you don't galvanize the base by saying what they want to hear about the merits of Russia for the liberation of the peoples and the faults of the U.S., we will lose votes to the Proletarian Democracy and many of our voters will not go to the polls. [...]” – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 70/56, 01/11/1982.

¹⁴¹ Aldo Agosti, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

¹⁴² Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

In the face of the Polish crisis and the subsequent Jaruzleski *coup d'état*¹⁴³, the never disappeared generational gap took the form of another kind of silence: the silence of communist youth. It was surprising, perhaps unexpected, because it was precisely that deafening silence of those who had cried out for Prague and Santiago¹⁴⁴, albeit against a different enemy, leaving now an indelible mark on the beginning of the new decade, the launch of a new course. Many of those who had been and were young, between 1968 and 1981, were silent. Some wrote a few lines¹⁴⁵ while almost no one moved to the forefront as they had done in the past. The call of the private became more and more enchanting in the face of the betrayals of politics, and even Berlinguer's call for pacifism¹⁴⁶, and his effort for patronizing the new pacifistic movements, no longer seemed to be enough to revive the huge masses of the previous decade¹⁴⁷.

Finally, on December 15, 1981, Enrico Berlinguer's extreme detachment from the model of Soviet Union, that was made explicit in a television press conference for the Polish coup – appearing almost like an ideological *mea culpa* – it was not enough to bring those who had distanced themselves from the party closer. That conference has gone down in history because the master of ceremony of Italian communism – and the most beloved party secretary – declared manifestly to believe that “the propulsive capacity for renewal of society, or at least of some societies that have been created in Eastern Europe, has come to an end”¹⁴⁸. That conference became – like Rossa's funeral – another ritual of separation within the communist party social body. It was celebrated through an unprecedented ceremony for the communist canons not in a square, or a PCI section assembly, but

¹⁴³ It happened on December 13, 1981.

¹⁴⁴ On the communist solidarity network for the Chilean case see, Loreto Rebolledo Gonzalez, “L'esilio cileno in Italia”, in Raffaele Nocera, Claudio Rolle Cruz, eds., *Settantre. Cile e Italia, destini incrociati*, (Naples: Think Tank Edizioni, 2010), pp. 115-139; for a general overview on PCI trans-national network see also, Teresa Malice, “Reti transnazionali e immaginari del socialismo nella tarda Guerra fredda”, in Silvio Pons, eds, *Il comunismo italiano cit.*, pp. 329-348.

¹⁴⁵ Gabriele Mattutino was one of the few more younger people who wrote during this period: “*Stim. Comrade Pajetta, the writer is a 48-year-old worker from Turin, a communist of conviction [...] who has always had political passion to believe and fight for change. [...] Son of communist Turin worker parents. Then after the war in the glorious ranks of the FGCI with precisely Enrico Berlinguer at its head, then in the Party. [...] well after the turning point that took place in this central committee in the factory among comrades and non-comrades, there is a lot of talk these days. Therefore, I want to express to you my judgment about it. [...] I'll come to the core at once: I agree minimally in part and doubtful and disagree in good part to the conclusions of this CC. "historical." I agree with the PCI leadership in its condemnation of the Soviet model, as non-socialist, of the stigmatization of the PCUS leadership core, as non-socialist those Eastern European countries. Agree with the condemnation of the military coup in Poland and its aftermath. Especially the condemnation of Stalinism. The destalinization march of the 20th PCUS Congress immediately stalled. The non-existence of a leading Party, much less still of the Soviet myth. All in agreement. Yes, but dear Comrade Pajetta, I disagree with the Party leadership overall other extremely important aspect. From Berlinguer's report from the speeches of all the other comrades in the CC. [...] is the search for another way, the third or if you want the beginning of the third phase of the world workers' movement. It may be, but from saying that the October Revolution finished its forward thrust in human emancipation, finished its march for the labor movement, and no I just don't agree with you.*” – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 70/55, 31/01/1982.

¹⁴⁶ For an overview on the 1980s relation between PCI and pacifism see, Gianluca Fiocco, “I diritti umani e la sfida dei nuovi universalismi”, in Silvio Pons, eds., *Il comunismo italiano cit.*, pp. 555-572.

¹⁴⁷ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-213.

¹⁴⁸ Giuseppe Chiarante, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

via TV. Precisely that television was the symbol par excellence of the modernity that Enrico Berlinguer had set out to fight. The statement on the “propulsive capacity” activated a self-defeating vortex for the Italian Communist Party identity. However, it was also one of the necessary steps in the transition toward the attempt of establishing a new autonomous identity for the largest Western Communist Party: a complex and long process which certainly could not be exhausted overnight but would take about ten years of further troubles.

1.5 Awakening from the Illusion: the Return to ‘*Operaismo*’ in a Changing Italy

The summer of 1980 had not started torrid, but it had become day after day until the 34 degrees registered on the morning of August 2 at the Marconi airport in Bologna, meanwhile at the station, few kilometers away, the season of terror would have attested one of its last shocks of tail, ordinarily unexpected as many of the brutalities that had took place on Italy.

The new decade seemed to be frighteningly opening like the long 1970s just closed. A crisis in the heart of Europe would have been repressed in blood by real socialism, as happened in Prague Spring. The world economy was still incapable of emerging from the stagflation in which Nixon had driven it ten years earlier. A reactionary attack opened the special editions of the Italian news, such as Piazza Fontana bomb. The Italian Communist Party was back in opposition – searching a new strategy for the future and for renegotiating its identity – decided not to be momentarily party of government, but at the same time rediscovering itself incapable of being that party of struggle, as it once was. Berlinguer’s *terza via*, after all, was increasingly considered a “conceptual refuge for a party unable to choose”¹⁴⁹.

However, this theoretical historical reconstruction – cyclical as the best Polybius’ tradition – is undermined by the grave error of not considering the unstoppable mutability of human experiences, which are hidden under the behavior of the great actors and in the narration of the epoch-making events. Indeed, while the leadership of the PCI consumed national and international tears¹⁵⁰ and questioned who it had been and what it intended to become, there was a social base that was rapidly evolving, slowly separating, and increasingly escaping the control, or rather the hegemony, of the party.

¹⁴⁹ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

¹⁵⁰ The expression “*lo strappo*” was often used to indicate break in the relations between Berlinguer and Moscow, but it was originally the title of Armando Cossutta’s book of 1982. Cossutta was the main PCI political leader to maintain strong relations with the Soviets and to create a network with pro-USSR militants and party management. – Armando Cossutta, *Lo strappo*, (Milan: Mondadori, 1982); Giuseppe Chiarante, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

Tiredness and fear, disorientation and hopeless were the hatching feelings of PCI militants and electors. The chain of events tilted additionally the communist basic idea of politics as exact science and of the party like unique defender of truth¹⁵¹.

For many years, the core believe of the party was: the “centrality of the workers” and their inevitable future¹⁵². Notwithstanding, this was about to collapse. In fact, the serious economic crisis of 1970s had required an extensive restructuration of the organization of labor in sectors central to the communist influence. In a short time, an enormous process of automatization and informatization invaded the 1980s Italian industry. Antonio Spisani, a Fiat-Cassino employee, described this epochal change with the words “many ‘carcasses’ fulfill the factories, simulating the essential movements needed to weld bolts, and the man put himself at the service of the machine”¹⁵³. Furthermore, the considerable improvement of workers’ personal education caused a further separation between qualified worker and unskilled worker, aggravating generational, gender, nationality, and occupational divisions which already pervaded the Italian - and communist party - social body. In fact, it was facing changes in living conditions, habits and consumptions that reduced the specificity of the working class to accentuate the one of new indigents.

In these uncertain situations, the PCI and Enrico Berlinguer seemed to get lost. They focused the attention on the ideological and political dimension of the problem, underestimating the more cultural and anthropological issues. Communist parties, in Italy and elsewhere, had “shaped a real way of life, created and imposed a set of references, customs, mythologies, behaviors and values”¹⁵⁴. During the 1980s, the triumph of consumerism and hedonism dismantled the communis values and markers of certainty. For instance, talking about the young militants and their *riflusso*, Franco Fortini and Aurelio Andreolli noticed that they were in a full transition “from Che Guevara to Renato Zero”¹⁵⁵, while older party’s activists were taken off-guard, listening how words and names to which they had usually gave a meaning of struggle, now took one of insouciance. In this respect, a passage from the diary of Arrigo Sacchi, a communist councilor from Modena, turns out to be evocative of the social distances carved within society:

Esco di casa alle sei e mezzo. Arrivo alla stazione in anticipo [...] mi dedico alla osservanza dei giovani. Nell’abbigliamento quest’anno sono di moda i giubbotti, diversi per foggia, colore, materiali: di pelle, di velluto, di renna, di plastica, di camoscio, di montone. Ad un certo punto in un

¹⁵¹ Massimo De Angelis, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

¹⁵² “Centralità Operaia” – Aldo Agosti, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

¹⁵³ Aldo Agosti, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

¹⁵⁴ Marc Lazar, “Les partis communistes de l’Europe occidentale face aux mutations de la classe ouvrière” in *Communisme*, No. 17, (1988), p. 32.

¹⁵⁵ Aurelio Andreolli, “Calvino, il telefono c’è”, Intervista con Franco Fortini, in *Paese Sera*, 25/02/1980.

*gruppo di giovani, sento fare il nome di Agnelli. Tendo l'orecchio: non parlano di Fiat, ma della Juventus e della squalifica di Bettega e Causio.*¹⁵⁶

The evident disappointment in Sacchi's words was immediately mixed with surprise: where has *il padrone*,¹⁵⁷ the epitome of unjust capitalism, Agnelli gone? The true answer was that *il padrone* had won such as his Juventus did at the end of 1980 football season, or rather, properly like Bettega and his team-mates on the field, others Agnelli's employees – the Fiat's ones – had won reopening in 40,000 the gates of factories locked by the pickets of a deluded working-class chanting, for the last time *en masse*, the cry: "*Il potere deve essere operaio!*"¹⁵⁸

It was October 14, 1980, when forty thousand people walked the streets of Turin demanding a return to work and the reopening of the factories after months of labor conflict, disputes, and strikes. As Spisani recounts in his memoirs, "the gates reopened in the hope of a better decade by restoring the authority of the managers and the workers' respect for hierarchy"; he continues "the calm determination of the action had bent the trade union, reduced to impotence, now unable to give security to members, fear was transmitted to workers, teams, departments and workshops: fear of mobility, layoffs, tax inspection, disciplinary measures and dismissals, often unfounded fears exploitable by finally authoritative leaders"¹⁵⁹.

Even the Italian Communist Party and its secretary were reduced to impotence by the all-internal clash within the working class that the PCI, together with the CGIL, set out to defend from the dawn of communist times. When the crisis broke out, the PCI immediately assumes an open conflict posture before the enterprise, inviting Luciano Lama and trade unions to do the same. Since October 1979, the interrelation between Fiat and PCI-CGIL had been exacerbated by Cesare Romiti's¹⁶⁰ decision to fire 61 workers suspected of violence and supporting terrorism.

The lays-off were followed by moments of absolute chaos in the communist ranks, such as the international crisis and the death of Guido Rossa, that had torn the party social body and entrenched the leaders in a defensive strategy unable to offer a bridge toward new struggle imaginaries and identity. Meanwhile, the Italian political chessboard was changing in a conservative manner,

¹⁵⁶ "I leave the house at 6:30 am. I arrive at the station early [...] I devote myself to youth observance. In clothing this year jackets are in fashion, different in shape, color, materials: leather, velvet, reindeer, plastic, suede, sheepskin. At one point in a group of young people, I hear Agnelli's name mentioned. I bend my ear: they are not talking about Fiat, but about Juventus and the disqualification of Bettega and Causio." – ADN, Arrigo Sacchi, *Il Palazzo che tiene*, Prot. No. 18731, DP/99, 1999, p. 97.

¹⁵⁷ "The owner".

¹⁵⁸ "Power must be workers!" – ADN, Antonio Spisani, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁰ Cesare Romiti was the Fiat CEO from 1976 to 1998, and President since 1996. For an overview on his role see, Cesare Romiti, Giampaolo Pansa, *Questi anni alla Fiat*, (Milan: Rizzoli, 2004).

renovating, also through the implementation of the "preamble"¹⁶¹ launched by the 14th DC Congress, the center-left alliance and the simultaneous exclusion of any possible dialogue with the PCI for both Christian Democracy and Socialist Party.

The new alliance between Bettino Craxi, Giulio Andreotti, Arnaldo Forlani required the direction of the party and Berlinguer to find political answers, even before of a new identity and relation with the pas. However, the firm belief of the Sardinian leader that these two elements could not be separated, led him to take refuge in what he blindly seemed as the only ideational *locus* of the communist tradition still immune to the virus of 1980s hedonistic modernity: the *operaismo*.

On the beginning of September 1980, Fiat communicated the decision to fire 14.469 workers, setting off the immediate response of trade unions which started strikes for impeding cargos transit. *L'Unità* collected the first workers' call for help months before when a Mirafiori worker declared that there were ambiguities also in their attitudes, such as the not immediate fight on terrorism¹⁶². This declaration looks like the one of the Genoa Italsider worker interviewed during Guido Rossa's funeral. However, also in this case, the PCI and Enrico Berlinguer decided to gloss over the confession of working-class ambiguities evading the necessity to face the real sense of those declaration. The communist leadership returned to search the "truth"¹⁶³ in the combining of working-class natural mistrust towards the owners and the necessary objective observation of the ongoing crisis of productions¹⁶⁴.

In the months of dispute, of direct confrontation between the working class and the enterprise, the Italian Communist Party seemed to have regained its strength; it appeared to have rediscovered the ancient spirit of struggle, lost in the years of National Solidarity for being legitimized as a governmental force and institutionalized party. These sensations brought back the PCI to the glories of the past, giving the illusions that the failures of 1970s political projects, the tear with the Soviet ally, and the consequent disenchantment of old and young generations could be overcome through the "isolation" and "defeat"¹⁶⁵ of Fiat directly under the hands of the working class and its *operaismo*.

Probably, Enrico Berlinguer, overwhelmed by sympathy, affection, enthusiasm, warmth of workers crying his name – when he arrived in Mirafiori on September 26, 1980 – was convinced that it was still possible a renewal in the continuity with the workers, and only them, at the center of this "new traditional" communist project-system. The strike force of this misguided optimism in the ultimate resources of the working-class pulled Berlinguer toward the use of an unusual and careless

¹⁶¹ Massimo L. Salvadori, *Storia d'Italia. Il cammino tormentato di una nazione. 1861-2016*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2018), p. 435.

¹⁶² FG, APC, Regioni, mf. 0467, 0429, 18/05/1980.

¹⁶³ Massimo De Angelis, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

¹⁶⁴ FG, APC, Regioni, mf. 0467, 0429, 18/05/1980.

¹⁶⁵ FG, APC, Regioni, mf. 0486, 0092, 27/09/1980.

radicalism¹⁶⁶ declaring not to exclude “harsher”¹⁶⁷ struggles against Fiat because, he argued, “it is not acceptable that a foot should be put on the neck of the working class and of Italian democracy”¹⁶⁸.

The PCI secretary impetus against Fiat was often narrated like the last point in time before the counter-manifestation of the 40.000, conversely, on the following day, Berlinguer took some steps back. During the political meeting in San Carlo square, he declared not to be in Turin to exacerbate the tough fight with the auto company¹⁶⁹, but he also added:

*[...] e non sono qui neppure per scavalcare i sindacati, ai quali anzi abbiamo dato e rinnovato il nostro impegno. Non dovrebbe dare fastidio a nessuno, a nessun dirigente sindacale, l'impegno concreto di una forza così radicata nella classe operaia, come il Partito Comunista. Vi è forse qualche dirigente sindacale che vorrebbe il PCI estraneo o escluso da un suo rapporto diretto con le masse lavoratrici? Questo sarebbe assurdo e inaccettabile in linea generale, e tantopiù oggi, in un momento che richiede la mobilitazione di tutte le forze democratiche a difesa degli interessi dei lavoratori.*¹⁷⁰

It became almost clear that “to no one” was referring to Luciano Lama. In fact, the CGIL leader had shown himself more inclined than the party to dialogue with the company for various reasons, two out all: the preservation of trade union unity and the understanding of a necessary sacrifice of some Fiat demands in order to safeguard as many jobs as possible. Moreover, it cannot be ruled out that party interference worried Luciano Lama about the success of the negotiations, since he could boast – unlike other communist leaders – mutual respect with Gianni Agnelli of which praise exchanged, in the episodes dedicated to them by Gianni Minoli’s TV show Mixer¹⁷¹, will be testimony. This opened a conflict between the party and its union that never became purely explicit, but also failed to be completely covert. The same relationship between Lama and Berlinguer became progressively colder, until 1983, when – again in Minoli's interview – the trade union head said he preferred a “third

¹⁶⁶ Massimo L. Salvadori, *op. cit.*, p. 435.

¹⁶⁷ FG, APC, Regioni, mf. 0486, 0092, 27/09/1980.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁹ FG, APC, Regioni, mf. 0486, 0094, 28/09/1980.

¹⁷⁰ “[...] and I am not even here to bypass the trade unions, to which, on the contrary, we have given and renewed our commitment. It should not bother anyone, no union leader, the concrete commitment of a force so deeply rooted in the working class as the Communist Party. Is there perhaps any union leader who would like the PCI to be alienated or excluded from its direct relationship with the working masses? This would be absurd and unacceptable in general, and even more so today, at a time that calls for the mobilization of all democratic forces in defense of workers' interests.” – *Ibidem*.

¹⁷¹ Gianni Minoli, “Intervista a Luciano Lama”, in *Mixer*, st. 1983/1984; IDEM, “Intervista a Gianni Agnelli”, in *Mixer*, st. 1983/1984.

way” in the PCI internal confrontation between the Sardinian secretary and one of the *miglioristi* leaders, Giorgio Napolitano: Luciano Lama’s way¹⁷².

The Fiat affair and the march of the 40,000 thus set out a new space of internal separation within the increasingly multifaced working class, and they also seemed to bring the work of the party and the GCIL onto two different tracks, perhaps for the first time but certainly not the last. The PCI was defeated. Agnelli and Romiti’s company laid off several thousand workers and forced many others into mobility. Berlinguer awoke from that brief oneiric parenthesis of being able to revive its course through the heritage of *operaismo*. The communist secretary let drop the auto-critic observations of the *miglioristi*¹⁷³, who understood yet that the massive valorization of the past could not be used as an identity device for the laicized political body of 1980s Italian society. According to Possieri, the communist tradition “was became, at this point, an identity resource indispensable for party militants and, at the same time, a cumbersome burden for the PCI political strategy”¹⁷⁴.

Few weeks after Turin’ events, the soil trembled again under the feet of PCI and beyond. On November 23, 1980, a devastating earthquake shook the Irpinia¹⁷⁵ generating an incredible emotion all along Italy. The President of the Republic, Sandro Pertini, was the first one to arrive in the wrecked zone and, as Miriam Mafai remembered, gave a memorable speech: “I saw an unforgettable scene. Entire towns razed to the ground, the survivors’ desperation, forty-eight hours later aid had not yet arrived”¹⁷⁶. Pertini’s disappointment at the slow pace of relief efforts put the government parties in the crosshairs – which would shortly be swept up in a series of scandals that forced Forlani¹⁷⁷ to resign – and at the same time, in an almost populist vein¹⁷⁸, the socialist President denounced “the real breakdown of the structures of the state”¹⁷⁹, which needed to be profoundly and radically renewed.

In that moment, watching the speech in front of the TV with Adalberto Minucci, Enrico Berlinguer stated, “we must come forward. We must propose a democratic alternative to this system...”¹⁸⁰ and

¹⁷² Gianni Minoli, “Intervista a Luciano Lama”, *cit.*

¹⁷³ Simona Colarizi, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

¹⁷⁴ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

¹⁷⁵ Irpinia is a geographic region of Italy between Campania and Basilicata. For a specific focus on the social and political impact of this event see, Gabriele Ivo Moscaritolo, *Memorie dal cratere. Storia sociale del terremoto in Irpinia*, (Florence: Editpress, 2020) and Toni Ricciardi, Generoso Picone, Luigi Fiorentino, *Il terremoto dell’Irpinia. Cronaca, storia e memoria dell’evento più catastrofico dell’Italia Repubblicana*, (Rome: Donzelli, 2020).

¹⁷⁶ Miriam Mafai, *Dimenticare Berlinguer, cit.*, p. 72.

¹⁷⁷ Massimo L. Salvadori, *op. cit.*, pp. 436-437.

¹⁷⁸ On Sandro Pertini as first figure into the contraposition between ‘ordinary man’ and elite see, Eugenio Capozzi, “Antipartito. Opposition to the political class and the party system in 1970s Italy”, in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, (2020), pp. 10-22.

¹⁷⁹ Miriam Mafai, *Dimenticare Berlinguer, cit.*, p. 72.

¹⁸⁰ *Ivi*, pp. 72-73.

Alessandro Natta completed the secretary sentence “we cannot have a President of the Republic who does more opposition than the opposition party”¹⁸¹.

From this crosstalk in the intimacy of Botteghe Oscure, it was born the last great Berlinguer’s political project: the *alternativa democratica*¹⁸². According to the Sardinian politician, Italy needed a different government that would pivot on the communists, on their diversity, on their honesty. Berlinguer illustrated his new policy in a press conference held in Salerno, while the definitive decision on the *alternativa* was taken in Vietri with some of the most important communist leaders, as clarified by Massimo D’Alema¹⁸³. Miriam Mafai describes that press conference as a difficult one for Berlinguer, who looked darkened and stubborn facing the questions regarding the plain application of this new project and other parties’ personalities who could join it. Presumably, the elusive and darkened behavior of the PCI leader was given also by the consciousness that not all the directorship agreed with him on this second *svolta di Salerno*: for instance, Emanuele Macaluso will declare: “the thought that the PCI could be – as Berlinguer had proposed – the pivot of a coalition, of a ‘government of the honesties’ to do, one could not understand with whom, it seemed to me immediately out of this world”¹⁸⁴. The attacks of the PCI internal opposition toward a supposed Berlinguer’s loss of political lucidity¹⁸⁵ were proved powerless: in fact, the charismatic secretary got out winner from the discussion, also through the directorship fidelity to democratic centralism.

According to Mafai, the launch of democratic alternative received a positive shock, giving new purposes for militants’ engagement and struggle and enabling the secretary to reinforce its strict relation with communist people: in the moment of maximum isolation for the party, Berlinguer gained the maximum shine for his myth¹⁸⁶. While a multi-layer analysis of the PCI social body reactions not only to the democratic alternative project, but also to the working-class defeat against Fiat and the ruptures within the directorship and CGIL, indicated the disillusion of many communists, who were not convinced by the new watchwords, fluctuating between alternative and government of the honesties¹⁸⁷.

Bruno Ceroli remembered that the day of the 40.000 march he had the sensation that all his world was collapsing because seeing employees, like those who supported him in his union actions, take to the streets against that same aims and against the workers, was something that left him disoriented: a disorientation that will lead him, a few years later, to leave the factory and his role of syndicalist,

¹⁸¹ Miriam Mafai, *Dimenticare Berlinguer*, cit., p. 73.

¹⁸² “*The Democratic Alternative*”.

¹⁸³ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

¹⁸⁴ Emanuele Macaluso, Claudio Petruccioli, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

¹⁸⁵ *Ivi*, p. 247.

¹⁸⁶ Miriam Mafai, *Dimenticare Berlinguer*, cit., p. 73.

¹⁸⁷ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

while continuing to renew the PCI card till the PCI disappearance. Rolando Polli, a militant from Foligno, sent a very critic letter to Pajetta and wrote “[...] unfortunately, if there is still a serious and honest party, it is the Soviet one, for ours it is all to be redone [...]”¹⁸⁸, demolishing in one shot both the democratic alternative strategy and the choice to distance the PCI from Moscow. Moreover, in Andrea Barbato’s documentary about five militants’ experiences within the party, it was precious Cesare Cosi’s interview. Cosi was a Fiat-Mirafiori worker and, answering the question on what signify being a communist worker there, he was very outspoken:

*[...] sicuramente c’è un dato di estrema difficoltà nel vivere la situazione di oggi a Torino come operaio, come comunista e come sindacalista. E più che altro perché a volte non abbiamo la soluzione o la prospettiva per risolvere tutti i problemi e siamo in una continua fase dialettica e di confronto al nostro interno per ricercare quale sia la soluzione migliore tra quelle possibili. [...] il problema oggi è che abbiamo una presenza in termini di lotta che è inferiore rispetto a quella di un tempo perché subiamo un grossissimo attacco all’occupazione, e quando c’è di mezzo l’occupazione tutti gli altri problemi vengono in sott’ordine e conseguentemente alcuni aspetti di autoritarismo e ripresa del controllo anche su aspetti che ritenevamo conquiste definitive il padrone sta recuperando [...] appunto perché la gente ha paura di rispondere a tutte queste cose perché c’è il rischio del posto di lavoro e questo è il problema principale.*¹⁸⁹

Therefore, Cesare Cosi – like his Cassino colleague Antonio Spisani – understood one of the most crucial and anthropological motifs which made un-useful Berlinguer proposals for restructuring politics and identity of Italian communism: the militants’ private recall and its intimate need to secure the conquests of a life in struggle. It was occurring a weakening of participation to PCI initiatives, that of course did not consist in a completely evaporation of communist militancy ritualistic celebration¹⁹⁰, but certainly signified the dawn of the end of party representation as *être supreme*¹⁹¹.

The Italian Communist Party and its militants lived crucial moment of separations, and it cannot be considered just a case that they happened in the years of passage between the decade of hyper-

¹⁸⁸ FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 69/53, 02/03/1981.

¹⁸⁹ “[...] certainly there is a fact of extreme difficulty in living today's situation in Turin as a worker, as a communist and as a trade unionist. And more so because sometimes we don't have the solution or the perspective to solve all the problems and we are in a continuous dialectic and confrontation phase internally to seek what is the best solution among the possible ones. [...] the problem today is that we have a presence in terms of struggle that is less than it used to be because we suffer a very big attack on employment, and when employment is involved all the other problems come in sub-order and consequently some aspects of authoritarianism and resumption of control even on aspects that we thought were final conquests the boss is recovering [...] precisely because people are afraid to respond to all these things because there is the risk of the job and that is the main problem.” – AAMOD, Andrea Barbato, *La prima tessera*, (Rome: Unitelefilm, 1982), TCR 00:50:10:00.

¹⁹⁰ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

¹⁹¹ Massimo De Angelis, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

ideologization, 1970s, and the one of the political bodies' secularizations, 1980s. The illusion of a 1976 victory, the fratricide death of Guido Rossa, the collapse of Soviet mythology and the internal split of working-class brought to the light the communist militants' consciousness perversion which, according to Revelli, took place in the dissolution of "their interiority in the absolute exteriority of the historical process"¹⁹². Except for the elderly militants' generation, who felt to have made history during the resistance and liberation being part of the Italian communism, the party for the new generations has been just a source of betrayals and disillusion for their revolution horizons. The communist newcomers were not willing to accept anymore the idea of a party which "while destroying them as individuals, however, it remained, even in the eyes of internal opponents, the only adequate device to make history that individuals, hired as individuals, could not but suffer, but which they had voted for all themselves"¹⁹³.

In the disclosed 1980s, the Italian Communist Party was lost in confuses political proposal and penetrated by the effect of the societal atomization. The older militants were even corporative, while the younger were even disinterested. The mass movements were becoming mass volunteering, while the new mass media, like private television, were emptying squares and party sections¹⁹⁴. In such scenario of transformation, in this powerful liminal moment¹⁹⁵, Berlinguer and the PCI leadership saw just the dark side of the individualization. The beloved secretary was so scared, as Pasolini, by the hedonism potential immorality to assume an archaic vision of the future based on traditional social structures and demands. For this reason, Berlinguer and his secretary have dedicated all themselves to emancipate the incoming society from the hedonistic sins of modernity in a very Jesuitic way, fallowing the slogan *perinde ac cadaver* that Gian Carlo Pajetta shared with Ignazio da Loyola¹⁹⁶, until the tragic death of the Sardinian secretary and the rise of new young leaders, determinate to change the Italian communist history forever.

¹⁹² Marco Revelli, *Oltre il Novecento*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), p. 206.

¹⁹³ *Ivi*, p. 210.

¹⁹⁴ Emanuele Macaluso, Claudio Petruccioli, *op. cit.*, p. 191; For a focus on the new mass media role see, Giuseppe Vacca, *Vent'anni dopo*, *cit.*, pp. 27-51.

¹⁹⁵ Bjørn Thomassen, *The uses and meanings*, *cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁹⁶ Miriam Mafai, *Botteghe Oscure addio*, *cit.*, p. 53.

CHAPTER TWO

In the Storm, Without a Compass: Communists' Lives in Mid-1980's

*Qualcuno era comunista perché
Berlinguer era una brava persona.¹*

In a 1983 interview, journalist Gianni Minoli wanted to unveil an intimate side of Berlinguer and asked him: “What bothers you about what other people say about yourself?” Berlinguer took few seconds to think and, smiling, replied: “that... I would be sad... because it is not true”². The PCI secretary was often firm and severe in his behaviors and sentiments³. For this reason, his smile appeared even more authentic. However, that carefree expression gave way to an exhausted face in about one year. April 1984 was the eve of a crucial European election for the PCI and, after the unsatisfactory outcome of the 1983 national elections, the communists were looking for a revenge. According to Chiara Valentini, Berlinguer was tense, sometimes distress, as always before the vote⁴ but, this time, the weight of recent years political and ideal battles seems too heavy even for the bolstered shoulders of the frail Sardinian leader.

The early 1980s were marked by an ongoing fragmentation of communist people, which was in turn a consequence of the process of separation outlined above. However, this cannot be understood only like the first symbol of communism decadence, but as the opening of a liminal period, or rather a creative age which is identifiable as a moment of uncertainty where many possibilities lie open⁵. On this premise, Berlinguer's last struggles for a moral renewing of the political system and PCI ideal path cannot assume, by definition, such as the first signs of the inevitable decadence of Italian communism. Instead, they can be analyzed like an initial attempt to use the liminal creative force to re-compose the party social body, renegotiating its identity.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the liminal phase experienced by the Italian communist party during the mid-1980s. Firstly, it is going to offer an overview on Berlinguer's attention for the “communist diversity”⁶ and for new social movements, like pacifism, which he considered as pivotal

¹ “Someone was a communist because Berlinguer was a good person.” – Giorgio Gaber, Sandro Luporini, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

² Gianni Minoli, “Intervista ad Enrico Berlinguer”, in *Mixer*, st. 1983/1984, 27/04/1973, min. 22:57-23:10.

³ Miriam Mafai, *Botteghe Oscure addio*, *cit.*, p. 126.

⁴ Chiara Valentini, *op. cit.*, pos. 6541.

⁵ Bjørn Thomassen, *The uses and meanings*, *cit.*, p. 20.

⁶ Giuseppe Chiarante, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

for the opening of a new course; or, to use an anthropological vocabulary, the engines for activate the liminal creativeness. Secondly, it focuses on the sudden death of Berlinguer and its consequences, which was experienced by communists as a proper “death of father”⁷, or the disappearance of the masters of ceremony – the only capable to conduce the PCI into the ongoing transformative process, such as this research will attempt to prove. Furthermore, it is interesting to look at the liturgical and public celebration of the long farewell to the Sardinian secretary that assumed both national and international significances. Thirdly, it explores Alessandro Natta’s behavior as new party head. It is going to pay attention on the choice to defend Berlinguer’s legacy and his blind will to re-establish a shared sense of purposes, making impossible to manage new political scenarios. Finally, it locates the liminal period undergone by PCI within the wider international context, marked by the advent of Mikael Gorbachev as new Soviet leader. Each section of this analysis relies also on the PCI members narratives about their experiences.

The 1970s faraway triumphs and the illusory renaissance of 1980s *operaismo* were replaced by disappointment, defeats, and internal conflicts. Miriam Mafai described this period like tragic one⁸. The enunciated factors forced Berlinguer to break through party resistances putting repeatedly his resignation on the Central Committee desk. Moreover, the PCI secretary used an even more “prophetic, hermetic, and enigmatic language”⁹ with ambivalent effects among party leadership and militants, concerning above all the project of democratic alternative. Within the party leadership, the *miglioristi* wing saw Berlinguer’s cryptic attitude as the perfect mask for his arbitrary and unclearly motivated political choices. The internal confrontation took on increasingly bitter tones which culminated into an accuse of Caesarism against the secretary¹⁰. Conversely, a renewed enthusiasm pervaded good part of militants through Berlinguer’s appeal to communist diversity. For instance, a comrade from Emilia-Romagna, Laura, declared:

*Mi ha avvicinato al PCI Berlinguer, sicuramente. Io credo di potermi definire una cattocomunista [...] Quindi c’era questa idea anche un po’ rigida di moralità. Quando arriva Berlinguer, che pone la questione seria dell’etica politica, io l’ho sentito molto vicino ed è quello, penso, che mi ha fatto avvicinare.*¹¹

⁷ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

⁸ Miriam Mafai, *Dimenticare Berlinguer cit.*, p. 71.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ivi*, p. 72.

¹¹ “I was brought closer to the PCI by Berlinguer, certainly. I think I can call myself a Catholic-Communist [...] So there was this even somewhat rigid idea of morality. When Berlinguer comes along, who poses the serious question of political ethics, I felt it very close and that's what, I think, brought me closer.” – Claudia Cappelli, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

Nevertheless, there was not an unconditioned affection for the Sardinian secretary in the whole social base even more after moments of doubt and uncertainty such as the rupture with the USSR, and the decision to renegotiate the Italian communism identity. For example, an elderly militant suggested “to send Enrico Berlinguer on holiday and re-study Gramsci”¹². Others of 1968 generation blamed the PCI head not to be bold enough to completely overcome the communist traditions in favor of new democratic and civil rights requests¹³. Thus, Berlinguer’s need to find a link between these two poles – Gramsci on one side, and a novel political field on the other – found its expression in the so-called democratic alternative, a proposal to renovate deeply public life and the political sphere.

In the vision of PCI secretary, the democratic alternative proposal should launch a radical shift in the mutual relations between State, political parties, and society through the coming in power of new governmental forces. The new coalition could rest on the communist party like pivotal actor, legitimated to govern by its moral diversity, and should be integrated by figures coming from outside the political-party spectrum, such as technicians. For historian Francesco Barbagallo this prospective “was essentially political, it aspired to combine democracy and socialism, also in noble and utopistic characters, of Gramscianian reminiscence”¹⁴. However, the secretariat underestimates the difficulties that this moralistic entrenchment would generate: first and foremost, the impossibility to find new allies open to accept the communist pivotal role. The failure of the project would isolate the PCI in the political arena till the collapse of the “First Republic”¹⁵.

As a consequence of the proposal, a new energy rose vibrantly among the communist ranks, Bruno Trentin said “we felt as if liberated”¹⁶, whereas Miriam Mafai detected in the choice for diversity “a retreat, haughty and proud, into a safe redoubt, into a trench in which to shelter”¹⁷ from the overwhelming rush of the new times. Berlinguer for his part could now propose a renewed political

¹² FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0486, 1943, 24/10/1980.

¹³ Claudia Capelli, *op. cit.*, p. 230. – Here, very interesting is also the rejection of Berlinguer’s mythization made by Nicola, a militant from Emilia Romagna who stated “*I have always had since my education little ability to get excited about popes, and so even the party secretary never influenced me more than what he said or what he proposed. I did not have the myth, for example, as far as Berlinguer's speech is concerned I never experienced it. He certainly represented an important part of the party even if it was with a lot of timidity and with a lot of ... it used to be called a way of working within the party considering all the different components, the famous democratic centralism. I was definitely not a Berlinguer's fan.*”

¹⁴ Francesco Barbagallo, “Il PCI dal sequestro di Moro alla morte di Berlinguer”, in *Studi Storici*, Vol. 42, No. 4, (2001), p. 865.

¹⁵ With the term First Republic is indicated the political system which had governed Italy until 1992 and collapsed because of a series of domestic and international changes such as the end of the Cold War and Tangentopoli inquiry on political parties’ illegal founding. For an interesting study of the First Republic political transition see, Filippo Focardi, “Il passato conteso: transizione politica e guerra della memoria in Italia dalla crisi della prima Repubblica ad oggi”, in Filippo Focardi, Bruno Groppo, eds., *L'Europa e le sue memorie: politiche e culture del ricordo dopo il 1989*, (Rome: Viella, 2013), pp. 51-91.

¹⁶ Miriam Mafai, *Dimenticare Berlinguer*, *cit.*, p. 75.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

offer to militants who had distanced themselves from the party of historical compromise, like the elderly Alfredo Muzi who wrote:

Nel 1946 scelsi il Partito Comunista Italiano perché nutrivo in esso stima e fiducia, perché aveva combattuto e vinto l'assassino di Gramsci, perché ritenevo il partito candido e dalle mani pulite, dotato di una fede incrollabile. In questi ultimi tempi ha peccato di sottomissione al partito degli scandali [...] fingendo di ignorare tutto ciò che doveva essere denunciato con fermezza all'opinione pubblica, all'elettorato più morto che vivo di cui il partito degli scandali se ne fa tesoro procurandosi in tal modo la nomina di complice [...] Questo stato di cose di cui sopra mi rattrista, mi spinge con vivo rincrescimento a restituirvi la tessera dopo 31 anni d'iscrizione¹⁸.

Therefore, it is undeniable that there was also in the communist body politic the strong need to reaffirm themselves through a distinctive morality, which for the PCI leadership also marked an irreconcilable difference with the other parties, not only the DC but also the PSI led by Bettino Craxi.

It was precisely in this moment that an earthquake shook Italian politics and the republican institutions of the country. On March 17, 1981, in the context of the Sindona's investigation, the militaries of *Guardia di Finanza* find out a long list of names searching among documents and registers of Licio Gelli¹⁹. The names were numerous: hundreds of armed forces officers, magistrates, public managers, and dozens of parliamentarians, including three ministers such as Enrico Manca, socialist Minister of Foreign Trade²⁰. The magnitude of the scandal was overwhelming and shrouded in a blanket of mysteries still not fully explained today.

¹⁸ “In 1946 I chose the Italian Communist Party because I had esteem and confidence in it, because it had fought and defeated Gramsci's murderer, because I considered the party candid and with clean hands, endowed with an unshakable faith. In recent times it has sinned by submission to the party of scandals [...] pretending to ignore all that needed to be firmly denounced to public opinion, to the electorate more dead than alive of which the party of scandals treasures by thus procuring for itself the nomination of accomplice [...] This situation above saddens me, prompts me with keen regret to return your membership after 31 years of membership.” – FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0467, 2073, 16/05/1980.

¹⁹ The Italian banker Michele Sindona was repeatedly investigated for fraudulent bankruptcy and recognized as the instigator of the murder of lawyer Giorgio Ambrosoli, who was appointed liquidator of Sindona's bank and finances following the Calvi's affair. That inquest also involved a puzzling character: Licio Gelli. He was identified as the head of the Masonic Lodge P2, involved in several investigation and condemned for bankruptcy of Banco Ambrosiano. Moreover, the Master of P2 Lodge is considered still today, by Bologna district attorney's office, one of the instigators of the terroristic attack against Bologna train station on August 2, 1980. For an overview on Michele Sindona's saga see, Marco Magnani, *Sindona. Biografia degli anni Settanta*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2016) and the article by Antonella Bilotto, Andrea Zaghi, “Michele Sindona, una storia di banche e malaffare”, in *Il Mulino. Rivista trimestrale di cultura e politica*, No. 5, (2016), pp. 909-915. While for a better understanding of Gelli's P2 it is interesting the reconstruction given through the diaries of DC deputy Tina Anselmi, who chaired the Parliamentary commissions on that case, thus see, Anna Vinci, *La P2 nei diari segreti di Tina Anselmi*, (Milan: Chiarelettere, 2016).

²⁰ Massimo L. Salvadori, *op. cit.*, p. 436. – For a detailed and interactive reconstruction of the P2 affair listen Lorenzo Baravalle, Lorenzo Pregliasco, “L'altra faccia della luna: Licio Gelli e la P2”, in *Qui si fa l'Italia*, Spotify Original Podcast, 12/07/2022.

Gelli's records had revealed the existence of the P2 Masonic lodge that he led having subversive and authoritarian aims. According to Massimo Salvadori, The "Plan of Democratic Resurgence" – prepared by Gelli – displayed "how the attack on legality and institutions was no longer conducted only by subversive groups of the extreme right and extreme left and by criminal organizations, but also by a ramified and vast group of members of the ruling class who, moved by the persuasion that the institutions were in the grip of an organic crisis, were secretly plotting against the democratic-parliamentary system gripped by a silent solidarity of political-mafia type"²¹.

Overcoming that structural crisis of the system was the legitimate and declared goal of the PCI which now could regain consensus attesting his diversity from a contaminated political environment. On July 28, 1981, Berlinguer released an interview to Eugenio Scalfari which was the apotheosis of communists' moral condemn:

*I partiti hanno occupato lo Stato e tutte le istituzioni, a partire dal governo [...] Insomma, tutto è già lottizzato e spartito o si vorrebbe lottizzare e spartire. E il risultato è drammatico [...] La questione morale non si esaurisce nel fatto che, essendoci dei ladri, dei corrotti, dei concussori in alte sfere della politica e dell'amministrazione, bisogna scovarli, bisogna denunciarli e bisogna metterli in galera. La questione morale, nell'Italia d'oggi, fa tutt'uno con l'occupazione dello Stato da parte dei partiti governativi e delle loro correnti, fa tutt'uno con la guerra per bande, fa tutt'uno con la concezione della politica e con i metodi di governo di costoro, che vanno semplicemente abbandonati e superati. Ecco perché dico che la questione morale è al centro del problema italiano.*²²

The *questione morale* allowed the PCI to break the silence which had accompanied the party since the final events of separations, such as the march of the 40.000 and the Polish crisis. Berlinguer's voice regain momentum after being constricted to a subdued status. Indeed, the Sardinian secretary understood the ideal potential, that the moral complaint possessed, and he decided to exploit it for reinforcing the communist identity. Berlinguer presented the communist party as renovated through the pride of its history and choices of struggle against privileges. The PCI, its hierarchies and militants should have become an entity "uncontaminated and nearly featured of salvific virtues"²³.

²¹ Massimo L. Salvadori, *op. cit.*, p. 436.

²² "The parties have occupied the state and all institutions, starting with the government [...] In short, everything is already allotted and divided, or one would like to allot and divide. And the result is dramatic [...] The moral issue does not end in the fact that, since there are thieves, corrupt, extortionists in high spheres of politics and administration, they must be tracked down, they must be denounced, and they must be put in jail. The moral issue, in today's Italy, is at one with the occupation of the state by governmental parties and their currents, it is at one with gang warfare, it is at one with their conception of politics and their methods of government, which must simply be abandoned and overcome. Therefore, I say that the moral issue is at the heart of the Italian problem." – Enrico Berlinguer, Eugenio Scalfari, "Marziani o Missionari", in *La Repubblica*, 28/07/1981.

²³ Miriam Mafai, *Dimenticare Berlinguer*, *cit.*, p. 77.

While the new political-identity line could boast sympathies of a large sector of the grassroots communists, but also outside the party, many members of the PCI leadership had reservations and concerns on the effectiveness of *questione morale* in electoral and political terms. For example, Alessandro Natta noted:

*Le cose sono dette in modo irritante: gli altri sono ladri noi non abbiamo voluto diventarlo! C'è una verità sostanziale, ma il tono è moralistico, settario, nel senso di una superiorità da eletti, da puri [...] Il rischio che la critica delle pratiche in atto possa divenire critica della funzione dei partiti c'è, che la condanna appaia generale e sommaria, che il metro di giudizio risulti quello morale e non quello politico... che la contrapposizione tra gli altri e noi diventi così profonda da non lasciare margine a nessuna politica, da isolarci, da alimentare una intransigenza morale, una denuncia radicale ma sterile!*²⁴

The excessive moralistic attack, principally against the socialists²⁵, was condemned also by Giorgio Napolitano without mincing his words. On August 21, 1981, Napolitano criticized Berlinguer, who was repeatedly accused of being incapable of promoting new policies by moving “on the reformist terrain” and concentrating instead on “pure verbal confrontations or empty invective”²⁶. Notwithstanding, the greatest reproach seemed to be that Berlinguer had forgotten the “tireless united insistence” and “renewing openness”²⁷ which “The Greatest”²⁸ secretary had toward Pietro Nenni’s PSI and the early center-left alliances. Basically, Napolitano condemned the Sardinian leader for forgetting Togliatti’s teaching of engagement with the socialists in name of his proud assertion of diversity.

Berlinguer and Napolitano embedded more than half of the PCI orientations, and both adopted meaningless instrument to read the *questione morale* in the light of the enormous changes of 1980s. On one side, the head of PCI parliamentary representatives was eager for realizing an Italian Bad Godesberg and for dialoging with the socialist older brother, lacking completely to comprehend how keenly felt the sense of ideal and cultural diversity, even before political programming, was in communist community. On the other side, the highest communist authority once again failed to

²⁴ “Things are said in an irritating way: others are thieves we did not want to become thieves! There is a substantive truth, but the tone is moralistic, sectarian, in the sense of a superiority of the elect, of the pure [...] There is a risk that the critique of current practices may become a critique of the function of the parties, that the condemnation may appear general and summary, that the yardstick of judgment may turn out to be the moral and not the political one... that the opposition between the others and us may become so deep as to leave no margin for any politics, to isolate us, to feed a moral intransigence, a radical but sterile denunciation!” – Miriam Mafai, *Dimenticare Berlinguer*, cit., p. 78.

²⁵ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

²⁶ Giorgio Napolitano, “Perché è essenziale il richiamo a Togliatti”, in *l’Unità*, 21/08/1981.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ This is the direct English translation of Palmiro Togliatti’s nickname: *Il Migliore*.

understand when the conjugation of the party's messianic nature and his diffidence toward the modern were deleterious for PCI achievements. Berlinguer's renegotiation of communist identity based on rediscovered moral exceptionalism certainly increased the affection of the militants, who had always self-represented themselves as a "chosen people" with a revolutionary horizon to pursue.

As historian Marco Albeltaro has written, "paradoxically, the fact of feeling involved in a movement that would like to revolutionize society constitutes a stronger element of cohesion than the fact of feeling part of a community that has already revolutionized it. [...] this element of hyper-activism, of continual striving toward a goal to be achieved holds together, unifies lifestyles and political cultures, and creates a community, a sub-society"²⁹. However, in parallel, it diminished the ability to engage the new electoral masses of 1980s, especially those conditioned by the *riflusso*, without whom the PCI would never be able to become an efficacious force for societal transformation.

Massimo Salvadori, commenting the attitude of the PCI secretary, affirmed that "his insistence, fully motivated, on the gravity of the moral issue that plagued Italy [...] took on the taste of a more moralistic than political perspective in a country where corruptive practices spread [...] – in the form of benefits derived from patronage, parasitic welfare, tax evasion, etc. – in a large proportion of the population"³⁰. The Piedmontese historian's interpretation was reinforced also by the insufficient electoral results of 1983. That ballot signed a move back for the communists, who obtain the lower percentage since 1976³¹.

Using the creative forces originated by the ongoing liminal experience, Berlinguer undertook a prudent way toward modern political platforms for stopping the communists' increasing losing of consensus, despite their recuperated passion. This openness toward the newness implied a sort of "violence on himself"³², but it seemed the last possibility to shape a future coherent with communist long heritage of avant-gardism.

²⁹ Marco Albeltaro, "Cultura politica, stili di vita e dimensione esistenziale. I comunisti italiani", in Francesca Chiarotto, eds, *Aspettando il Sessantotto: continuità e fratture nelle culture politiche italiane dal 1956 al 1968*, (Turin: Accademia University Press, 2017), p. 39.

³⁰ Massimo L. Salvadori, *op. cit.*, p. 444.

³¹ Simona Colarizi, *op. cit.*, p.153. – The PCI electoral result of 1983 national elections corresponded at the lowest percentage after the communist exploit of 1976, attesting the party around 29,9%. Probably, the acquiescent reading of the communist vote was endorsed by the grievous DC loss of consensus. Indeed, the Christian Democracy passed from the 38,3% of 1979 to the 32,9% of 1983.

³² Lucio Magri in AAMOD, *L'addio a Enrico Berlinguer*, fasc. 4, busta 1, 12/06/1984-05/06/1985, TCR: 01:11:17:00 – 01:13:02:20.

2.1 The Pursuit of Modernity: Communist Openness to the Contamination of 1980s Novelties

In the Italian communist universe, there was widening diversity. A diversity of purposes and views toward the future, typical of the ideal and strategic fluidity, that the party experienced during its last decade of life. This dimension caused a two-speed trend between the leadership and the social base, a generational divide in the communist community, and the need for the leadership to ideally rethink itself and the party. The *questione morale* and the proposal of the democratic alternative had strained Berlinguer's consensus within the party hierarchies, so much so that he had repeatedly pushed him to wonder about a step backward. Moreover, the Sardinian leader personally felt an increasing difficulty in combining his two inclinations: his being a moralist attached to the tradition and an innovative and creative man. Such conflicts troubled the PCI leader in a way that perhaps only Moro's death had done so far. Valentini wrote in this regard that Berlinguer was tired and for the first time spoke in public of the possibility of retiring³³. At the TV show *Tribuna Politica*, he said:

*Se io poi abbia ancora le forze, le energie per continuare a ricoprire la responsabilità che ho, questa è una questione che esiste e sulla quale discuteranno certamente gli organi dirigenti e sulla quale avrò anch'io la mia parola da dire*³⁴.

This statement generated a certain astonishment. For Adalberto Minucci, Berlinguer's possible departure from the secretariat would have been considered by the Sardinian politician himself a "lesson of secularism"³⁵ capable of downplaying the burden of that office. On May 25, 1982, celebrating Berlinguer's 60th birthday, Paolo Bufalini had signed a portrait of the secretary – ritualistically published in the pages of *L'Unità* – placing a special focus "on the wearisome fatigue" and "continuous tension" that gripped the life of the PCI's highest office³⁶.

That kind of fatalistic reading of communist leader's fate touched the innermost chords of a person, such fair-minded and prone to sacrifice as Berlinguer. The latest political and ideal distresses of the communist people thus seemed to dictate an "ever more constant search for secularism"³⁷ to unload even the burden of militancy, at every level. The tendency toward secularism – which according to Possieri was expressing, at its best, in the attribution of "academic character"³⁸ to historical research

³³ Chiara Valentini, *op. cit.*, pos. 6127.

³⁴ "Whether I then still have the strength, the energy to continue the responsibility I have, that is a question that exists and on which the governing bodies will certainly discuss and on which I will also have my say." – *Ibidem*.

³⁵ *Ivi*, p. 6143.

³⁶ Paolo Bufalini, "Continuità e innovazione nella politica del PCI", in *L'Unità*, 25/05/1982, p. 3.

³⁷ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

on the PCI and the workers' movement – seemed to have also made inroads into the human attitudes of much of the communist social body, from leaders to voters. Again, perfect testimony of this process of political spaces humanization are the words that the Sardinian secretary confided to Minucci: “I want to be the first secretary of the PCI to live alive”³⁹. Unfortunately, he did not come through it.

Naturally, Berlinguer – as long as he lived – would never leave the party before having conducted it throughout the enormous changes produced by both neo-liberalism development and ideological secularization. With the aim of succeed in this task, the PCI secretary had the extreme need to shake off some of the strongly ideological and traditionalist bearing that had marked the launching of the democratic alternative, hinged on communist diversity. In a certain sense, the “last” Berlinguer was certainly “a hard and pure man”, as Luciano Lama certified with respect to the period of “very difficult and ungrateful”⁴⁰ tensions related to the Craxi government's *Scala Mobile* decree⁴¹. However, he appeared also “new”⁴² or, at least, determined to open himself and his PCI to new horizons reinvigorating and renewing the whole party in term of political culture and strategy. A precursor to these openings was the interview with Ferdinando Adornato in December 1983. One of the happiest. One of the communist secretary's last.

In Adornato's interview – entitled *Verso il Duemila* and inspired by Orwell's *1984* – Berlinguer expressed a novel spirit, which assume the feature of a futuristic “utopia of long times”⁴³, especially regarding the realistic possibility to realize a worldwide disarmament. In that occasion, Longo's successor proved wrong the “millennial pessimism”⁴⁴ that many used to attribute to him. Dialoguing with the journalist of the party newspaper, Berlinguer seemed remodeled its thought about the present to assert that there was not just fear for the future, but also the “will for millions of men and women to not leave that fundamental issues of their lives were decided by someone else”⁴⁵.

Thus, he wanted to word off the idea of an inevitable defeat predicted by Orwell's masterpiece and underline the power of “new energies, new minds and new forces”⁴⁶ creativity, which 1980s age of fractures⁴⁷ was generating. Understandably, the maturation of such a new conception of the present had not matured in a short time such as Berlinguer's interview in 1982 documentary *La Prima Tesserà*

³⁹ Chiara Valentini, *op. cit.*, pos. 6143.

⁴⁰ Luciano Lama, *Intervista sul mio cit.*, pp. 127-135.

⁴¹ The term “*scala mobile*” indicates an economic instrument for salaries policy for indexing automatically the salaries depending on prices. Its aim is to contrast the decrease of purchasing power caused by rise in inflation and costs of life. For a valuable focus on the effect that the cost-of-leaving escalator had on Italian economy since 1977 see, Marco Manacorda, “Can the Scala Mobile Explain the Fall and Rise of Earnings Inequality in Italy? A Semiparametric Analysis, 1977–1993”, in *Journal of Labor Economics*, Vol. 22, No. 3, (2004), pp. 585-613.

⁴² Chiara Valentini, *op. cit.*, pos. 6324.

⁴³ Ferdinando Adornato, “Verso il Duemila”, in *l'Unità*, 18/12/1983.

⁴⁴ Chiara Valentini, *op. cit.*, pos. 6318.

⁴⁵ Ferdinando Adornato, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2012).

shows. On that occasion, the communist secretary debated, perhaps for the first time openly, the opportunity to rethink even the concept of militancy.

*[...] oggi la situazione è più complessa e le scelte più difficili e naturalmente oltre a quell'impulso fondamentale occorre anche una convinzione sulla necessità di militare attivamente in un'organizzazione che possieda determinati obiettivi che non sono solo quelli finalistici della costruzione di una società superiore [...] con misura l'uomo e tutti i suoi bisogni, ma occorre anche una convinzione sulla necessità di organizzarsi e impegnarsi per risolvere i grandi problemi della umanità di oggi e dell'Italia di oggi, da quello della pace a quello della occupazione [...] e occorre al tempo stesso [...] saper comprendere non esiste soltanto la milizia del partito ma esistono oggi forme di impegno politico diffuso che non tutte si riconoscono e non tutte possono essere integrate nei partiti, e nello stesso partito comunista, ma che noi dobbiamo saper comprendere.*⁴⁸

These words hinted at Berlinguer's awareness that he was facing a new era, in which the party was no longer the gravitational center of political and social activism. For example, pacifism had been a catalyzing force of many ideal resources that had allowed the PCI to open new horizons or even re-establish frayed relationships with other left movements, inherited from the long 1970s.

Indeed, the peace movement was a place for shared battles and “family reunions” as evidenced by the simultaneous participation of Luciana Castellina, Lucio Magri and Pio La Torre at the outstanding manifestation against the Cruise missiles installation in Comiso. Pino Santarelli – a former communist militant switched to Party of Proletarian Union – remembered as the human wave greeted the two leaders of PDUP and the leader of the Sicilian PCI section, who were observing together the parade⁴⁹. This visual reunion of the left became proper to the lived experience of militants like Santarelli for whom the one in Comiso was not surprisingly the last manifestation with the PDUP before his final return to the PCI ranks. An equally impactful event was the Peace March held in Assisi on October 10, 1983. In that occasion Berlinguer got carried away in eulogizing a saint for the first time in his life. He described Francis as a “madman” capable of opposing church hierarchies to challenge the “reasonableness” of crusades and the distinction between “just wars” and “unjust wars”⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ “[...] today the situation is more complex and the choices more difficult, and of course in addition to that fundamental impulse there is also a need for a conviction about the necessity of actively militating in an organization that possesses certain objectives that are not only the finalistic ones of building a superior society [...] with measure man and all his needs, but we also need a conviction about the need to organize and commit ourselves to solving the great problems of humanity today and Italy today, from that of peace to that of employment [...] and we need at the same time [...] to know how to understand there is not only the militia of the party but there are today forms of widespread political commitment that not all recognize themselves and not all can be integrated into the parties, and into the Communist Party itself, but that we must know how to understand.” – AAMOD, *La Prima Tessera*, cit., TCR: 00:45:06:00.

⁴⁹ Pino Santarelli, *op. cit.*, pos. 3074.

⁵⁰ Chiara Valentini, *op. cit.*, pos. 6335.

Both these pacifist events had a lowest common denominator: the involvement of young people. The youth issue had become very complex for the party to handle over the years. The violence of 1977 and the ebb had marked a rift between young and old that appeared impossible to heal. Yet the need to revitalize the party was felt by the leadership, as well as by the grassroots militants themselves. In a letter to Gian Carlo Pajetta, comrade Reggio Battista condensed some of these concerns:

[...] sarebbe logicissimo, che a tutti i livelli raccogliessero i frutti di quanto seminato tra i giovani (questi hanno sempre costituito l'unica nostra grande speranza) ma, a me non pare, che questa condizione esista realmente. Nelle provincie che conosco più da vicino i giovani attivi sono pochissimi e, secondo me, sono insufficientemente attivi, non lavorano a "tempo pieno" ma soprattutto non sono "saldati" bene alle lotte e alle esperienze del passato e quindi con prospettive per l'avvenire purtroppo scarsissimi. La saldatura tra vecchie e nuove generazioni, perché sia tale, deve avvenire con lo scambio di esperienze e nel reciproco rispetto. In queste province piemontesi, la FGCI è ridotta al lumicino e non esiste più. I giovani non ci seguono più. Nemmeno quelli che hanno tendenze progressiste. Chiunque dica il contrario falsa tutto.⁵¹

The crisis of the FGCI⁵² and youth involvement was under the eyes of many leaders for years, even though they had repeatedly neglected its importance. The "new" Berlinguer wanted to find a solution, however, this could no longer be the "militarization" of the youth militancy. The PCI secretary pushed for a major involvement thorough innovative parallel ways, just provided that common interest to

⁵¹ "[...] it would be most logical, that at all levels they would reap the fruits of what they sowed among the youth (these have always constituted our only great hope) but, it does not seem to me, that this condition really exists. In the provinces I know most closely, there are very few active young people, and, in my opinion, they are insufficiently active, not working "full time" but, above all, not "welded" well to the struggles and experiences of the past and therefore with prospects for the future unfortunately very poor. The welding between old and new generations, for it to be such, must take place with the exchange of experiences and in mutual respect. In these Piedmontese provinces, the FGCI is down to its lowest ebb and no longer exists. Young people no longer follow us. Not even those who have progressive tendencies. Anyone who says otherwise is falsifying everything." – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 70/56, 30/04/1982.

⁵² The crisis of communist youth movement was acknowledgeable also through young militants' letters which arrived to Botteghe Oscure, like the one of the FGCI comrade, Maria Cristina Cecchini: "Dear Comrade Berlinguer, I want to explain to you in outline the organizational situation of the FGCI in the Marches. Today this is the most important issue: our image in the eyes of young people has changed positively while an organizational weakness persists. In particular, we are unable to organize the presence of the FGCI in municipalities above 5,000 and even more so in urban centers. [...] my letter is meant to bring to your attention a disastrous relationship with the party federations, particularly those in Pesaro and Ancona. After years of "non-relationship" where the FGCI lived a minority life, sometimes even giving up the political battle to assert a PCI line more suited to the problems of the youth condition, there has been a exasperation of relations (e.g., the drug law, on the student movement in schools, demands for young candidates on PCI lists), and as a result we now have the FGCI leadership groups of Pesaro and Ancona on the line of wait-and-see and giving up militancy. The situation in Ancona after the provincial secretary of the FGCI submitted his resignation because he was not being put in a position to work, was finally discussed, concluding with a real commitment of the party for the future. Good relations with the party in the federations (in the sections except in rare cases the situation is improving) are the condition for being able to rebuild the FGCI." – FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0485, 0585, 05/07/1980.

transform present society. The engagement of young people went through new fields like feminism, pacifism, and environment, used for arresting the hemorrhage of electoral consensus too. According to historian Paolo Capuzzo, it worked till 1983 election but without guarantee the hoped-for recovery of votes in subsequent years⁵³.

The cause of negative result was quite often linked to the unclearness of Berlinguer's last strategic proposal of democratic alternative and the pursuing of *questione morale*. However, this conception bypass two crucial elements: the militants reading of Berlinguer's proposals and his last effort to win his resistance to modernity. As regard the first point, there was a great discordance among the militants' position on the *questione morale*. For instance, Nicla Ghironi reported a confrontation with another comrade and friend Miranda which showed perfectly the two faces of the party and its militancy. Ghironi underlined how the PCI was losing its ideal creativity, and becoming even more unimaginative⁵⁴, not for the extremely ethical position of its secretary, but cause the excessive bureaucratization of the structure.

*I miei scopi sono quelli di desiderare un PCI di grande attualità, non quelli di servirmi del PCI per eventuali mie cariche politiche e se devo fare delle critiche le voglio fare apertamente e liberamente. [...] io non ce l'ho col PCI nel suo complesso, io ce l'ho coi dirigenti nazionali e periferici. Berlinguer è Berlinguer, ma tutti gli altri sono guardiani del faro, certi anche scemi o disonesti... certo, però, che Berlinguer non valuta quali sono gli effetti che lui stesso produce nel partito! Lui è persona etica, lui ha una passione politica autentica, lui ama davvero i popoli e vorrebbe riscattarli dalla miseria ... forse anche da quella culturale ... ma tutti gli altri se ne fregano di queste cose e usano Berlinguer nel più bieco dei modi.*⁵⁵

These words found an immediate back and forth with comrade Miranda, which had a total opposite vision.

M: Io tutta questa passione per Berlinguer non ce l'ho, è un moralista insopportabile. [...] Berlinguer predica cose difficili per qualsiasi militante.

⁵³ Paolo Capuzzo, "Trasformazioni postindustriali e consumi", in Silvio Pons, eds., *Il comunismo italiano*, cit., p. 602.

⁵⁴ ADN, Nicla Ghironi, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁵⁵ "My aims are to desire a topical PCI, not to use the PCI for any political posts of my own, and if I must make criticisms, I want to make them openly and freely. [...] I do not resent the PCI as a whole, I resent the national and peripheral leaders. Berlinguer is Berlinguer, but everyone else is a lighthouse keeper, some of them even dumb or dishonest... of course, though, Berlinguer does not evaluate what effects he himself produces in the party! He is an ethical person, he has a genuine political passion, he really loves the people and would like to redeem them from misery ... perhaps even from cultural misery ... but everyone else doesn't give a damn about these things and uses Berlinguer in the most vicious of ways." – Ivi, p. 92.

*N: Solo per quei disoccupati che intendono trovare occupazione nel partito e per quegli ambiziosi che vogliono governare a tutti i costi e che hanno mire ministeriali...*⁵⁶

Therefore, the militants developed a dual reading of Berlinguer's proposal which contributed to questioning the morality of communists' cadres and base and not just the one of their opponents. A sort of self-analysis that remained silent under the leadership of Berlinguer – who as a messiah⁵⁷ seemed to purify alone, with his ethics, the entire communist community – and that exploded, pervading the party and posing the theme of the ability to win and govern, at the time of the final transformative stage of the Italian Communist Party. This attitude made the party's base and hierarchies shun in an internal debate on the theoretical lines of the secretariat while it was diminishing the capacity to involve an up-dated initiatives that movements capable to attract new masses of activists, such as the newfound feminism wave⁵⁸.

The *questione morale* – consequently also to the effects it began to have within the PCI – turned into a kind of boomerang against Enrico Berlinguer. The morality required for others became imperative for communists as well, but above all it was rooted in a traditionalism that the PCI secretary understood was destined to be outmoded in the rapid period of change as liminal as that experienced in the mid-1980s. Nevertheless, he continued undaunted in his openness to renewal and modernity, which also became increasingly clear in his words. The PCI secretary, who said “this century had three great revolutions: the Soviet and Chinese ones, the anticolonial movement of 1950s and the feminist movement”⁵⁹, was a completely different leader since he had glorified Maria Goretti offering her as an example of virtue for Italian girls⁶⁰.

Moreover, Berlinguer appeared more conscious that the cultural transformation of the society could be helpful to reinvigorate the party's image. Indeed, an updated PCI portray was necessary for bringing militants back to participate politics with renewed heart and passion. This hopefully would

⁵⁶ “M: I don't have all this passion for Berlinguer, he is an insufferable moralist. [...] Berlinguer preaches difficult things for any militant; N: Only for those unemployed people who intend to find employment in the party and for those ambitious people who want to govern at all costs and who have ministerial aims...” – ADN, Nicola Ghironi, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁵⁷ Miriam Mafai, *Botteghe Oscure addio*, *cit.*, p. 129.

⁵⁸ For a specific focus on the relation between PCI and feminist movement see, Maud Anne Bracke, “Una rivoluzione incompiuta: la sfida del femminismo negli anni Settanta e Ottanta”, in Silvio Pons, eds., *Il comunismo italiano*, *cit.*, pp. 517-538. Moreover, for a peculiar analysis of the party's engagement with women movements see also, Gianluca Fantoni, “Women's Issues, Feminism, and the PCI”, in *Italy through the Red Lens. Italian Politics and Society in Communist Propaganda Films. 1946-1979*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 223-242.

⁵⁹ Chiara Valentini, *op. cit.*, pos. 6373.

⁶⁰ *Ivi*, p. 6379 – During 1950s, Enrico Berlinguer at that time leader of the FGCI used the figure of Maria Goretti, who was killed for defending her virginity, and the one of Irma Bandiera, a partisan tortured by Nazi to protect her comrades, such as two examples of moral virtue for the Italian girls. For a general analysis of these two characters see, Kathleen Z. Young, “The Imperishable Virginity of Saint Maria Goretti”, in *Gender and Society*, Vol. 3, No. 4, (1989), pp. 474-482, and Leo Goretti, “Irma Bandiera and Maria Goretti: gender role models for communist girls Italy. (1945-1956)”, in *Twenty Century Communism*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (2012), pp. 14-37.

also reinstate into communist party whom “had rediscovered the subtle membranes of poetry out of social reality”⁶¹, according to Ghironi’s romantic description of militants withdrawn from high political participation to return in the private. For this reason, the PCI head’s decision to open the party’s doors to new categories of intellectuals and artists, also from mass media such as cinema, to let them contaminate the party took on important value. The Sardinian secretary, who allowed himself to be picked up by one of this new artist Roberto Benigni on the stage of FGCI manifestation for the peace held in Rome on 16 June 1983, was no longer the same austere man who had experienced a confrontational relationship with Pier Paolo Pasolini. Enrico Berlinguer was no longer identifiable only as the silently charismatic leader of the Italian Communist Party but for many people, communists and non-communists alike, evolved into “a poet of our time”⁶².

Italy seemed to return to breathe air of freedom after a period in which the “lead” had kept her down. Berlinguer tried to initiate the party to something new, encountering new sectors of Italian social activism. One of the ways, he had, it was to overcome his fears of the uncertainty of modern times, but the resistances he himself had generated, by proposing a government alternative of impossible realization could, not but weigh on his last months of secretariat. In the weeks between 1984 winter and spring, the creativity of the communist masters of ceremony seemed to fade away to permit the last return of two memorable pivotal elements of Berlinguer’s communist proposal: the attention for the working class and the moral-ideal effort, now directed against Craxi’s idea of socialism.

2.2 The Last Duel: Berlinguer, Craxi and the Defense of the Underdogs

In August 1983, the President of the Republic Sandro Pertini nominated a socialist leader as Prime Minister for the first time in Italian history. Bettino Craxi formed a governmental coalition with the Christian Democracy and other three party – PSDI, PRI, PLI⁶³. Into the *pentapartito*⁶⁴ there was only one absolute rule that Bettino Craxi would never allow the slightest exception: the absolute exclusion of the Italian Communist Party. The strong anti-communism sentiment of Milanese socialist leader and the Sardinian secretary extraordinary distrust towards the political recklessness of his opponent transformed their dispute into a “zero-sum game”, in which “either one won or the other won”⁶⁵.

⁶¹ ADN, Nicola Ghironi, *op. cit.* p. 47.

⁶² AAMOD, *Berlinguer e Benigni al Pincio*, 16/06/1983, TCR: 00:59:02:18.

⁶³ Massimo L. Salvadori, *op. cit.*, p. 439.

⁶⁴ “Five-Party Coalition” – For a general overview on the history of this political coalition see, Martin J. Bull, “The Pentapartito”, in Erik Jones, Gianfranco Pasquino, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 296-308.

⁶⁵ Emanuele Macaluso, Claudio Petruccioli, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

However, the discord was beyond the incommunicability of their different political strategies. In this regard, Gianni Minoli suggests: “for two personalities, two worldviews so different, so opposite, there was just an anthropological difficulty in understanding each other, not a mutual ill will. Berlinguer calls Craxi a poker player [...] and Craxi calls Berlinguer a utopian communist. Meaning, they were made to not understand each other on their own cultural level. Basically, on the human level there was no special grudge against each other, but they were made to not reciprocal understand, just ethically”⁶⁶.

The political clash between the two was at times very violent. On the one hand, Berlinguer, after the end of national solidarity, had attempted an ineffective reconstruction of the political strategy of the PCI, which in fact had ended up splitting the party further. Moreover, the need to renegotiate a new identity for Italian communism in the light of international and domestic separations entailed a task that, would have been abruptly interrupted by the departure of Berlinguer. On the other hand, Bettino Craxi experienced an ascending climax for his personal leadership and the centrality of his party. After the successful conquest of the PSI leadership, together with a group of young (forty-something) friends and comrades, in the new decade the Milanese politician had assumed such a significant political weight that he was the first socialist to go inside Palazzo Chigi⁶⁷. Craxi had the opportunity to follow a path that could be reconciled in the end with that of the Communist Party – especially with the approach of Napolitano’s *miglioristi* wing – but he had decided “to abandon this road to open a real dispute between the two parties of the left”⁶⁸.

As a matter of fact, Berlinguer kept almost always the door closed, despite also the request to changing its approach toward the Italian Socialist Party, coming not only from PCI directorship but also from some militants. For example, a Sicilian comrade criticized the return of *operaismo* because it has implied consequences on Craxi’s consensus.

*Il Pci sembra rivolgersi oramai solamente alla classe operaia, quando questa oggi nel suo insieme non è più del 20% del popolo italiano. È così difficile rendersi conto che il vostro atteggiamento, oltre ad aggravare le fratture della sinistra, fa il gioco di Craxi che cerca a destra il suo nuovo maggiore spazio.*⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Lorenzo Baravalle, Lorenzo Pregliasco, “Bettino Craxi, ascesa e caduta di un leader”, in *Qui si fa l’Italia*, Spotify Original Podcast, 26/07/2022, min. 25:17-25:50.

⁶⁷ Palazzo Chigi is the Italian Prime Minister’s headquarter. For a brief study on Craxi’s experience as Prime Minister see, Vincenzo Iacovisi, “1983-1987. Un Socialista a Palazzo Chigi. I Governi Craxi e il Pentapartito”, in *Federalismi.it*, No. 16, (2013), pp. 1-17.

⁶⁸ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

⁶⁹ “The PCI now seems to address only the working class when this today as a whole is no more than 20 percent of the Italian people. It is so difficult to realize that your attitude, besides aggravating the fractures of the left, plays into the hands of Craxi who is looking to the right for his new major space.” – FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0486, 1837, 10/1980.

Contemporarily, other militants were less edulcorated in attacking Berlinguer's choice to close all the spaces for dialoguing with the "older socialist brother". Indeed, although the antipathy towards the socialist leader was shared and shared by much of the communist base, the decision to close the channels of communication with the whole Italian socialism was not accepted in the same way. In the opinion of many PCI militants, but also cadres and leaders, this would have involved the displacement of Craxi and his politics progressively to the right. On this regard, the following words against Berlinguer's behavior by the militant Mario Moncada were illustrative and echoed the previous ones:

*Ricordo un commento di Giorgio Amendola che giudicava "ottusi e settari" i quadri del partito comunista italiano durante i peggiori anni dello stalinismo. Enrico Berlinguer, in questi ultimi mesi, ha fatto di tutto per dimostrarsi il più coerente quadro prodotto da quella burocrazia del partito. È così difficile rendersi conto che i suoi interventi, oltre ad aggravare le fratture della sinistra, fanno il giuoco di Craxi che cerca a destra il suo nuovo maggiore spazio? Un grande partito come il PCI può mantenere un segretario che sempre più spesso si lascia travolgere dall'isteria di un infelice rapporto personale? Non è tempo che venga sostituito un segretario che rischia di riportare il PCI agli infausti anni dell'apostrofe di "socialfascista traditore" rivolta a Nenni? Possiamo rischiare di rimanere con un segretario del PCI che sembra rivolgersi ormai solamente alla classe operaia quando questa oggi, nel suo insieme, non è più del 20 per cento del popolo italiano? [...]*⁷⁰

Moncada wrote those words in autumn 1980 during the Fiat affair. Four years later, many things had changed in Italy and within the PCI. Many militants and many Italians loved Berlinguer's politeness while disapproved Craxi's thirst for power. In this scenario the final moral, ideal and political battle of Enrico Berlinguer will be consummated. In the background a new attack on the working class and an antagonist that will not spare even the lowest blows. This will help to exhaust the last vital forces of the communist leader and perhaps the creative ones of an entire party, who will no longer find a

⁷⁰ "I recall a comment by Giorgio Amendola who judged the cadres of the Italian Communist Party during the worst years of Stalinism to be "obtuse and sectarian." Enrico Berlinguer, in recent months, has gone to great lengths to prove himself the most coherent cadre produced by that party bureaucracy. Is it so difficult to realize that his interventions, in addition to aggravating the fractures on the left, play into the hands of Craxi, who is looking to the right for his new major space? Can a great party like the PCI maintain a secretary who increasingly allows himself to be overwhelmed by the hysteria of an unhappy personal relationship? Is it not time for a secretary to be replaced who risks taking the PCI back to the inauspicious years of the "traitorous social-fascist" apostrophy directed at Nenni? Can we risk remaining with a PCI secretary who now seems to address only the working class when this class today, as a whole, is no more than 20 per cent of the Italian people? [...]" – FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0486, 1943, 24/10/1980.

master of ceremony able to lead the party through a liminal period and its consequent transformation of Italian communist identity.

During the night of Valentine's Day 1984, the teletype placed in the center of the living room of Giulietto Chiesa's Moscow home began to rattle. That clink interrupted the relaxed evening Enrico Berlinguer was spending with the homeowner, Massimo D'Alema and Paolo Bufalini⁷¹. The PCI secretary was in Moscow for Andropov's funeral, and it was there that he learned about the Craxi government's decision to cut the *scala mobile* by decree. Massimo D'Alema remembers how at that point the evening took an abrupt turn. The Sardinian leader wanted to see *l'Unità* headline before returning to the hotel for preparing to come back immediately in Italy, but not before exclaiming emphatically in front of his comrades: "It is an injustice, a bullying, an abuse of power"⁷². Berlinguer's uncontrollable reaction was not attributable to his sectarian workerism but to his belief that despite claiming that "workers no longer existed as a class – they - as human beings, continue to be singled out as the perpetrators of all evil"⁷³.

However, for the PCI secretary was difficult to understand the diminishing centrality of the working class, that also industrials like Carlo De Benedetti tried to explain during the conversations with him⁷⁴. The *scala mobile* affair put the focus right on the necessity to offer a special regard to workers in a country where, for instance, the growth of third sector was constantly increasing and the historical function of the PCI was questioned. The latter element was probably the one which pushed Berlinguer to prepare a struggle response toward the decree. Initially, this decision was contrasted by Luciano Lama, who was more incline to discuss with Craxi. Nevertheless, the vigorous pressure coming from the CGIL workers and peripheral directorships, against the agreement with the government, forced Lama to abandon the negotiating table, also mitigating the contrasts with the PCI secretary. As Valentini described, "the day after – February 15, 1984 – Italy was invaded by flared up workers' demonstrations, who occupied squares and train stations showing a rage which has not seen in a long time"⁷⁵. After all, the *scala mobile* had always been a cause of struggle for the working class, as also recalled by multiple telegrams⁷⁶ that arrived at Botteghe Oscure during the months of the 1980 Fiat protest, when it was feared that many more Italian workers might pay, such as happened to their colleagues in Turin.

⁷¹ Chiara Valentini, *op. cit.*, pos. 6444.

⁷² Massimo D'Alema, *A Mosca l'ultima volta. Enrico Berlinguer e il 1984*, (Rome: Donzelli, 2004), pp. 74-75.

⁷³ Enrico Berlinguer, "La governabilità fallita. Il PCI con l'Italia che reagisce e lotta per costruire l'alternativa", in *l'Unità*, 15/04/1982.

⁷⁴ Chiara Valentini, *op. cit.*, p. 6456. – The author makes references to the sympathies that Enrico Berlinguer had for the entrepreneur Carlo De Benedetti. The two had often meetings with a mutual exchange of opinions.

⁷⁵ *Ivi*, p. 6466.

⁷⁶ FG, APC, Regioni, mf. 0467, 1381, 27/06/1980.

The battle became immediately felt among the social base and in the party leadership. After the visceral internal clashes over the democratic alternative and the moral question, the PCI returned to close the ranks around its charismatic leader. Giorgio Napolitano was among the first to persevere with the parliamentary filibuster against the decree, which lasted a week and showed a united Communist Party as in times far from memory. The Communists succeeded in getting the decree to lapse, bringing it to a close in what Craxi called “the black week in the history of the Republic”⁷⁷. In those days, several comrade - like Edda Fagni – saw an enthusiastic Berlinguer “ready to be outraged when someone attempted to vilify, by means of jokes, what was being done”⁷⁸.

Indeed, the Sardinian secretary in those months had not ceased to show himself charged with a vitality for himself and his party that was different from usual, almost certainly influenced by the fluidity of a period of experimentation with newness and unknown, such as the one he was living. However, the fatigue of a life in constant motion, in permanent struggle, was beginning to claim a space for rest in Berlinguer's agenda. The PCI leader would increasingly begin to cede to the flattery of younger daughter Loretta, who almost intimated to spend time with her: “Enough Daddy, let's go for a walk”⁷⁹. The days became more and more hectic and full of work. Notwithstanding, Berlinguer carved out moments of absolute intimacy and pleasant relax.

The independent left senator, Giuseppe Fiori, met him at Rome's Olympic Stadium during the Champions League Final. They talked about everything from football to Fellini, via Vargas Llosa's novels, and ending with the booing which Craxi had received at a basketball game a few days earlier. Fiori narrated about the meeting that he has not seen Berlinguer in such excellent spirits for a long time and responding with an unusual expansiveness, as was the complexion of his face that evening⁸⁰.

There had also been one last political occasion when Berlinguer's spirit, immortalized by Fiori, had been visible to an extraordinary crowd of communist and noncommunist militants: the huge workers' demonstration in Rome on March 24, 1984, against the *scala mobile* decree and Craxi. Actually, the secretary had not been able to participate directly on that occasion because of his role as communist secretary, but he had wanted to observe that extraordinary human wave from a sidewalk behind the church of Santa Maria Maggiore. The secretariat staff had advised the Sardinian leader not to take to the streets lest he be overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of the demonstrators, as had happened on other occasions⁸¹. The demonstration represented a moment of mass involvement to which the new Italy of the return to the private no longer seemed to be accustomed.

⁷⁷ Chiara Valentini, *op. cit.*, pos. 6496.

⁷⁸ *Ivi*, p. 6501.

⁷⁹ *Ivi*, p. 6552.

⁸⁰ Giuseppe Fiori, *Vita di Enrico Berlinguer*, (Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 2020).

⁸¹ Chiara Valentini, *op. cit.*, pos. 6506. – The other occasion recalled by the writer was the metal-mechanics manifestation held in Turin the year before. There, Berlinguer had wanted to see the parade from a corner in Piazza Castello. When the

According to Valentini, that March 24 represented one of the last happy days for Berlinguer “almost as if it were a reparation for the bitterness he had felt from the parade of metalworkers at the time of national solidarity”⁸². A symbol of that day, among working-class men and women, remains alive even today. It is a photograph of Berlinguer smiling, almost embarrassed, holding the special edition of *l'Unità* and intent on showing it. The front page of PCI newspaper, destined to go down in the recent history of the left, was dominated by a large print that read out: “Here we are”⁸³. The same words that a few months later militant Communists would shout, torn with grief, toward the coffin of their beloved leader, their master of ceremony, their Enrico passed away.

2.3 The Death of the Master: Berlinguer’s Stroke and the Days of a Commune Agony

The air in Padua was melancholy. The sky was gloomy and would remain so for several days, while the pelting rain beat down outside the window of Enrico Berlinguer’s hospital room. On 8 June 1984, the PCI secretary was giving a speech for the European electoral campaign in Piazza della Frutta when he was hit by a brain stroke. Despite his sudden illness, Berlinguer had decided to continue undaunted to the end of his harangue to the communist people. Loud shouts rose from the audience urging him to stop, “enough...enough, Enrico”⁸⁴. In the square, the militants immediately understood that their leader's condition was worrying as well as Antonio Tatò, his closest and most trusted collaborator, did. Tatò rushed to support him and beg him to interrupt, at the very moment when the PCI head was clinging exhausted to the podium of the stage. The secretary voice, with his strong Sardinian accent, was even more faint. Nevertheless, he succeeded in passing one last message:

[...] nel mondo giovanile vi sono immense energie e potenzialità. In esso è più che mai viva l'esigenza di prospettive, di cambiamenti per un futuro in cui valga la pena di lavorare, di studiare, di lottare [...] Ebbene a tutte queste forze della cultura, della scienza, del lavoro, del mondo giovanile, a quelle più vive ed aperte della realtà cattolica, i comunisti indicano una prospettiva di pace [...] di rinnovamento della politica e dell'organizzazione della società. [...] Votando Partito Comunista [...] si contribuisce a portare in Europa ... non l'Italia della P2 ... ma quella pulita e onesta. Lavorate tutti... casa per casa... azienda per azienda... strada per strada... dialogando... noi ci presentiamo

news, that he was present, spread assailed by the enthusiasm of thousands of workers who forced the party security service to take him away. During that retreat, Giampaolo Pansa, who was present, said “I wonder if so, many people are running to meet De Mita”, and Berlinguer, amused and smiling, had replied, “Certainly not the workers”.

⁸² *Ibidem*.

⁸³ AU, Edizione Straordinaria, “Eccoci”, in *l'Unità*, 24/03/1984. – The photo is available on Italian Chambers of Deputies Flickr web page: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/cameradeideputati/14397599985/>

⁸⁴ AAMOD, *L'addio a Enrico*, cit.

*per quello che siamo stati e siamo, con la fiducia, è possibile conquistare nuovi e più vasti consensi alle nostre liste, alla nostra causa, che è la causa della pace, della libertà, del lavoro e del progresso della nostra società.*⁸⁵

Each of these words perfectly summarized his ultimate efforts to reimage the PCI political strategy and identity based on morality, democratic liberties, and dialogue with the new generations.

The next morning, the party's press organ revealed how critical was the situation headlining “Berlinguer in coma fights for life”⁸⁶. The columnists of *l'Unità* found three perfect terms to describe the mood of the whole communist community and many other Italians: dismay, anxiety, and hope. Unfortunately, the last one was replaced soon by the word despair. In the editorial of that day, the newspaper's director, Emanuele Macaluso, traced a very brief but effective account of the secretary previous days, which sent into oblivion the carefree smiles of a few months earlier. The Sicilian comrade wrote: “Berlinguer lived these difficult and eventful months with a feverish tension and passion peculiar to one who is deeply convinced of the vast scope of what is at stake. He sensed that we are facing facts destined to mark for a long time not only the fate of a party – the PCI – which has a great heritage behind it, and which bears on its shoulders enormous responsibilities for today and for the future. Responsibilities that involve not only communists, but the present and the future of millions of workers and Italian democracy”⁸⁷.

The impression that the stakes were so high, as described by Macaluso, became an unquestionable certainty in the face of the dense schedule Berlinguer had prepared for the European elections campaign. Moreover, prior challenges and concerns were diluting the soul and the body of the Sardinian leader. In this regard, Berlinguer's last meeting of the Central Committee was enlightening testbed. On that occasion, Berlinguer had the impression “to not to be helped and to be betrayed by his comrades”⁸⁸ and for this reason he made a real menace to take a step back: “after the election we have to reach a point of truth-clarification”⁸⁹. Perhaps also aware of these tensions, Berlinguer's children had scolded him more than usual about his electoral tour, telling: “Dad, you can't do this life.

⁸⁵ “[...] in the world of youth there is immense energy and potential. In it is more alive than ever the need for prospects, for changes for a future in which it is worthwhile to work, to study, to fight [...] Well, to all these forces of culture, science, work, the world of youth, to those most alive and open of the Catholic reality, the Communists point to a prospect of peace [...] of renewal of politics and the organization of society. [...] By voting Communist Party [...] you help bring to Europe ... not the Italy of P2 ... but the clean and honest one. Work all of you ... house by house ... company by company ... street by street ... dialoguing ... we present ourselves for what we have been and are, with trust, it is possible to win new and wider support for our lists, for our cause, which is the cause of peace, freedom, work, and progress of our society.” – AAMOD, *L'addio a Enrico*, cit., TCR: 00:12:51:24.

⁸⁶ In *l'Unità*, 09/06/1984.

⁸⁷ Emanuele Macaluso, “Momento drammatico”, in *l'Unità*, 09/06/1984.

⁸⁸ Miriam Mafai, *Dimenticare Berlinguer*, cit., p. 20.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

You are over sixty years old now”⁹⁰. A loving sounding, albeit helpfulness, appeal that did not distract their father from devoting all himself to the last mission as a communist leader.

The PCI leader had remained on a coma for four days until his death on 11 June 1984 at 12:45 am. During the hours of agony, the Italian political life seemed suspended, and a state of uncertainty enveloped a large part of the country. In compliance with Valentini’s thought “if until then Berlinguer was referred to moderate public opinion as a reprobate, a dangerous troublemaker, now it seems to everyone that in that bed in Padua an indispensable protagonist”⁹¹ of Italian public scenario is fading away. For counter checking this hunch, it is meaningful the letter that DC former secretary, Benigno Zaccagnini, wrote to Gian Carlo Pajetta.

*Caro Pajetta, scrivo a te per l'amicizia e la stima che ho sempre sentite per te e, a di mezzo tuo, vorrei esprimere a tutti i tuoi compagni il mio sentimento di viva partecipazione al vostro dolore e alla vostra animosa speranza. La notizia, appresa stamane dalla radio, del gravissimo malore che ha colpito Berlinguer mi ha profondamente scosso e addolorato. Ho avuto occasione di incontrarmi più volte con lui, spesso a quattr'occhi e ne ho avuto sempre un'ammirazione sincera per la sua acuta intelligenza, apertura mentale, dirittura morale, lealtà di impegno politico e animo. Vi sono perciò sinceramente vicino con gli auguri più fervidi che possa presto tornare ristabilito alla sua testimonianza politica e umana perché, sia pur di ispirazione diversa, possa continuare a operare per il fine certamente comune di difesa ed elevazione dell'uomo e di ogni popolo. Cordiali saluti.*⁹²

Around the bedside of communist secretary gathered all. From his cousin Francesco Cossiga to a devastating and inconsolable Pietro Ingrao. Claudio Martelli, Luciano Lama, Giovanni Spadolini, Monsignor Franceschini – bishop of Padua sent directly by John Paul II to check on about Berlinguer's health condition⁹³ – were just some of the figures who paraded before the clinic doors. Even Bettino Craxi tried to visit his eternal rival, without success. The PSI secretary's arrival created disappointment among Berlinguer's family members, especially in his son Marco. Indeed, Alberto Menichelli, the chief escort of the PCI secretary, recounted that it was Marco Berlinguer himself who

⁹⁰ Chiara Valentini, *op. cit.*, pos. 6573.

⁹¹ *Ivi*, p. 6612.

⁹² “Dear Pajetta, I am writing to you because of the friendship and esteem I have always felt for you, and, through you, I would like to express to all your comrades my feeling of lively participation in your grief and animated hope. The news learned this morning from the radio, of Berlinguer's very serious illness has deeply shaken and grieved me. I had the opportunity to meet with him several times, often face to face, and I always had sincere admiration for his keen intelligence, open-mindedness, moral uprightness, loyalty of political commitment and soul. I am therefore sincerely close to you with the most fervent wishes that he may soon return restored to his political and human witness so that, though of different inspirations, he may continue to work for the certainly common goal of the defense and elevation of man and of every people. Sincerely yours.” – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 72/63, 09/06/1984.

⁹³ Chiara Valentini, *op. cit.*, pos. 6618.

confronted Craxi, asking abruptly to leave, almost certainly mindful of the booing his father received during the participation in Verona Socialist Congress on May 1984⁹⁴.

However, another socialist Sandro Pertini was the first one to arrive and to remain close to Berlinguer until the end. The President of the Republic was as alike the communist secretary as the Italian political scene could offer, but at the same time he was also the most different. On the one hand, the gentle Sardinian leader with his being “not very Italian” obtained “exclusive prominence in the eyes of a country which loves to denigrate itself but, above all, to idolize the different from itself”⁹⁵. On the other hand, Pertini was the quintessence of Italian-ness as his standing next to Berlinguer highlighted. According to journalists Indro Montanelli and Mario Cervi, the elderly socialist President “was as much a protagonist of the agony as and almost more than the agonizing”⁹⁶.

Pertini lived the eighty-six hours of Berlinguer’s suspension between life and death, repeating often “It is not fair that it happened”⁹⁷. Barbagallo suggested that the socialist partisan was referring, maybe, also to the waning of his dream of bringing the communists into government together with the PSI⁹⁸. The President of the Republic was the last to return to the Padua clinic before the Sardinian leader passed away and, given his heartbreak, he allowed only one statement which seemed to be at once his own and that of many others, who loved Berlinguer, “I take him away with me to Rome, like a brotherly friend, like a son, like a comrade in struggle. I take him with me... I take him with me”⁹⁹.

The large communist apparatus, from the top leadership to the last militant, had been set in motion immediately. As Berlinguer's body traveled to Rome, the party was choosing how and where to allow his final adoration. The main atrium of Botteghe Oscure became the funeral hall in which thousands of people paraded unceasingly, while Piazza San Giovanni was chosen as the stage for the last great funeral celebration. It would be not only the last celebrative rite for the Sardinian secretary, but also for the Italian communism as catalyst for the mass sentiments expression. However, The PCI militants had decided not to stop in the previous days because the stillness would signify to betray its own communist DNA and especially the last effort demanded by its dying leader: “go house to house”¹⁰⁰. Francesco Riccio recalls that there was a mix of feelings, between the desperation and the will to be

⁹⁴ On the occasion Craxi did not condemn the aggressive catcall but rather endorsed it with a bad quip. From the stage of PSI Congress, Craxi said after the booing: “*I know very well ... that we were not being addressed to a person, but to a policy ... a policy that we judge to be deeply wrong ... and if the booing was a political signal manifesting against this policy, I cannot join in the booing ... just because I don't know how to whistle.*” – The video is available on YouTube while for a complete report of that day see, *l'Unità*, 12/05/1984. Menichelli's recall about Marco Berlinguer's reaction was recorded in Walter Veltroni's documentary, *Quando c'era Berlinguer*, (Italia: Palomar - Sky Cinema, 2014).

⁹⁵ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, pp. 292-293.

⁹⁶ Indro Montanelli, Mario Cervi, *L'Italia negli anni di fango*, (Milan: Rizzoli, 1994), p. 169.

⁹⁷ Chiara Valentini, *op. cit.*, p. 6617.

⁹⁸ Francesco Barbagallo, *op. cit.*, p. 882.

⁹⁹ Antonio Del Giudice, “Pertini l’ha vegliato fino alla fine poi ha voluto la sua bara con sé”, in *La Repubblica*, 12/06/1984.

¹⁰⁰ AAMOD, *L'addio a Enrico*, *cit.*

proactive, which could be read in the faces of Bolognese comrades, who like him had chosen the Communist Party precisely by virtue of Berlinguer.

Arrivo in federazione. [...] leggiamo le ultime famosissime parole del discorso [...] come sempre si rivolgeva a noi, ai militanti, a coloro che con sacrificio ed entusiasmo andavano di casa in casa a portare il giornale, l'Unità, tutte le domeniche, o i volantini [...] facendo rapide scale per giungere anche da quella vecchietta che forse all'iniziativa non sarebbe mai venuta, ma che vedeva in noi [...] il tramite con un mondo che era stato, in gioventù, anche suo e dal quale non voleva staccarsi. [...] l'indicazione è quella di fare esattamente ciò che Berlinguer ci ha detto la sera prima. Ci organizziamo subito [...] Non si tratta di sfruttare l'emotività del momento (che grande peso avrà senz'altro sul voto), quanto piuttosto di essere vicini a quei compagni delle sezioni, dei quartieri che ci chiamavano forse solo per esorcizzare una grande paura e condividere una vana speranza. La campagna elettorale non si doveva fermare, il nostro cuore era colmo di dolore, di ansia, di angoscia. Ma potevamo dimostrare l'affetto e la stima per Enrico solo facendo al meglio quello che ci aveva indicato di fare: "andate di casa in casa".¹⁰¹

Riccio's words hint at an experience of grief and mourning apparently different from that witnessed elsewhere in the immediate aftermath, but it was going to expand, time after time, to the roots of the entire communist social base. Indeed, for understanding the unique reaction of the militants in Bologna – the city with the largest communist federation in the West – the explanation of the “psychological washing”, in which Berlinguer's gradual disappearance had immersed Italian civil society, communist and not, in order to satisfy its anxiety to “ennoble itself by interposing itself”¹⁰², is insufficient. Even more so if the Sardinian leader was considered by all to be, albeit in a good sense, an “anomalous compatriot”¹⁰³ because of his manners and the “length of his thoughts”¹⁰⁴.

However, the reactions of Bolognese militants depowered this key of reading in favor of another. Berlinguer would hold his last political meeting of the electoral campaign right in Bologna, the day

¹⁰¹ “Arriving at the federation. [...] we read the very famous last words of the speech [...] as he always addressed us, the militants, those who with sacrifice and enthusiasm went from house to house to bring the newspaper, L'Unità, every Sunday, or the leaflets [...] making quick stairs to reach even that little old lady who would perhaps never come to the initiative, but who saw in us [...] the link with a world that had been, in her youth, also hers and from which she did not want to detach herself. [...] the indication is to do exactly what Berlinguer told us the night before. We organize immediately [...] It is not a question of exploiting the emotionality of the moment (which great weight will undoubtedly have on the vote), but rather of being close to those comrades in the sections, in the neighborhoods who were calling us perhaps only to exorcise a great fear and share a vain hope. The campaign was not to stop, our hearts were filled with pain, anxiety, anguish. But we could only show our affection and esteem for Henry by doing as best we could what he instructed us to do: go from house to house.” – Francesco Riccio, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.

¹⁰² Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁴ Francesco Riccio, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

after Padua. For this reason, when all the Bolognese communist people rounded up in Piazza Maggiore on 9 June, the physical absence the communist leader body seemed to destroy the last “markers of certainty”¹⁰⁵ of the PCI and its militancy, resulting in an “empty place of power”¹⁰⁶ which no one was able to fulfil from that point onwards. The PCI secretary had embedded in his own body the remained certainties for renegotiating a new identity and guiding his people thought the liminal period inaugurated since the various moments of separations of the late 1970s.

Therefore, it was right the maximum office of communist secretary that, during the liminal period, implied the assumption of a double function, needed for shaping party present and future. Berlinguer, at the time of his body's non-appearance at Bologna's stage, was both the “king of the two-body doctrine”¹⁰⁷ and the master of ceremony of the party. On the one hand, being “king”¹⁰⁸ implied holding in one's body politic an “eternal secular power”¹⁰⁹ so deeply tied to the communist tradition that it prevented the regeneration into the newness, which the liminal period was imposing. On the other hand, being master of ceremony and hold the office with the task of transporting the militants – and the whole PCI – toward the regeneration into a novel and modern entity, assumed a fundamental value for the very survival of Italian communism.

A duplicity with a creative and simultaneously destructive charge that was extremely difficult to control. Berlinguer in his way was the only one who managed to harness it because – using those variations of ideality and programs which from the outside appeared such as doubts and second thoughts – he was the only one who understood, albeit belatedly, that the newness had to constitute a radical renegotiation base for communist identity, not its convergence to pre-existing leftist ideals such as European social democracy. Moreover, he seemed the sole still capable, through his popularity, to hold together a body politic corroded by internal separations, which modernity had been generating. Thus, the loss of the Sardinian leader, in the eyes of militants, became even more concrete and tragic in his body absence in Bologna than in his concrete disappearance on Padua backstage. Indeed, the “search for the lost object”¹¹⁰, which psychoanalyst John Bowlby places at the heart of the grief reaction was twofold. Communists, taking to the streets to keep their word to their

¹⁰⁵ Harald Wydra, “Liminality and Democracy”, in Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, Harald Wydra, eds., *Breaking Boundaries. Varieties of liminality*, (New York – Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), p. 186.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁷ John Borneman, “Introduction: Theorizing Regimes Ends”, in John Borneman, eds., *Death of the Father. An Anthropology of the End in Political Authority*, (New York – Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), p. 5. For an exhaustive study on the concept origins see also, Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*. – Here, it is interesting to remember that during his secretariat Enrico Berlinguer was often nicknamed “Re Enrico” such as Nello Ajello noted in his book. Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

¹⁰⁹ John Borneman, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Jeremy Holmes, *La teoria dell'attaccamento. John Bowlby e la sua scuola*, (Milan: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 1994), p. 96.

leader were attempting to get back and reunite with the – double – lost object¹¹¹: namely, the political body linked to tradition and the spiritual-liturgical body passed over for regeneration. Failing to get either back, now or ever. Furthermore, according to Possieri “the passing of Berlinguer represented, undoubtedly, the ultimate great occasion of a collective self-recognition of communist’s identity, after that, with the *death of father*, it will be even more difficult to ferret out a new and efficacious synthesis”¹¹².

2.4 In Name of the Father: the Communist Funeral and the Farewell to Berlinguer

The body of the secretary arriving in Rome is thus that of one and many, simultaneously. It is the body of an eternal leader, a master of ceremony, and a father. Berlinguer was point of reference for entire generations of leaders, militants, party cadres, and activists, coming also from other ideal areas. Camillo Martino remembered that in the PCI history, the period of Berlinguer’s leadership has been certainly the most important and fruitful, experienced by Botteghe Oscure employee with an enormous passion and participation¹¹³. The Sardinian leader brought many women and men – young and old – closer to the communist cause and, more generally, to honesty, rediscovered morality, careful reflection on future and modernity. He did this as a father does: sometimes rebuking, sometimes encouraging behind a face that could take on looks and tones that were haughty or mild, stern or playful. Just like a father he understood that it was necessary for some of his children to experience the new and allowed them to do so, provided they always remembered their roots and traditions. The PCI secretary separated his own offspring from those who could lead them down the path of violence and repression, and instead brought them closer to respect for the freedoms of others and democratic justice.

Among the multitude of people who parade in front of the funeral hall for a final farewell, many militants defined him “like a father”¹¹⁴. A comrade, unable to speak without crying, stated: “Berlinguer was the greatest man on earth... a father”¹¹⁵. In the similar emotional impulse, the actor Francesco Nuti – arrived at Botteghe Oscure with the comedian Carlo Verdone to honor the leader – declared: “a father died ... today it is as if my father had died”¹¹⁶. Everyone equally felt Berlinguer was part of them, just as happens with a loving parent. It was felt by those young people who

¹¹¹ Jeremy Holmes, *La teoria dell’attaccamento*, cit., p. 96.

¹¹² Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

¹¹³ ADN, Camillo Martino, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

¹¹⁴ AAMOD, *L’addio a Berlinguer*, cit., TCR: 00:09:30:00.

¹¹⁵ *Ivi*, TCR: 00:10:31:00.

¹¹⁶ *Ivi*, TCR: 00:33:12:00.

“politically grew up with him”¹¹⁷. It was felt by women, like Lidia Menapace, who remembered his “understanding and severity” but also the struggles to stimulate a fair debate on women's issues within the party¹¹⁸. It was felt by foreign leaders like Mikhail Gorbachev who declared to the cameras:

*La vita del compagno Berlinguer è un esempio lampante, resa tutta in favore del popolo italiano, per la democrazia, per il socialismo, e noi comprendiamo quel profondo dolore che muove adesso tutto il popolo italiano ai quali erano vicini le preoccupazioni, le sollecitudini dei lavoratori, e l'attenzione verso la loro vita, la lotta per rendere migliori la condizioni della loro vita.*¹¹⁹

Moreover, the many kids, who came together with their parents to Botteghe Oscure, were crucial testimony to a mutual feeling of fatherly love. Among them, there were those who characterized Berlinguer such as “good” or “handsome”; those who at the mere age of nine declared themselves “lifelong communists” or otherwise “felt like a comrade” entitled to see him; and there was also a child of inconsolable weeping, hiding behind his mother's dress with his school smock still on, who between sobs added: “he was a very good man ... the best ... there is no other good man”¹²⁰. These words are just some of those gathered in the kilometer-long lines of comrades waiting to see one last time Berlinguer's coffin. Indeed, they were echoed by the declarations of political opponents and other institutional figures, who arrived from all over the globe for proving their participation to the suffering of an entire community¹²¹.

Thus, the death of PCI head had been experienced such as a common father's loss. On this point historian Andrea Possieri noted: “Berlinguer personified for communist militants the juridical-theological portrayal of “the good father of a family” meaning by family, in this case, the entire communist people”¹²². This evolution of the Sardinian secretary to the father of the PCI's entire social base has not been just reconstructed in retrospect by historiography, contrariwise was already observed at that time by communist militants, like Carlo Iannuccilli.

¹¹⁷ AAMOD, *L'addio a Berlinguer*, cit., TCR: 00:17:18:00.

¹¹⁸ *Ivi*, TCR: 00:19:00:00-00:20:00:00.

¹¹⁹ “Comrade Berlinguer's life is a shining example, rendered all in favor of the Italian people, for democracy, for socialism, and we understand that deep sorrow that moves now all the Italian people to whom were close the concerns, the solicitations of the workers, and the care for their lives, the struggle to make better the conditions of their lives.” – *Ivi*, TCR: 00:50:00:00-00:53:00:00.

¹²⁰ *Ivi*, TCR: 00:17:00:00-00:18:20:00.

¹²¹ *Ivi*, TCR: 00:58:00:00. – Giorgio Almirante, founder of the Italian Social Movement, was also among those who went to the funeral chamber at Botteghe Oscure to pay their respects to Berlinguer. To the cameras filming him, the leader of the neo-fascist right declared: “I came humanly to pay my respects to the body of an honest man who believed in his ideas.” For a brief overview on the relations between these two leaders see, Antonio Padellaro, *Il gesto di Almirante e Berlinguer*, (Rome: PaperFirst, 2019).

¹²² Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

*Sono un vaso capillare del PC. Circa 30 anni di militanza. 10 anni di segretario del Pc di Teano. Ti voglio rivolgere delle domande: È vero che Berlinguer mentre completava il suo ultimo comizio chiese un bicchiere d'acqua? Perché i familiari non lo vollero far visitare dai medici Russi? Perché non vollero far tumulare con Togliatti e Longo? Ormai Berlinguer non faceva più parte della sua famiglia – apparteneva al Partito Comunista Italiano anzi – attese le onoranze funebri apparteneva al mondo intero. Tante scuse e grazie.*¹²³

Iannuccilli's sentences show how, according to militants, any intimate aspects around Berlinguer's death had to fall away. It was necessary for the party's members to know and share everything, because the leader and his body could not belong to a restricted private family¹²⁴ but had to pertain to every Italian communist. At the end of the day, it was this morbid feeling of possession and identification, with the leader, to constitute the “patricentric”¹²⁵ nature signature of communist regimes and parties, among which the PCI. In other words, the creation a modern communist subjectivity required an identification with the leader who “becomes the general equivalent of his subjects, the standard of all value”, assuming contemporarily a “paternal authority” and allowing to exercise all the authority in his name¹²⁶.

There was one more final element that united, in death, Berlinguer with the communist tradition from which he had tried with difficult to emancipate himself, in life: the funeral rite. Possieri recalls that it was “attributable to the rules of the more cast-iron tradition of the communist funeral technics which combine the canons of soviet liturgy and the folk art”¹²⁷. The ceremony was held on June 13, 1984, after two days and two nights of “popular pilgrimage”¹²⁸ to the funeral hall of Botteghe Oscure. The communist doctor Camillo Martino wrote that all Italian communists participated in the mass mourning with sincere emotions¹²⁹. A huge procession accompanied Berlinguer's coffin, winding from the PCI headquarters to San Giovanni square, without interruptions. Francesco Riccio arrived from Bologna with other comrades described the celebration place with those words:

¹²³ “I am a capillary vessel of the CP. About 30 years of militancy. 10 years as secretary of the Teano PC. I want to ask you some questions: - Is it true that Berlinguer while completing his last rally asked for a glass of water? Why did the family members not want to have him examined by Russian doctors? Why did they not want to have him buried with Togliatti and Longo? By now Berlinguer was no longer part of his family-he belonged to the Italian Communist Party rather-he waited for the funeral services-he belonged to the whole world. Many apologies and thanks.” – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 72/64.

¹²⁴ Berlinguer's daughter Bianca recalled during an interview years later the difficulties to share the loss and the funeral of her father with all the communists arrived in Rome. See, RaiPlay, *Storie Italiane*, St. 2019/2020, 02/01/2020, min: 00:01:00:00-00:01:04:00.

¹²⁵ John Borneman, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁷ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

¹²⁸ ADN, Camillo Martino, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*.

Poi la piazza, gli elicotteri della Rai che volteggiano restituendoci le immagini di una folla incalcolabile, del corteo funebre che procede lento tra due ali di folla affranta. Ci sono tutte le generazioni, forse tutti gli orientamenti politici. Le note dell'Adagio di Albinoni sono coperte da quel grido che ancora sentiamo strozzato in gola: "Enrico, Enrico".¹³⁰

Right the images taken from the Rai Television helicopters will give an idea of the crowd oceanic immensity that rushed to greet Berlinguer. It was precisely thanks to the TV, which the secretary little loved, that all of Italy and part of the world were able to accompany him till the end. The voice of the famous journalist Bruno Vespa¹³¹, who signed the live commentary of that event, seemed incredulous to read the participation estimates: in fact, more than a million people¹³² decided to take the streets of Rome for accompanying the PCI leader. Furthermore, Riccio's observation about the diversity of political creed among the participants was confirmed also by some letters arrived on the following day to PCI leaders like Pajetta, who had taken the stage for the funeral oration.

Carissimo Pajetta, Sono un prete! C'ero anch'io stasera in Piazza San Giovanni. Quel grido continuo "Enrico! Enrico!" mi ha profondamente commosso. Anche io volevo bene a Berlinguer: mi incontrai a lungo con lui, sei anni fa, esattamente il 9 maggio 1978, il giorno della morte di Moro. Io mi stavo interessando allora dei prigionieri politici brasiliani (sono missionario in Brasile) e quel giorno mi incontrai con Berlinguer per esporgli la situazione politica del Brasile. Soffro molto anche io per la morte di Enrico... e stasera mi hanno commosso le sue parole, caro Pajetta, le sue parole finali (che ricordo a senso, ma che mi hanno fortemente colpito): "Se ci asciugiamo una lacrima è per vederci meglio, è per guardare più lontano". Non dimenticherò mai quel suo pensiero caro Pajetta. Io vivo in mezzo alla miseria della periferia di Salvador De Bahia. Grazie per queste sue parole. Le sono vicino, caro Pajetta, nel suo dolore e prego per lei. Un grande abbraccio. Renzo Rossi prete.¹³³

¹³⁰ "Then the square, the RAI helicopters whirling around giving us images of an untold crowd, of the funeral procession proceeding slowly between two wings of the distraught crowd. All generations are there, perhaps all political orientations. The notes of Albinoni's Adagio are covered by that cry we still hear choked in our throats, Enrico, Enrico." – Francesco Riccio, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹³¹ AAMOD, *Funerale di Enrico Berlinguer*, 13/06/1984. Available also on YouTube under the title: "Telecronaca dei Funerali di Enrico Berlinguer".

¹³² Philip Cook, Gianluca Fantoni, "We all miss you: Enrico Berlinguer in post-Berlin Wall Italy", in *Twenty Century Communism*, Vol. 20, No. 11, (2016), p. 1.

¹³³ "Dearest Pajetta, I am a priest! I was also there tonight in St. John's Square. That continuous cry "Enrico! Enrico!" moved me deeply. I also loved Berlinguer: I met with him at length, six years ago, exactly on May 9, 1978, the day Moro died. I was taking an interest then in Brazilian political prisoners (I am a missionary in Brazil) and that day I met with Berlinguer to expose him to the political situation in Brazil. I also suffer a lot for Enrico's death... and tonight I was moved by your words, dear Pajetta, your final words (which I remember in a sense, but which affected me strongly): "If we wipe away a tear, it is to see each other better, it is to look farther." I will never forget that thought of his dear Pajetta. I live in the midst of the misery of the suburbs of Salvador De Bahia. Thank you for these words of yours. I am close to you, dear Pajetta, in your pain and I pray for you. A big hug. Renzo Rossi Priest." – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 72/64, 13/06/1984.

The priest Renzo Rossi was the umpteenth witness of how Berlinguer had entered the hearts of many because of his righteousness and concern for the weakest. The cartoonist of *l'Unità* Sergio Staino, remembering that day, talked about an “unnatural silence”¹³⁴ very difficult to describe with images. He wrote down: “I came back from Berlinguer’s funeral with tears in the eyes: everyone was touched. The pathos of that day conquered Rome. How could I recall it? [...] I reproduced the situation, people from all over Italy, the silence, the deep feeling, and everyone tears, the quietly interview of journalists, the ones who come from abroad and the crowd who grow up in unexpected manner”¹³⁵.

The international reporters, cited by Staino, were probably the more astonished by “the collective hug, with a more sentimental than ideological taste, that clung to the upright man’s coffin”¹³⁶. For instance, Peter Nichols – correspondent for The Times – compared Berlinguer’s funeral to a “magnificent classic ritual”, writing down: “An immense sea of red flags sways majestically among the most imperialist, not to say imperial, monuments of ancient Rome [...] the spirit of so many Roman emperors, if it still hovered over the Forums, would look with much envy at the posthumous triumph of this communist anti-hero”¹³⁷. The transport of that outpouring of affection was so enthralling that even the communist bias of a British newspaper fell away. Berlinguer's death also seemed to have suspended the “K factor”¹³⁸ in many. Communists came out no longer as awful rivals, but like anti-heroes with their own morals, their own righteousness, ready to be loved by a people, not necessarily confined to those of the Party's militants. Nevertheless, there was no shortage of reservations expressed by such authoritative voices as that of Catholic philosopher and senator Augusto Del Noce and journalist Sandro Viola. On the one hand, Del Noce pointed his finger at the Togliatti’s legacy always cultivated in his view in the Sardinian secretary; on the other hand, Viola pointed his finger

¹³⁴ Sergio Staino, *op. cit.*, p. 102. – The letter of the comrade Maria Losi explained her silence which can be paradigmatic of other militants’ experiences: “*I have to apologize to you infinitely; in these days I read in the newspaper the time of your picket duty at our comrade also I had been in line for hours like others and I went in supposedly at that time, I had proposed to thank him infinitely for all the commitment he gave to the party, to the women's movement, but certainly not at the price of his life and I also think I don't know if we really gave all the contribution he wanted from us, but I couldn't do that because that moment I walked by him was even faster and when I walked in I dedicated it only to him I greeted him and threw him as many kisses as fast as I could, the lump was strong in my throat and there was no time to cry there was no time to stop for a second without realizing it I found myself outside still sending them to him, and I realized that I was not alone then I vented together with the thousands of comrades who were feeling the same pain, if you were there at that moment I didn't do it on purpose to ignore you. But when you passed by with our Henry and I saw you crying, I just wanted to say. "Courage comrades together we will make it." but seeing our Berlinguer locked in a coffin and you dear comrades who gave and gave everything for the party tightened all around him crying, the anguish was so great that the voice did not come out, I was sweating and cold I swear it was the saddest moment of my life*” – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 72/64, 17/06/1984.

¹³⁵ Sergio Staino, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹³⁶ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

¹³⁷ Peter Nichols, “Millions say ‘addio’ to Berlinguer”, in *The Times*, 14/06/1984.

¹³⁸ The term “K-factor” was coined by journalist Alberto Ronchey and first used by him in an editorial on *Corriere della Sera* dated March 30, 1979. It stood for the lack of turnover of governmental political forces in the first decades of republican history caused by the need to exclude communists. The “K” in fact stood for the Russian word *Kommunizm*. On this regard see, Andrea Nelli, *Ronchey. La Russia, l'Italia e il fattore K*, (Pisa: Della Porta Editori, 2013).

precisely at the liturgy of the rite stating that such funeral was reminiscent of those of Perón or of a great tango singer, such as Carlos Gardel, with the big difference that no one died in the crush of Berlinguer's last farewell¹³⁹.

In the next days, militants' letters continued to arrive to Botteghe Oscure, to the family, to other party's leaders while comments filled up the newspaper. Francesco Alberoni wrote one of these columns. The journalist of *La Repubblica*, analyzing Berlinguer's charisma, aimed higher: "in this politically silent era he was not just a survival. He was a witness to a living faith, a hope and a will that will not be extinguished, and that is why his death truly leaves a void"¹⁴⁰. Undeniably, Alberoni's words contains part of the truth, but are not sufficient to explain the crucial impact of that void for the PCI future. According to Possieri, "the Sardinian secretary's loss from a symbolic point of view constituted an important moment of redefinition of collective memory and, thus, of communist identity", starting immediately from the eclipsing of Togliatti's memorial liturgies¹⁴¹.

The death of the secretary certainly brought a regeneration of collective memory, but never to a renegotiation of communist identity. Indeed, the passing of the man who, in addition to being the party's father and leader, had been above all its master of ceremony in the liminal period would mark a defining moment in the attempt to transform the party into a new being. Berlinguer's legacy was impossible to manage for this very reason. It was not just a political legacy, but a liturgical legacy. Whoever was to succeed the Sardinian secretary would also have to assume the office of ferryman of the Italian communism soul toward its own regeneration. This did not happen, condemning the PCI to its demise without even having attempted to renovate its contents and identity.

2.5 What is Next? Natta's PCI between the Old Legacy and an Unavoidable Destiny

A few days after Berlinguer's funeral, the promise that the Sardinian leader had embodied for years was fulfilled: the Italian Communist Party won. On June 17, 1984, the PCI obtain the 33,4% of consensus in the European elections, overcoming the Christian Democracy which stopped at 33,1%¹⁴². The long wave of emotions for Berlinguer's death was fostered implicitly by the PCI's press which titled the first page of June 15, "And now let's all say it with the vote"¹⁴³. The editorial staff decided to collect militants' public letters, testimonies, and tributes in rhyme for Berlinguer¹⁴⁴.

¹³⁹ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, pp. 299-300.

¹⁴⁰ Francesco Alberoni, "Il carisma di Berlinguer", in *La Repubblica*, 16/06/1984.

¹⁴¹ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

¹⁴² Simona Colarizi, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

¹⁴³ In *L'Unità*, 15/06/1984.

¹⁴⁴ "Caro Enrico, ti scrivo", in *L'Unità*, 15/06/1984. – This was the title of the three special pages with readers' letters for the dead secretary.

The words used by the writers showed a high level of engagement with the PCI coming from the more disparate sides. For instance, there was a note – sent by a doctor from Sulmona – which describe the inconsolable crying of his porter, who always voted for DC¹⁴⁵. The impressive and heartbreaking funerals in Piazza San Giovanni had made inroads into the hearts of even those people, who had never been communists; thence an “emotional vote”¹⁴⁶ seemed to be looming at gates. Comrade Maria Losi, in her letter to Gian Carlo Pajetta, gave further proof of it:

*Ma oggi sono andata a votare e non ho potuto fare a meno di baciare il nostro emblema perché in quel momento ho pensato al nostro Berlinguer che ha dato la sua vita e ha lottato fino all'ultimo per difenderlo, mi ha assalito il magone e le lacrime le ho trattenute a stento, allora ho capito cosa dovevo fare, e ho fatto la più bella croce della mia vita ripassandola un'altra volta con la massima attenzione. Sì Enrico ho votato anche per te, mi sembrava di aver fatto una cosa strana, e sono stata un po' timorosa a confidarlo ai compagni, ho scoperto invece che anche loro hanno fatto come me e ho aspettato i risultati ... Caro Enrico ti sei spento proprio alla soglia del grande giorno ed è vero quello che ha detto il grande Pertini non è giusto che paghino i giusti, e questo sorpasso te lo dedichiamo con tutto il cuore, ma i maligni non mancano mai, e hanno detto subito che è stato un voto emotivo, non è vero non siamo stupidi e i lavoratori Italiani non sanno solo piangere ma anche lottare [...]*¹⁴⁷

Losi's words exude a naive emotionalism, unrecognizable to militants and almost disavowed by them since it might have been a delegitimization weapon of the communist victory.

The first “*malign*” who delegitimize the PCI success was the Christian Democrat secretary, Ciriaco De Mita. He talked openly of a “funeral-election rally” and considered the overtake such as a disastrous result for three main reasons: it would be distorted by expectational circumstances; it would be not what Italians want; and it would weaken the government coalition because the DC represented its fundamental element of stability¹⁴⁸. De Mita's fears disappeared within a week, along with communist joy and hopes. Indeed, on June 24 the regional vote in Berlinguer's homeland – Sardinia

¹⁴⁵ Gianvincenzo D'Andrea, “Piangeva anche la portantina democristiana”, in *l'Unità*, 15/06/1984, p. 4.

¹⁴⁶ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

¹⁴⁷ “*But today I went to vote, and I couldn't help but kiss our emblem because at that moment I thought of our Berlinguer who gave his life and fought to the last to defend it, I was assailed by the feeling down and the tears I could hardly hold them back, then I knew what I had to do, and I made the most beautiful cross of my life by going over it one more time with the utmost care. Yes, Enrico I voted for you too, it seemed to me that I had done a strange thing, and I was a little afraid to confide it to my comrades, I found out instead that they also did as I did, and I waited for the results ... Dear Enrico you went out right on the threshold of the big day and it is true what the great Pertini said it is not right that the righteous should pay, and this overtaking we dedicate to you with all our heart, but the malignant ones are never lacking, and they immediately said it was an emotional vote, it is not true we are not stupid and the Italian workers do not only know how to cry but also how to fight [...]*” – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 72/64, 17/06/1984.

¹⁴⁸ Luca Giurato, “La Dc teme il sorpasso”, in *La Stampa*, 15/06/1984.

– restored the unshakable electoral hierarchies of the First Republic, returning the DC to leading position. Nonetheless, the Sardinian election did not distress the Communist Party leadership too much, perhaps, because it was aware of the emotion hidden beneath the volatile European electoral consensus and it was engaged in the difficult and delicate choice of a new secretary.

Berlinguer's succession was by no means a foregone conclusion. Several shortlists of candidates were circulating due the fact that the Sardinian leader had refused to choose a vice-secretary to whom the baton would be conferred by right, as had happened to him after Longo's dismissal. The voices were manifold. Giorgio Napolitano would have represented a rupture with recent past, Luciano Lama a depoliticized but more unionist “fourth way”, and Achille Occhetto a generational advance, probably, well accepted by large part of the communist community¹⁴⁹. The issue of succession became a topic of debate, and questioning, inside and outside the party precincts. There were those who spoke of a “Botteghe Oscure conclave”¹⁵⁰ of the few historical leaders, those who predicted open “primaries”¹⁵¹, while some other suggestions also came from communist voters, like Jolanda Oldo.

[...] Io non ero Comunista [...] Il socialismo degenerò sono al punto da essere rappresentato da un figuro come Craxi. [...] Ora invece – e grazie al tatto e alla Virtù impersonata da Enrico – il Partito gode di un rispetto e di una considerazione mondiale. Mi pare inutile affrontare argomenti religiosi, del resto la religione è politica. La correttezza di Berlinguer, la Sua vita è religione! Credo che con un segretario di partito come Lui si possano abbattere le ultime barriere: purtroppo Lui non ha più la possibilità di farlo! Spero scegliate quindi in questo senso (io vedrei molto bene la signora Nilde Iotti – non perché donna – ma per le sue doti di equilibrio, rettitudine e preparazione, ma forse non può essere eletta). Comunque, poiché avete sempre scelto la persona giusta in ogni momento della storia, voterò anch'io PCI attendendo fiduciosa il nuovo segretario, senza mai scordare chi ha saputo dare al Vostro partito la considerazione e la stima mondiale di cui gode. [...]]¹⁵²

The thinking expressed by Oldo pointed out how party voters, and militants, wanted a secretary who could embody what Berlinguer had done up to that moment. There was no stopping in them the need

¹⁴⁹ Giampaolo Pansa, “E come segretario io vorrei...”, in *La Repubblica*, 14/06/1984.

¹⁵⁰ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵² “[...] I was not a Communist [...] Socialism degenerated are to the point of being represented by a figure like Craxi. [...] Now instead-and thanks to the tact and Virtue impersonated by Enrico-the Party enjoys worldwide respect and consideration. It seems to me useless to address religious arguments; after all, religion is politics. Berlinguer's correctness, His life is religion! I believe that with a Party secretary like Him the last barriers can be broken down: unfortunately, He no longer could do so! So, I hope you choose in this sense (I would see Mrs. Nilde Iotti very well - not because she is a woman - but because of her qualities of balance, rectitude, and preparation, but perhaps she cannot be elected). However, since you have always chosen the right person at every moment in history, I too will vote PCI confidently awaiting the new secretary, never forgetting those who have been able to give your party the worldwide consideration and esteem it enjoys [...]]” - FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 72/64, 14/06/1984.

to search for the object lost in mourning, or rather the secretary's body and its content. Thus, in the new leader the older one had to survive. However, a repeated choice of continuity would prove irreconcilable with the transformative needs put in place by the liminal phase which the party was experiencing.

Alessandro Natta was the most natural candidate for his long experiences within the PCI in many different roles. Moreover, he had been one of the closer Berlinguer's collaborator especially during the difficult period of passage from the National Solidarity to the Democratic Alternative. Natta was "a combination of integralism and ductility"¹⁵³ which was chosen, according to the reporter Mario Pirani, with "the hope that he will not cause any surprise"¹⁵⁴. Natta's temperament, lack of ambition, advanced age, and ideal closeness to the beloved and popular Berlinguer made him the connecting figure – a guarantor – for a leadership in which the divisions, which arose in the early 1980s, were far from being dormant. Alessandro "the continuator" or Natta "the professor"¹⁵⁵, such as the newspapers soon nicknamed him, was elected with a large supporting majority: 227 votes gathered in his favor against 11 abstentions and none against¹⁵⁶. Some years later, Giuseppe Chiarante, who was member of that directorship, stated about Natta's election: "A formal continuity with Berlinguer's action of last period was certainly a very important choice and nevertheless not sufficient for giving an adequate answer to the difficult problems which the PCI had to deal with. It would be necessary, by Berlinguer's heirs, to face the new situation, with a more renovated spirit compared to the one that they demonstrated"¹⁵⁷.

It was precisely on this point that Natta's choice strongly mortgaged the future of the PCI, even before his practical political initiatives as secretary. The members of the PCI Central Committee, who survived Berlinguer, thought that the dead secretary had leaved a mere political programmatic legacy, without grasping the liturgical role that the Sardinian leader had been assumed during the 1980s liminal period. Renewal in continuity had already totally broken down in the face of the need to renegotiate the communist identity to allow it to survive, but this was not understood by the party leaders, increasingly divided among themselves, who decided to postpone once again the choice for a radical transformation.

¹⁵³ Antonio Padellaro, "Non sarà una reggenza", in *Corriere della Sera*, 28/06/1984.

¹⁵⁴ Mario Pirani, "Perché altri eredi sono stati esclusi", in *La Stampa*, 27/06/1984. However, to better understand Natta's figure is interesting what Ajello wrote about him in relations with Berlinguer: "an inspired and dramatic character seems to be succeeded by his unobtrusive double"; Moreover, Miriam Mafai reported an interesting description of new secretary's passions, who was passionate of Caproni's poetry and an aspiring opera singer capable to duet, with his wife Ade, entire stanzas of Verdi's *Traviata*. A meticulous hand writer who took notes with his tiny and unreadable calligraphy, during every meeting. See, Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 306 and Miriam Mafai, *Botteghe Oscure addio*, *cit.*, p. 141.

¹⁵⁵ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

¹⁵⁶ Giuseppe Chiarante, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

Natta thus found himself playing a bridging function between a past in crisis and an indefinite future. However, this function of connection was never considered, and conceived, by the Latinist secretary as that of a master of ceremony. This can be discerned in the Gramscian motto which he chose for his role: “the fundamental task of one who leads is to prepare his successor”¹⁵⁸. He did not look at himself as the right man to fulfill the liturgical office of leading the passage toward a new entity, but he understood its importance to such an extent that he tried to pass it on to those comrades who would take its place. Indeed, the new secretary had the great merit to open the doors of the secretariat toward new leader coming from ‘68 generation and go beyond the generational rift which was one of the causes of separation of the communist social body.

Among these new entries, both Achille Occhetto and Massimo D’Alema appeared politically capable to lead the PCI, but in what direction was not clear enough at that time. Moreover, the incumbent secretary honored Berlinguer’s last effort toward the party innovation letting enter to the secretariat thirty-one Livia Turco, the first woman in Italian communism history. It quickly became manifest that there were tendencies toward innovation also in the new leadership of Botteghe Oscure, although the creative force, unleashed by liminality, failed to be shaped around the demands that the modernity imposed on the Italian communism. Thus, ending up tilting its responsiveness on the political level as well.

The perfect storm hit the PCI with the referendum vote on the *scala mobile* decree. The launch of that initiative had been strongly advocated by Enrico Berlinguer a few days before his death. Perhaps partly because of this legacy, it was not challenged despite the splits it continued to cause in the party. The approach to that vote had been conditioned by two factors: the electoral meltdown on May 12, 1985, local elections, and the almost total absence of a “pro-yes” campaign for repeal the most contested decrees of Craxi’s era. On one hand, the local elections’ defeat was unexpected to that extent, especially after the launch of Occhetto’s formula of *zoccolo duro*¹⁵⁹ for indicating that the PCI could be able to rely on 30% of consensus also during unfortunate moments. On the other hand, the absence of a compact mobilization in the run-up to the referendum pointed out how the masses, if not moved by the emotionality of tremendous moments, were no longer led to the polls by their organic connection to the PCI. Politics was changing along with society, and for success it now relied on the set of “acts, formulas and slogans”¹⁶⁰ fine-tuned by the PSI and just copied futilely by the communists.

According to historian Piero Craveri, the leadership of Botteghe Oscure was aware that the electoral regress and the referendum defeat should be considered “something more than a simple

¹⁵⁸ Miriam Mafai, *Botteghe Oscure addio*, cit., p. 141.

¹⁵⁹ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

¹⁶⁰ *Ivi*, p. 317.

setback”, or rather “a real definitive inversion of the cycle”¹⁶¹. In addition, this situation had been made even more complex by the coincident successes of communists’ opponents because, for the first time in the Republican history, the political dispute was the one between Christian Democracy and Italian Socialist Party. As *La Repubblica* titled “the challenge is Craxi-De Mita” and this condemned the PCI to an absence of exposure which was the worst that could have happened to it¹⁶², according to Ajello. The intricacy of the PCI difficulties was described in detail by a militant – Aldo Oldi – who wrote to Natta in September 1985, after a communist summer of failures.

*Pensavo che [...] dopo la scomparsa del compagno Enrico Berlinguer, il partito avesse scelto l'unica personalità che avrebbe rafforzato il ruolo dei comunisti nella nostra nazione. Evidentemente On. Natta lei ha raccolto molto meno di quello che effettivamente ha meritato. L'impressione che oggi noi comunisti stiamo dando è quella di un pugile che dopo aver subito un KO non ha più recuperato quella lucidità di mente e quella vigoria che sono indispensabili per poter tornare all'assalto. Questa situazione sta facendo infinitamente bene ai nostri amici-nemici socialisti.*¹⁶³

The image of the boxer in the corner is undeniably effective for describing both the PCI's isolation, caused by Berlinguer's hyper-moralistic legacy and Natta's inability to exploit the creativity implicit in the dynamism of that times, which on the contrary was precisely what the socialist “friend-enemies” were putting into action, gnawing away at the PCI among others.

Managing a party troubled by the increasingly consistent emergence of currents and the social changes, sweeping through the base, was cumbersome for a “bridge leader” like Alessandro Natta. It was so complicated that it challenged, as never before, the relationship with militants and local federations. Botteghe Oscure appeared increasingly inaccessible to the grassroots comrades, who thus distanced themselves from active militancy and relapsed into the silence that would accompany them from then on. In this perspective, it is comprehensible the unpleasant repartee between militant Francesco Nania, who complained about the PCI's indecision before electoral runs, and the secretariat, which initiated a blame-shifting action against the local federations.

¹⁶¹ Piero Craveri, *La Repubblica dal 1958 al 1992*, (Turin: Utet, 1995), p. 898.

¹⁶² Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

¹⁶³ “I thought that [...] after the passing of Comrade Enrico Berlinguer, the party had chosen the one personality who would strengthen the role of communists in our nation. Evidently Hon. Natta you reaped far less than you deserved. The impression we Communists are giving today is that of a boxer who after suffering a knockout has no longer recovered that lucidity of mind and vigor that are indispensable to be able to return to the assault. This situation is doing our socialist friends-enemies infinitely well.” – FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0581, 0040, 05/09/1985.

M: Caro Natta [...] dopo la sconfitta del 12 maggio tanti compagni mi hanno fatto notare l'indecisione del PCI [...]. Mi dispiace la questione sorpasso non è stata azzerata. Per non parlarti del referendum che non lo dimenticherò mai, mai, mai, mai.

P: Più che scrivere a noi sarebbe più opportuno che tu esponessi i tuoi punti di vista alle organizzazioni locali del Partito.¹⁶⁴

Natta's PCI remained at the mercy of the stormy sea represented by the ongoing changes in social reality, inside and outside the party. This happened both because the new leader lacked Berlinguer's "great prestige"¹⁶⁵ and he did not want to directly assume the role of leading the transition to the newness.

Irrefutably, the reading capacity of the whole party on the societal ongoing changes was insufficient. The exhaustion of the centrality of the working class wore down Occhetto's *zoccolo duro*. The growing atomization diminished the mutual support among the social and professionals' components of the PCI, which ended up requiring that the demands of one prevail over those of the other¹⁶⁶. Moreover, communists' directorship did not realize that the growth of tertiary sector was going to constitute a new electoral basin for achieving "new and broader consensus"¹⁶⁷.

Ajello assessed the situation through this metaphor: "The edifice of communist certainties is moth-eaten from within, like those bombed-out buildings of which only the outer walls remain standing, and one hesitates to tear them down"¹⁶⁸. This structural criticality now concerned also, and especially, the ideological-identity building. Here, a phrase of a leader from Emilia Romagna federation to his comrades lead little doubt: "You may dream of revolution at night, as long as tomorrow morning, when you are awake, you free yourselves from this nightmare"¹⁶⁹. Such heresy would have been condemned in not-too-distant times, now dampened its charge and the possibility of condemnation.

The PCI was changing and under Botteghe Oscure roof no longer lived a single idea of communism. In fact, during Natta's secretariat, the question of "what to do" was joined by the question of "let us still serve as we are"¹⁷⁰. Leaders, intellectuals, disillusioned militants and the

¹⁶⁴ "M: Dear Natta [...] after the May 12 defeat so many comrades pointed out to me the indecision of the PCI [...]. I'm sorry the overtaking issue has not been reset. Not to mention the referendum I will never, never, never forget it.

P: Rather than writing to us, it would be more appropriate for you to expound your views to the local Party organizations." – FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0581, 0001, 01/07/1985.

¹⁶⁵ Giuseppe Chiarante, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

¹⁶⁶ In the PCI archives are stored letters coming from workers of different sectors, such as local municipality administrative workers, who demands more attention for their interests from the party leadership. For examples see, FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0581, 0101, 14/05/1985 and FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0580, 0025, 20/03/1985.

¹⁶⁷ AAMOD, L'addio a Enrico Berlinguer, cit.

¹⁶⁸ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

¹⁶⁹ Francesco De Vito, "Utopia vo cercando", in *L'Espresso*, 15/09/1985. – The sentence was reported by Giancarlo Pajetta in this interview.

¹⁷⁰ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

“homeless of the left”¹⁷¹ understood that the implicit need to change became explicit, by asking themselves that last question. Although they still had not to figure out how¹⁷². Nevertheless, as had occurred at times in the past, foreign influences had restored cohesion of purpose and aspirations within the Italian communist party. While the PCI was searching for a common path toward changing its communism, elsewhere there was someone who was already attempting to enact such a process, inspired among other things right by the experience of the Italian communism. That person was the new visionary secretary of the PCUS, Mikhail Gorbachev.

2.6 Global Communism on the Move: the PCI and the Rise of Gorbachev

On May 1985, the PCI militant Cesare Occhiolini wrote:

*[...] non è che è il vertice che sbaglia tattica politica? Voi grandi statisti, non vi sembra di dimenticare le basi fondamentali del piccolo elettore?*¹⁷³

The short comment was cutting and sly, pointing out the communist body politic dissatisfaction for the disoriented attitude of the incumbent leadership toward new strategies. Under these circumstances, Natta opted to draw on identity resources, which came from Berlinguer and Togliatti's heritage, without evaluating enough their inadequacy and outdatedness in maintaining party unity¹⁷⁴. However, among old secretaries' bequests, there was the use of international spaces and relations for stimulating PCI domestic innovations; thus, the new secretariat gambled deep on the relaunch of this instrument. In any case, to succeed, a new way had to be found also here. To the inexorable decline of Eurocommunism and the inoperable nature of the Jalta Memorial, there now had to be added a substantial reflux of the pacifist movement.

In contrast to the past, a new opportunity was offered to the PCI by the advent of a pioneering figure. Mikhail Gorbachev was elected secretary of soviet comrades in March 1985, after elderly Konstantin Chernenko's death. The new PCUS head was fifty-one years old and came from Russian countryside with the idea that the soviet system had to be renovated. He made experience in local government of his province, before being called to Moscow, that's way the incumbent soviet secretary

¹⁷¹ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 323. – The term “*senza tetto della sinistra*” was used for the first time by Antonio Giolitti.

¹⁷² The discussion on the direction of change to be given to the party formally opened with the publication of the pamphlet by historian and director of the Gramsci Institute, Aldo Schiavone. See, Aldo Schiavone, *Per il nuovo PCI*, (Rome – Bari: Laterza Editori, 1985).

¹⁷³ “[...] isn't it that it is the top leadership that errs in political tactics? You great statesmen, don't you seem to forget the fundamentals of the little voter?” – FG, APC, Singoli, mf. 0581, 0038, 18/05/1985.

¹⁷⁴ Marco Di Maggio, “Tra Socialdemocrazia e Perestrojka. Le relazioni internazionali del PCI nelle carte di Alessandro Natta”, in *Studi Storici*, No. 1, (2020), p. 200.

well knew the state of the art of collective farms, industries, and party administration far from the Kremlin¹⁷⁵. For these very reasons, once he came to power, Gorbachev deemed liberalization and reform measures necessary for the Soviet system, which took on the names of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*¹⁷⁶. However, the main positive determinant, which unclosed real “Gorbymania”¹⁷⁷, was the “new way of thinking” – or rather “the formulation of a universalistic vision which recalled the traditional invention of humanistic socialism”¹⁷⁸ – that the Soviet leader launched. According to Pons, this vision “constituted indeed a form of cultural hybridization inspired by the perspective of a post-cold war world, convergent with other political and religious cultures, without repudiate the reclaim narrations of the communist identity”¹⁷⁹.

Nevertheless, it was persistent the Italian communists’ distance from a Soviet-type socialist project due the hopeful growing integration with the European left family: in fact, the Italian communists remained skeptical, when Gorbachev launched the program for “the Common European Home”¹⁸⁰, and they were absolutely against the reorganization of the International Communism Movement. The latter proposal had been presenting to the PCI delegation on January 27, 1986, during the meeting with the soviet young leader held in Moscow. The reception of Italian communist delegation was like that given to state representatives, but above all it is purged of all those “Cominform traditional elements”¹⁸¹ that had always characterized PCI-PCUS meetings. Gorbachev exerted great charm and gave an immediate positive impression to Natta, Macaluso, Sandri and Pajetta. The four PCI delegates were particularly satisfied by the explicit and exhaustive analysis that the head of the PCUS carried out about contemporary soviet society, highlighting its few lights and many shadows. There was just

¹⁷⁵ For an overview on Gorbachev biography see, William Taubman, *Gorbachev: his life and times*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2018).

¹⁷⁶ These two terms were used to indicate the process of reforms and liberalization decided by the new soviet leadership in the mid-1980s with the aim to invert the USSR economic cycle of stagnation and to open to a process of liberalization of soviet political system. – Odd Arne Westad, *op. cit.*, Cap. XX; see also Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹⁷⁷ Gorbachev’s attitude was very appreciated all around the world during his mandate because of his reform project for the Soviet Union, but above all his engagement to end the bipolar system. The combination of those factors generated a real mania toward PCUS secretary, who became the face of many newspapers first pages and tv programs. The “Gorbymania” was also fostered by the good words which the British PM Thatcher spend for him after their first official meetings. For a complete study of this side of late Cold War history see, Archie Brown, *The Human Factor. Gorbachev, Regan and Thatcher and the end of the Cold War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

¹⁷⁸ Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, *cit.*, p. 282.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸⁰ It was one of the last Gorbachev’s ideas for trying to change USSR destiny, domestically and internationally, achieving a possible integration of Russia in the European systems for a Europe “from the Atlantic to the Urals”. For an overview on this conceptualization see, Kristian Petrov, “Russia in the European Home? Convergence, Cosmopolitanism and Cosmism in Late Soviet Europeanisation”, in *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 65, No. 2, (2013), pp. 321-346; and also Wilfried Loth, “Mikhail Gorbachev, European Security and the Common European Home. 1985-1989”, in Michael Gehler, Wilfried Loth, eds., *Reshaping Europe. Towards a Political, Economic and Monetary Union 1984-1989*, (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2020), pp. 421- 442.

¹⁸¹ Marco Di Maggio, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

one element of friction, that would actually fall away after some time: the revival of the international communist movement as a variant of social democracy.

The historian Marco Di Maggio recalled that “the soviet leader insists on deep links not only between both parties’ leaderships, but also among the masses of the two countries, constituted through common struggles leaded by communists”¹⁸². Natta and his delegation rejected an exceptional reading of the intra-communist relation for several reasons. Firstly, it was respecting the heritage of Berlinguer, for whom a variant on the social democratic model was necessary but it should be authentically created by the PCI. Secondly, the Italian communists are not at all convinced of mending the *strappo*¹⁸³ with USSR, such as Armando Cossutta’s exclusion, from Natta’s new leadership, is also pointed out¹⁸⁴. Ultimately, the delegation seemed most interested in new soviet leadership’s idea of overcoming the Cold War bipolar system, because it had always barred the PCI from the govern. Therefore, using Ligurian secretary’s words: “the PCI is not and does not feel part of an international communist movement, which [...] does not exist today and whose re-foundation [...] would entail serious damage”¹⁸⁵.

Despite these differences, Gorbachev was dedicated to recovering a tilted relationship. After all, the soviet leader had never hidden his esteem for the Italian communist experience and for Enrico Berlinguer. The Sardinian secretary’s funeral had taken on for him a significance that was even greater than the reading of Gramsci¹⁸⁶, who underpinned anyway the Perestroika inherent challenge of transforming “the struggle for power into the struggle for hegemony”¹⁸⁷. The PCI doubtfulness

¹⁸² Marco Di Maggio, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

¹⁸³ Gregorio Sargonà, “La fine del comunismo”, in Silvio Pons, eds., *il comunismo italiano, cit.*, p. 628.

¹⁸⁴ Cossutta’s removal from the party direction was not popular among the militants who, despite his sovietism, saw the elderly leader such as a reference figure in the history of PCI and trade union struggles. For this reason, an old base comrade, Gianni Berardi, wrote to Gian Carlo Pajetta: “*Dear Comrade Pajetta, as I unfortunately easily predicted and wrote to you, one of the most popular and prestigious exponents of the party like Armando Cossutta has been excluded from the leadership. [...] you understand Cossutta certainly has a larger following among members and voters than people like Livia Turco, Fulvio Mussi, Gavino Angius, Luciano Guerzoni, Umberto Ranieri and many others. Cossutta's theses had a certain following, even though it was dangerous for fellow leaders to pronounce and fight for them to prevail. Why then was there a desire to distort the will of the base? Why were corridor maneuvers preferred to stifle a very widespread trend in the party? Perhaps because one wants to move closer to the DC again (I think I read that Ms. Turco is a practicing Catholic!) and renew the inglorious years of solidarity that cost the loss of 4 percent of the vote, many members, and many militants? Perhaps because one dislikes those who are decidedly anti-American [...] and in favor of the anti-imperialist policy (Afghanistan aside) of the Soviet Union? If this is the case, let us not be surprised if [...] our members and voters are leaving for Proletarian Democracy, which is increasing its followers every day to our detriment. [...] I am worried about the backlash that such a torpedoing wanted by the top leadership will cause in the base. [...] If you talk to the base about Cossutta's exclusion, you will see how many will say they are against it. And let's not complain then if there are few, very few who make section life and actively participate in electoral campaigns as happened until 1976. When you ignore the will of the grassroots and make such undemocratic decisions [...] it is difficult then for the grassroots to mobilize as they did before the ill-fated government alliance of 1976! [...]*” – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 73/67, 31/01/1986.

¹⁸⁵ Antonio Rubi, *Incontri con Gorbaciov. I colloqui di Natta ed Occhetto con il leader sovietico. Giugno 1984 – Novembre 1989*, (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1991), pp. 92- 95.

¹⁸⁶ Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri, cit.*, p. 282.

¹⁸⁷ Giuseppe Vacca, *Vent'anni dopo, cit.*, p. 118.

was still consistent when they came back¹⁸⁸. However, Natta reported his impressions and openly argued that the expressions used by Gorbachev, like those about the “lack of progression” the soviet system, could be assimilated on Berlinguer’s “end of the propulsive thrust”¹⁸⁹.

The PCI leaders accepted Natta's positive assessments, but they were not enough to drop their prejudices about the Soviets. Giorgio Napolitano, as was often the case, was the most skeptical, asserting that it was necessary to wait further to verify the veracity of the new Soviet intentions. In any case, it was shared the intention not to return to party’s identification with Cold War blocs’ movements. The confirmations, which Napolitano sought, were received directly from the new Soviet ideologue Zagladin following the Chernobyl accident and the imminent start of the Reykjavik negotiations with the United States. Indeed, the soviet leadership showed itself ready and willing to understandably accept the PCI's positions on the European left, and to open the door to a revision of its own judgment toward the social democratic parties¹⁹⁰.

The Gorbachev effect spread all over and the whole party seemed to be contaminated. The Italian communist pedagogy was no exception. Natta’s leadership decided to place at the center of its pedagogical action the historical reconstruction of the “reformist turning points”¹⁹¹ experienced during the political evolution of the PCI and the International Communist Movement. Therefore, in 1986, the choice could only fall on an event that had profoundly marked the course of communist evolution worldwide: the 20th Congress of the PCUS. According to Possieri, the commemoration of that Congress was celebrated such as “the starting moment of a process of communism reform which had Khrushchev as its forerunner and Gorbachev as its epigone”¹⁹². The party’s press conveyed a political-cultural system which provided for the revaluation of Khrushchev’s decision to launch, albeit in a poor and rude manner, a process of reformation. At the same time, *l’Unità* also emphasized Togliatti’s Yalta Memorial and its implementation realized by Berlinguer’s renewal into the continuity, ending up with an outstanding celebration of Gorbachev who took credit for having closed the Brezhnev’s era stagnation through a reform with the features of a “second revolution”¹⁹³.

Such a pedagogical narrative seemed to belie the need to veer toward a renegotiation of communist identity, whose absolute importance, and contemporary incompatibility with renewal in continuity, Berlinguer himself seemed to have realized in the ultimate phase of his life. Perhaps, Natta's party

¹⁸⁸ Alessandro Natta had expressed significant doubts about the soviet reforms during a directorship meeting on March 1985, affirming that “*we can expect some change and some measure of dynamism, but we know how complex the problems of the USSR, of the PCUS, are because of the positions we know. Confidence and caution in tandem, then.*” – FG, APC, Direzione, Verbalì, 20/03/1985.

¹⁸⁹ FG, APC, Direzione, Verbalì, 4/02/1986.

¹⁹⁰ Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri*, cit., p. 284.

¹⁹¹ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

¹⁹² *Ibidem*.

¹⁹³ *Ivi*, p. 193.

decided for this reason to immediately put another narrative alongside, concerning the rethinking of what had been the real 1956 traumatic event for Italian communism, namely the Soviet repression from the Hungarian revolution. Consequently, the leader of the Hungarian insurrectionists, Imre Nagy, was partially rehabilitated by the Ligurian secretary through an op-ed of *l'Unità*, in which he stated that “Nagy was certainly a true communist”¹⁹⁴.

The incorporation of these two events into the same pedagogical design appeared complex. However, Natta and other party leaders, such as Occhetto who had traumatically experienced the Hungarian revolt¹⁹⁵, succeeded in this undertaking using the Perestroika project. Indeed, after the PCI delegation's visit to the elderly Hungarian leader Kadar, which took place on October 1986 precisely in the days of the uprising celebration, Natta could also ascribe Nagy's executioner¹⁹⁶ among those communists who by espousing Gorbachev's reforms were attempting to redeem their past. The rehabilitation of Kadar was maybe the easier contribution in the “new cultural elaboration” of 1956 because already Berlinguer dedicated positive words to him during the Gianni Minoli's TV program Mixer. Indeed, on that occasion, the prematurely passed away secretary said that Kadar, along with Tito, was the communist leader who he had most appreciated¹⁹⁷.

Gorbachev and his Perestroika thus took on a salvific and redemptive dimension for those communist movements that decided to believe in it. For the Italian communists, it even offered a touch of liminal creativity, becoming potentially a carrier for a regeneration of the party. Furthermore, the admiration for Gorbachev functioned as a *trait d'union* between the various party components in their ongoing contention since the end of National Solidarity. For instance, Natta and Occhetto even after the difficult turnover in the party secretariat they always remained favorably convinced that in the Soviet Union reforming socialism, finally giving it a human face, was possible¹⁹⁸. This extreme and unwavering trust persisted until the aftermath of the Berlin Wall fall, highlighting how it was sustained more by political faith than by a conscientious analysis of the crisis that Italian and international communism were experiencing.

¹⁹⁴ Ugo Budel, “Intervista ad Alessandro Natta. L'Ungheria 1956, Il PCI, la sinistra”, in *l'Unità*, 12/10/1986.

¹⁹⁵ The journalist Giorgio Rossi recalled about the arrive of Achille Occhetto at the party newspaper offices to request a condemnation against USSR, the day after Hungary invasion: “*Rossanda, Feltrinelli and Achille Occhetto (who was then in charge of the Milanese university students) – 1956 - arrived to demand the publication of a communiqué against the USSR, and Lajolo first locked them in a room, then had to work hard to remove them.*” – ADN, Giorgio Rossi, *Niente di personale*, Prot. No. 51, MP/00, 2000, p. 88.

¹⁹⁶ For a brilliant study about the Hungarian revolt and its suppression see, István Rév, *op. cit.*

¹⁹⁷ Gianni Minoli, *Intervista a Enrico Berlinguer*, *cit.*

¹⁹⁸ On November 1989, during the TV program *Samarcanda*, Achille Occhetto, watching a video which showed the failures of Perestroika, still refused to recognize the enormous difficulties to reform communism following Gorbachev's program. – Michele Santoro, “Intervista ad Achille Occhetto”, in *Samarcanda*, 30/11/1989. The video is available on YouTube.

On this regard, historian Silvio Pons noted that “Gorbachev hence represented more an obstacle than a stimulus for the evolution of PCI political culture”¹⁹⁹ and, possibly, its identity. This interpretation appeared also confirmed by Giorgio Napolitano’s memory when he recalled that “the hope and illusion of a plain success of Gorbachev reformist design ended up slowing the tardive and delayed evolution of PCI toward the European democratic socialism”²⁰⁰. Nevertheless, Napolitano’s way out to European-style social democracy and the idea that the Perestroika was an obstacle, for the conclusion of PCI transformative process, were certainly not the interpretations given at the time by the party leadership, but neither the ones given by its militants.

The Italian communist people, or at any rate the part of it that remained most active, seemed to entrust Gorbachev and his “second revolution” with the ultimate attempt to keep the revolutionary horizon alive, albeit with increasingly reformist connotations. The words of several comrades writing in *Botteghe Oscure*, parallel to the advance of the Soviet reformist program, should thence be read in this light. A twenty-five-year-old student, with a past of militancy also in *Lotta Continua*, Pietro Rocca wrote to Gian Carlo Pajetta:

*Caro compagno Pajetta, innanzitutto mi presento sono uno studente universitario di giurisprudenza ormai, ahimè, fuoricorso, ho venticinque anni, e sono un sincero, convinto marxista. Ho vissuto la mia adolescenza in un clima politico ben diverso da quello attuale [...] tra il 1976 e il 1980 c'era quella effervescenza rivoluzionaria (avventurista, dicesti tu) che ha caratterizzato la fine di un'epoca, e che ha marcato la mia vita e il mio modo di pensare. [...] compagni come te il partito non ne produce più. E se ci sono, non li spinge a sufficienza. Sapessi che impressione negativa fanno, visti da "fuori", i giovani quarantenni compagni dirigenti e funzionari che parlano e si propongono senza alcuna passione, come se reclamizzassero un asciugacapelli o una scatola di cioccolatini. Sì, lo so, i tempi sono cambiati, si vive in un'epoca avara, disillusa, de-ideologizzata, in cui ci fanno credere che i confini fra destra e sinistra siano sempre più confusi: questa è un'epoca in cui ci si vergogna di essere Compagni, in cui definirsi leninisti comporta la derisione degli altri, come se fossimo dinosauri in via di estinzione. Invece Gorbačëv ci dà nuove speranze, è lui, il suo operato, il suo tentativo rivoluzionario e nobilissimo che ci infonde coraggio di non abiurare. [...]*²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Silvio Pons, “L’invenzione del ‘post-comunismo’: Gorbachev e il Partito Comunista Italiano”, in *Ricerche di storia politica*, No. 1, (2008), p. 22

²⁰⁰ Giorgio Napolitano, *Dal PCI al socialismo europeo. Un'autobiografia politica*, (Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 2005), p. 228.

²⁰¹ “Dear Comrade Pajetta, first of all let me introduce myself I am a university law student now, alas, out of school, I am twenty-five years old, and I am a sincere, convinced Marxist. I lived my adolescence in a political climate quite different from the one we have today [...] between 1976 and 1980 there was that revolutionary effervescence (adventurist, you said) that characterized the end of an era, and that marked my life and my way of thinking. [...] comrades like you the party no longer produces any. And if there are, it does not push them enough. If you only knew what a negative impression they make, seen from "outside," the young 40-year-old comrade leaders and officials who speak and propose

The words of this young man, a son of the defeated generation of 1977, are a mixture of criticisms and hopes. He blamed the young unpassionate bureaucrats of the Italian Communist Party, while he exalted the reformist-revolutionary project of the new Soviet leadership because it kept alive the fideistic hope of those who saw in communism not just a declining political party, but an inescapable creed. Even though similar in content, but different in intent and hopes, the words of another communist student, Fabio Carlini, who analyzed the critical issues of communist policy after the 1987 election defeat, were crucial to understand Gorbachev's effect on militants.

*La classe operaia e i giovani, dunque, si trovano smarriti e confusi nei confronti di un PCI che ha la volontà di cambiare senza avere le idee chiare e la fermezza necessaria a imporre la propria immagine di partito guida di una nuova classe operaia. In queste circostanze i giovani preferiscono dare il loro consenso a chi fa trasparire la volontà di fare battaglie veramente senza esclusioni di colpi [...] o a chi può garantire la stabilità e il benessere del paese [...] Tutto questo è potuto accadere perché non c'è più un sindacato e un partito capace di salvaguardare gli interessi degli operai, non c'è più vera opposizione. [...] Allora se si vogliono mantenere i vecchi voti ed acquistarne di nuovi c'è da fare una svolta riformista vera, concreta, [...] è il caso di dire Gorbacioviana. [...] così deve trovare coraggio il Pci: eleggere un segretario giovane, anonimo e riformista, riformatore, nuovo e innovatore. [...] sarebbe meraviglioso se la persona fosse donna, il che dimostrerebbe la grande maturità acquisita dai comunisti che non dovrebbero più guardare l'Inghilterra con un senso di invidia. Perciò volti nuovi per mentalità nuove che rispettino gli insegnamenti marxisti e la classe operaia. [...]*²⁰²

without any passion, as if they were advertising a hair dryer or a box of chocolates. Yes, I know, times have changed, we live in a miserly, disillusioned, de-ideologized age, in which we are made to believe that the boundaries between left and right are increasingly blurred: this is an age in which we are ashamed to be Comrades, in which calling ourselves Leninists entails mockery of others, as if we were endangered dinosaurs. Instead, Gorbachev gives us new hope, it is he, his work, his revolutionary and most noble attempt that instills in us courage not to abjure. [...] – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 76/81, 08/11/1987.

²⁰² *“The working class and young people, therefore, find themselves lost and confused vis-à-vis a PCI that has the will to change without having the clear ideas and firmness necessary to impose its image as the leading party of a new working class. Under these circumstances, young people prefer to give their consent to those who show a willingness to wage truly no-holds-barred battles [...] or to those who can guarantee the stability and well-being of the country [...] All this has been able to happen because there is no longer a trade union and a party capable of safeguarding the interests of the workers, there is no longer any real opposition. [...] So if you want to keep the old votes and acquire new ones there must be a real, concrete, reformist turn [...] it is the case to say Gorbachevian. [...] so the PCI must find courage: elect a young, anonymous, reformist, new and innovative secretary. [...] it would be wonderful if the person were a woman, which would show the great maturity acquired by the communists who should no longer look at England with a sense of envy. Therefore new faces by mentality new faces who respect Marxist teachings and the working class. [...]* – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 76/79, 21/07/1987.

Fabio Carlini's request seemed to be heeded only barely to some extent. Soon after, Natta left his office, willing or not, to the younger and more emphatic Achille Occhetto. The inspiration to Gorbachev remained, the manners changed, the political project attempted to advance. The time of liminality was about to close, without regenerating communism, leaving militants with no political creed and with no one more reason for living politics.

CHAPTER THREE

A Left Palingenesis: Italian Communism Facing the 1989 Conundrum

*Qualcuno credeva di essere comunista,
e forse era qualcos'altro.¹*

Tita loved to read during her pregnancy. There was no shortage of books at home; after all, her husband Adolfo was the commercial director of the Einaudi publishing house in Turin. The childbearing often obliged to a bed rest, which Tita escaped reading of adventures and explorers. Among the latter, especially one captured her attention: Akel, a notorious Danish voyager of Greenland. The explorer's adventures, on the edge of reality and fantasy, were so pervasive in Tita's imagination that she did not hesitate for a second, after learning that the child she was carrying was a boy, to name him Akel. Unfortunately, it was 1936 and the Fascist registry office, pervaded by xenophilia, did not allow the newborn to be registered with that name. Tita and Adolfo searched for an Italian appellative that would most evoke him and opted for Achille... Achille Occhetto². Thus, it was inscribed in his birth certificate that Occhetto would be destined to cross the boundaries of the known world, sailing to the unknown. An unknown toward which he would also lead the Italian Communist Party when he became its secretary in June 1988.

This chapter focuses on the PCI's final political journey toward unexplored destinations, which Occhetto saw as the promise land, for creating with other Italians progressive forces a new enlarged left. This should be capable to overcome the "block of party system"³, assuring the end of communists' *coventio ad excludendum*. Here, the rise of this new leader and his "movementism"⁴ are examined to grasp the origins and nature of the changes that he had in mind for his party. In the first paragraph, the focus will shift on the new political pedagogy, launched by the incumbent leadership, to redefine the historical coordinates and displaying new potential landfalls for the political crew of the "communist galleon"⁵. Secondly, the spiritual, emotional, and political of Italian

¹ "Someone thought he was a communist, and maybe he was something else" – Giorgio Gaber, Sandro Luporini, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

² Sebastiano Messina, "Il leader che cambiò nome", in *La Repubblica*, 14/06/1994.

³ Martin J. Bull, "The Italian Communist Party in the 1980s and the denouement of the Italian party system", in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, (2022), p. 2.

⁴ Nello Ajello, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

⁵ This expression was used by Italo Calvino to define the giant and complex machine which was the Italian Communist Party. Nello Ajello, *Intellettuali e PCI. 1944/1958*, (Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 1997), p. 440-441.

communists at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of communist regimes in Eastern Europe will be described. In the third section, the attention will be devoted to discussions amongst leaders, cadres, and militants, on the future of the party, and their own future, which well ended up with a fracture in the communist body politic. Lastly, the chapter is going to recall the PCI ultimate moment of life and the birth of its successor *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (PDS, Democratic Party of the Left). This passage is important to understand. The crucial point here is that the communist leadership failed to re-aggregate the communist body politic, and therefore was not able to close the liminal period that lasted since the early 1980s. This is key to understand the limits, problems, and opportunities of the post-communist identity.

On May 1988, the PCI suffered another unsuccess in the local elections, losing the 4% compared with the precedent round. This negative result was amplified by the 1987 disastrous defeat at the national ballot, a sudden seatback for the communists' consensus. The party went down to 26,58%, or 10.250.644 votes⁶. On the eve of May 1988 elections, Occhetto issued a rash statement in which he claimed that the PCI was not declining and was instead still well rooted in Italian society⁷. Such an assessment was met with skepticism. There was in fact a growing alarm for the party state of political health at any level. Political scientist Piero Ignazi, commenting PCI latest results, made this statement: "if it is excessive to speak of a grassroots revolt, it is, however, unquestionable that the election defeat acted as a trigger for a long latent dissatisfaction and frustration"⁸.

During the summer 1987, Occhetto's appointment as deputy secretary – and the ensuing generational change in the whole party's leadership – should also have served to overcome the disillusionment generated by the electoral failures, in keeping with Natta's vision. However, this was not the case. Quite the opposite, the choice to appoint Occhetto confirmed was one of the worst practices of the party. According to Liguori, "such acceleration of decision-making processes that set aside consultations [...] that served to form consensus in the extended leadership group. In this there was certainly a desire to give a rapid response to the anxieties that ran through the party, but also a desire to balance or relativize the influence gained by the *miglioristi* at the XVII Florence Congress"⁹.

The deputy secretary was supported by the right wing of the PCI because of his personal history and political collocation. In fact, Occhetto's fascination for sixty-eight movementism, his youth passion for party left wing circles, and his irreverent dynamism head should be warning on the fact that he would not have been a "cookie" nor a "whisker"¹⁰ easy to handle and harness. This was even

⁶ Guido Liguori, *La morte del Pci. Indagine su una fine annunciata. (1989-1991)*, (Rome: Bordeaux, 2020), e-book, pos. 900.

⁷ Sandra Miglioretti, "Occhetto: in declino sarete voi", in *Paese Sera*, 29/05/1988.

⁸ Piero Ignazi, *Dal PCI al PDS*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992), p 95.

⁹ Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, p. 935.

¹⁰ ADN, Giorgio Rossi, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

more the case, considering that his future leadership had quite a specific mandate, namely, “to effect the renewal necessary to arrest the party's decline and restore it to a new, more effective place in the Italian political framework; while at the same time avoiding a traumatic breakup of the organization and its still enduring social strength”¹¹.

Natta was concerned by Occhetto's conceptualization of “discontinuity” from the past, because the Piedmontese leader wanted to pursue it as a “general political methodology”¹². With this mind, the discontinuity would be entirely opposed to the canonical “continuism”¹³ of the PCI since Togliatti's establishment of the *Partito Nuovo*¹⁴. Probably, for this reason, the Ligurian secretary was until the last-minute undecided whether to suggest as his own successor a young, but much more indebted to the tradition: Massimo D'Alema¹⁵. Despite the doubts of many, Occhetto's deputy secretaryship received the support of 191 Central Committee members out of a total of 257 voters. A fairly clear result confirmed, a year later, by his appointment as secretary after Natta's resignation.

On April 30, 1988, a new tragedy seemed to materialize for the communist secretariat. About four years after the death of Berlinguer, Natta also suffered a stroke shortly before a rally in Gubbio (in the Umbria region). His conditions were in fact not desperate, but it remained critical throughout the election campaign, which was then led by Occhetto. On June 13 Natta, having come out of life-threatening danger and returned to his home in Oneglia, wrote a letter to the party leadership. He decided to resign out “of a sense of duty” and to undertake a prompt succession dictated by the “harsh and troubling result of the local elections”. Nevertheless, he specified in the letter that he did not want to abandon the political activity and, once recovered, he would like to return as common militant, complying with the Franciscan rule whereby the prior once he has completed his term returns to being a simple friar¹⁶.

The resign disclosed something unprecedented in the PCI culture, or rather in its liturgy, especially considering the truthfulness of Miriam Mafai's comment, published in *La Repubblica* on June 26,

¹¹ Alberto Asor Rosa, *La sinistra alla prova. Considerazioni sul ventennio 1976-1996*. (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), p. 115.

¹² Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 945.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ This term is used to define Togliatti's re-construction of the Italian Communist Party after his return in Italy and the birth of the Republic. According to Togliatti the PCI should become a mass party ideologically pluralistic, constituting a base for the development of Italian Republic and its parties' democracy. For a general overview on Togliatti's role in the dawn of the Republic see, Aldo Agosti, eds., *Togliatti e la Fondazione dello stato democratico*, (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1986); Donald Sassoon, *Togliatti e il partito di massa*, (Rome: Castelvecchi, 2014); Giorgio Bocca, *Togliatti*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2021). For an interesting digital document about the lessons held in the PCI schools on Togliatti's history, see also, AAMOD, Stefano Gentiloni, Giuseppe Sibilla, *Togliatti e il Partito Nuovo*, (Rome: Ufficio Cinema PCI, 1976).

¹⁵ News reports trace back to the immediate aftermath of Berlinguer's death, a meeting in the Botteghe Oscure garage between D'Alema and Occhetto in which the two apparently seemed to agree not only to force a generational change at the top of the PCI but also, and above all, to establish a line of succession to Natta's secretariat – *Il patto del garage*. It would in fact be Achille Occhetto who would succeed the Ligurian professor and then leave the helm to Massimo D'Alema. See, Nello Ajello, “La fine del conclave rosso”, in *La Repubblica*, 29/10/1998; and Miriam Mafai, *Botteghe Oscure addio*, *cit.*, p. 142.

¹⁶ “Si è dimesso Alessandro Natta: la lettera al Comitato Centrale”, in *l'Unità*, 14/06/1988.

1988. The communist journalist recalled how, liturgically, “a secretary once elected is like the Pope, neither subject to revocation nor authorized to an autonomous act of resignation”¹⁷. The ritual of the PCI thus seems to be at the mercy of a strong wind blowing toward innovations, even with respect to the very role of secretary, such as demanded by militants too.

*[...] cos'è che è venuto a mancare nel Partito? Un Segretario Generale. Un Segretario Capo che abbia polso, energia, intelligenza politica, e grinta. Il partito comunista non è l'Azione Cattolica o un'organizzazione filantropica. È il partito che si batte, che si è sempre battuto. [...] Noi comunisti veniamo da lontano, ma ci siamo fermati presso un dormitorio. Ci siamo spogliati del nostro glorioso bagaglio e ci siamo arenati nella palude. Compagni dirigenti, SVEGLIA, MUOVERSI, AGIRE, così il Partito sarà degno di essere comunista. E che il PCI esiste, e si batte più che mai. Questa dovrebbe ed è la parola d'ordine non solo in questo momento contingente, ma sempre. [...]*¹⁸

These words, by the militant Gabriele Mulattino, were echoed by those of Mario Lizzero, who pointed out to Gian Carlo Pajetta an enormous mistrust of the party's choices, indicting the treatment that was given to Natta:

*[...] Consentimi di dirti con infinita tristezza che io penso: che Natta non si meritava questo trattamento; che il PCI da tempo non ha una chiara linea politica; non ha un programma politico, (malgrado la rivoluzione copernicana); non ha un gruppo dirigente di vertice che abbia sufficiente unità per dirigere un partito che, ancora oggi è una grande forza; che è isolato e senza alleanze. E soprattutto, penso che finché resta in queste condizioni, il PCI non ha avvenire. Un giorno non tanto lontano, tu mi hai detto che mai, durante tanti e tanti decenni della tua militanza nel PCI, neppure quando stavi in galera, ti sei sentito tanto in crisi. Come me. [...]*¹⁹

¹⁷ Miriam Mafai, “Dopo tre bocciature Natta sogna il ritiro”, in *La Repubblica*, 26/06/1988.

¹⁸ “[...] what has been missing in the Party? A general secretary. A Chief Secretary who has pulse, energy, political intelligence, and drive. The Communist Party is not Catholic Action or a philanthropic organization. It is the party that fights, that has always fought. [...] We Communists came from afar, but we stopped at a dormitory. We have stripped ourselves of our glorious baggage and stranded ourselves in the swamp. Comrade leaders, WAKE UP, MOVE, ACT, so the Party will be worthy of being communist. And that the PCI exists and is fighting more than ever. This should and is the watchword not only at this contingent moment, but always. [...]” – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 77/83, 03/06/1988.

¹⁹ “[...] Allow me to tell you with infinite sadness that I think: that Natta did not deserve this treatment; that the PCI has long had no clear political line; it has no political program, (despite the Copernican revolution); it has no top leadership group that has sufficient unity to lead a party that, even today is a great force; that is isolated and without alliances. And above all, I think that if it remains in this condition, the PCI has no future. One day not so far away, you told me that never, during so many and so many decades of your militancy in the PCI, not even when you were in jail, did you feel so much in crisis. Like me. [...]” – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 77/83, 14/06/1988.

The communist crisis, aggravated by the electoral defeats and Natta's resignation, was so pervasive that it undermined everyone from distinguished leaders to grassroots militants.

Furthermore, outside the party was condensing an air of drama made unbreathable by the interests of those who saw an advantage in weakening the PCI. Some newspapers, both Italian and foreign, began to fear the idea that a conspiracy orchestrated by the PCI's young leaders had been held against Natta²⁰. The cartoonist Forattini depicted Occhetto with a smoking rifle in his hands, Natta's head as a hunting trophy and at the foot of the caricature the epithet: Akiller²¹. Natta himself did everything in his power to refute that reading of the facts, but without too much success. Certainly, the succession had not been totally fair. Natta, however, elegantly tried to ensure the most peaceful passing of the baton possible; so much so that he earned an attestation of esteem even from a former communist like Giuliano Ferrara, who while considering Natta a "very bad secretary" would re-evaluate him as "an excellent former secretary"²². According to Ajello, "Natta's affair, and the manner in which it was carried out, had demonstrated that the generational change at the top of the PCI is accomplished"²³.

The reshaping of communist ritual that began with the resignation of Natta was finally accomplished on June 21, 1988, when the Central Committee ratified Occhetto's appointment. The party's highest collegial governing body also had undergone a transformation indicative of communist adaptation to current methods of politics. As Ignazi pointed out, the Central Committee had undergone an "abnormal growth – capable – of broadening the range of positions by making the various components accede to it"²⁴ and hence acknowledging, though not yet explicitly, the crystallization of the various internal factions. The votes for Occhetto were 278, an overwhelming majority. Only three members were against (all belonging to the reformist area: Colajanni, Perna and Fanti); whereas – among those abstaining – there were famous names like pro-soviet Armando Cossutta, ex-partisan Arrigo Boldrini and historian Giuliano Procacci.

The new 52-year-old secretary has been synonymous with "movements" at Botteghe Oscure for years. In his first speech to the leadership on July 6, 1988, Occhetto spoke immediately of the need for a "deconstruction of traditional social and political arrangements" aimed at the "re-founding"²⁵ of the party's identity, but also in the form and analysis of priority political issues. Pivotal role, among these priorities, assumed the unblocking of the political system and the adjustment in a socialist key

²⁰ Actuality, the letters Natta sent were two. The second one directed precisely to his successor in which, though elegantly, he expressed a severe and critical judgment of the forcing of communist customs and seriousness that had occurred during the succession. Without, however, ever hinting at conspiratorial ideas, advanced by the newspapers. On this regard see, Nello Ajello, *il lungo addio*, cit., pp. 358-359 and Paolo Turi, *L'ultimo segretario. Vita e carriera di Alessandro Natta*, (Padua: Cedam, 1996), pp. 649-650.

²¹ In *La Repubblica*, 17/06/1988.

²² Nello Ajello, *Il lungo addio*, cit., p. 359.

²³ *Ivi*, p. 360.

²⁴ Piero Ignazi, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

²⁵ FG, APC, Direzione, mf. 8811, 06/07/1988, pp. 6-7.

of the existing imbalances in capitalist society, through a program based on the new conceptual category of “strong reformism”²⁶. He tried to give a charming aura to the PCI, in line with the times. Whereas, he could not be considered an outsider, his personal story was so distinctive that he never expired in the dullness typical of other communist leader-bureaucrats.

Growing up in a family close to Franco Rodano's Christian left wing, Occhetto had been close to Italo Calvino and Natalia Ginzburg from an early age because of his father's work. Cesare Pavese often helped him with his schoolwork while the Catholic-communist Felice Balbo had been his confirmation godfather²⁷. Firstly, the young secretary had been very in line with Ingrao's purposes and, only later, he chose more moderate standings, coming close to Berlinguer. Occhetto had been active in the Italian Goliardic Union²⁸, where he had shared time and ideas with Bettino Craxi and Marco Pannella. In the 1970s he had been sent to head the Sicilian federation where he implemented the “autonomist pact”²⁹ policy with the DC. However, he discloses his best in in the PCI press and propaganda section.

He actually nurtured with the media a relationship of mutual attraction, characterized above all by his ability to speak in images and formulate slogans. Also, for this very reason, historian Guido Liguori noted that “there was in Occhetto's political culture an element of 'postmodernism' that placed him in tune with the 'spirit of the times', that means to be in line with the cultural model hegemonic in Italy and the West during the second half of the 1980s”³⁰. The “eternal young man”³¹ of Italian communism did not fail to adopt postmodern features even in the transformation that he attempted to enact on the political attitude and composition of his secretariat. On this regard, Ignazi recalled: “Compared to previous decades, when landing in the Secretariat was the crowning achievement of a long career, the difference is striking. Rather than the inner circle of the party's leadership, the

²⁶ Gregorio Sogronà, *op. cit.*, p. 634.

²⁷ Nello Ajello, *Il lungo addio*, *cit.*, p. 366.

²⁸ The *Unione Goliardica Italiana* was a university student association. It is generally framed as a left-wing organization, initially of the secular and republican area, then from the 1960s of the left tout court, with references such as the Italian Socialist Party, but also the Italian Communist Party and the Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity, which operated within the Italian National Representative University Union (UNURI) from 1948 to 1968. For a broader understanding see, Giovanni Orsina, “Ricostruire con l'unità di una generazione l'unità della Nazione. La nascita dell'Unione Goliardica Italiana. 1945-1953”, in Gaetano Quagliariello, Giovanni Orsina, eds., *La formazione della classe politica in Europa, 1945-1956*, (Manduria: Lacaita, 2000), pp. 383-424; and Vittorio Emiliani, *Cinquantottini. L'Unione goliardica italiana e la nascita di una classe dirigente*, (Venice: Marsilio, 2016).

²⁹ Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 962. – This pact launched in Sicily during the 1970s permitted to open a space for collaboration between PCI lead by Achille Occhetto and Nicoletti's DC. For an overview on this openness see, Pierluigi Basile, *Le carte in regola. Piersanti Mattarella, un democristiano diverso*, (Palermo: Centro studi e iniziative culturali Pio La Torre, 2007), pp. 57-79.

³⁰ Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 968.

³¹ It was the French newspaper *Le Monde* that called Occhetto the eternal young man, promising hope of Italian communism; “Achille Occhetto nouveau secrétaire general du Pci”, in *Le Monde*, 22/06/1988.

Secretariat of the Occhetto administration – as, in part, was already Natta's – looms rather like a working team in support of the secretary"³².

The discontinuity with the past had to be sharp according to the new communist secretary. The “old party” had to be overcome and put aside, even in term of symbolism and iconography. In this sense, the decision to allow to be photographed while he was kissing his wife Aureliana Alberici, in the Tuscan house of Capalbio, was not an extemporary decision, but instead it was certainly thoughtful. The photo-report was published by Eugenio Scalfari's *La Repubblica*, the latter of whom saw in the new PCI secretary the right man to carry out a liberal-socialist transformation of Italian communism. These images published in *Il Venerdì di Repubblica*³³ revealed two new interrelated aspects: a move toward modernization, without dismissing at least a bunch of hard-core communist ideas, and the increasing “Americanization”³⁴ of his politics.

Occhetto's Americanization and his influence on the party was increasingly visible. So much so that it also had to be openly presented to the militant body. For this reason, a public meeting between Alfredo Reichlin and Lester Thurow – a distinguished American economist and adviser of the future Democratic President Bill Clinton – was held before the final rally of the newly appointed secretary at the Festa Nazionale dell'Unità of Florence in 1988³⁵. The contamination³⁶ with liberal position was fostered by John Rawls' idea of a combination between “the principle of equal equality of opportunities and the principle of difference”³⁷, which was diffused in Italy by philosophers Sebastiano Maffettone and Salvatore Veca. The latter, in line with Liguori's argument, had a considerable influence in the PCI high culture and contributed for to redesign party theoretical horizons during the 1980s³⁸. The political recipe, that Occhetto was preparing for the revival of the PCI and was to be revealed at the 18th Congress, was “therefore a syncretic mix of communist radicalism and liberal themes, which in fact was going, albeit not entirely explicitly, toward a post-Marxist landing”³⁹. The direction toward a new way of understanding social justice was traced.

³² Piero Ignazi, *op. cit.*, p. 119. – The secretariat launched by Occhetto, which would become almost his staff, was formed by Fassino, Mussi, Pellicani, Petruccioli and Turco. Only Turco, along with Occhetto, remained there compared to Natta's last secretariat. Massimo D'Alema seemed to be sent into exile to run *L'Unità*, while others including Walter Veltroni, Massimo De Angelis, Iginio Ariemma while holding more functional positions became very close and privileged collaborators of the new secretary.

³³ Stefano Marroni, “I baci di Achille”, in *Il Venerdì di Repubblica*, 25/06/1988.

³⁴ Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 1613.

³⁵ Francesco Riccio, then national party manager, will give an account of that meeting, who will point out how there was also fear on the part of Occhetto's staff of ill-feeling about that American guest: “*Veltroni preferred a hall in the city. Naturally overflowing. He feared the liberal Democrat's impact with the people at the closing rally. Very red and festive. I invited Thurow to the closing rally. He wanted to learn about our world. He was impressed by the warmth and the big torchlight procession with newspapers that greeted the end of Secretary Occhetto's engaging rally. A debut for him as well.*” – Francesco Riccio, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

³⁶ The term contamination is going to be one of the workhorses of Occhetto's *Svolta* and PCI transformation into PDS.

³⁷ John Rawls, *Una teoria della giustizia*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1989), p. 77.

³⁸ Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 968.

³⁹ *Ivi*, pos. 1683.

Nevertheless, it had to be balanced wisely with symbolic elements of the communist tradition, so as not to open an identity crisis in the social body of the party ahead of time.

Instead, Occhetto will not be afraid to make a breakthrough during his trip to the United States in May 1989. It was then that the PCI secretary sought new support for his project to reform communism. Victor Navaski, editor of *The Nation*, declared that, dialoguing with Occhetto, he had the impression to confront a leader who “spoke the same language as the liberals in Manhattan”⁴⁰. He was almost enchanted with the political constellation of the “new world” that on May 19, 1989 – at Council on Foreign Relations’ meeting in New York – said: “In America, the word “liberal” has a meaning that closely resembles what is meant in Europe by the left. Thus, in America, speaking of the PCI, one could speak of an “Italian Liberal Party”. However, in Italy “liberal” would mean something else”⁴¹. Indeed, in the *Belpaese*, still for many people, militants and not, even the word communist had a different meaning from the one Occhetto gave to his U.S. interlocutors. Undoubtedly, the final communist secretary was not completely aware of this, but the PCI was still far from his idea of “new party” and would remain so for much longer, perhaps permanently.

3.1 Ending History: the New Communist Pedagogy for a Reforming Party

Communism was not intended just like an ideal or a programmatic solution for overcoming the problems and capitalism and establish equal social justice. Had this been the case, Occhetto's mandate to renew the party would probably have been easier to accomplish. However, in Italy communism had been – and still was – for millions of people something more. It was an existential marker of certainty, the reference point giving meaning to life, a utopistic horizon empowered to move masses sentiments and actions. The anthropologist David Kertzer defined it like “a faith, complete with complex liturgy and holy hierarchy” and, for this reason, when someone asked “Are you a Catholic? A citizen [...] was like to reply: No, I’m Communist”⁴².

Therefore, communism was a constellation of meanings that sustained the political and existential identity of people. Such a constellation was difficult to uproot and reshape, exactly how religions has been doing over centuries. Occhetto felt he needed to make a comprehensive reform to address the crisis of PCI and the inherent socialism that inspired it. Something that went even beyond Gorbachev's admired *Perestroika*. Something that would not re-aggregate the preexisted identity of the communist body politic, torn apart by the liminal period, but instead could create a new one, perhaps autonomous

⁴⁰ Guido Molto, “Un comunista a New York”, in *Il Manifesto*, 12/05/1989.

⁴¹ Achille Occhetto, *Un indimenticabile '89*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1990), p. 30.

⁴² David I. Kertzer, *Politics and symbols: the Italian Communist Party and the fall of communism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 13.

from communism itself. He needed a schism and achieved it through rewriting history, which was one of Marx and Engels's doctrine great pillars.

The research for a renegotiation of the communist identity until Occhetto's rise was conducted complying with Togliatti's heritage. Unquestionably, Berlinguer had introduced new variables – such as his move to pacifism – while preserving continuity with the past. This attitude seemed also at the base of Gorbachev's reforms, which were, for Occhetto, the only credible reference within the communist framework. The very fact, that the new PCI secretary chose a different path, although not denying his admiration for the Soviet counterpart, seemed to be a way to legitimize his renewal project in the eyes of those Italian communist militants. Indeed, quite a few among them still saw in Gorbachev – and not in Clinton's ideologues – the true path to the future revival of socialism⁴³.

The path toward identity innovation, which the new Italian communist leadership was ready to really implement, started from the need to sever the link with two strong historical-traditional elements: the heritage of Togliatti and the founding myth of October Revolution. According to Possieri: “notwithstanding the new historical-symbolic acquisitions of Occhetto's leadership, the roots with these two founding elements of the tradition had not been severed yet”⁴⁴.

For Piedmontese leader now the time had come, and in fact it was one of his first acts as new communist head. In 1988, following Gorbachev's decision to restore Bukharin's reputation, the PSI requested to the communists a true abjuration of Togliatti, who was accused to be a silent accessory of Stalin's crimes. The issue was strongly felt by the new young leadership of Botteghe Oscure for two main reasons. On one hand, from a practical point of view, the bond with Togliatti was an obstacle to be fully recognized such as a party legitimately belonging to the European democratic left⁴⁵, and consequently able to achieve Occhetto's first major foreign policy goal: the PCI entrance into the Socialist International. On the other hand, Togliatti's removal assumed an existential value for the new ruling class of the party, which saw here the heart of the generational dialectic erupted since 1968. On this regard, Massimo De Angelis remembered how their generation, forged by Dubcek's human socialism, was for a total reform of politics, for a struggle against a “jacobine conception of power and its profound democratization”⁴⁶. Three conditions that clashed profoundly with Togliatti's Soviet life and the moral justification, which through the party he offered to USSR during crisis like the 1956 in Hungary.

⁴³ Many Italians, communist or not, were fascinating by Gorbachev's reforms and, for this reason, they were still convinced – between 1988-89 – of a success in restructuring the USSR and the utopic horizon of communism. These beliefs were expressed in many letters which Italians sent to the PCUS head and his wife. See, Riccardo Mario Cucciolla, “La *perestrojka* vista dall'Italia: le lettere degli italiani al segreteria generale del Pcus tra gorbysmania e scetticismo”, in *Mondo Contemporaneo*, No. 2/3, (2020), pp. 171-190.

⁴⁴ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

⁴⁵ Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 1637

⁴⁶ Massimo De Angelis, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

Within about two weeks of his appointment as secretary, Occhetto began to rewrite of communist history. On 8 July 1988, he was in Civitavecchia for inaugurated a monument dedicated to Togliatti and precisely in that occasion the neo-secretary pronounced severe words against the famous comrade, who was being celebrated. Occhetto said concisely: “We know very well that he was inevitably co-responsible of choices and facts of Stalin’s era”⁴⁷. The historiographic revisionism of the new leadership was launched. Nevertheless, the tentative to reshape the collective memory of the party before a symbolic monument, which demonstrated concretely how deep was the appreciation for *il Migliore*, was problematic and would continue to be so.

In this sense, the Piedmontese secretary faced immediately two difficulties: a widespread strong opposition and the lack of an entrenched recognition of his leadership. As was obvious, the attempted *damnatio memorie* of the main party's illustrious fathers could not be received amiably by the older communists, who were still attach to Togliatti’s myth. The new secretary’s attempt was rejected by many because the generational turnover had not been as strong in the social base as in the PCI leadership. Occhetto was well regarded initially, but he could not count on an unchallengeable mandate. Even more so because he wanted to take advantage of it to erase the dear figures of communist people.

Occhetto talked about the necessity to “construct a new identity” and not “re-discover a blurred one”⁴⁸, without gave justifiable motivations and well-defined coordinates to do that. Togliatti had to be removed, but why and what to replace him with did not have been decided yet. Such revisionism compromised the militants’ identity, generating fear and dread for party and personal future. Someone was frightened that these removals constituted the sacrificial tribute, which PSI was asking communists to pay to bring them closer to “governability” area. An opportunity which fascinated Botteghe Oscure’s young leaders, such as denounced by comrade Giovanni Lanzena:

*Penso di aver capito il ragionamento di questa direzione di mezza età: a conti fatti [...] il futuro è assicurato. Una emorragia di voti del 3-4% per volta gli garantisce l’elezione fino alla morte, anche se quel giorno dovessero iscriversi al gruppo misto. L’importante è la poltrona. E una poltrona val bene la sconfessione di tutto: basta che Martelli ne faccia richiesta e si manda a mare Gramsci, Togliatti, Berlinguer. L’importante è dare “garanzie” agli altri. Ma quand’è che l’elettorato comunista ha dato questa delega alla svendita del Partito? In nome dei chi parla questa gente? [...]*⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, p. 1637.

⁴⁸ In *l’Unità*, 04/09/1988.

⁴⁹ “I think I understand the reasoning of this middle-aged leadership: on balance [...] the future is assured. A 3-4% hemorrhage of votes at a time guarantees them election until they die, even if they join the mixed group that day. The important thing is the armchair. And an armchair is well worth the disavowal of everything: all it takes is for Martelli to make a request for it and it sends Gramsci, Togliatti, Berlinguer overboard. The important thing is to give “guarantees”

The last question seems rhetorical and underlines considerably the absence of solid consensus for a process of historical revisions. Renegotiating communist identity had not been simple for the beloved Berlinguer; it seemed pure utopia for the divisive new secretary. It was not Occhetto as a person the problem; it was instead what he, also generationally, embodied that would create tension: a *nuovismo*⁵⁰, that had always been unwelcomed among a party that had been constantly resistant to modernity. Occhetto wanted at all costs to be recognized as the party's new master of ceremony. He understood that his role could not stop at mere secretariat. However, the communist body politic seemed not to recognize him unconditionally for this new function, preventing the young leader from fulfilling it.

Quite the opposite, the grassroots seemed to invite Occhetto to defend and relaunch the tradition. For instance, a militant, who had recently joined the party, noted in a letter to Gian Carlo Pajetta:

*[...] Sono un neo-tesserato di Genova e Le scrivo la presente per esternarle il mio dissenso alla linea assenteista assunta dal partito in merito alle accuse rivolte al nostro defunto Segretario Onorevole Palmiro Togliatti. Occorre a mio avviso che il partito assuma una netta e chiara linea di difesa dell'operato di Togliatti nel suo complesso, puntando soprattutto su quanto ha fatto per il nostro Paese, sul lavoro svolto per ricucire il tessuto economico, politico e sociale lacerato e distrutto da quella classe dirigente che ora ha il coraggio di riesumare il passato per i propri fini politici, quel passato di cui detta classe dirigente non ne ha mai pagato nella giusta misura il conto.*⁵¹

The comment was subtle and not frontally directed toward the secretary. Others so found new manner for expressing his disagreement, finding fault in the capacities of PCI offices – such as the press and propaganda one – now guided by the inner circle of Occhetto.

Io mi attengo ai fatti, se noi perdiamo voti, e perché ci allontaniamo dalla base, sindacale e politica. Le sezioni non si devono aprire solo nelle campagne elettorali? I nostri amministratori, comunali, sindacali e regionali, ognuno va per conto suo, senza sentire la base e i lavoratori. Il Partito deve avere la sua identità, rinnovatrice sì ma con la sua identità politica. [...] Secondo me il PCI sulla

to others. But when did the Communist electorate give this proxy to the selling out of the Party? In whose name do these people speak?" – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 77/83, 31/05/1988.

⁵⁰ “Newness” for indicating Occhetto’s leadership attitude toward party’s renewal through the introduction of some new ideal and political features, see Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 3243.

⁵¹ “[...] I am a new member from Genoa and I am writing you this letter to express my disagreement with the absentee line taken by the party regarding the accusations made against our late Secretary Honorable Palmiro Togliatti. It is necessary, in my opinion, for the party to take a clear and unambiguous line of defense of Togliatti's work as a whole, focusing above all on what he did for our country, on the work he did to mend the economic, political and social fabric torn and destroyed by that ruling class that now has the courage to exhume the past for its own political ends, that past for which said ruling class has never paid the bill in due measure.” – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 77/86, 13/10/1988.

*informazione, è molto carente su tutti i campi. [...] si continua a parlare sulla stampa, alla Radio, alla Tv, adesso fanno anche i libri, su Stalin come se tutti i mali lui. Ma allora nell'impero mondiale capitalistico fino a oggi, e giorno per giorno, ci sono i super Stalin massacratori senza un minimo motivo [...] Io ho voluto farvi presente, che nel nostro partito le cose non vanno bene, ci vogliono più controlli, esigere come faceva Togliatti [...] aveva ragione lui, non ci si deve fermare mai, ci vuole la lotta dura, contro la DC.*⁵²

The communist community looked pervaded by diriment questions, the answer to which had such a strong spiritual charge that it almost wanted to be exorcised by militants. Mighty evocative queries which took the courage out of everyone to ask it explicitly. Nevertheless, an intellectual comrade from Milan, Ernesto, asked it bravely to Occhetto: "Let us turn the page. But reneging on what?"⁵³

For the new communist leadership, the list of removals was long and often troublesome to carry out without breaking with faithful party members, as in the case related to the further rehabilitation of Hungarian leader Imre Nagy, already partly accomplished by Natta. In 1988, it was going to be celebrated the thirty anniversaries of Nagy's death. The secretariat coordinator Piero Fassino was invited in Paris to join a celebration in tribute of the executed leader, while on *l'Unità* was published a series of documents and memories about Hungarian trials, judgments, and repression edited by historian Federico Argentieri⁵⁴. The recognition of Budapest atrocities was evidently belated, but inevitable. However, 1956 had been one of the party's first moments of internal crisis and splits, still experienced with great bitterness. A wound that had never healed. For this reason, before leaving for Paris, Fassino received a phone call from Pajetta in veiledly undermining tones: "If you defend Nagy on behalf of the party, I will go to Budapest to speak in favor of Janos Kadar"⁵⁵. The PCI secretariat coordinator paid no heed to the words of the elderly and influential leader. Arriving in the French capital, Fassino described Nagy's 1956 revolution as "a great and indelible event in the history of human emancipation [...] a precursor of the Prague Spring"⁵⁶.

⁵² "I stick to the facts, if we lose votes, and why are we moving away from the grassroots, union and political. Shouldn't sections be opened only in election campaigns? Our administrators, municipal, union, and regional, each go their own way, without hearing from the grassroots and workers. The Party must have its own identity, renewing yes but with its own political identity. [...] In my opinion the PCI on information, it is very deficient on all fields. [...] you keep talking in the press, on Radio, on TV, now they even make books, about Stalin as if all the evils him. But then in the capitalist world empire until today, and day by day, there are the super Stalin slaughterers without the slightest reason [...] I wanted to point out to you, that in our party things are not going well, we need more controls, demand as Togliatti did [...] he was right, we must never stop, we need the hard fight, against the DC." – FG, AGCPAJ, fasc. 77/86, 09/07/1988.

⁵³ Francesco Demitry, Gabriella De Paolis, *Compagno Occhetto, che fare? Critiche e domande degli italiani nelle lettere al segretario del PDS*, (Genoa: Marietti, 1993), p. 36.

⁵⁴ Nello Ajello, *Il lungo addio*, cit., p. 361.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

Another crucial moment of 20th century communist history was pedagogically re-thought by the incumbent leadership, now only remained to weed out the seed of all the evils of decent socialism: the October Revolution. Occhetto's attraction to the liberal left and his constant distancing from the communist left tout court posed the need to rethink the founding myth of the party's new identity. The October Revolution no longer seemed to suit for the new generation in power. 1917 had been emancipation but also an omen of great human misfortunes. The struggle for justice and equality had since then ended up turning into a suffocating bureaucratic and Jacobin power structure. It was precisely that Jacobinism – which Mathiez's historiographical current had correlated to Bolshevism⁵⁷ – that was deemed by Occhetto to be the capital sin of the French Revolution, whose Girondin phase he was instead preparing to exalt.

On January 29, 1989, the weekly magazine *l'Espresso* published a special issue regarding the French Revolution bicentenary. The pages of that edition contained an interview to the PCI secretary, who declared: “If we stop at the stage of August 1789, if we look at that fundamental moment of the Revolution that was the ‘Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen’, there is no doubt: the PCI is a child of this great act of history. it is a child of the French Revolution. We recognized democracy as a universal value [...] affirmed in that very declaration”⁵⁸. Occhetto established a new palingenetic event not so much for emphasizing the diversity of Italian communism – so dear to its predecessors and militants – but precisely to change its identity roots. The October Revolution was annihilated and sternly replaced by 1789. Symbolically, not just a certain set of ideals of communism was lost, but the very meaning of this word and of saying oneself a communist such as millions of Italians still felt they could and should do. According to Liguori: “The explosive consequence of Occhetto’s thesis was detectable in a sudden reshaping of October Revolution, set aside together with seventy-years of communist history and ideals (and with almost a century of socialist principles) to make way for liberal ideals brought about the French Revolution”⁵⁹. Such an interpretation is not completely convincing, because Occhetto’s choice was not simply extemporaneous and sudden.

Quite often, the Piedmontese secretary has been described such as “*lo svelto*”⁶⁰ and disinclined to long thoughts and reflections. However, his re-symbolization of party’s founding myth was a process-initiated months before Adornato’s interview. Florence’s 1988 Festa Nazionale dell’Unità was totally dedicated to the bicentenary of 1789 revolution “for providing the needed lifeblood to Occhetto’s new path, so that it permits to the new young leadership to free themselves from communists’

⁵⁷ Albert Mathiez, *Le bolchevisme et le jacobinisme. Éd. 1920*, (Paris: Hachette Livre BNF, 2018).

⁵⁸ Ferdinando Adornato, Achille Occhetto, “Parigi, tu sei la nostra rivoluzione”, in *A due secoli dalla Rivoluzione Francese* add to *L'Espresso*, 29/01/1989.

⁵⁹ Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 1707.

⁶⁰ “*The quick Achille*” – Gianfranco Piazzesi, “Achille lo svelto”, in *Corriere della Sera*, 21/06/1988.

regimes”⁶¹. The choreography, debates, and guests – such as Thurow – were directly related to Enlightenment-liberal culture, while traditional and Eastern-sounding elements became residual. There, the militants were enveloped in a “light mood profoundly different from the traditional PCI gatherings [...] The political fest par excellence had been transformed into a cultural playful happening in which the removal of the past and indeterminacy for the future dominated”⁶².

Few months after, several French Revolution commemorative articles were diffused by party’s press, culminating with Michel Winock’s book “*Francia 1789. Cronaca della rivoluzione*”⁶³, which took on great pedagogical value. Based on Furet and Richet’s Manichean reading of the Revolution as a “good 1789” and a “baleful 1793”, it included the condemnation of Jacobinism as totalitarian. Thus, both Jacobins and Bolsheviks had become for the PCI leadership “no longer hardened and intransigent revolutionaries, advocates of an enlarged democracy, but orthodox supporters of unanimism at the expense of pluralism”⁶⁴. The substitution of the Soviet October for the French May marked a new identity breakthrough fundamental for the party’s future. The class revolution was being replaced by individual and the citizens’ one, giving birth to the concept of “civil society”⁶⁵. It would be a cornerstone of the PCI transformation, undertaken by Occhetto a year later.

In a recent book about the “left eclipse”, Occhetto emphasized the fact that his leadership, at the time of the turn toward the birth of the PDS, had already fielded a renewed political culture through the theses elaborated at the PCI’s 18th Congress. He writes: “I underline it once again, for a collective decision of all that congress, we decided to name ourselves ‘new PCI’. Nearly, an anticipated reference toward a new name, a sort of unspeakable desire”⁶⁶. As matter of fact, the Congress held in Rome between 18 and 22 March 1989 throwed together “good intentions and feigned proposals”⁶⁷, which for certain aspect were very sensible to Ingrao’s left-wing ideas. The document prepared by the Central Committee, and approved by the congress, was permeated by large attentions toward themes and movements like feminism and ecologism. Particularly, the latter was so exasperated in Occhetto’s speech that the PCI political meeting go down in history such as the Congress of Amazonia⁶⁸. However, using the words of liberal Salvatore Valitutti, the “skillful and patient

⁶¹ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁶³ Michel Winock, *Francia 1789, cronaca della rivoluzione*, (Rome: l’Unità, 1988). The book was distributed in Italy such as an addition to newspaper *l’Unità* on 18/12/1988.

⁶⁴ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

⁶⁵ *Ivi*, p. 268.

⁶⁶ Achille Occhetto, *La lunga eclissi. Passato e presente del dramma della sinistra*, (Palermo: Sellerio Editore, 2018), p. 1528.

⁶⁷ Nello Ajello, *Il lungo addio*, *cit.*, p. 372.

⁶⁸ This expression was utilized by Bettino Craxi, commenting the PCI Congress during those days. Achille Occhetto, *La lunga eclissi*, *cit.*, pos. 1789.

interweaving of revolutionary futurism and everyday Realpolitik”⁶⁹ hid the modified identity reference contained in the document approved during the Rome Congress.

While everyone was captivated by Occhetto's references to replacing revolution with strong reformism or his praise of John Paul II's encyclical, the congress text sanctioned the transformation of socialism into an “*idea-limite*”⁷⁰. Marx's conceptualization was no longer understood as a goal to be achieved but as “a process” capable of leading to “a more just society”⁷¹. Therefore, the document approved by the congressional representatives of the Italian Communists stated: “socialism can no longer be conceived as a system, as a law of history. It is born out of the objectivity of real needs and contradictions; it is the ideal and political inspiration of a movement capable of transforming existing societies, in both the national and international spheres, through the greatest possible extension of democracy”⁷². For Occhetto's party, socialism seems no longer a utopian horizon and faith for the integral construction of a more just and equal communist society. It becomes mere political instrument for the rehabilitation of democracies, especially capitalist ones. The party was preparing itself, and preparing its socialism, for the “end of history”, that a few months later would be theorized by Fukuyama⁷³.

Now though it had to be made clear to those who that end and the waning of utopia on the communist horizon line did not yet want to believe. Indeed, the 1968-libertarian journalist Giuliano Zincone, emphatically hailing the new liberal-democratic course initiated by the reformist leadership of the “new PCI”, asked a crucial question that Occhetto could never have, nor knew how to answer: “Welcome among us, comrade Occhetto. Welcome among the social-traitors [...] among the non-violent radicals [...] welcome to the liberal left which knew Tocqueville, Gobetti and Dahrendorf [...] welcome among the descendants of anti-authoritarian Sixty-eight and creative Seventy-seven [...] Welcome under the wings of Wojtyla, Brandt and Gorbachev. Notwithstanding, to whom will you narrate that this is called communism, comrade Occhetto?”⁷⁴

Admittedly, Gorbachev remained the last great foothold for communism and, perhaps, that was the reason why Occhetto had placed him at the center of the bulk of his address to 18th Congress. However, Soviet regimes crisis deepened over 1989 summer⁷⁵ and it seemed to drastically diminish

⁶⁹ Nello Ajello, *Il lungo addio*, cit., p. 373.

⁷⁰ “*Idea-boundary*” – Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 1897.

⁷¹ *Ivi*, pos. 1889.

⁷² Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 1896; see also, Partito Comunista Italiano, *Documenti approvati dal 17° al 18° Congresso*, p. 554.

⁷³ Francis Fukuyama, “The end of history?”, in *The National Interest*, No. 16, (1989), pp. 3-18.

⁷⁴ Giuliano Zincone, “No, caro Cossutta, nel tuo partito non c'è più posto per i comunisti”, in *Corriere della Sera*, 21/03/1989.

⁷⁵ The 1989 Congress had been immediately followed by the staggering events of repression that had occurred in China. The Tian An Men Square massacre had destabilized Italian Communists, who immediately condemned the actions of the Chinese Communist government. In any case, sharing the term communist between the PCI and its Chinese counterpart increasingly embarrassed Occhetto's party, which was intent on self-reform. The embarrassment would also grow

hopes for the success of the visionary leader of the PCUS' reforms. Not many viable avenues remained to try to explain the revisions of the 18th Congress as overhauls of a communist nature unless the name was changed abjuring even more decisively the party's past. It was necessary, nonetheless, to probe internal reactions to such an eventuality. Many felt that the article by the Neapolitan philosopher Biagio De Giovanni, which appeared in *L'Unità* on the 25th anniversary of Togliatti's death, served precisely that purpose. The title "*C'era una volta Togliatti e il comunismo reale*"⁷⁶ left little doubt. Following up on the arguments of his pamphlet published in January 1989 – "*La Nottola di Minerva*"⁷⁷ – De Giovanni argued that "the builder of the new party was an integral part of Italian history but not of the new course of the PCI because the new identity of the party required the total rejection of everything that had been 'involved in Stalin's legacy as an 'ethical-political' responsibility before Italian society'"⁷⁸.

It was evident that the very term communism, as characterized up to that time, had to be included in that legacy. The controversy was fierce, unleashing leaders young and old, grassroots militants and intellectuals. Nevertheless, it came to a standstill thanks to Occhetto's rapt about-face at the historical controversy, without symbolic fallout capable of triggering real political transformations. For everything to change, it took a certainly symbolic, but also highly material, fall that occurred on November 9, 1989, when Berliners took to the streets to pick axe the wall that had kept them and the world apart for twenty-eight years.

3.2 The After Morning: Material and Spiritual Reactions to Real Socialism Collapse

Franco Frezzotti, a militant from Ancona, in a letter to one of his comrades, remembering the turning point of PCI transformation, wrote:

*Correva l'anno 1989, correva a precipizio come tutti sanno ed ad un certo punto si mise a correre anche Occhetto. La svolta ovviamente provocò un gran casino sul quale non è certo il caso di soffermarsi [...] In quel momento di grandi sconvolgimenti eravamo al contrario impegnati nel lavoro di grande serenità e pace: nel campo di Croccamellata [...] era in corso la raccolta delle olive.*⁷⁹

throughout the summer because of the democratic breakthroughs initiated in Eastern European countries and the increasingly obvious failure of Gorbachev's reformist project. For some insights of that period see, Luciano Canfora, *La crisi dell'Est ed il PCI*, (Bari: Edizioni Dedalo, 1990).

⁷⁶ "Once upon a time Togliatti and real communism" – In *L'Unità*, 20/08/1989.

⁷⁷ Biagio De Giovanni, *La nottola di Minerva. PCI e nuovo riformismo*, (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1989).

⁷⁸ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

⁷⁹ "The year 1989 was running, running precipitously as everyone knows and at one-point Occhetto also ran. The turn of course caused a big mess on which it is certainly not the case to dwell [...] At that moment of great upheaval we were on the contrary engaged in the work of great serenity and peace: in the field of Croccamellata [...] the olive harvest was in progress." – ADN, Franco Frezzotti, *Lettera a undici compagni*, Prot. No. 5796, DP/93, 1992.

The lives of Italian communists seemed to flow in an ordinary daily routine. Certainly, the party was not at its best for a series of internal and external reasons. The 18th PCI Congress had laid the groundwork for innovations, however, which were not fully understood by the entire body politic.

After a long time spent in the ford, Italian communists sensed that the crystallization of political utopias and ideal horizons was reporting cracks. However, they would not have ever imagined waking up on a Friday morning, ready for the last day of one of their life's usual weeks, and seeing images of a world, which had also been theirs, that was imploding. The world of real socialism was collapsing. It was happening in Berlin where, on November 10, 1989, both the Cold War and the communist dream, at once terrible and extraordinary, ended. The occurrence was the obvious outcome of Gorbachev's politics; nonetheless it surprised the contemporaries, even those more informed and interested⁸⁰. Among them, there were Achille Occhetto and the top PCI leadership.

The Piedmontese secretary was in Brussels the day of the Berlin Wall fall. He and Massimo De Angelis were arrived in Belgium for a meeting with the English Labour leader, Neil Kinnock, to discuss the PCI admission into the Socialist International. De Angelis remembered that ever since the night before there was an unusual atmosphere. Gunther Schabowski – the SED information office head – had communicated during a press conference that from the after morning the DDR citizens could across the more dangerous borders in Europe and travel freely toward west Germany. The announcement had set off an “overwhelming emotion and disbelief”⁸¹ in Berlin, which soon expanded to all who saw the images arriving from the Teutonic country. De Angelis talked about a widespread “febrile sense of joy”⁸² and described his and Occhetto's reaction as fallows: “We watched with a little bit frustrated sentiment of participation, which grips the viewer as distant images flow by, recounting events of historical significance. We were and were not in Berlin. We could have reflected, though. We certainly could not stand still”⁸³. Indeed, they did not.

There were few journalists on call and Occhetto released to them an initial statement, which he closed as follows: “From now we must find new balances. All the structures coming from the postwar period break down and all the forces more warned are called upon to redefine themselves”⁸⁴. Scholars have never paid attention to these words, just as the audience of the time did not. However, it is evident how already here Occhetto anticipated the extraordinary statement he that then made two days after in Italy. This does not diminish the unpredictability and the astonishment of Occhetto's *svolta*, but it does allow to understand the initiation of a reflective motion on what to do concretely

⁸⁰ Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 2888.

⁸¹ Massimo De Angelis, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁸² *Ibidem*.

⁸³ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

with the PCI fate on the part of its leader. He went to the meeting with Kinnock with strange feelings: ironically, the Italian Communist Party was discussing to join the social-democratic community, in parallel with the loss of communism symbolic worldview⁸⁵.

De Angelis narrates that, during the dialogue, the Labour Party head was more interested in what changes the PCI could undertake immediately than future changes. In fact, Kinnock himself would recount long after that he asked principally if there was the possibility to change the name of the party, and the answer of Occhetto was a resounding no⁸⁶. Probably, the persistent question on that issue opened the pandora's box of his doubts about the need to accelerate the mutation starting from the very name of the party. De Angelis confirmed this argument too. Indeed, Occhetto's press officer wrote that the name's topic was present already in his exchange of words with the secretary during the flight back to Rome: "For what concerns the new name, the reference concepts should be community and liberty. To bad that *Comunione e Liberazione* exists yet"⁸⁷.

The question of the name, the possibility of its change and how to do it became crucial as time went by. The dialogue between Occhetto and De Angelis took on also another meaning, perhaps, even more fundamental to what would happen in Bologna a two days later. The PCI had been experiencing liminality for years, which potentially carried a valuable a situation of creative symbolic transformation. It was evident that the fall of the Berlin Wall and the marks of certainties, which it represented, were opening a micro-cycle of liminal momentum, within a wider time of liminality. The separation of identity, began with the end of real socialism, was grafted on and followed processes of disenchantment like that of Berlinguer's tear from the USSR. Now, Occhetto found himself having to deal with an event of such magnitude not only as a member of the transforming body politic, but also as the master of ceremony entrusted with the task of closing the liminal phase, re-aggregating it into a new identity. The communist community must be regenerated into the new, although not necessarily alienated it from the past. As De Angelis would write, the Berlin contingencies had accentuated Occhetto's "vital energies"⁸⁸ without provoking displeasure for what was coming. A fundamental attitude for those who must lead the transformation, but not fully shared by those who would be transformed. Occhetto soon realized this even if he first initiated the end of Italian communism's existence.

⁸⁵ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

⁸⁶ Massimo De Angelis, *op. cit.*, p. 30. – The Labour Party leader literally said: "I asked Occhetto if the PCI could change its name, and he replied by sounding out three times, 'it is very difficult, very difficult, very difficult'. Back in London, on Monday I read in the newspapers, in big letters, *The PCI changes its name. If he had told me 'It's difficult' just once, he would have changed already on Saturday.*" in Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 2896.

⁸⁷ Massimo De Angelis, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁸⁸ *Ivi*, p. 29.

Once back in Italy, the PCI leader did not linger in Rome but went to Bologna. Here, he decided to accept the invitation he received from a comrade and friend, William Michellini⁸⁹, to attend a rally of the National Association of Italian Partisans (ANPI). The assembly was organized to celebrate the forty-fifth anniversary of a heroic battle of the resistance, taken place on November 1944. For this reason, that Sunday 12, 1989, the civic center hall at Bolognina – an area of Navile neighborhood – was full of elderly partisan and militants, keen to welcome the notable guest⁹⁰. According to Kertzer, “what might have been simply another symbolic reinforcement of the ties binding the party periphery to its center was to become much more. As a result of Occhetto’s visit, Bolognina would, ironically, become a symbol of the end of the PCI, the demise of not only a political party but a personal identity that gave special meaning to the lives of most of the elderly partisans assembled in that Bolognina hall”⁹¹.

The Piedmontese secretary spoke few words that morning but chose them so carefully that they opened a diatribe – still unresolved to this day – about whether, or not, that intervention was long premeditated. Occhetto declared before his partisan comrades:

*Viviamo tempi di grande dinamismo. Gorbačëv prima di dare il via ai cambiamenti in URSS incontrò i veterani e disse loro: voi avete vinto la Seconda guerra mondiale, se ora non volete che venga persa non bisogna conservare ma impegnarsi in grandi trasformazioni. Da questo traggo l’incitamento a non continuare su vecchie strade ma ad inventarne di nuove per unificare le forze del progresso [...] è necessario andare avanti con lo stesso coraggio che fu dimostrato dalla resistenza.*⁹²

These limited sentences disclosed indefinite scenarios. Based on Liguori’s opinion, they were composed by equivocal words in which the grassroots militants unaccustomed to the subtleties of the Political Palaces language did not grasp anything extraordinary⁹³. Nevertheless, two young reporters, while Occhetto was leaving the hall, asked him about the possibility that his words, regarding “new streets”, also implied a re-naming of the party. In contrast to the answer given to Kinnock forty-eight hours earlier, this time the communist leader said, albeit unambiguously, that his words foreshadowed

⁸⁹ Francesco Riccio, *op. cit.* p. 82.

⁹⁰ David I. Kertzer, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

⁹² “We live in times of great dynamism. Gorbachev before initiating changes in the USSR met with veterans and told them: you won the Second World War, if now you do not want it to be lost you must not conserve but engage in great transformations. From this I draw the incitement not to continue old paths but to invent new ones to unify the forces of progress [...] it is necessary to go forward with the same courage that was shown by the resistance.” – Walter Dondi, “Occhetto ai veterani della Resistenza: dobbiamo inventare strade nuove (il PCI cambierà nome? ‘Tutto è possibile’)”, in *l’Unità*, 13/11/1989.

⁹³ Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 2927

everything... even the name change: “We are carrying out great changes and innovations in all directions. Everything is possible”⁹⁴.

Presenting the transformation path, such as an act of Resistance, was needed because “symbols play a crucial role in relating one group to another”⁹⁵. The represented an essential political capital from which the leader can derives his legitimacy to act. Occhetto seemed conscious that all the changes, which he had in mind, were going to encounter resistance at every levels. For this reason, he used reference to the traditional role of Resistance and to crucial innovative one of Gorbachev’s ideas, hoping thus to be entitled to accomplish the PCI transformative process. He then chose those two arguments for keeping the faith of communist community alive. However, the use which he decided to make of it marked an irreparable mistake. Occhetto thought that the “magical power”, derived from faith in the symbols of the communists’ tradition, could be used also for innovating those very symbols. Starting with the “act of naming”⁹⁶ the party anew, the secretary did not realize that he was preparing to reshape its identity and not just its function⁹⁷, as he and his leadership had been intent on doing since the proposal of a “new PCI”. Giving that response to the few journalists at Bolognina, the communist leader had in fact tied the name to the “Thing”⁹⁸ that the party would become. In the following weeks, the about-faces would not be enough to erase Occhetto's image as a “liquidator”⁹⁹, delegitimizing him maybe permanently to be leader of the transition.

The *svolta della Bolognina* was a further aggravation of that loss of the cosmos, that had begun in Berlin¹⁰⁰. Possieri states: “what seems fainted, in other words, was a portrayed of the world such as an orderly totality in which the party, that was embodiment of history and place of collective identification, came before and went beyond the individuals’ experience”¹⁰¹. The PCI liturgies and symbols, also through loyalty and ethical tension, had generated a political identity. For many people, the collective “we” of the party had demarcated also personal self, giving them a reason to live. Consequently, Occhetto's speech produced a *horror vacui*, typical of *tabula rasa*¹⁰² situation, making the crisis both political and existential. Militants had already experienced some of these feelings. However, frustration, fear, resentment, and despondency now took on an incomparable scope, because they were associated with a marks of certainties’ generalized erosion. The trans-national

⁹⁴ Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 2927.

⁹⁵ David I. Kertzer, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁷ Massimo De Angelis, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁹⁸ This was the English term to indicate the Italian “*la cosa*” which was the name used in the public debate to indicate the new political entity, which would substitute the PCI.

⁹⁹ It was the philosopher Norberto Bobbio to give for the first time this title to the PCI secretary. See, Ferdinando Adornato, Norberto Bobbio, “Buio a sinistra” in *l'Espresso*, 05/02/1989.

¹⁰⁰ “*The Bolognina turning point*” was the term used to define Occhetto’s speech and his decision to change the nature of the PCI from that moment. It was developed in the journalistic context and soon after used also by historiography.

¹⁰¹ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*.

effect of the material implosion of the Eastern regimes was combined with the ecumenical spiritual significance of the utopian-revolutionary horizon disintegration.

On November 13, 1989, the Italian communism thus had its Black Monday¹⁰³. The magnitude of Occhetto's words had been downplayed in the front-page headlines of *l'Unità*, partly because, during the Sunday, the editor Marco Demarco found no confirmation at Botteghe Oscure of what the secretary meant to say¹⁰⁴. No one was aware of Occhetto's decision and intentions, not even some of his closest staff members. Veltroni and Mussi arrived in their office without any idea of what was going on. The latter declared that he was informed right when Occhetto introduced the Secretariat meeting that morning. The party left wing leader, Ingrao, would say that he had received just summary information¹⁰⁵, while Massimo D'Alema was hellion. Asor Rosa wrote: "I remember D'Alema seated at his table of *l'Unità* in the days after: he was out of his mind if the expression "out of his mind" should be appropriate for his character"¹⁰⁶. The editor of *l'Unità* was indicated as one of the more attached to communist identity and, moreover, he appeared worried about letting the ascendancy over Occhetto and the future of the PCI slip away, even more so after his exit from the secretariat.

The hypothesis, that Occhetto had made the decision by himself or almost, was confirmed¹⁰⁷. However, the secretary's inner circle had made survey, before his speech, about the possibility to change the name. De Angelis questioned telephonically Livia Turco: "I tried, very discretionally, to probe her regarding the necessity to change everything. Nevertheless, she seems on a different wavelength"¹⁰⁸. Claudio Petruccioli acted with less prudence with Alfredo Reichlin. The old leader was denning with Valentino Parlato and Luigi Pintor when Petruccioli questioned them¹⁰⁹. Pintor and Parlato thought to a joke, while Reichlin was surprised and irritated, perhaps noticing a harbinger of destiny. Occhetto's staff became the "*zoccolo duro*" of his supporters, joined after by other skeptical comrades like D'Alema. They considered themselves at the top of a "communist party no longer communist. Or perhaps, it could be translated: to be them, a narrow leadership group no longer communist, at the head in a party made up of leaders and militants who, in the overwhelming majority, believed they were communists in name and in practice"¹¹⁰.

¹⁰³ The expression "Black Monday" it is here barrowed from its first reference, which was the stock market catastrophe occurred in Wall Street in 1987 causing an economic contraction worldwide. For a general overview see, Tim Metz, *Black Monday. The stock market catastrophe of October 19, 1987*. (Washington: BeardBooks, 1987) and John Crudele, "Black Monday Memories", in *Syracuse University Magazine*, No. 2, Vol. 4, (1988).

¹⁰⁴ Letizia Paolozzi, Alberto Leiss, *Voci dal quotidiano. L'Unità da Ingrao a Veltroni*, (Milan: Dalai Editore, 1994), p. 247.

¹⁰⁵ Mino Lorusso, *L'era di Achille: Occhetto e la politica italiana da Togliatti a Berlusconi*, (Florence: Ponte alle Grazie, 1994), p. 227.

¹⁰⁶ Alberto Asor Rosa, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁷ Nello Ajello, *Il lungo addio, cit.*, p. 388.

¹⁰⁸ Massimo De Angelis, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁹ Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 2973.

¹¹⁰ *Ivi*, pos. 2991.

A controversy began to mount within Botteghe Oscure leadership regarding how to face the events, while thousands of militants found themselves bewildered and overwhelmed by mixed feelings. Damiano, a militant from Polistena, a Calabria's small town, asked to PCI leadership to never be ashamed of being communists, because under this banner so many people had paid high tributes in the name of justice and freedom¹¹¹. The perspective of loss of name was perceived as an intolerable grief – the death of the father. As happened to Fedele, a Roman merchant and PCI voter, who wrote bitterly to Botteghe Oscure:

*Io sono un comunista che vota comunista e basta. Sotto la direzione di Palmiro ho saltato dai fossi, ho scalato delle montagne... Sotto la direzione di Enrico ho camminato su un prato fiorito di fiori rossi... Sotto la direzione attuale mi sento orfano.*¹¹²

Through the last sentence, Comrade Fedele also underlined the main difference between PCI's generations, in how they were experiencing the *svolta*. From one side, the older one, as him, did never overcome the loss of the father, lastly represented by Enrico Berlinguer, who they recognized like the more legitimate party's master of ceremony. On the other side, the new leaders' generation, shaped in 1968, wanted to be orphan for not being more constraint under any political-paternal authority. They wanted to be totally emancipated in choosing what became in their lives.

In just a few hours, the Italian Communist Party became a completely different thing from what it had been until then. It seemed to be embarrassed of its identity and was already orphaned of symbols, which although still visible, were disappearing in the shadow of Berlin Wall rubble. The PCI was profoundly divided step by step. A partition that crossed the border of Botteghe Oscure, local federations and towns' sections and entered the homes of comrades, their intimate sphere. That private sphere which had so distanced militants from politics, during the 1980s, was now being imbued with the identity value of communist ideology to the marrow.

The tale recorded in the diary pages of a Roman comrade is quite meaningful of what was happening and would befall in the Communist Party thereafter.

Un incidente cardiaco che colpì Luciano nel marzo del '79 ebbe come conseguenza positiva di fargli smettere di fumare e negativa di farmi perdere del tutto l'indipendenza. [...] Ma le divergenze di opinione non sono cessate. Iniziate nel 1956 con la questione ungherese, sono riemerse fortissime

¹¹¹ Francesco Demitry, Gabriella De Paolis, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

¹¹² "I am a communist who just votes communist. Under Palmiro's leadership I jumped from ditches, climbed mountains... Under Enrico's leadership I walked on a meadow blooming with red flowers... Under the current leadership I feel like an orphan." – Francesco Demitry, Gabriella De Paolis, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

*nel 1989, quando si è trattato di scegliere sul futuro del partito cui avevamo dedicato le nostre esistenze. Abbiamo scelto vite diverse. A me pareva che quella infausta decisione avrebbe non allargato ma ristretto come una pelle di zigrino quel partito di massa, che era punto di riferimento per migliaia di persone di ogni ceto. Un compagno, capomastro edile, proprio in quei giorni amari, mi disse: “Mi sento nudo” esprimendo in tre parole il pensiero di tanti. E non mi pare che i successivi sviluppi in negativo della situazione italiani ci abbiano dato torto. Comunque, ho aderito sin dal primo momento a Rifondazione Comunista che ha recuperato all’attività solo una parte di quei moltissimi compagni che non sono stati d’accordo con la così detta “svolta”. Per fare un esempio: la sezione di Albano aveva votato per il no al 60% circa, è una gran parte di questi non si è iscritta a nessun partito.*¹¹³

Tilde Bonavoglia described how the events of 1989 and the breakthrough initiative had reopened torn discussions with her husband about the party’s future. Perhaps most remarkable is the metaphor quoted to describe the state of mind of many communists: that of nakedness. The communist identity had been the daily dress throughout the lives of millions and the decision of the *svoltisti* to rip off their comrades amounted to a real act of violence against them. An act apparently carried out by the few, against the many.

On this regard, a militant from Parma, Maria, argued strongly against the behavior of Occhetto and his leadership, which divest the importance of militants’ considerations:

*Sono molto delusa [...] fate sempre quello che vi viene in mente, senza chiedere a noi della base [...] Oggi cambiate il nostro partito. Ma non pensate a quello a cui andate incontro, per fare ciò ci vorrebbe un referendum aperto ai soli iscritti, perché fosse una cosa giusta. [...] dico questo perché sono cose che mi fanno molto male; siamo diventati dei burattini, non abbiamo più identità, non possiamo più parlare con la gente, non sappiamo più cosa rispondere. [...] Avrei tante cose da dire, ma in questo momento non ci riesco perché sto piangendo [...] Che delusione!*¹¹⁴

¹¹³ “A heart accident that struck Luciano in March '79 had the positive consequence of causing him to stop smoking and the negative consequence of causing me to lose my independence altogether. [...] But differences of opinion did not cease. Begun in 1956 with the Hungarian question, they resurfaced very strongly in 1989, when it came to choosing about the future of the party to which we had devoted our existences. We chose different lives. It seemed to me that that inauspicious decision would not enlarge but shrink like a shagreen skin that mass party, which was a point of reference for thousands of people from all walks of life. One comrade, a construction foreman, said to me in those bitter days, “I feel naked,” expressing in three words the thoughts of so many. And it does not seem to me that the subsequent negative developments in the Italian situation proved us wrong. However, I joined from the very first moment Rifondazione Comunista, which recovered to the activity only a part of those very many comrades who did not agree with the so-called “turnaround.” To give an example: the Albano section had voted for the no vote at about 60 percent, and a large part of these did not join any party.” – ADN, Tilde Bonavoglia, *Gavetta rossa. Scampoli di diario politico personale*, Prot. No. 11225, 1995, p. 74.

¹¹⁴ “I am very disappointed [...] you always do what comes to your mind, without asking us at the grassroots [...] Today you are changing our party. But you don't think about what you are getting into, to do that it would take a referendum

The estrangement from communist body politic feelings and the removal of historical-traditional symbolism – dear to militants and empowered of confirming their own identity by giving meaning to the present¹¹⁵ – were among the final acts of the liminal phase, experienced by the party. Upon its close, a re-negotiated and reshaped identity but not exceptionally new and opposite, should have emerged. After December 12, 1989, the communist community was no longer a separated community, but a forever broken one¹¹⁶. As Liguori discusses, it became “an object and no longer a subject expropriated de facto of the possibility of choosing together albeit through the distinction of roles and capacities”¹¹⁷. The PCI was becoming a “thing”, apparently deprived of its vitality. However, in the fifteen months of agony, that followed the Bolognina up to the last PCI Congress, there was a “collective and public self-examination”¹¹⁸. This showed an exceptional creativity that could have continued to survive. Unfortunately, it did not.

3.3 The Long Agony: the Twilight of Utopia

On November 14, 1989, the final step of Italian Communist Party history began. The first stage was the meeting of PCI directorate. Francesco Riccio remembered that sense of tension and angst. “The telephones rang again and again. The hallways were a great square, tears and rational dialogues mixed up with an atmosphere, which was absolutely not the enthusiastic one of a new beginning [...] for the first time I heard people talking about we and you”¹¹⁹. Getting to the party headquarters had not been easy, especially for the more moderate leaders. That morning, the dry cold of late autumn in Rome was compounded by the human barrier of the demonstration “self-convoked” by some comrades to contest Occhetto's statement¹²⁰. This was not the first-time militants had self-convened. Indeed, the practice had been inaugurated since 1987 when the election defeat prompted many to worry about the PCI fate. From then on, many grassroots militants’ initiatives bypassed the party's canonical-hierarchical organization to discuss, write letters to the press, and print leaflets. One of these leaflets was distributed also that morning, reciting:

open only to members, because it would be a fair thing. [...] I say this because these are things that hurt me very much; we have become puppets, we no longer have an identity, we can no longer talk to people, we no longer know what to answer. [...] I would have so many things to say, but right now I can't because I'm crying [...]. What a disappointment!”
 – Francesco Demitry, Gabriella De Paolis, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

¹¹⁵ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹¹⁶ Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 3076.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁸ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

¹¹⁹ Francesco Riccio, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

¹²⁰ Luca Telese, *Qualcuno era comunista*, (Milan: Solferino, 2021), pp. 63 et seq.

*Il PCI, come ogni partito della sinistra europea, ha bisogno di una rifondazione [...] quello che sta avvenendo, per come è stato impostato, non va verso una rifondazione, ma verso lo scioglimento del PCI [...] per rifondare una sinistra d'alternativa italiana e transnazionale non c'è bisogno di cancellare la propria identità storica, sociale (e umana)*¹²¹.

Therefore, the militants did not want to resist irrevocably the change, which had been advocated on many fronts for years. Nonetheless, they were expressing opposition to transformation by removal that Occhetto had envisioned.

The PCI secretary did not appear touch by the words his comrades shouted out under the balcony of his office. Indeed, facing the directorship, he provided a purposeful report which contained his plan for transforming Italian communism. Occhetto reiterated some concepts yet established in the Rome Congress, above all, the transcend of socialism as ideology¹²². However, the re-negotiation of communist identity was not considered enough to achieve this objective. At this moment, the Piedmontese leader claimed the necessity of “a democratic party, a progressist, socialist and popular that should have as ideal core the socialist democracy, socialism and liberty”¹²³. Occhetto was well known for his fluid and not rigorous use of concepts¹²⁴, making here ambiguous the proposal of new party's identity. During the conclusion of his report before the directorship he decided to be clearer, “It will be a matter of opening a true unity process, of putting our autonomous strength at the service of the united re-composition of the left, of unblocking the Italian situation, of removing all alibis. In essence, we propose to give birth to a new political formation, to gather the great potential of the left. Our change is at the disposal of this goal: and the name will be the consequence, the result”¹²⁵.

These sentences casted off the PCI ideological power and his possible pouring toward the new entity. The party was no longer the subject bearer of a revolutionary communist proposal, but it was the collector object of an enlarged left. The ideal horizon was replaced by the effective function. Indeed, for the *svolta*'s champions, the salvation of the PCI political experience passed through the separation of its function from its ideological identity¹²⁶.

A Central Committee was held between November 20 and 25, 1989. There, the incumbent leadership stated: “We cannot avoid to free ourselves completely from the old communist shell, that

¹²¹ “*The PCI, like every party of the European left, needs a refounding [...] what is happening, in the way it has been set up, is not going towards a refounding, but towards the dissolution of the PCI [...] in order to refound an Italian and transnational alternative left, there is no need to erase its historical, social (and human) identity.*” – Fabrizio Clementi, Fabio Giovannini, eds., *La parola al conflitto. Esperienze e proposte degli autoconvocati del PCI. 1987-1990*, (Rome: Datanews, 1990), pp. 53-54.

¹²² Achille Occhetto, *Un indimenticabile*, cit., p. 128.

¹²³ *Ivi*, p. 130.

¹²⁴ Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 3139.

¹²⁵ Achille Occhetto, *Un indimenticabile*, cit., pp. 131-132.

¹²⁶ Massimo De Angelis, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

we have circumvent through our politics since time albeit it has burdened them, positively addressing the nexus between old and new”¹²⁷. According to Vacca, the strengthening of the confrontation between function and ideals, made two basic limitations for the future party. They were the negative assessment of the forty-years “consociativism” and the failure in indicating original constituent elements of the new political entity¹²⁸. On one hand, the first assessment led to precarious reforms, like the majoritarian system. On the other hand, the second deficiency was mostly dictated by the idea of a “constituent phase”¹²⁹ opened toward external progressive forces’ contamination¹³⁰.

During the Central Committee Occhetto proposed two possible alternatives for this constitutional momentous¹³¹. The first one was the Central Committee participants’ acceptance of the leadership’s design for the new party, whose implementation would be verified by a national conference, which would then determine how to implement it. Alternatively, the second proposal, considered more radical, was the convening of a special congress to which submit the new party’s project. The resulting directives would then be set off by a further ratification’s congress¹³². Occhetto had the majority to opt for the first proposal. Nevertheless, he decided to convene an extraordinary congress, because the opposition had gathered the 33% of consensus. The front contrary to secretariat’s ideas although very heterogeneous – as evidenced by its so diverse leading comrades Ingrao, Cossutta, and Natta – was supported by an ideological force, like the armies’ one in “a religious war”¹³³.

The Manichean tradition typical of the International communist movement’s symbolism¹³⁴ seemed now to dominate the internal dispute. Each part considered itself good and the other evil. This entailed the fragmentation of the party’s unity in a few wings (*correnti*), whose views were not conciliable. The Communist tradition was broken. Manichaeism was no longer directed toward an external enemy, but toward the internal opponent. The immediate political result was to turn the special upcoming congress in a final judgment on Occhetto’s proposal.

The Manichaeism of the debate on the party’s future pervaded the sections by dividing militants, both from the top and among themselves. On one side, it alienated many of them from the PCI forever. On the other, it seemed to have reawakened the desire of politics that many militants said had been dormant for years¹³⁵. In this regard, a militant from the Genoa Ca Nova branch will say, “I have been

¹²⁷ Massimo De Angelis, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

¹²⁸ Giuseppe Vacca, *Vent’anni dopo*, *cit.*, p. 197.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁰ The term was used by Giulia Rodano during her speech before the Central Committee. – Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 3227.

¹³¹ For a deep historical reconstruction about the development of that Central Committee meeting see entirely, Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, cap III.

¹³² Giuseppe Vacca, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

¹³³ Massimo De Angelis, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹³⁴ David I Kertzer, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

¹³⁵ This statement is based on the memories of a militant, Fabiana, interviewed by the Hugues Le Paige in his documentary about the experience of some comrades from Mercatale, a neighbored of San Casciano di Val Pensa, a small town of

a member for years I have never seen so much serenity in the discussion...which means that people want to discuss, must confront each other and say the point of view". The fate of the party was close to everyone's heart. It would remain so for the next few months, which militants would spend in the sections, discussing congress' motions, opinions on the name and symbols, and how much the PCI had marked their lives. The Italian communism was not outdated yet.

PCI official Aldo Tortorella, during the November Central Committee discussion said: "A party, its symbols, its name are not merely a political subject, as someone hints, but they are a moral and human community"¹³⁶. Notwithstanding the young leadership attempt to objectify the party, the vitality of the human communist community was still vigorous. Peerless creativity exploded in the comrades' reunions, an offspring of the liminality in which militants were immersed, albeit it was maimed by the master of ceremony's absence to steer it into an authentic renegotiation of communist identity. Among the militants, there were the re-appearance of generational-gap pains, guilt mixed with self-absolution over ties with the Soviet Union, and a growing impatience with maintaining unity at all costs.

The *svolta* was evidently fostered by the rise in power of younger party-rulers, such as the elderly opposition to Occhetto's proposals could demonstrated too. At the militants' level, the generation division of those who supported – or not – the party transformation was much more fluid. Mario, an eighty-five-year-old comrade, accused Occhetto to have provoked a schism with the party for liquidating it. His letter to the PCI secretary seemed to meld with one of a comrade from Bologna. Germano was 53 years younger than Mario, however, he harbored the same unease about the changes proposed at Bolognina: "change the name sounds like change an identity, repudiate our own past. [...] It did not seem to me fair call-in doubt the history of a party that contributed so much to the development of the country, despite some errors"¹³⁷. Conversely, Cristiano, a nineteen-year-old communist student, sustained Occhetto's decision, starting from the necessity to win new consensus among a broader and post-classist social body.

Sono perfettamente d'accordo con Lei per la proposta di cambiare nome al Partito (anche se inizialmente non lo ero per motivi nostalgici) nonostante la mia giovane età. [...] Il partito che si è sempre battuto per la difesa dei diritti inalienabili dell'uomo e della donna. È certo che cambiare nome non significa rinnegamento del nostro passato [...] se oggi stiamo meglio materialmente, ciò è

Tuscany, where there was a high PCI political and social activity. – Hugues Le Paige, *Il fare politica. Cronache dalla Toscana rossa*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2007). Moreover, Liguori offered an overview about the data of militants' participation of 1989-1990, discovering a negative trend for the party subscriptions, which became even more pessimistic after the PDS and *Rifondazione Comunista*'s births, see, Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 3207.

¹³⁶ Aldo Tortorella, "Documenti per il Congresso straordinario del Pci", in *l'Unità*, Vol. 1, 07/01/1990, p. 138.

¹³⁷ Francesco Demitry, Gabriella De Paolis, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

*anche merito delle lotte svolte dal PCI. Ma a quanto pare, anche qualche operaio di ieri, borghese di oggi, non se ne ricorda. È per questo che è, secondo me, necessario cambiare nome. Per dimostrare che il Pci è capace di lottare ancora per tutti gli onesti cittadini che lavorano e pagano le tasse [...] Quindi, forza Occhetto, che noi giovani siamo con te!!*¹³⁸

Cristiano's arguments resulted inter-generational, echoing the ones of Reggio Emilia old partisan comrade, Wanda, who hoped that the new party could "collect the more honest forces of the country for giving to Italy everything the communists had fought for"¹³⁹.

Therefore, it is not possible to draw a clear-cut profile of the transformation's supporters, among militants, based on generations, understood as merely age difference. Conversely the generational gap must be interpreted such as militants' exposure to party's pedagogy in a given period. In fact, who had been exposed to the more orthodox pedagogy, during party's early entrenchment phase¹⁴⁰, did not conceive now the collective self-analysis. This happened in Naples party's section of San Giovanni a Teduccio, where an old militant, who was passing through the section assembly, listened a comrade suggesting the necessity to party's change to cut links with communism's crimes. Immediately, a diatribe ensued between them. The older militant shouted, while was approaching the speaker's podium: "the name communist must not change ... we are superior to all the others, who call themselves communists ... we are a different matter ... a different thing"¹⁴¹. The two comrades were not many years apart, but those of militancy and first contact with communism were distant. This episode displayed a different resistance to transformation between the comrades formed in the post-war and those who learned communist precepts later. Moreover, it poses two others matters in militancy's internal confrontations: the perceived diversity of Italian communism and the fragmentation of party "unanimistic" unity.

The diversity issue had often been related to the differentiation between the communists and others actor on the Italian political framework. However, Berlinguer's distancing from the USSR during the early 1980s had pose the query about the possible existence of a good or bad communisms. The

¹³⁸ "I am in complete agreement with you about the proposal to change the name of the Party (although initially I was not for nostalgic reasons) despite my young age. [...] The Party that has always fought for the defense of the inalienable rights of men and women. It is certain that changing our name does not mean denial of our past [...] if today we are better off materially, this is also thanks to the struggles carried out by the PCI. But apparently, even some workers of yesterday, bourgeois of today, do not remember this. That is why it is, in my opinion, necessary to change the name. To show that the PCI is still capable of fighting for all honest working and tax-paying citizens [...] So, come on Occhetto, that we young people are with you!!" – Francesco Demitry, Gabriella De Paolis, *op. cit.* pp. 59-60.

¹³⁹ *Ivi*, p. 60.

¹⁴⁰ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, pp. 9 et seq.

¹⁴¹ Here, the tale and sentences reported about the PCI Naples' section meeting is based on Nanni Moretti's documentary work regarding the militants' path toward the 20th Communist Congress, which ended the party. The documentary was developed by the Roman director following the party's section assemblies along 15 months and across various Italian regions and cities, like Naples, Turin, Milan, Genoa, and Rome. – Nanni Moretti, *La cosa*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2007).

answer had not been found, or rather it had not been intended to be searched. Gorbachev's come to power had even implied a minimal reopening toward the Moscow establishment, even in the permanence of the tear. In any case, it had separated the communist people, contributing also to open the liminal phase. Now in the PCI's liminality micro-cycle, triggered by Berlin Wall collapse, it was necessary to answer that question in order to successfully conclude the transition. The party leadership caught up in infighting, did not understand the scope, leaving the militancy without guidance in understanding and overcoming this conceptualization of diversity. Among grassroots comrades, there were those who metaphorically pointed out how "the sense of adventure" of Italian communists, inherent in the Resistance experience's democratic fruits, had always sheltered them from becoming "boring and dangerous people", like Eastern communists¹⁴². Others, while acknowledging the mistakes made in name of communism worldwide, professed a diversity of history – even their own personal history – to which they did not want to renounce, as Occhetto called for by changing symbol and name¹⁴³. Finally, the youngest were the most bewildered. They were beginning to feel ashamed, because they did not know how to answer those who asked why the PCI was opting to change everything, despite the sense of diversity. On this point, a young comrade from Genoa denounced in his section:

*Sono piuttosto nuovo perché non sono iscritto da 40 anni, o 20, non possono andare a ritroso ... non voglio ... ma mi sembra quasi un rifuggire dentro i fatti del passato per avere qualche appiglio ... sarebbe bello averlo, ma non ce l'ho ... una certa consequenzialità viene comunque posta fra ciò che accade ad est e ciò che dovrebbe fare il PCI ... e allora mi sorge una domanda ... ma se voi dicevate di non essere collegati a loro, perché ve ne frega tanto che Honecker sia agli arresti domiciliari e che i paesi del socialismo reale abbiano fallito dappertutto, e perché lo mettete sempre nei vostri discorsi? Le risposte sono due: un fatto emozionale ... oppure è vero che non eravamo così distaccati da loro...*¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Nanni Moretti, *op. cit.*

¹⁴³ During the meeting in a Milan PCI section, a longtime militant took the floor, criticizing the turnaround as a kind of public abjuration to which he, however, did not want to expose his personal history as a communist. He said: "The sections are full ... I felt a great thrill ... the main merit of this provocation was to make us rediscover the taste of being communists ... let me also say this is the end of utopia, of men all equal, who could realize themselves as men ... I remain anchored in this story of mine ... I will enter this thing ... I will still be extremely proud of this party in which I served ... don't make me give up my history ... because I will do a bloody battle on this." – Nanni Moretti, *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁴ "I'm new and I haven't been a member for 40 years, or 20, they can't go backwards ... I don't want to ... but it seems to me almost a shunning within the facts of the past to have some foothold ... it would be nice to have it, but I don't ... a certain consequentiality is nevertheless placed between what is happening in the East and what the PCI should be doing ... and then a question arises for me ... but if you said you were not connected to them, why do you care so much that Honecker is under house arrest and that the countries of real socialism have failed everywhere, and why do you always put that in your speeches? The answers are two: an emotional fact ... or it is true that we were not so detached from them ..." – Nanni Moretti, *op. cit.*

The truth lied perhaps in between the two answers. The utopia of the communist horizon was still definitely rooted in many militants, who experienced the transformation, how it was proposed, like a forced removal. They were feeling deprived of an important part of their identity by the changes of indestructible symbols, living terms, and an unforgettable past. As much as Occhetto could be denied, his leadership was transforming, into a mere functional tool, both a collective and personal identity. Outstandingly, this made that transformative experience such as an “emotional” one, diminishing the significance of political content in favor of symbolic elements.

On March 7, 1990, the 19th Congress was inaugurated. Bologna's sports hall hosted 1092 representatives from federations all over Italy, divided according to the votes obtained by the three congressional motions. Obviously, the most represented was the first motion, or rather the secretary's one aimed at creating a new party, which was represented by 703 delegates¹⁴⁵. The Piedmontese secretary would have more than willingly avoided using the PCI's highest ritual to officially decree its dissolution. However, the need to comply with the communist liturgy for the “blessing of the new choice”¹⁴⁶ – added to the pressure from the oppositions for the congress path – left him no other choice. Kertzer argues that “rites provide occasions for the use of the most important symbols, and these symbols give participants their sense of identity. These rituals must follow a certain path, a certain formula, and changing these symbols also means running the risk of producing reactions of anguish and anger”¹⁴⁷.

Occhetto had to take risks for obtaining his radical transformation aims. Therefore, he had the further opportunity to offer new symbolism, to add to the political programmatic innovations he would present in his congress' speech. The incumbent secretary did it, by subtraction. In fact, the delegates, upon their arrival, find a bare congress “naked”¹⁴⁸, just as a militant said he felt after the Bolognina. In the hall, the word communist seemed to be missing. The hammer and sickle had become so stylized as to be invisible. The red color of tradition was still present, while flags, slogans, anthems, and delegations from “brother” countries were unjustifiably absent¹⁴⁹. After all, in some PCI sections, Romanians were already being indicted as “fascists”¹⁵⁰. Thus, it would have been

¹⁴⁵ For a detailed reconstruction of all the 19th Congress stages and motions see, Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, cap. IV.

¹⁴⁶ David I. Kertzer, “Il rito politico e la trasformazione del Pci”, in *Polis*, No. 2, (1998), p. 289.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁸ ADN, Tilde Bonavoglia, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

¹⁴⁹ David I. Kertzer, *Il rito politico*, *cit.*, p. 289.

¹⁵⁰ In a PCI's section in Milan a comrade was very critical of the party's difficult to discuss its own past mistakes and for this reason he had welcomed convincingly the self-analysis momentous imposed by the party, also in relation to its relations with other communist parties. He argued: “*I for one am very grateful to Occhetto for the proposal to re-discuss and re-found us because I think an act of great humility and great pride was needed ... which the party and individual militants needed ... because in the face of this revolution in Europe who said there is no need ... confronted me with an inadequacy, first of all of feelings ... those we hear about in these weeks in cartwheels ... inadequacy of the heart of communists, and I am glad that the secretary of the party ... because there is some shame ... we can't say we don't give a shit ... are balls ... starting with the fact that it's true that at the last we didn't send a delegation to the Romanian fascists but at the penultimate one we did ... I had ... the lack of heart ... we don't center ... a clean hands thing a little bit out of*

counterproductive to have them at the table of a party which was presented increasingly liberal and democratic. The young secretary was depriving thousands of communists of their identity, without being able to give them anything in return. Neither a new symbol, nor a new party, nor a new anthem. The repudiation of the traditional symbolic heritage, by Occhetto and his entourage, allowed the oppositions to appropriate it. Strengthening in this way the ideal charge of the “no” against transformation. The combination of these elements brought to an illusory win of the secretary’s proposal for the 19th Congress. That event effectively enshrined the defeat of a shared transition toward a new party, like Occhetto hoped. His opening speech became a definitive proof.

In his report, Occhetto reaffirmed the plan he had presented at the 18th Congress, even with a more liberal twist. The secretary “fundamental program” should be devoted to end the *pentapartito* political dominion and to embrace all the progressist force of Italian scenario, notably the catholic ones “which has developed an autonomous consciousness disapproving the individualistic capitalism and bureaucratic collectivism”¹⁵¹. Moreover, he formalized the existence of the *correnti*, while declining paradoxically collegially management of the *svolta*¹⁵².

Occhetto’s programmatic insights did not provide an emotional edge for the listening communist people. Indeed, it kept a funerary silence for the entire three-hour speech. The only applause and signs of approval came at the moments of ritual tributes to Nelson Mandela and Daniel Ortega. Occhetto did not even receive applause from the leaders seated next to him, and their greeting was anything but ritualistic¹⁵³.

In the few days between the directorate meeting and the November 1989 Central Committee, the PCI had espoused the principle of renewal proposed by the secretary, holding firm to the rule of unity. However, the direction of that change, for many, had become even more intolerable over the weeks. The 19th Congress was there to prove it; and it would do so through a hug between the two major representatives of the party’s two most distant souls: Occhetto and Ingrao. The latter has been Occhetto’s youthful inspiration, becoming now his more hostile duelist.

On 8 March 1990, Ingrao took the floor. Immediately, his supporters stood up and began to sing the two PCI hymns: *Bandiera Rossa* and *Internazionale*. The emotional wave was incredible and dragged some members of the majority in. At the end, everyone bellowed “Pie-tro, Pie-tro!” and tried

place ... an act of humility to say that what is happening must make us rethink ... at least say it may well be that we were wrong ... I had the reactions of a very strong defensive reflex, very much of the head and little of the heart. Democracy, nonviolence, are not made in PCI ... not only that of others, which has failed, but not ours either ... we can't always historicize others ... I think we must make a great high of humility ... from the desire to see if ... we are doing wrong ... to make a new political formation to make what we have built not be lost ... doomed to decline ... I would rather spend it on something that has a chance.” – Nanni Moretti, *op. cit.*

¹⁵¹ Giuseppe Vacca, *Vent'anni dopo*, *cit.*, p. 198.

¹⁵² *Ivi*, p. 199.

¹⁵³ David I. Kertzer, *Il rito politico*, *cit.*, p. 290.

to shake his hand, while Occhetto “after a polite applause, remained disconsolately perched over a crowd that had exploded in a joyful celebration”¹⁵⁴. The emotions aroused by Ingrao’s discourse forced Occhetto to address the problem of symbolism’s continuity. He did so by starting with the exaltation of “Comrade Gorbachev” and criticism of the US¹⁵⁵. The PCI secretary concluded on the choice to make the hall inserts with the communist color: “red is the color of the labor movement of socialist and communist inspiration ... We want to change many things, but we do not intend to get out of the historical groove from which we came”¹⁵⁶. It was a statement of defense, it was evident. Occhetto had been trying to rewrite communist history and alter its identity weight since his first speech as secretary. He thought agreeably that facing the radically transforming world, the PCI could not remain anchored to a closing 20th Century. Nevertheless, most militants demonstrated how communist symbols must still be considered something more than mere “images aspects”¹⁵⁷, as some supporters of the new turn had claimed.

The 19th Congress ended with a drama of the embrace Ingrao gave Occhetto. Indeed, after the secretary’s concluding speech, while other leaders refused to applaud him, the opposition’s most influential referent did. Ingrao stood up, clapped his hands, and squeezed the young secretary in a brief hug. Occhetto burst into tears while the crowd before that gesture raised their right fists simultaneously. The more than 1,000 voices in the hall became one, which chanted a final prideful cry of grief: “Long live communism and freedom!”¹⁵⁸. The reporter Antonio Padellaro poignantly described the final moments of the Congress, when by then Occhetto’s motion was certain of victory:

*Adesso Achille ha il viso sullo scranno e la testa fra le mani. Piange. Piange Macaluso, piange Napolitano, piange perfino l’algido D’Alema. Il congresso intona l’internazionale. Piange Pajetta o forse no. Ma ha groppo in gola quando si avvicina al microfono e dice: “abbiamo vissuto un momento alto nel congresso”. E conclude: “Forse era ora”*¹⁵⁹.

It was the time. The Bologna Congress closed just as it had opened, overwhelmed by the power of communist symbolism.

¹⁵⁴ David I. Kertzer, *Politics and Symbols, cit.*, p. 143.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁶ In *l’Unità*, 11/03/1990.

¹⁵⁷ This expression is referred to an intervention by a Bolognina’s militant during one of the assemble for discussing Occhetto’s proposals. He told: “A symbol or another name ... in the end the important thing is the politics we make and the interests we advance ... I honestly don’t understand this rigid attachment to these image aspects.” – Nanni Moretti, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁸ David I. Kertzer, *Il rito politico, cit.*, p. 290.

¹⁵⁹ Antonio Padellaro, “Occhetto all’ultimo salva la svolta”, in *Corriere della Sera*, 11/03/1990.

The PCI would be transformed into something else, something new. Once again, the party found itself united in the presence of immeasurable grief, precisely as occurred with Berlinguer's death. On that occasion, too, Pajetta had been entrusted with the farewell speech. The elderly Resistance leader had always found the appropriate words of goodbyes for the person passing away, and of courage for the people who would resume the struggle. It is just a coincidence, but with a relevant mean, that Pajetta at the 20th Congress in Rimini, where the PCI disappeared forever, was not present. He died a few months after Bologna, on September 13, 1990. The funeral and mourning, for his passing, brought together for the last time what remained of the communist people and their symbolic worldviews¹⁶⁰.

3.4 *Addio Compagni, the Hammer and Sickle Rusts while an Oak Grows*

In his documentary about Italian communist militancy, the Belgian director Hugues Le Paige asked to his Italian communist friend, Carlo, if deep down he still felt like a communist. Carlo did not hesitate, “I still feel like a communist in the same way I learned to be in the Italian Communist Party, even joining a party that is no longer called the Communist”¹⁶¹. The non-communist party, in which Carlo still lived as a communist, was the Democratic Party of the Left. It was born in Rimini on February 4, 1991, in the hall of the PCI 20th Congress. It was the child of Occhetto and his *svolta*.

According to Kertzer, the last act of PCI transformation into PDS should pass through the ritual of consecration, offered by the twenty-congress, to be properly valid¹⁶². Indeed, the months before the inauguration of the convention were characterized by a harsh conflict among Occhetto's majority and the internal oppositions. The minorities were upset by the fact that Occhetto had leaked out the new symbols and name after the 19th Congress, albeit he is not in the position to approve none of them without the pronouncement of the PCI sovereign body¹⁶³. The “no” front thus hoped to overturn the precedent results and save the communist identity¹⁶⁴. However, it proved a vanishing hope.

Even before opening the 20th Congress, Occhetto had hinted that it was not possible, for the PCI, to turn back. If anyone thought of doing so, they could not by remaining in the transforming entity that was currently the party. After all, the title of the majority's motion, presented on November 16, 1990, was enlightening: *Mozione presentata da Achille Occhetto per il Partito democratico della*

¹⁶⁰ For a strong study about the symbolic means of Pajetta's death see, David I. Kertzer, *Politics and Symbols*, cit., pp. 145-149.

¹⁶¹ Hugues Le Paige, *op. cit.*

¹⁶² David I. Kertzer, *Il rito politico*, cit., p. 294.

¹⁶³ Here, it is intended the PCI Congress as higher collegial body for party's decisions.

¹⁶⁴ David I. Kertzer, *Politics and Symbols*, p. 149.

*sinistra*¹⁶⁵. It provided both the new name proposal and a quasi-total identification between the incumbent leader and the transformative project. On this point, Liguori wondered: “the secretary laid his text on the table, thus, whoever wanted – within his own majority – to assume the burden of distinguishing himself from the top party figure he had so far supported”¹⁶⁶. In other words, either one chose to support Occhetto's motion or stay out of the party. There was no other possibility.

From one side, the Piedmontese secretary's determination was driven certainly by a strong conviction that organic change should be undertaken to finally bring his community to success. On the other side, Occhetto became firmly convinced of the chosen path because he felt the growing affection of some militants. For instance, Dino, a Turin comrade, wrote to him: “Thank you, dear comrade Occhetto, thank you from the heart to make the right choice, a choice which will contribute to give back to the people, the workers, the honest and young people, the faith which they deserve”¹⁶⁷.

However, the difficulties, for a successful end of the transition, were several, including the opposition's motions to impede the PDS inception and the loss of 100.000 militants' subscriptions. The grassroots support, garnered by Occhetto around the new party proposal, was sometimes dictated more by a loyal respect of leadership's indications than a real belief in his programs. Thus, accepting the PCI transformation became a viaticum for pains, doubts, and questions, that many comrades were asking themselves, such as “what can it be and become ... do I continue to participate?”¹⁶⁸

On January 31, 1991, the anxiety among the Italian communists, who had reached Rimini for the 20th congress, was severe. There were 844 majority delegates, more than double the number of opposition's ones, so the hope of seeing the PCI emerge intact from the gates of that event was practically nil. Moreover, the air had been saturated by international contingencies as often happened in the party's history. A few days before the 20th congress beginning, the United States had launched its offensive against Iraqi. Saddam Hussain's troops had invaded Kuwait and unleashed a military reprisal by an American-led and UN-authorized international force. The Gulf Crisis had channeled a great deal of attention, also within the party. Pacifism had been, throughout the 1980s, a cornerstone in reviving the image of a modern PCI, opened to no-partisan movementism. Thus, Occhetto started precisely from there his last speech as communist secretary. However, he again did not do it in the right way.

Kertzer argues that this new was scenario offered to Occhetto, and his allies, the opportunity to mark a new identity, but they choose to reestablish old symbolism and solidarity rites¹⁶⁹. Indeed, fallowing once again the old communist traditions, the PCI head gave an opening speech with a heavy

¹⁶⁵ In *20° Congresso del PCI. Mozioni documenti regolamento*, opuscolo, p. 3.

¹⁶⁶ Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 5288.

¹⁶⁷ Francesco Demitry, Gabriella De Paolis, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

¹⁶⁸ Nanni Moretti, *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁹ David I. Kertzer, *Il rito politico, cit.*, p. 294.

denunciation of American intervention. Except for the mention of Pope John Paul II, he seemed to set aside all those social-liberal developments he had proposed since the 18th Congress. The Piedmontese leader was evidently concerned about lending his side to opposition and being labeled a non-leftist. It was paradoxical to see the *svolta*'s secretary recover communist concepts, as anti-Americanism, right after ordering the hammer and sickle to be removed from the congressional posters¹⁷⁰. As the first half hour of speech went on, it became increasingly evident that, through those symbolic references, Occhetto hoped to “unify the party”, “strengthen solidarity among the membership”, and accredit himself as a still-communist leader, on par with his internal enemies¹⁷¹.

The instrumental use of PCI liturgical symbols, against Gulf military intervention, worked only partially. For instance, a congress delegate answered to a reporter, who asked what emotions she was experiencing:

*Boh ... sono iscritta da tre anni, prima ero indipendente di sinistra. Un'esperienza non diversa da prima, la continuità del lavoro che già avevo prima... l'emozione più grossa è stata la relazione di Occhetto in cui è stato ribadito la posizione ferma sulla pace e la crisi del golfo. Io spero che la solidarietà interna sia possibile, una novità non data per scontata dalle minoranze [...]*¹⁷²

The young comrade, who said to have recently undertaken communist militancy, appeared enthusiastic about the pacifist references, coming from the left traditions. However, her inability to express an articulate description of her own feelings, regarding the new party's course, suggested a sense of bewilderment. Before the same interviewer, a PCI long-time delegate added:

*Questo dibattito mi pare un po' scontato ... la linea è definita, non c'è molto entusiasmo... ci voglio pensare – sull'iscrizione nuovo partito – perché sulla prima parte dell'intervento di Occhetto, sulla guerra, mi sono ritrovata... sul resto ci voglio pensare.*¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ On the posters for publicizing the 20th Congress and decorated the hall, it was removed the traditional emblem and name of PCI and it was only present the words “twentieth” with a red background.

¹⁷¹ David I. Kertzer, *Il rito politico*, cit., p. 294.

¹⁷² “Boh ... the excitement, I have been a member for three years, before that I was a leftist independent. An experience not different from before, the continuity of the work I already had before ... the biggest emotion was Occhetto's report in which the firm position on peace and the Gulf crisis was reiterated. I hope that internal solidarity is possible, something new not taken for granted by minorities [...]” – AAMOD, XX Congresso nazionale del PCI. Rimini, 31 Gennaio 1991, (1991), TCR: 00:55:00:00.

¹⁷³ “This debate seems a bit predictable to me ... the line is set, there is not much enthusiasm ... I want to think about it – about the new party membership – because about the first part of Occhetto's speech, about the war, I found myself ... about the rest I want to think about it.” – Ivi, TCR: 00:50:00:00.

The attempt to disempower traditional symbolism, by appropriating it, ended up having a little hold on the militants. Moreover, this wrong choice had alarmed “outsides delegates”¹⁷⁴ belonging to the pacifist, ecologist, and Catholic worlds. They wanted to avoid finding themselves in a “new Italian Communist Party”¹⁷⁵, that they would never join. Once again, Kertzer seemed to be right when noted: “the resulting mixture of symbols was not entirely successful”¹⁷⁶.

Occhetto realized that his transformation proposal had not garnered full support among militants. However, the consensus around the leadership’s motion was broader in the congress, which looked less fideistic than the past. Many delegates responded to reporters’ questions with disenchant manners. The vital charge of the previous fifteen months’ debates was lost. Some spoke of “predictable” and “mediocre”¹⁷⁷ congressional arguments. Others hid their pain by saying they accepted the change only because it did not mean “end”¹⁷⁸. However, the greatest fear, for both the PCI secretariat and militants, was to achieve the transformation with a separated and disarticulated body politic. Occhetto’s traditionalist calls hinted precisely at this apprehension. The long path of discussions, toward the 20th Congress, had revealed that the party was divided at every level. Many militants had not renewed their membership and would not join the PDS. Several leaders, especially Cossutta, were ready to refound communism in a different form. A delegate from Mantua declared: “It is not possible to make all these souls of the party coexist together...I think it is an illusion, also because the soul around which contraposition is created is the oldest soul”¹⁷⁹. A conservative soul from whom Occhetto would never receive the blessing he sought to lead the transition till the end.

The party’s head needed not only the benediction for the new party, but also an endorsement for himself, as legitimate master of ceremony of Italian communism. If this recognition had not come from within the party’s body politic, the transition toward the newness would have been inevitably undermined. The absence of a communist identity’s ferryman prevented the closure of both the long and micro-cyclical liminality, experienced by the PCI. Occhetto by divesting himself of the hammer and sickle had disavowed the master of ceremony’s scepter, attributable to the leader. Without it, the secretary could totally change the party and give it a new distinct identity, however, he could not re-negotiate the existing one re-aggregating its detached people. Thus, the 20th Congress was not envisioned for the PCI renewal, but for its disappearance. The body politic would be passing away,

¹⁷⁴ The 20th Congress was opened also to “external” delegates coming from other political movements, which were invited on the base that the convention should be also the inauguration of the new party, contaminated also by the arriving of non-communist activist.

¹⁷⁵ AAMOD, *XX Congresso, cit.*, TCR: 00:45:29:00.

¹⁷⁶ David I. Kertzer, *Politics and Symbols, cit.*, p. 150.

¹⁷⁷ AAMOD, *XX Congresso, cit.*, TCR: 00:49:10:00.

¹⁷⁸ Ivi, TCR: 00:58:35:00.

¹⁷⁹ Ivi, TCR: 00:51:02:00.

or rather revive partially into the PDS. The communist identity was dismissed in favor of something undefined, such as a new liberal-socialist soul.

The confused symbols' use was also emblematic of the complexities and uncertainties linked to those passages. Kertzer underlines that also "the hall's decorations reflected the transitional nature of the proceedings"¹⁸⁰. The PCI red color was mixed with the green, to wink at ecologist movements, and white, for honoring the national flag. The celebration of the Italian colors seemed notably a double representation. On one hand, they displayed the democratic legitimacy, already inherent in communist participation of the republic construction through the Resistance and the constituent. On the other hand, they were distancing the new entity from worldwide communism, adding to the Communist International's typical color those of national way.

Furthermore, the three new colorations characterized the new PDS emblem. It was designated with a large green oak tree and at the foot it was placed an ever-smaller PCI symbol. It was distinguished by a large oak tree with a green color at the foot of which was placed the ever-smaller PCI symbol. The new emblem had been the focus of militant discussion for months, almost following the divisive grooves of "yes" or "no" to the *svolta*. In contrast to the name issue, there had been higher acceptance of the new image for two main reasons. Firstly, the oak tree was the primary symbol created by Occhetto's leadership, by addition. In fact, it included the introduction of a third element, without the total deprivation of the hammer and sickle. Thus, the oak tree could be used for undertaking an original identification with the new party. Secondly, many comrades understood that change as a positive upgrade, dictated by the increasing political consumption of more appealing images¹⁸¹. The information society was expanding, at such a pace, that even the communists' resistance to modernity was now overwhelming. Nonetheless, there were those who saw in the changes of these symbols a deplorable action and attacked Occhetto, without half measures. It was the case of an elderly Umbrian communist, Maria Teresa Presenzini, who hand-noted in her diary:

[...] Occhetto che non è né un comunista né un socialista. Credo però che sia più fascista. Come saranno contenti i Cattolici della caduta del comunismo, ma sono sicuri che sia finito così? Io non ci credo chi difenderà i lavoratori dai nostri sfruttatori, [...] è bello vedere tante bandiere con falce e martello che sembrano tanti papaveri in un campo di grano ancora verde. Non appena vedrò qualche compagno domanderò quale sarà la vostra bandiera [...] se c'è qualcosa che non va lascerò il sogno di sempre. Però voterò contro la quercia per far perdere i porci di Occhetto. Occhetto non

¹⁸⁰ David I. Kertzer, *Politics and Symbols*, cit., p. 151.

¹⁸¹ This tendency was evident also starting from Bettino Craxi's decision to reshape the PSI emblem, using a red carnation. For a specific insight about the Milanese leader's influence on the managing of political communication see, Stefano Rolando, "La comunicazione del Partito Socialista Italiano dall'affermazione all'epilogo di Craxi", in *Comunicazione Politica*, No. 1, (2007), pp. 1-17.

*ha capito che tutti i maiali non mangiano le ghiande, la quercia è una pianta che è stata cantata nella canzone fascista giovinezza, chi non mi crede lo domandi a qualche fascista, se è vero, io l'ho cantata andavo a scuola insieme ai compagni di scuola, adesso questo Occhetto mette sotto la quercia il vero emblema del partito comunista, e con quale diritto? Se è un signore si metta in un altro partito per signori e non stia a fare l'Occhetto con i veri comunisti. Sono sicura che il comunismo tornerà anche presto, forse con una rivoluzione, come quella dell'Ottobre 1917, e allora queste carogne pagheranno.*¹⁸²

The oak tree as a reminder of fascism, Occhetto portrait as a fascist party official, and communism as the only redeemed force were evidently hyperbole. However, they testified a visceral aversion against who – and what – wanted to show to communist people not that “God was dead”¹⁸³, but that he never existed.

The 20th Congress, in line with Ariemma’s argument, was disastrous for Occhetto’s leadership, despite the clear victory of his proposal¹⁸⁴. A new party had been created, without settling account with the past. This was Occhetto's responsibility, his own lack of courage and confidence in his own initiative, which in any case was unavoidably needed for facing the world upheavals.

The fear of being defeated and losing himself part of his identity were evident in the running of his speech before the congress’ delegates. His new proposals had caused awkward silences in the crowd, while elements of continuity with the past had rekindled their enthusiasm. The communists’ feelings apotheosis was momentarily restored at the sounding of Occhetto’s phrase: “We will take Gramsci with us into the new party”¹⁸⁵. The Piedmontese secretary clung to communist “continuism” while perpetrating the turn that was supposed to overcome it completely. He did it, thinking he was blessing that transformation and leading it to completion. Instead, the PCI head achieved the opposite result. Occhetto certainly was not helped by his opponents. In the following days, Cossutta and

¹⁸² “[...] Occhetto who is neither a communist nor a socialist. I believe, however, that he is more of a fascist. How happy the Catholics will be with the fall of communism, but are they sure it is over like that? I don't believe it who will defend the workers from our exploiters, [...] it's nice to see so many flags with hammer and sickle looking like so many poppies in a still green wheat field. As soon as I see some comrades, I will ask what your flag will be [...] if there is something wrong, I will leave the dream as always. However, I will vote against the oak tree to make Occhetto's pigs lose. Occhetto has not understood that all pigs do not eat acorns, the oak tree is a plant that was sung in the fascist song youth, whoever does not believe me ask some fascist, if it is true, I sang it I used to go to school together with my schoolmates, now this Occhetto puts under the oak tree the real emblem of the communist party, and with what right? If he is a gentleman let him join another party for gentlemen and don't be Occhetto with the real communists. I am sure that communism will also return soon, perhaps with a revolution, like the October 1917 revolution, and then these carrions will pay.” – ADN, Maria Teresa Presenzini, *Sono a lavorare*, DP/ADN, 1969-1990.

¹⁸³ Frederick W. Nietzsche, *La gaia scienza*, (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Rusconi Libri, 2017), pp. 130-131.

¹⁸⁴ Iginio Ariemma, *La casa brucia. I Democratici di Sinistra dal PCI ai giorni nostri*, (Venice: Marsilio, 2000), p. 88.

¹⁸⁵ David I. Kertzer, *Il rito politico*, cit., p. 295.

Tortorella would make speeches so densely filled with communist liturgical symbolism that they would sound like the two highest priests of the PCI¹⁸⁶.

On February 3, 1991, Cossutta stirred up the congress crowd from the stage, shouting: “You cannot stop me from remaining a communist ... you cannot stop our children”¹⁸⁷. Those words came back to support the identity’s identification of the audience both with the leader and the term communist, increasing even more the pain for the widespread failing to re-aggregate the body politic. Indeed, the opposition's extremist and divisionist attitude did not help Occhetto and his allies. After all, the splits, that followed Rimini Congress, and the birth of Cossutta's *Rifondazione Comunista* were gales of which there had been warnings long before the *svolta*. This interpretation was countercheck by a comrade, with forty-eight years old communist experience, who sadly said: “it did not touch my heart anymore because it’s a process which coming from afar”¹⁸⁸.

The dramatic end of the Italian Communist Party corresponded to the PDS ill-fated inception. In fact, the new party's secretary was also voted on in Rimini. Occhetto failed to reach a majority quorum, because many delegates, who were supposed to participate to that immediate vote, left the city prematurely. It was remedied two days later in Rome; on that second occasion the former PCI secretary became the first PDS head¹⁸⁹. The latter episode, on the one hand, seemed symptomatic of the desire to escape and leave behind that congress full of suffering and tears. On the other, it gave an early indication of phenomenon, that would be documented in the fallowing years together with the collapse of post-communist support¹⁹⁰ in 1992 national elections: the gradual abandonment of political participation by ex-militants¹⁹¹.

On February 3, 1991, The PCI's historical-political journey stopped in Rimini in a cold afternoon. About 500 km away, the life journey of a grassroots militant, Mario, finished too. The after night, his granddaughter Francesca decided to write to Occhetto, unable to sleep because of the grief pain. She had inherited from her grandfather a love for politics, for the PCI and its ideals.

¹⁸⁶ David I. Kertzer, *Politics and Symbols, cit.*, p. 152.

¹⁸⁷ In *l'Unità*, 03/02/1991, p. 16.

¹⁸⁸ AAMOD, *XX Congresso, cit.*, TCR: 01:00:18:00.

¹⁸⁹ Guido Liguori, *op. cit.*, pos. 5390-5399.

¹⁹⁰ Simona Colarizi, *Storia politica, cit.*, pp. 189-191.

¹⁹¹ Fabiana Falciani, a communist militant from Mercatale, was questioned about this theme during her interview with Le Paige. She answered: “I left the party after the last congress ... I can no longer recognize myself not so much in the ideals but in the programs that the new party is carrying out. It no longer wants to transform society the way I want. I am very bitter because doing political activity as communists was first and foremost about being together, sharing ideas, being together in victory and defeat ... Being with comrades I miss it is true but being with them cannot be enough for me to join a party whose aims I do not share. [...] Political activity for me was also an everyday commitment ... I thought much less about my babo's activity and rarely came to the country ... It scares me to live isolated from the problems and struggles ... I am convinced that a person should live and work for others.” – Hugues Le Paige, *op. cit.*

Il 3 febbraio è il giorno della grande attesa per i membri del PCI in riunione e per mio nonno [...] mentre tutti attendiamo le notizie da Rimini, lui è sotto i ferri per un'operazione chirurgica. Si spera! Le ultime speranze, in questo buio così tetro; la luce non è ancora del tutto sparita: il nonno può farcela, il partito può ancora rimanere vivo. Ma arriva il momento definitivo, il nonno è morto, è stata la sua unica sconfitta [...] il partito ce l'ha fatta! E penso al nonno [...] avrebbe pianto [...] come fece quando tu, Achille, avanzasti la tua proposta di cambiamento [...] capii quanto per il nonno il partito fosse importante. [...] Per questo sono certa che nonostante il suo dissenso, il nonno oggi avrebbe la tessera del PDS nel portafoglio, l'avrebbe mostrata soddisfatto e avrebbe continuato a lottare per le sue idee. [...] Tra poco spunterà il sole, nel cielo si vedono già tracce di un'alba, di una nuova alba, senza mio nonno e senza il vecchio PCI, ma in quel cielo bianco sogno di vedere ancora uomini con magliette, bandiere [...] con sopra disegnata la Quercia che manifestano di nuovo, per gli stessi ideali di libertà ed uguaglianza del nonno¹⁹².

This memory, with poignant features, explains how strong the bond between communism and militants was. How difficult it was to survive a party that represented part of oneself, and just as a part of oneself it remained in the hearts of those left behind after the bereavement. The Italian Communist Party had disappeared, like Mario. It took away part of militants' identity, right in the same way that the disappearance of Francesca's grandfather's body had taken away her point of certainty, especially political. Something survived, however. Not the emblems, the anthems, and the idea of an active and deep-rooted political militancy. What survived was a set of traditional communists' ideals, related to justice and equality. Occhetto also recognized that in his response to Francesca's letter:

[...] gli uomini e i simboli passano, ma gli ideali e le cause per le quali impegnarsi restano. [...] l'utopia a cui tuo nonno e tantissimi altri hanno dedicato gran parte della loro vita, continuano a vivere nella domanda di giustizia della gente [...] e nella nostra voglia di impegnarci per cambiare

¹⁹² "February 3 is the day of great anticipation for the PCI members at the meeting and for my grandfather [...] while we all wait for news from Rimini, he is under the knife for surgery. One hopes! The last hopes, in this darkness so bleak; the light is not yet completely gone grandfather can make it, the party can still stay alive. But the final moment comes, Grandfather is dead, it was his only defeat [...] the party has made it! And I think of Grandpa [...] he would have cried [...] as he did when you, Achilles, put forward your proposal for change [...] I understood how important the party was to Grandpa. [...] That is why I am sure that despite his dissent, Grandpa would have the PDS card in his wallet today, he would have shown it contentedly and continued to fight for his ideas. [...] Soon the sun will come out, in the sky we can already see traces of a dawn, of a new dawn, without my grandfather and without the old PCI, but in that white sky I dream of still seeing men with T-shirts, flags [...] with the Oak drawn on them demonstrating again, for the same ideals of freedom and equality as grandfather." – Francesco Demitry, Gabriella De Paolis, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

*l'ordine esistente. L'alba c'è sempre, credimi, come quella di cui scrivi e ogni giornata è degna di essere vissuta.*¹⁹³

Therefore, the Italian Communist Party may have disappeared. Nevertheless, the better part of its utopia could still be the cornerstone of a just and egalitarian society's renewal. Occhetto himself admitted it. The failure to close the communist transition has generated a permanent liminality¹⁹⁴, which seems survive even now. It certainly posed a great problem of continuous mixing of identities and structures within post-communist body politic. However, post-communism was endowed with a creative force, perhaps unmatched. Unfortunately, no new leftist leaders understood how use it. The wounded and disillusioned communist militants were left alone, losing them and hence much of what had made outstanding the Italian Communism's epic.

¹⁹³ “[...] the men and symbols pass away, but the ideals and causes to strive for remain. [...] the utopia to which your grandfather and so many others devoted so much of their lives continues to live on in people's demand for justice [...] and in our desire to strive to change the existing order. The dawn is always there, believe me, like the one you write about, and every day is worth living.” – Francesco Demitry, Gabriella De Paolis, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-124.

¹⁹⁴ Arpad Szakolczai, “Permanent (Trickster) liminality: the reasons of the heart and of the mind”, in *Theory & Psychology*, No. 2, Vol. 27, (2017), pp. 231-248.

CONCLUSION

On October 16, 1999, not even a decade had passed since the Bolognina *svolta*. Nevertheless, the world seemed so dramatically distant and transformed. The Soviet Union did not exist anymore. Communism survived just in a handful of “authoritarian paradises” like Cuba, North Korea, and China, but with quite specific national features. The Democratic Party, led by Bill Clinton, had returned to rule the United States, after a long-serving Republican reign, but was about to hand power over again. Fukuyama had declared the end of history and liberalism turned more and more into a normative ideology and a prescriptive ideal. It was then in its name that people began to fight wars, to restructure entire national economies and social rights for the presumed benefits of globalization, and to tame the uncontrollable power of an increasingly self-referential financial system. Everything was changing for the world to evolve. Meanwhile, in Italy, as usual, everything had already changed to keep the world as it was. Except for one thing: post-communists were in power.

Was Occhetto therefore, right? Was the end of PCI the only way to allow communists to rule the country? Not quite. The “new party” created with the 20th Congress already no longer survived and it changed its name again in *Democratici di Sinistra* (DS)¹. Occhetto, the master of the transformation, leaved politics, while his ally-enemy Massimo D'Alema became the first Italian Prime Minister coming out of a communist background. In fact, he had retained little of communism. For example, his endorsement of the NATO bombing of Belgrade (in the Spring of 1999)², reflected his move from pro-Soviet pacifism to the armed preservation of pro-Atlantic democracy. Sure, government and realpolitik sometimes require taming ideals and dreams. Yet, these did not seem to survive even in the party that was supposed to continue, in a different frame, the tradition.

Thus, on October 16, 1999, the newspaper *La Stampa* published an article that seemed a bold confirmation of such a transformation. In it, the newly appointed DS Secretary Walter Veltroni wrote: “It was possible to stay in the PCI without being a communist. It was possible, it was so”³. Veltroni disowned what he had been to become something else. Not all his comrades had the same courage and the same audacity to say goodbye to a part of themselves, represented by communist identity. Not all of them became post-communists.

¹ For a brief and deep understanding of all the main evolution stages of the PDS into DS see, Paolo Bellucci, Marco Maraffi, Paolo Segatti, *PCI, PDS, DS. La trasformazione dell'identità della sinistra di governo*, (Rome: Donzelli, 2000) and Daniela Giannetti, Rosa Mulé, “The Democratici di Sinistra: In Search of a New Identity”, in *South European Society and Politics*, No. 3-4, Vol. 11, (2006), pp. 457-475.

² For a deeper understanding of the Italian government's action in this crisis see, Valerio Cartocci, “La politica estera italiana nella seconda repubblica: il caso Kosovo”, in *Nuova Antologia*, No. 1, (2017), pp. 357-369 and Massimo Bucarelli, “L'Italia e le guerre jugoslave di fine secolo. (1991-99)”, in Franco Botta, Italo Garzia, eds., *Europa Adriatica. Storia, Relazioni, Economia*, (Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 2004), pp. 73-116.

³ Walter Veltroni, “Incompatibili comunismo e libertà”, in *La Stampa*, 16/10/1999, p. 3.

Veltroni's abjuration of his past was shared by ample sector of the communist people, and it was the more direct and immediate result of Occhetto's *svolta*. The communist body politic reacted to the end of the PCI in two ways. From one side, those who had supported the transformation tried to free themselves from the past, both the political and the personal past. This behavior generated the perception in their opponents that the change had occurred only on the veneer. Paradoxically, an event of profound disarticulation of the Italian communists' identity – which would undermine the future political capacity of the entire left – appeared to the outside world as little more than a cosmetic intervention on the iconography. On the other side, many comrades opted for the silence. In them, there was a growing nostalgia, above all, for the youthful, human relationships and passionate political experience within the PCI⁴. They were not only those who opposed the *svolta*, but also people who entrusted Occhetto, thinking that his choice was right. These comrades felt the needed to renegotiate the communist identity before a reborn post-Cold War world; nonetheless, they were not ready to bury all their beliefs and values under Berlin Wall's ruins. In short, they could have agreed to re-aggregate into a new entity tied to communist roots but transforming into an ideally different political entity was not contemplated.

The resulting double distinction of the communist community after the 20th Congress, suggested also to rethink its complete assimilation with post-communism. Indeed, the failure of complete the transition toward the new entity, which could end the liminal period, created two wings within a body politic that had not come to re-aggregation: the post-communist and the former-communist. The first ones, such as Veltroni, substituted the communist beliefs with the dominant socio-liberal ideology. The latter was obviously contaminated with social and civil rights aims. The post-communists soon also shifted their political point of reference, from the in-crisis European social-democratic party to the American democrats. Recalling Kertzer's arguments about symbolism, it was also confirmed by the PDS-DS progressive use of U.S. Democratic Party's political vocabularies and colors⁵. The second ones should be considered former communist because they not denied completely their identity. The former communists were those who suffered more the *svolta* outcomes because it was experienced as a deprivation and not as a journey toward societal renewal. Many continued to militate for a while within the post-communists' parties. However, their past identity and new incumbent leaderships' projects, and precepts, clashed very soon. A turning point was perhaps in the 1994 left defeat against Berlusconi; Occhetto's last one⁶. After that, the former communists took on the

⁴ Vittorio Foa, Miriam Mafai, Alfredo Reichlin, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁵ For a meaningful research about the later evolution of PCI and post-communist parties posters' images and symbols see, Francesco Marchianò, "Il manifesto politico: dal Nuovo Pci ai Democratici di Sinistra", in *Democrazia e Diritto*, No. 1, (2014), pp. 149-174.

⁶ The harsh impact that the 1994 defeat had on the already stressed and divided PCI's heirs was well captured by Le Paige's documentary. Especially, the former communist Fabiana said a very thoughtful sentence about that moment: "I

definitive guise of voters and no longer activists, while remaining attached to some of the values they had acquired through years of communist militancy.

From an electoral point of view, Occhetto only defeat was at the 1994 national election, against Silvio Berlusconi. Although he did not achieve extraordinary electoral results, as PCI secretary he had won the paramount struggle: the internal conflict for the transformation of the party. Nevertheless, what resulted from that victory was in no way comparable to the hoped-for achievement. Occhetto's *svolta* was a highly divisive event, whose historical assessment is quite controversial. For someone, the creation of a new party, capable not only to overcome its predecessor communist identity but also to contaminate itself with other political families, such as progressive Catholicism and ecologism, was an enormous success. It was sufficient to recollect the esteem's expressions for PCI former secretary's decisions, coming from Scalfari's articles⁷. For some others, Occhetto was responsible of a severe failure because, appointed for regenerate with newness the party, he ended liquidating it. The truth, as usual, is to be found in the midst, in the between the overly celebratory and the radically opposed positions.

Occhetto was ahead of his time. He always had been a little bit. Perhaps, it was because he felt that he had already experienced ruptures with a certain communist way of understanding socialism. The year 1956 had been more than a traumatic event for him; it had been a real warning watch for the future. On that occasion, his strong protests the party hierarchies, which shamefully covered up the real events of Budapest Red Army's invasion, appeared as prodromes of a personal dissent from that way to intend socialism. Occhetto was repeatedly treated as a late Sixty-Eighter, whereas he had probably been an early precursor of that exceptional moment. Similarly, his idea of the need for contamination with other political traditions to ensure the renewal of society came from afar. Occhetto's personal story had exposed him since childhood to an extraordinarily mixed ideal environment. He went from Calvino to Rodano, without fear of being labeled in any way. The influence of Rodano was obviously reinforced by his closeness to Berlinguer.

The last Communist secretary differed from his Sardinian counterpart in many ways. To begin with, he was warm, effusive, and easygoing, while Berlinguer was strictly reserved and austere. However, the two seemed to share the same perception of the PCI's future horizons' crisis. Both seemed to have understood that innovating a stalled political system, a dissipated society, and an increasingly divided party required not just a change of clothes, but a deep transformation in term of identity. The difference lay in the manner and, perhaps, above all in the timing. For example, Occhetto bitterly recounts when Berlinguer asked him what he thought about changing the party's name. The

don't know if even then it was paying, or already beginning to pay, this having considered the participation of the people, the grassroots, as something superfluous." – Hugues Le Paige, *op. cit.*, min. 00:58:00:00.

⁷ Nello Ajello, *Il lungo addio*, *cit.*, p. 410.

Piedmontese leader immediately began proposing names, driven by his own *nuovista* charge, only to be restrained by one of the harsh and “continuist” smiles, typical of the Sardinian secretary⁸.

At the dawn of the Berlin Wall's collapse, Occhetto thus seemed to be very well aware of what had been the PCI's path up to that point and of the direction in which to direct Italian communism's future. The last secretary had critically experienced the party's liminal phase, and he also seemed to have a fuller awareness of it than other comrades. Nonetheless, the very fact that he had so consciously experienced the personal transition, from a communist to a post-communist social-liberal left identity, created a bias in his “optimistic reading”⁹ of the 1989 occurrences. Occhetto took for granted that the collapse of real socialism was for the whole communist body politic the counterevidence of a need to change. It was not. The events of that year took on a similar, yet slightly different meaning, depending on the lived experience of each communist. Thus, for the Piedmontese leader 1989 was the final step in his own transitional process. For many others it was instead the beginning of a new separation, embedded in a context of new micro-cyclical liminality. This started a two-speed process of renegotiating communist identity. Along with Occhetto, ran fast those who were to become *svoltisti*, and hence post-communists. While behind remained those opposed, or were undecided, about the change. They remained in the ford of what could have been and had not been, becoming former communists. Of course, the post-communists were also facilitated by the fact that they were the most recent generation exposed to a de-powered PCI's pedagogy. Some of them had been baptized to communism ideals in the very period of liminality, becoming, for this reason, beings capable of evolving and mutating smoothly. Conversely, it could not be – and was not – the case for those who had been initiated to communism during the party's first post-World War II entrenchment.

The last leadership's de-symbolization and re-historicization of Italian communism appears to be pervaded by Bourdieu's “oracle effect”. Occhetto was convinced to be entitled both to guide the transition, such as party master of ceremony, and to divine the more fruitful path for its future. However, he was never recognized in such roles by the communist body politic in its fulness. Indeed, in line with Bourdieu the oracle effect “enables the authorized spokesperson to take his authority from the group which authorizes him in order to exercise recognized constraint, symbolic violence, on each of the isolated members of the group”¹⁰. The last secretary was never authorized by the group, in such manner. Moreover, it is not possible in those case to assimilate the authorization with the PCI majority judgment above the transformation, because the militant congress delegates' acceptance of secretary's projects was often subordinated to democratic centralism and hierarchies' respect.

⁸ Achille Occhetto, *La lunga eclissi*, cit., pos. 1665- 1670.

⁹ Giuseppe Vacca, *Vent'anni dopo*, cit., p. 196.

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, (Cambridge – MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 212.

Perhaps, Occhetto had understood more than anyone else – even Berlinguer himself – the creative effect of the deep liminal and transformative period, where the PCI found itself in the 1980s. However, the acceleration, he imparted to the changes and the unambiguousness of their direction, became too divisive. The Piedmontese secretary failed to obtain the title as Italian communist community's master of ceremony, who was needed to end its transition, even though he had some of its characteristics. Foremost, among that people, having he early ended the liminal period of personal and political identity transformation. In 1989, Occhetto was already no longer a communist believer and assumed mistakenly, that this was valid for every PCI member. The collapse of the Berlin Wall had been, to paraphrase Furet, a “great denial of history”¹¹ but it did not mean that history was over, at least not the personal communism history of many militants. He realized it late and to his own cost.

It was difficult to innovate a party often resistant to modernity. Undoubtedly, it became even more unmanageable, thinking to do so through a radical replacement of symbols and traditions with a fuzzy and unclear newness. Communism symbolism and ritual had been at the roots of the collective and personal identity of thousands of Italians, more a religious belief than a political ideal. For this reason, ending the transition was possible just through an identity renegotiation, by the reaggregation of communist separated body politic, hence renewing rites, symbols, and historical traditions. However, the choices were for a critical and total change. The new generation leaders wanted success and communist identity had proven to be a hindrance, rather than an asset.

For this reason, the new party born in Rimini could not be more communist. It was to provide a platform for the coming together of many souls who were tired of systemic immutability. Obviously, this opened the way to a disarticulation of the strong ideals needed to unify an increasingly heterogeneous and interclass social base. Thus, the end of real socialism certainly implied a necessary renewal with, at the same time, the launching of a new identity. The incumbent leadership would have to be able to offer new symbols and traditions to compensate for the deep sense of mournful emptiness, opened by the dissolution of PCI and its ideals. They were unable to elaborate new aggregating ideological features for a renewed identity, no longer communist, but still leftist. There was an evident tendency to employ liberal elements, sometimes in substitution of socialist ones. The celebration of the French Revolution as foundational moment of the Italian communism was exemplificative in this sense.

The transition leaders paid for this liberal contamination, mainly because the ambiguities with which it was posed were not easily understood by the communist base. Since the 18th Congress, Occhetto seemed to adopt a kind of double linguistic, symbolic, and ideal register. But above all, he adopted a double attitude toward the PCI's heterogeneous body politic. Factually, he did everything

¹¹ Andrea Possieri, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

to accelerate the party's transition from a structural-organizational point of view. The PCI was hence surely to disappear, while the PDS would have time to become more than a “thing”. This seemed to be the dominant thinking in the communist elites. Ideologically, the approach was different, above all in the discourse with grassroots militants. Occhetto used an inventory, which, albeit dense with new elements such as strong environmentalism, attention to feminism instances, and individual civil rights, tended to anchor itself constantly in elements of continuity, such as anti-Americanism linked to Gulf crisis’ developments. This made the programmatic project confusing, but more importantly it prevented the establishment of an autonomous and original ritual space, symbolic language, and ideal spirit for the new political formation. Three elements that would have been useful perhaps in making a future, if not immediate, reaggregation of the changing social body more plausible. This lack inevitably marked the impossibility of realizing Occhetto's project, but also of beginning the construction of a viable bridge to end that condition of permanent liminality, in the future. There was no ability to begin writing a new post-communist history and it ended up thinking that erasing, or contaminating, the former communists’ one was enough.

The PCI disappearance represented a real mourning for many militants, as many of their testimonies show. Further marks of certainty that had remained residual in the long process of communist transition seemed to dissolve as the new political formation was defined and took hold. Occhetto also remained undecided about what to do with these last remnants, especially regarding the mythology of the PCI pantheon of great fathers. Togliatti was stripped of all his glory. Gramsci, instead, was to preserve, he thought, even though the new party veered increasingly toward Gobetti and Sturzo. However, the only one who seemed really to survive the erosion of Italian communism story was Enrico Berlinguer.

The martyr of the party par excellence, Berlinguer was admired by everybody, included the neo-fascist Almirante. His myth survived for several reasons. Primarily the lack of complete collective processing of the grief for his death. The funeral in Piazza San Giovanni had been impressive, but the sudden disappearance of the leader's body had opened a void that no one could compensate for. Natta because of his lack charisma, Occhetto because he was already no longer a communist. Berlinguer appeared to pass the abjuration of history unscathed due to the fact that he had been a messenger between different worlds, a moderate innovator, and modern “continuist”. Berlinguer was and could still be celebrated such as an everyone's secretary, always balancing between the two spheres of the communist world: historicism and vanguardism. For many, he had been a man of providence, returned to it too soon. In reality, the Sardinian secretary's political epic had not been marked only by lights. Many were the shadows that weighed on his choices, first of all that of having made communist moral diversity the anchor of a political project with no possibility of implementation. Moreover, it was in

his exasperation of the *questione morale*, which grew up the seeds of the first phenomenon in which many former communists re-found themselves: anti-party justicialism.

Berlinguer, and the party he left behind, were strongly convinced of messianic diversity. Communist morality seemed unassailable, even more so in the face of a political scenario in which corruption was increasingly making its way. These two elements – diversity and morality – persisted in the body politic of the dissolved Communist Party. After the 20th Congress, the PDS became its direct inheritor but failed to channel its potential, especially its most dangerous ones. Indeed, part of the militancy that had been orphaned by the PCI, but not at all by values and beliefs derived from it, found itself swelling the ranks of the justicialist and proto-populist protests that followed *Tangentopoli*¹². It is not possible here to discuss those events and the communal response that followed, nevertheless it can be drawn from them a crucial element for this study.

The moralistic adherence to 1992 anti-political contestations reflected the willingness of many former communists to continue in doing politics. The end of communism had generated voids that needed to be compensated, and stimuli to be recovered. Not everyone saw anti-system protest as the way to do this, of course. For example, other former communists preferred to try the participation path in public administration. Thus, if community service could no longer be done through the social functions of the party, then it was done by running for elective administrative roles in town halls. Still others opted for silent and temporary militancy in the new party. They continued the door-to-door delivery of *l'Unità* or took care of the activities and setup held in the still-open People's Houses. Finally, there were those who participated in politics no longer through the political organizations, but through new spaces, such as associationism also inspired by different, and not necessarily, ideals and values¹³.

The collapse of the Italian political-party system, that followed a year later the dissolution of the PCI, meant an expansion of the transitional period to an entire national political, institutional, and social scenario. Italy was coming to terms with the worst part of itself, of which politics was certainly representative, but not the only evil. What ensued for it, however, was complete disaffection. Moreover, the total disappearance of many political parties made also necessary to reshape the channels in which to have the forces of political confrontation expressed. In many cases the demise of an opponent, constituted the depletion of a perceived need to act. It had happened with the DC, which was wondering who to be once its Siamese eternal twin, the PCI, fell apart. Conversely, it also happened to the still creative, if divided, hereditary communist body politic when the Socialists, and

¹² For a broader knowledge about this topic see, Carlo Guarnieri, “Mani Pulite: le radici e le conseguenze”, in *Il Mulino*, No. 2, (2002), pp. 223-231 and Martin Rhodes, “*Tangentopoli* – More than 20 years on”, in Erik Jones, Gianfranco Pasquino, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 309-324.

¹³ Hugues Le Paige, *op. cit.*

Christian Democrats, vanished in the form, which it was used to know them during the “age of extremes”¹⁴. Since then, the enemy was identified in the son of the vigilante anti-politics of *Mani Pulite*: Silvio Berlusconi.

Berlusconi’s phenomenon had an impact on the PCI heritage for two factors. First, it demonstrated that the traditional way of doing politics, was outmoded and did not work, that TV had become the new squares and that politics had to be experiences as an individual and not collective experience. Second, Berlusconi and his visceral anti-communism were proof of the existence of a permanent liminality in the inherited body politic of that tradition. He could handle anti-communism precisely because the communist transition had remained open and unfinished. The perception of Occhetto's changes, as mere re-styling, and the actual failure to complete a social base re-aggregation, into a re-birth communist collective with a truly new identity, were decisive for his astonishing triumph in 1994.

Therefore, the permanent liminality of Italian communism survived the same party, becoming a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it continued to determine in the inherited body politic an extraordinary creative force. It expressed itself especially in the act of mixing with other progressive traditions, giving rise to innovative experiments for the time, such as the *Ulivo* coalition, in 1996. On the other hand, the failure to re-aggregate the party social base, into a new body shared by all those who were heirs to the PCI tradition, constituted the inability to create a strong left-wing identity that overcame its past. To have disowned the latter was a counterproductive act, alienating those who had believed in it, and narrowing the basis for creating a new future equally rooted in the collective identity of the communism heirs. At the time of the necessary search for a new form, an original body, transited into the communist drama, they opted instead to remove that drama altogether. Letting people believe, that the communist history was different from what they experienced, was unhelpful for the transition leaders, because communism was already part of a personal identity, not just collective, of many Italians. And a large part of them has not renounced to it, still today, albeit it evolved autonomously in something even more fluid.

The year 1989 marked for many comrades a year of mourning and grief and sadness. However, every transitional phase also brings, with it, unprecedented vital creativity. In the case of the PCI legacy left, perhaps, it is longer persistent, because it is still searching for a road that will complete that transition. Mourning for something that disappears is often joined by hope for what survives. This occurred for Italian communism and its militants, witnessed it. In a farewell letter to eleven comrades, for the journey made together toward utopian horizons, Franco Frezzotti wrote:

¹⁴ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: 1914-1991*, (London: Abacus, 1995).

*E per i tristi allegri si apre una fase nuova, speriamo che l'allegria continui e che magari diventi contagiosa. Sia pure con un grande sforzo di ottimismo della volontà, per la speranza c'è ancora posto.*¹⁵

In the end, if there is one truth about Italian communists, it is that they never stopped dreaming to become something else, something more, in order to make their country different.

¹⁵ “*And for the sad cheerful ones, a new phase opens, hopefully the cheerfulness will continue and perhaps become contagious. Albeit with a great effort of optimism of will, for hope there is still room*” – ADN, Franco Frezzotti, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Millions of communists lost their identity, future, their history in one night and one day. It was November 9, 1989. At that time, the Berlin Wall collapsed under the pick stroke of thousands of Berliners in search of freedom and liberties. The Cold War was ending. However, with sudden mourning, many communist militants stood up in a new world where certainties had evaporated. The utopia of a fair and equal world, inspired by Marxist ideology, was gone, along with its revolutionary horizons. These occurrences opened a post-communist time for states, parties, and people in the East and the West. The Italian Communist Party shared this *momentum* with the rest of the post-communist world, overwhelmed mainly by a mutual feeling of political mistrust and apathy.

The PCI reached that date already in crisis. It was broken to the core by the desire of someone to overcome the communist identity, to become another “thing”, and by the pain of others at the attempt to remove symbols and rituals that had marked their social and private lives for many years. For these very reasons, the Italian communists found themselves before a party transition which they handled at two distinct levels: the structural and socio-cultural ones. The structural transition was immediately tackled, with the PCI leadership deciding to transform the organization into a new political entity. Meanwhile, from the socio-cultural viewpoint, who guided the Italian communism transition appeared incapable of transferring its references to a disoriented body politic in transformation.

The existing literature on this topic centers on systemic and structural features. Conversely, this dissertation examines the deeper symbolic aspect of this critical juncture, answering the following questions: how did the PCI militants experience the transition? When and if they start to manifest disenchantment from communist ideals, culture, historical traditions, and symbols? Can a collective and personal identity, like the communists’ one, dissolve overnight?

The responses are not obvious and easy to find. A profound enfranchisement is needed with the party's vicissitudes and the militants' life experiences. However, finding them can assume a meaningful value for reconstructing the Italian left-wing coalitions’ course in the “Second Republic” history. Indeed, the comprehension of what had happened to the communists’ ideal culture and identity when their home party transformed, and they left militancy to become voters will give new lenses to assess the shift of left post-communist parties toward Clinton’s and Blair’s models. Moreover, it is probably here that might be researched the origins of other phenomena, like the birth of Italian populism and the empathy of some post-communism personalities for post-ideological movements.

Theoretically, the tools to analyze the militants' human experiences, within the PCI, during its transition must be gathered from history and other fields. In this specific case, political anthropology. From there, the concept of liminality was borrowed, firstly used by the French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, deeply developed by Victor Turner, and recently updated by Björn Thomassen. The liminality is used for explaining the rites of passage, which can be experienced, in a specific time and space, by individuals, communities, and entire populations. According to van Gennep, the transition should be understood through the division into three phases: separation, liminal period, and reintegration. The mid-phase is central and crucial because every kind of structure is suspended, and the marks of certainties dissipate. This situation can generate a social drama for those living within it, but also an incredible creative force capable of generating something new through the last moment of reaggregation. However, when the latter does not occur, the transition can remain open in a status of permanent liminality.

The basic idea is to reconstruct these three phases as experienced by the comrades of the Italian Communist Party. To succeed, it is required to define a temporal arch that can embed all the events of the party's history for each phase of its transition. The temporal arch is the one of a "prehistory of post-communism", which went from 1979 to 1991. The idea to describe the prehistory of post-communist came from a re-elaboration upon Istvan Rev's study on the Hungarian socialist-regime transition and the process of *straniamento* presented by Carlo Ginzburg in his book "*Occhiacci di Legno. Dieci riflessioni sulla distanza*". As already said, talking about prehistory is needed for the construction of a specific period where the historical analysis can be mixed with the liminality conceptualization of transition in order to remove political nostalgia, often, present in the re-elaboration of contemporary events. Therefore, the combination of liminality and the idea of "post-communist prehistory", applied to PCI militants' experience, is the key to reading the end of Italian communism as the result of a long run without a way out and the failure to re-integrate into the last liminality stage the communist body politic in a new strong identity.

The first chapter focuses on the historical events linked to the moment of separation, which opened the transition between 1979-1981. During this period, the PCI suffered the Historical Compromise's failure caused, primarily by Aldo Moro's affair, and soon after by the scarce political results of National Solidarity's governments. The fight against terrorism, and the alliance with the DC, had generated significant discontent in the communist social base, distancing the latter even more from the leadership decision. Moreover, the Red Brigades' assassination of the communist trade unionist Guido Rossa and the march of 40.000 in Turin, to contrast the workers' strike at Fiat, were two other diriment moments of division. From that moment on, the PCI body politic started to lose certainties, like the effectiveness of *operaismo* and the unanimity of workers' social base. Moreover, it will

discuss the separation impact of the USSR Afghan invasion and the Polish military coup d'état on the Italian communists.

The second section will be devoted to a deep analysis of the liminal phase of the long PCI transition. The years taken into consideration went from 1983 to 1986. During those periods, it was even more central the figure of the Sardinian secretary, Enrico Berlinguer. He understood the necessity to proceed toward a renewal of the communist identity. Furthermore, Berlinguer was the sole leader to be widely recognized, such as the master of ceremony who could manage the creative force of liminality, guiding the divided body politic toward a future re-aggregation. Unfortunately, the Sardinian leader's sudden death in 1984 due to hit brain-stroke during an electoral rally was the decisive turning point of the communist transition. His loss moved for one last time, unitedly among the PCI people. Since then, the party's destiny seemed signed, although Alessandro Natta's attempt to push away, as far as possible, the time of the necessary re-discussion of the ideal symbols and identity content of Italian communism.

The third and last chapter centers on the dissolution of the Italian Communist Party, beginning with the appointment of Achille Occhetto as party secretary. The young leader embodied the desire of new leadership to open the party's doors to contamination by other movements and ideas, such as the liberal ones. He started from a re-shaping of communist history with its apotheosis in the tentative to substitute the October Revolution with the 1789 French one. However, the crucial moment was the Berlin Wall collapse and the subsequent declaration, which Occhetto did at Bolognina talking about the possibility of changing the party's name. After that announcement, the communist body politic entered the last transition phase. While the PCI was undergoing a symbolic and identity transformation, many comrades found themselves intensely experiencing politics in the lengthy discussions in the municipal sections. Even though the change was excruciating, with the 20th Congress in Rimini, it eventually took place. The Italian Communist Party became the Democratic Party of the Left. Its symbols were changed along with its name. However, the closing of the phase of re-aggregation of its body politic did not happen, leaving the way open for the formation of permanent liminality, which is still open today.

The failure to complete the last stage of the rite of passage, from 1988 to 1991, led to the formation of two different identities in the post-communist moment. That of post-communists who accepted and implemented the overcoming of the old party and that of former communists who, instead, never entirely accepted that loss. The latter are the ones, as shown in the results of this dissertation, who still conserve some remnants of communist identity. Those ended up feeding into the "Second Republic" those feelings of anti-politics, the demand for populism, and the blocking of substantial

structural reforms of the Italian political-party system, for which the country continues to pay the cost to this day.

In conclusion, it seems necessary to also underline the critical value of the methodological instruments adopted to realize this dissertation. Besides the extensive literature on Republican Italy's history and the Communist Party itself, both domestically and internationally, sources from the PCI archives, preserved at the Fondazione Gramsci, were of paramount significance. Additionally, the analysis of a collection of diaries kept at the Archivio Diaristico Nazionale and some multimedia documents from the online catalog of the Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico (Audiovisual Archive of the Workers' and Democratic Movement), proved pivotal. It has sought in the letters, writings, and televised testimonies of hundreds of comrades to reconstruct their emotions in the period of transition and the dreams, fears, aspirations, and expectations embodied in the attempted transformation into a new political entity.

The main hope is to have been able to chronicle a decisive moment in communist and Italian history through comrades' eyes and by conveying the never-ending passion incarnated in their militancy until the dismantling of the PCI.