

ITALIAN COMMUNISM IN CRISIS

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INTRODUCTION

The 1980s have not been kind to the Italian Communist Party (PCI). It has avoided the fate of its French and Spanish counterparts, and is in no immediate danger of being relegated to the historical **dustbin**. It has not succumbed to the sectarian isolation many were predicting at the end of the 1970s, just as it has resisted the temptation to cast off its entire history and carry out an 'Italian Bad Godesberg'. It has increased its critical distance from the statist models of the East, and has also evolved a considerably more open internal structure. **Finally**, the PCI still counts 1.5 million members, and, in spite of a severe setback in the 1987 elections, it obtained 26.4% of the vote.

But the PCI has unquestionably been floundering since the end of the seventies. It has suffered three straight setbacks in general elections after never declining in national elections between 1946 and 1976, when it reached 34.4%. Party membership is down 300,000 since peaking in 1976-77, and the drop has accelerated in the 1980s. Politically, the party has not been so isolated since the 1960s—but then it was at least increasing its public support. It abandoned an ill-fated strategy at the beginning of this decade, but it has basically been paralyzed and devoid of any serious project since then. For all these reasons, and in spite of its continuing strength, the PCI is currently threatened with political marginalization and further decline. The shock generated by an unexpectedly sharp setback in the most recent elections (1987) was enough to cause an openly contested leadership realignment in the party and intensify the internal debate that has been going on for some time.

Of course, neither the PCI nor Italy is unique: over the past decade, the Communists have faced the same difficulties confronted by the Left everywhere in the current phase of capitalist restructuring. Italian conditions have put their mark on the setting and the actors, but the fundamental problems have been strikingly similar throughout the **West**.¹ What is distinctive about the Italian case, and what explains so much about *how* the PCI has attempted to address its present difficulties, is the way events unfolded in the previous period, which I will refer to as the

1970s, but which really spans 1968–1980.

In this essay, I will examine the PCI's trajectory over the past two decades to analyze the emergence and evolution of the crisis of Italian Communism. It is a truism that the parties of the Left have all been stymied in the present period. But while they face similar problems, they face them in very different ways, in different cultural and institutional settings. The Italian case is particularly instructive because it shows that sectarianism and authoritarianism are not the only ways for a Communist party to dig itself into a hole.

A truly thorough discussion of the PCI's recent fate would begin towards the end of World War II, when the curious hybrid of a mass membership Communist party took shape. Such a discussion would also pay considerable attention to the fairly thorough 'de-Stalinization' of the organization that took place at all levels of the party beginning in the late 1950s. These and many other elements would provide a more complete understanding of how the PCI managed to avoid at least some of the pitfalls that befell its counterparts elsewhere. Since space and the constraints of the present topic only allow the most cursory treatment of these issues, I will simply outline a few key points that are essential to understanding the party's post-war evolution.

The key formative fact in the history of Italian Communism is Fascism. The sudden crushing of the workers' movement, and the generation-long submergence of the party in clandestinity and exile, were experiences that burned themselves into the consciousness of the leaders who built and led the post-war PCI. Fascism made party leaders sensitive to the importance of democratic institutions. Combined with the successes of the Resistance and the mobilizations immediately following the war, it powerfully reinforced the value of a *mass* party: its extensive social presence guards against reaction, and also provides a powerful mobilizational capacity. But the PCI is also a *Communist* Party: it has evolved considerably, but it was a loyal—if at times problematic—member of the Third International and Cominform. Particularly in the organizational sphere, the party's Leninist and Third International heritage has left distinct traces. Because it combines the features of parties of both the Second and Third Internationals, the PCI has at times benefited from what was best in both traditions. But it has also sometimes seemed to exhibit only the worst tendencies in its hybrid nature.

With these factors in mind, we can review the PCI's evolution since the tumultuous period of the late 1960s. The point is not to rehearse largely well-known events, but to place the emergence of the party's 'historic compromise' (*compromesso storico*) strategy in proper perspective. For, while it would be simplistic to blame *all* the PCI's current difficulties on this strategy, there can be no question that the *compromesso storico* severely limited the party's options.

THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE (1972–80)

The late 1960s triggered deep changes in Italian society, changes in the customs, culture and politics of the country. The Communist leadership, specifically party secretary Enrico Berlinguer and his closest collaborators, reacted to these changes in ways that altered the PCI. Its evolution away from the USSR, underway since the 1950s, was accelerated, while its *explicit* embrace of pluralistic representative democracy was made definitive. But the most significant development was a dramatic twist in the Communists' strategy. In the early 1970s, Berlinguer articulated an 'historic compromise' that was closely linked to his reading of the situation in Italy. This line would govern the party's behaviour until the end of the decade. The basic assumption of the strategy was that profound changes can only be realized through the broadest possible co-operation between historically opposed forces. In the Italian context, this meant working with the ruling Christian Democrats (DC). Aside from the error in its major underlying assumption, the *compromesso* was profoundly flawed in two ways: it seriously underestimated the changes in Italian civil society during the 1960s and 1970s, while it simultaneously overestimated what was possible in the political-institutional realm, particularly through co-operation with the DC. These two issues are closely related, and have always represented tensions in the PCI strategy.

There has been a basic consistency in the PCI's strategic debates over the past several decades. The key to understanding the major divisions in the party is not to adopt the standard left-right distinctions traditionally applied to Communist parties. Because of a widespread consensus within the PCI since the 1950s over the desirability of mass party characteristics and the acceptance of parliamentary democratic institutions and methods, the major ideological disputes have evolved within this framework. Differences between left and right in the PCI have involved many issues, but the most important disagreements have hinged on whether one's major emphasis is primarily 'social', with a stress on mass mobilization and movements, or institutional, with political alliances and obtaining a national governing role as the central concerns.

In the 1960s, for example, the right wing of the party (then personified by Giorgio Amendola and Giorgio Napolitano), pressed for a classically frontist alignment in which the historical parties of the left (Communists, Socialists, Social-Democrats) would eventually achieve 50% of the vote and relegate the DC to the opposition. Amendola shocked many people in the mid-1960s when he called for a single workers' party, in recognition of the fact that the Second and Third International had *both* failed their respective historical missions. There was a contingent aspect to this suggestion, and calls for a single party of the Left are no longer heard anywhere.² Right-wingers in the PCI were, until the 1970s, also among

the strongest supporters of strict internal discipline. This was partly because the most powerful criticism came from the left, but it was also consistent with the *frontism* of this group: a solid, disciplined party is an undeniable contribution to institutional negotiations and manoeuvring. The current dominant group on the right, which includes Napolitano and former union chief Luciano Lama, is often referred to as *laboristi*, and is very much at home within the mainstream of European Social-Democracy.

The left wing of the PCI (Pietro Ingrao, Lucio Magri, Rossana Rossanda and Achille Occhetto were among the major proponents) also favoured a 'recomposition' of the Italian left, but from an entirely different point of departure.³ In its view, an arithmetic summing of the historical parties of the left could never provide the social bloc—or the political will—necessary to realize radical changes in Italy. Given Italy's history, important sections of the 'popular masses'—peasants especially, but significant parts of the working class as well—responded to a Christian ideological appeal, and *frontism* would define them out of the potential revolutionary bloc. Since these 'popular masses' were largely encapsulated in the Catholic subculture dominated by the DC, the ruling party's internal contradictions had to be exacerbated until the masses turned to the Left. In this view of things, the best way to work on those contradictions would be through intense social struggle and mobilization. This activist approach necessarily included a more open and democratic conception of the party, as well as considerable emphasis on concepts like participatory democracy. Ultimately, it was hoped, the DC's social hegemony and political mediating skills would be undermined, causing it either to undergo a schism or a traumatic loss of support via the formation of a new Left party of religious inspiration (or at least with prominent figures identifiable as Catholics in its leadership).

For the right wing of the PCI, a schism was ruled out, either through fear of the consequences or simply because it was considered unrealistic. The 'Catholic popular masses' were not really accepted as an autonomous political force: as they developed sufficient political consciousness, it was assumed that they would migrate to the historical parties of the Left.

Neither of these viewpoints countenanced an out-and-out strategic alliance with the entire DC, nor did the more numerous 'centrist' tendencies who generally steered a course between the two wings (but usually tilted to the right). Some observers claim that the mainstream PCI leadership *always* harboured dreams of a deal with the DC, but there is scant evidence to support this view—which is why it has to be argued as a 'privately held' *desire*.⁴ Yet it was precisely the posing of *long-term* collaboration between the PCI and the DC that was at the heart of the *compromesso storico*. And this became the Communists' strategy and governed their tactics in the 1970s. The strategy was Enrico Berlinguer's 'synthesis', and tried to bridge many of the party's left-right divisions.

Berlinguer's sensitivity to the Catholic question, and his emphasis on a profound transformation of social values struck resonant chords among a number of those on the left inside the PCI. His insistence that the Communists had to enter the government echoed one of the right wing's most persistent demands. In practice, however, the *compromesso* turned out to be a total victory for the institutionalist tendencies in the party. Why Berlinguer was able to pull off this synthesis, and how he implemented it, will go a long way toward clarifying the PCI's present situation.

The Strategy's Origins

When we recall that the historic compromise was first proposed by name immediately following the overthrow of Unidad Popular in Chile in 1973, we are reminded how crucial *defensive* considerations were in the origins and early articulation of the *compromesso storico*. Nor is this merely an exercise in intellectual history, for in so far as the PCI ever put any part of the strategy into practice, the party leadership seemed far more concerned with legitimizing the PCI as a party worthy of governing Italy, and not as a political force with a serious programme for change. These points are worth underscoring, for there has been a sort of 'revisionism' about the strategy since its demise, which has emphasized the dramatic and radical implications of Berlinguer's vision.'

The fact is, however, that the party secretary only spelled these implications out *after* the strategy was already in place, and then only in response to intense pressure within the PCI. When Berlinguer made strong overtures to the ruling parties in the wake of the 1976 elections, his own party wanted assurances that this was not a simple bid for cabinet posts. The main forums in which Berlinguer explained the concept of 'austerity'—and its presumably radical moral and political consequences as a new model of development—were an intellectuals' gathering and a workers' conference, both of which were held early in 1977.⁶ This was more than three years after the *coup* in Chile—and the strategy had in fact first been adumbrated a full year earlier than that, at the PCI's Thirteenth National Congress. It was at this congress that Berlinguer was promoted from vice-secretary of the party, and he wasted no time in suggesting that (a) the Italian crisis was so severe that the PCI's presence in government was required; and (b) only collaboration between the three historic mass components of Italian politics (Communists, Socialists and Catholics) could save the country from *disaster*.⁷ It remained for him to translate 'Catholics' into 'Christian Democrats' the following year; but the thrust of the proposal was clear by 1972, when the point was made that Left unity was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for finding a way out of the crisis.

What was it about the early 1970s that led Berlinguer to such a dramatic conclusion? The period between 1970–73 was an extremely complex time, and it emitted confusing signals. Unprecedented advances for the workers

had been achieved, and a variety of so-called 'new movements' and 'new social subjects' erupted onto the scene. But the same period also witnessed a powerful anti-left, anti-worker reaction by many parts of the middle strata, and mass southern discontent ably manipulated by the neo-Fascist MSI (Movimento Sociale Italiano), which reaped immense electoral benefits in 1970 and 1972 as the Left fragmented and stalled. And all of these events unfolded more or less simultaneously, which is why numerous interpretations of the true significance of this period continue to be debated.⁸

Beneath the surface impression of an apparent blockage of the forces of change, strongly reinforced by the results of the 1972 general elections, there was in fact enormous movement. That Italy had undergone deep changes became apparent in 1974, when a referendum was held to repeal the country's new divorce law. The referendum was the opening salvo in a restorationist design to roll back the victories of the previous period, and almost everyone on the Left—led by the PCI—feared a massive victory for the abolitionists.⁹ The Communists, to their shame, even offered to support amendments to the divorce law to placate the Right. The anti-divorce effort was crushed by a 60-40 margin, however, and revealed that the DC's hegemony had in fact begun to crumble.

The crucial point here is the question of timing. At the very lowest ebb of the Left's fortunes, Berlinguer had enunciated the party's new strategy. Almost immediately after the compromesso was spelled out, events took a significantly positive turn: the 1974 referendum was followed by the 1975 local elections, which saw the PCI rise to 33% and take over the government of most of the large cities in the country, as well as several regions. A year after that, the Communists obtained 34.4% of the vote and, with the Socialists demanding PCI inclusion in any governing coalition, it suddenly became impossible to form any government without a decisive Communist contribution.

Berlinguer was obviously committed to the strategy when he articulated it, and he tenaciously held to it in the face of evidence of change.¹⁰ He and his supporters—and they grew by leaps and bounds as the party's fortunes soared—attributed the PCI's, and the Left's, advances to the compromesso storico's wisdom. The party leadership thus became firmly convinced that it had accurately read conditions in Italy: and in fact, the massive leap in PCI votes in 1975 and 1976 did only come after the moderate strategy and offers of co-operation were spelled out. Berlinguer thus felt he had received a carte-blanche to carry out the historic compromise. What might have been an ideal tactical opportunity was thus squandered because of the belief that the party's strategy had been vindicated.

This, of course, is what hindsight tells us. It is worth remembering, however, that while the PCI's reading of the early 1970s was excessively

pessimistic, it was by no means devoid of foundation. Absolutely crucial in this regard are the 1972 general elections. Given the predispositions already evident in the 1972 Congress, the Left's poor showing in the elections a few months later only solidified **Berlinguer's** convictions. After the four most intensive years of social mobilization and militancy in post-war Italian history, the total vote for the opposition to the left of the ruling coalition actually *fell* by a full percentage point, to 30.5%. Worse still, the small groupings of the Left, ranging from the rag-tag former left wing of the Socialists to a number of far-left organizations, ended up fragmenting a million votes (3%) so badly that they failed to elect a single deputy, in spite of Italy's relatively permissive system of proportional representation. One of the most dramatic losers was the MPL, a left-Catholic formation that originated in a split within the Christian Labourers' Association (ACLI), previously a key recruitment facility for Christian Democratic leaders. Many people on the Left had hoped the MPL would drain significant numbers of workers' votes from the DC. But it gained less than half a percentage point, barely more than 100,000 votes. When Berlinguer saw this result, he concluded that there simply was no way to make serious inroads into the DC's 'popular' base. In short, none of the most cherished assumptions of the PCI's left wing appeared to be borne out by events.

At the same time, reaction was rearing its head throughout Italy, most dramatically in the form of terrorist bombings of public places. And there were disturbing signs of collusion between Fascist terror and elements of the Italian judiciary and military apparatuses. Finally, as noted above, from 1970 the MSI rode a wave of resentment against the militancy of the workers' and other movements and reached its historic high point of nearly 9% in the 1972 elections—after rising well over 20% in many urban centres of the South. Italian Communist leaders hardly had to be hysterical to read in all this a very real threat of reaction with a frightening *mass* dimension, which is why we suddenly see so much attention paid in PCI writing in the early 1970s to the importance of alliances and the dangers of isolating the working class. In 1972, the Christian Democrats managed to maintain their usual percentage only by executing a brusque turn to the right to win back votes from the neo-Fascists. The result was an array of forces in Parliament that made it possible to construct a Centre-Right government for the first time since the 1950s. (Such a government was created, but it lasted less than a year.)

It is now apparent that these were the turbulent, and threatening, symptoms of the breakdown of the social and political equilibrium that had dominated Italy for a generation. But the PCI read these events as a profoundly threatening, immediate crisis: the party's special nightmare, the spectre of Fascism, had reared its ugly head. Berlinguer not only thought that Italy's society and institutions were on the verge of *dis-*

integration, but that only the country's true mass parties, each with a deeply-rooted 'popular' character, could save the situation. The accommodation he sought with the DC was therefore anything but contingent. By remaining committed to an ambitious long-term collaboration, the PCI played straight into the hands of the ruling party, which feared no impending catastrophe and conceded as little as possible as slowly as possible, eroding the Communists' credibility as they were increasingly forced to play by the DC's rules.

The course of events in this crucial period would probably suffice, alone, to explain—not excuse—the PCI's misreading of events and its moderate impulses. But to understand fully the party's tenacity in holding to the *compromesso storico*—even when events turned seriously against the PCI after 1976—we need to examine more closely the key assumptions of Berlinguer and his closest collaborators. This examination helps illuminate one of the most important sources of the party's consistently hostile reaction to so many manifestations of social change in Italy in the 1970s. It also sheds light on the truly terrible relationship that evolved between the Communists and Socialists during that decade.

Underlying Analyses and Assumptions

Various currents within Marxism have emphasized' capitalism's impending collapse, often with strongly moralistic overtones that condemn the system's degradation and *degeneration*.¹¹ Especially susceptible to this attitude are the Communist leaders and intellectuals most influenced by Christian social thought, a potent force in Italy. Formulations emanating from these quarters often appear to view capitalist development, or indeed any forms of modernization or secularization as somewhat tainted, if not depraved. There is no need to make far-fetched connections between these ideas and those of Berlinguer, for it is well known that his key ideological adviser in the early seventies was **Franco Rodano**, part of a small 'Catholic-Communist' formation at the end of World War II who joined the party after the Church and DC crushed their movement.¹² Ideas may not completely determine actions, but there is no question that Berlinguer was deeply influenced by these attitudes, which frequently crept into his denunciations, and which some observers think account for his constant stress on 'the moral question' and the need for good government.¹³

This pro-Catholic bias in Berlinguer undoubtedly fed into another attitude that was increasingly widespread in the PCI by the 1970s, namely to dismiss the PSI as a serious political actor, as well as an integral part of the Left. In spite of Berlinguer's references to the three mass actors of modern Italian history, it is no secret that he was in fact rather contemptuous of the Socialists, and certainly came to view the *compromesso* as primarily an arrangement between the PCI and DC. The Communists' analysis was uncharitable, especially since these parties had

enjoyed uncommonly good relations compared to their counterparts elsewhere. But there was more than a grain of truth in the PCI's assessment. The PSI's mass base, especially among workers, had badly eroded after joining Centre-Left governments in the early 1960s; by 1970, after two schisms in five years, this party was obviously groping for an identity and a clear 'space' on the Italian political spectrum, where it had just under 10% of the vote. It is important to remember that it was the Socialists' refusal to remain in coalition with the DC that made the political stalemate of the mid-1970s possible. The Communists, however, showed no appreciation of this act, and brusquely pushed the Socialists aside in their rush to come to terms with the DC. The ill-will that developed between the two historic parties of the Left went far beyond the normal political rivalry and **back-stabbing** that is a component part of Italian politics, and helps explain the outright hostility that has characterized their relations to the present.

THE LEGACY OF THE HISTORIC COMPROMISE

Because the line adopted by the PCI was so strange, and its fruits so meagre, it is easy to dismiss the argument, heard often in the late 1970s, that the Communists had no other options given the social and political balance of power. If the summary above shows anything, it is that the *compromesso storico* was not improvised on the spur of the moment. The PCI was unable to implement the strategy between 1974-79, but it certainly tried to do so. The key period was 1977-79, when the Communists passively, and then actively, supported 'National Solidarity' governments dominated by the DC. Although the PCI insisted on a ministerial role, the DC refused. Preaching moderation and patience for reforms that never came, losing credibility as 'a party different from the others' as it stood by a do-nothing government, the PCI finally, in 1979, issued an ultimatum to enter the cabinet. When this was refused, early elections were called, and the Communist vote declined four points to 30%. With the Socialists champing at the bit to promote 'governability' in their new identity as 'modernizing' champions of Italy's rising strata, the PCI's appeal to the PSI for an alternative to the DC was ignored. A new phase in the isolation of the Communists had begun.

The dismal record is evidence enough of the strategy's flaws. Yet what were the options open to the PCI in the early seventies? A different party might not have reacted so quickly to the backlash, and thus might have been able to respond more flexibly to signs of secularization and political realignment. This certainly would have been desirable, both for Italy and the PCI—but since the fear of mass reaction is such an integral part of the party's constitution and historical memory, it borders on fantasy to imagine a much more audacious reaction from Italian Communists in the

conditions that prevailed at the time. Had the 1972 vote not punctured most of the hopes of the left within the party, a more 'Left Euro-communist' alternative—certainly preferable to the historic compromise—might have emerged. But the PCI's caution and some unsettling events gave Berlinguer, and not his more militant critics, the upper hand.

I have suggested that the party would have been far better off to view DC-PCI co-operation as a *tactic*. When the political stalemate made more ambitious goals unrealizable, the leaders could at least have tried to maximize the party's advantage. They could have called for unity on a restricted, but firm platform of reforms with wide popular appeal (e.g. tax reform). This would have put great pressure on the DC: had a crisis and new elections ensued, the PCI could have pointed to the DC's fear of carrying out any reforms at all. Such a moderate approach would have been similar in intention to the SPD's Grand Coalition tactic of 1966–69, which ultimately legitimized the German Socialists as a governing party (the PCI's key concern). But this 'social democratic' tactic was never countenanced by Berlinguer, because of the commitment to the *compromesso* as a *strategy*.¹⁴ Apparently he truly believed that Italy was on the brink of catastrophe.

Hence, while it is easy to suggest any number of alternatives that would have produced less disastrous outcomes for the PCI (and the country), they ultimately rest on the premise that the historic compromise need not have been the party's strategy—or that the PCI could have dropped the strategy almost as quickly as it had adopted it. The first option is certainly possible: inevitability is usually the refuge of apologists. Had Enrico Berlinguer not been party secretary in 1972, the *compromesso* might not have been adopted, and it surely would not have been articulated in so sweeping a fashion. The second option is more problematic, simply because parties—especially large mass parties—cannot switch strategies like articles of clothing.

Other analysts have suggested alternative routes the PCI might have followed. Some, particularly Tobias Abse, raise interesting questions that go to the heart of the crises of the PCI and the Italian left in general. With reference to the early 1970s, Abse argues that the PCI could have pushed for a 'United Front' with the Socialists, at a time when that party still maintained a tenuous link with its Marxist heritage. Had the Communists pursued this goal instead of courting the DC, and had they thrown themselves more thoroughly into representing the militant workers' movement, Abse claims that the Communists could have pulled the smaller PSI to the left and built an eventual electoral majority on a sounder *basis*.¹⁵ This is a provocative idea, but it flies in the face of the social and political situation at the time.

My discussion of the workers and unions in a later section will point out the limits on any party's capacity to gain from the militancy in the

factories at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s. For the moment, I will limit myself to the reasons why the 'United Front' idea would have been a complete non-starter. First, the combined weight of the PCI and PSI at the time amounted to 37% of the vote, which is a long way indeed from the needed parliamentary majority—and let us recall the polarization and decline in the Left vote in 1972. Even more importantly, the Socialists simply would never have accepted a 'United Front'. The early seventies was an extremely vulnerable period for the PSI, which lost its left wing in 1964, and then underwent a second split following a brief reunification with its former right wing (1966–69). To jump immediately from social democratic reunification into a subordinate *frontism* with the PCI would have obliterated its credibility as an autonomous party, led to yet another split, and might well have meant its disintegration.

The early 1970s did see the Socialists insist on Communist participation in the government as the price for their own continuation in power. The reason for this, however, was negative and defensive: the PCI had mercilessly hammered the PSI throughout its experience under the Centre-Left, helping in this way to hasten the end of the Socialists as a credible force among most workers. The Socialists, whose own behaviour in government was the primary cause of their plight, resolved no longer to be exposed to PCI sniping from the opposition. And although the PSI soon began to espouse a 'Left Alternative', this was naked plagiarism of the highly successful French Socialists, and a desperate reaction to the historic compromise—in which they (correctly) saw themselves destined to be crushed between the PCI and DC. With only 10% of the vote, and lacking a serious mass presence, they knew they would count for little if the two largest parties ever came to a lasting agreement.

Of course, PCI-PSI relations need not have degenerated as much as they did, and through the mid-1970s it is the Communists who bear the primary responsibility. The PCI could have been more constructive in its dealings with the Socialists, as many Communist leaders admitted later in the 1970s. The dismissive contempt with which this former ally was treated did nothing to slow its evolution to the right, and generated unnecessary resentment, bordering at times on hatred. But a broader perspective tells us that the PSI was going to move, ideologically and electorally, into the only space on the spectrum that was open to it. The southern European socialist parties have all undergone a remarkably similar transformation, for many of the same reasons.¹⁶ The PCI's faults in this period were many, but it can hardly be blamed for what the Socialists did, motivated as they were by concerns for their own political survival. The Socialists' appeal is consciously moderate and 'modernizing', and involves distinguishing themselves at all costs from both major parties. *This* is the distinctive identity the PSI is apparently finally

consolidating, after many decades of searching. It courts the urban middle strata by demonstrating its 'decisiveness'—which all too often means extolling market forces while keeping the most militant sectors of the unions in their places.

In a related line of argument, Abse argues that the *compromesso storico*, with its dream of rapprochement with Catholicism, prevented the Communists from articulating a platform able to embrace the emerging demands of a variety of secular forces. A progressive secular bloc, built around the PCI, PSI, the far left, the Radicals and the least conservative elements in the small but important Republican Party (PRI) would have had to confront numerous difficulties. But, Abse claims, it would have been 'perfectly feasible' as a medium-term electoral alternative to drive the DC out of power.¹⁷

There are serious flaws in this argument, but it does raise interesting questions about secularizing trends and the possible directions they might have taken under different circumstances. Here, as elsewhere, Abse's harsh judgement of the PCI appears to grow out of the belief that as the most powerful party on the Left, its forceful intervention could have decisively influenced later developments in the entire country. The PCI's myopia concerning secularizing trends is certainly one of that party's most colossal blunders. But it is an exaggeration to lay the whole country's subsequent failure to evolve in the desired direction on the doorstep of the PCI.¹⁸ That line of argument actually parallels criticisms from the 'laical reformist' area close to the Socialists and Radicals, with some proponents in the PCI itself. These people have long contended that the strong Marxist and Catholic subcultural remnants of the two major parties are throwbacks that hinder Italy's complete modernization and secularization.

As suggestive as it is, the idea of a 'secular electoral front' is not very persuasive. The combined strength of this coalition was below 45% in the early 1970s, when it presumably would have been proposed, and only somewhere between 46–47% in 1976—assuming the Left's showing in that election would have been identical in a head-to-head confrontation with the DC (a very dubious proposition). Moreover, and crucially, this front would have lumped together strange bedfellows indeed—a problem Abse skirts by speaking in terms of the political areas it would have represented, rather than the political forces who would have had to work together. The various groups on the far left, particularly in the seventies, were almost never able to work with one another. Most detested the PCI, not to mention the other forces to its right. The Radicals (a meager 1% in 1976, but 3.5% in 1976), fractious libertarian individualists that they are, cannot seriously be considered for any co-operative effort. Moreover, they, like many of the 'rising strata secularists', have been notable for vituperative anti-communism, union-baiting, and anti-worker attitudes. (In their most recent electoral adventure, they sent a pornographic film

star to Parliament and argued that this was a triumph for feminism.) Finally, it is dubious in the extreme that the minute PRI (3% through the 1970s), so comfortable as the critical and rigorous conscience of most of Italy's governments—and therefore satellites of the DC—would have undergone a split in the name of secularist principles.

Fundamentally, the issue here is far more profound than the character or programme of any individual political formation. It involves, at least for all the parties between the PCI and DC, the nature of the social and political dynamic in Italy as it has emerged since the 1970s. The expansion of a secular space on the political spectrum is a matter of political survival for these groups, and they have behaved accordingly. The Socialists have committed themselves to this area as the only one that provides them with leverage against both major parties. The minor lay parties, constantly in danger of failing to achieve an electoral quorum, have tried to contest this terrain with the PSI, with mixed results in the past. None is willing to cede the initiative to the other, and all would recoil in horror if the PCI suddenly became the paladin of secular modernization.

Furthermore, survival instincts involve more than parliamentary manoeuvring. Most of the urban middle strata to whom these parties pitch their appeals fear the industrial unions and the Communists. Many, to be sure, are no longer terrified—as they and smallholding peasants were in days gone by. But they would not hesitate to bolt to the right if they thought the PCI was coming too close to power. It is not at all coincidental that the lay area shrivelled in 1976, when the PCI's star was rising, and that it expanded at the expense of the DC in 1983, when the PCI was clearly pushed back to the margins of the political system. In short, these groups will flirt with the PCI, particularly if it provides momentary advantages, but they cannot afford too close an identification. A recent illustration of this dynamic took place during the crisis that led to the 1987 elections. The Communists suggested that a secular, caretaker government be put in place simply to guarantee that the referendum on nuclear energy—which was dividing the majority—be held. The Socialists vetoed the idea without hesitation.

These considerations pinpoint some of the problems that the PCI, but in reality any left formation, faces in contemporary Italy. In the present conjuncture, both the social forces and the political representatives of the most logical allies of a left alternative are not only unavailable for a serious dialogue, but, more often than not, downright hostile. And a good part of this hostility derives from economic and sociological, not ideological or secular, sources.

The failure to come up with an adequate response to many new developments is the failure of the entire Left, and not just in Italy. This is why I find attributing to the PCI the failure of a more progressive evolution rather an exercise in blaming than in explaining. The Italian case is

fascinating because the PCI, through most of the 1970s, completely *abandoned* the terrain of secularization. In spite of this default, none of the other forces on the Left proved capable of doing anything with the opportunity. The formations that have occupied that terrain with the greatest success since the early 1970s have counterparts in totally different political settings (Socialists, Radicals, Greens). To produce such similar results, forces more powerful than the ideologies and strategies of party leaders have to have been at work. The PCI's abdication of modern secular themes was a serious error, but the failure of anyone else to apply more constructive content than the left-baiting Radicals and the 'modernizing' Socialists can hardly be laid at the Communists' door.

It is a gross exaggeration to hold the PCI responsible for the failure of Italy to evolve in a more desirable direction, but it is certainly appropriate to 'judge' the PCI for serious delays in its *own* evolution and, by extension, that of the entire Left. In the 1970s, when gigantic changes were taking place all around it, the party leadership obstinately stuck to an erroneous analysis of almost every aspect of Italian (and modern capitalist) society. It moralized against the symptoms of change instead of making a serious effort to comprehend their underlying causes. This cultural 'lag' disarmed the PCI's critical facilities at a crucial juncture, and delayed by perhaps as much as a decade the further evolution within the party of the openness and critical consciousness that will be necessary to meet the challenges posed by the socio-structural changes of the end of the twentieth century. There are no easy answers to these challenges. But a party obviously cannot approach them if it militantly refuses to ask the right questions, and instead rails against manifestations of social phenomena it does not understand. *This* is the albatross hung by the *compromesso storico* around the neck of Italian Communism, and the party has suffered greatly as a result.

It is inevitable that discussions of parties of the Left would focus, in the present period, on questions of grand strategy. Yet if we concentrate excessively on strategy, we end up with an almost exclusive concern with the top leadership of the party. By default, the party's organization, the state of the working class and workers' organizations, and the party's interaction with crucial sectors of society all receive far less attention than they deserve. Particularly in a mass party like the PCI, a failure to put these factors into proper perspective risks a very faulty understanding of the way the party operates and how its crisis has evolved. For example, while the leadership tried in the 1970s to get the rank-and-file to accept the *compromesso storico*, it failed miserably. Party activists never interpreted the line as the leaders did, and only a small proportion believed that strategic co-operation with the DC was possible. Resistance from a disoriented and demoralized base played an important role in the leaders' decision to abandon the National Unity experiment in 1979 and the

compromesso a year later.¹⁹ The PCI may not be a paragon of participatory democracy, but it is a far cry from a bureaucratic monolith that can ignore its members.

To furnish a more detailed examination of the PCI's problems, the remainder of this article will examine a number of key issues and areas that are at the heart of the party's crisis. This will permit us to examine the possibilities for the future in a more informed way.

THE MASS PARTY IN CRISIS

Several phenomena have steadily undermined the effectiveness of the mass parties of the Left since World War II, and especially over the past generation. The structural source of many problems has been the physical shrinking of the industrial proletariat in the advanced capitalist societies, along with the replacement of work and the workplace as the socially and culturally central phenomena they once represented for the working class (a centrality that accounts for the original strength and success of the workers' organizations). Related to these trends is the expansion of social strata that may technically belong to the working class, but do not respond to the ideological or organizational appeals of the historic parties of the Left.

Party organizations originally tried to educate the masses to politics and integrate them into party subcultures. These tasks were never easy to carry out, but the social and political marginalization of the labouring masses provided conditions in which they were possible. The particularly vituperative form that the Cold War took in Italy in the immediate post-war period (with powerful assistance from the Church of Pius XII) aided the PCI's structural consolidation and enabled it to complete its hegemonization of the socialist tradition.

But changing structural and political conditions have made it a matter of serious debate whether the old concepts apply as they once did. Advanced capitalism has destroyed or rendered obsolete most of the conditions in which the mass parties of the left thrived. It has also provided multiple channels of communication, transportation and recreation, as well as an educational system, that have usurped many of the parties' tasks. The same developments have loosened parties' hold on their constituents. The basic issue is not whether the concept of the 'working class' maintains its validity in the last years of the twentieth century, but whether the *specijic components of the working class* that make up most of Italian (or any other advanced capitalist) society can be organized in anything like the same fashion that brought together artisans and proletarians, and built 'red subcultures', in earlier epochs of capitalist production, when the subaltern classes were socially marginalized and systematically denied political rights.

Confirmation of the seriousness of these problems comes from the **PCI** itself, a party that has enjoyed a striking measure of success by most standards. In terms of the ability to organize members (as opposed to gain votes), the geographical distribution of party strength has remained nearly unaltered since the 1940s. Even more tellingly the **PCI**'s strongest areas coincide almost perfectly with those of the turn-of-the-century Socialist Party. Students of Italian politics know, but most others are surprised to learn, that the socialist tradition is far stronger in the so-called 'red belt' of central Italy (**Emilia-Romagna**, Tuscany, Umbria) than in the historical industrial heartland of the north-west (Turin and Milan especially). In recent years, the party's decline in the red belt has almost matched its weakening elsewhere, but the three red regions continue to account for nearly 45% of all **PCI** members. Thus, the fact that the mass party and red subculture flourished in historically specific circumstances and geographically circumscribed enclaves is hardly an indication that things will improve for the party as a whole—on the contrary.

The **PCI**'s reaction to its organizational difficulties has, typically, been varied and contradictory at times. Through the 1960s, it acknowledged that important changes had reshaped Italian society, and began the experimentation that has marked its organization ever since. But the basic posture through the 1960s remained traditional: save for abandoning the cell as the fundamental unit of the party, and some efforts at decentralization, there was a constant reaffirmation of all other aspects of the organization. Alarming trends such as the fall-off in members and militants were attributed to a lack of sufficient effort in applying the correct formulas. This approach was functional to the internal reinforcement of the party, but it never addressed the general decline adequately.

The decline was steady, if unspectacular, for nearly twenty years. With the exception of a large drop in 1956–57, **PCI** membership fell steadily from its peak of over 2 million in the early 1950s to 1.5 million by the end of the 1960s. Then, in the wake of the mass mobilizations of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the long downward trend in membership temporarily reversed itself. Increasing experimentation and flexibility found their way into party structures at all levels. Since this was also the period of the **PCI**'s maximum electoral appeal, there was interest throughout the party in putting it into better contact with the broader society. Traditionalists saw the masses of new voters as a potential sea of new recruits. Others sensed that the party's 'antennae' needed improvement simply to maintain sensitive contact with rapidly changing conditions. In addition, from the late 1960s onwards, everyone in the **PCI** agreed that the party's presence in the factories had to be strengthened, and those more interested in electoral success joined those more concerned with social movements in emphasizing the need for the **PCI** to 'project its presence into society', to use the party's own language. With a lot of new

blood in the organization, these goals became more than arid assertions.

But recruitment waves seem to follow their own trajectory.²⁰ When the increases in the wake of the Hot Autumn ebbed, (from 1.5 million in 1969 to 1.8 million in 1976-77), it proved impossible to stabilize the membership. Indeed, turnover in the party was so high in this period that party structures were in crisis everywhere. When this large but vulnerable organization then had to face the consequences of the PCI's National Unity policies, it is no surprise that its difficulties were compounded. Yet the abandonment of the *compromesso stonco* did nothing to help turn the organization around: by the end of the seventies, the opportunities had passed. Because of the savage restructuring in Italian industry, the erosion of the working class has further undermined both the PCI's structures in the factories and its ability to recruit enough new members each year to make up for normal turnover.

A related, equally serious concern, voiced constantly in the 1980s, is that the social composition of the party is not keeping up with the socio-structural evolution of Italy. In fact, the class breakdown of PCI members has not changed since the 1960s, when historically important agrarian categories such as sharecroppers and day labourers declined dramatically. The present 'scissors effect' is cause for alarm because the strata that are expanding most among the active employed—technical and clerical white collar categories—continue to be seriously under-represented in the party's ranks.”

Moreover, membership turnover in the 1970s was greater than the absolute increase of 300,000 suggests: by the end of the seventies, more than half the members had joined the party after the 1960s. Stagnation is evident in the most recent party statistics, which *still* show that only a bare majority of members have joined since 1969. They also show that the average age of PCI members is now just over fifty, with a third of the members sixty or older in 1985, a jump of more than 10% in a decade. Even more alarming for the party's future is the fact that the average age of *new* recruits was just over *thirty-six*. Nowhere is the PCI's problem with young people more evident than in this last figure, or in the fact that less than 10% of all members are now under thirty years of age (ten years ago, the proportion was almost 30%).²²

Activism and Organizational Experimentation

With its emphasis on an extensive social presence, the PCI has always had very large numbers of marginally committed card-holders, and thus only a limited proportion of the membership can be considered active cadres. (The accepted figure has long hovered around 10%.) For decades, the party claimed it was trying to improve the ratio, but it had no success. Because of the commitment to an active social presence, a large number of militants has always been required to carry out the myriad tasks into which the

party throws itself. Even in the best of times, this compulsive activity took a devastating toll of overworked cadres.

There was thus a chronic crisis of activism even prior to the recent fall-off in membership and recruitment. Until the late 1970s, the PCI failed to recruit 100,000 new members only twice—and it at least managed to get more than 95,000 on both occasions. Since 1979, the number has gone from just over 90,000 to barely 60,000.²³ The party set a goal of 80,000 new members in 1987—a figure that would have been scoffed at a decade earlier, but which was unlikely to be achieved in the grim reality of the present. In the past, recruits represented somewhere around 8% of the membership, adequate to slow organizational decline when they could not stop it altogether. Now they are below 4%, which accounts for the very rapid drop in the number of members as well as the steep rise in their average age.

These devastating trends have forced many inside the party to accept what others have observed since the middle of the seventies: the nature of political militancy has changed significantly. Changes in society and the party have undercut the idea of politics as an all-consuming passion. No less a figure than the head of the organizational section of the party recently wrote that even the politically active now dedicate a far smaller proportion of their lives to politics than *previously*.²⁴ This decline has forced alterations in many established party practices, including such seemingly banal matters as the timing and style of meetings. In the past, meetings were almost always scheduled in the evenings. They generally ran on for hours, with a ritual structure that guaranteed the leadership's control: an introduction, followed by set-piece 'interventions', with conclusions offered by the ranking official present. Fewer people will now put up with such lengthy and generally inconclusive, not to mention boring, affairs; they are also less inclined to sacrifice an entire evening for a meeting. Old habits are slow to die, but there has recently been a lot of experimentation with shorter, less structured gatherings, with more convenient schedules and very limited agendas.

As noted earlier, the PCI long ago abandoned the cell as the basic organizational unit (save in factories and small villages). This follows from the party's commitment to a mass presence in society: that cells were treated as sacrosanct for so long says more about how traditions endure than it does about cells' usefulness in a non-insurrectionary or non-clandestine situation. Cells are better mechanisms for recruitment and ideological reinforcement than for reaching out into society. But while the PCI's commitment to the larger territorial section has remained strong for decades, sections have also consistently had their difficulties. The 1970s and 1980s exposed their weaknesses in large urban centres, which is where the PCI most needs a solid presence and capacity for intervention." The party now openly acknowledges that its sections—and

therefore, in essence, the entire organization—is inadequate to its tasks.²⁶

The Communists have experimented with numerous organizational forms in urban settings, but without much success to date. One very recent initiative has been the encouragement of 'specialized sections'. These are city-wide organizations that gather together all members who are employees in a given sector—e.g. banking or insurance. By cutting across firms, it is felt these units avoid the mere duplication of the unions; by focusing on tertiary sector firms, it is hoped they will attract more of those strata the party has found so hard to organize. These topical or special-interest sections also provide a structure that, it is hoped, will get away from the focus on generalities that everyone acknowledges is the bane of the regular section.

Experiments with decentralization, which first began in the late 1950s, but which continue today, provide an excellent illustration of the sort of organizational dilemmas the PCI constantly confronts. Loosening the hold of the party centre over the periphery was, understandably, a goal that all but the most retrograde centralists applauded. There were considerable resistances in the provincial federations at first, but eventually most of these were successfully overcome as older leaders were replaced with those who came to the party in the Resistance or post-war period. And yet, with a strong consensus in the party that this was the correct route, the results were (and remain, many years later) very mixed.

How, for example, was each federation to decentralize? How should different areas of each province be grouped together, and how much autonomy should they be granted? Making zones too homogeneous and too autonomous often led to sectoralism and special pleading. But efforts to ensure a broad heterogeneous mix, so as to keep a general focus on problems foremost in the local party's actions, proved equally problematic: limited energies were diffused, generating a sense that nothing ever really got the attention it deserved. In addition, in these larger, more complex areas, there was a tendency simply to mimic the structures and solutions found in local or national headquarters. Equal frustration and confusion greeted efforts to create 'City Committees' in the larger urban areas. Where sophisticated structures were put in place, these committees sometimes usurped the power of the much larger provincial federation. Where the PCI was in the government of these cities, the committees often became megaphones for strictly electoral and political priorities, thereby demoralizing the party organization. And the rank-and-file was inevitably unhappy because it saw still another bureaucratic layer interposed between the grass roots and federation headquarters. Yet everyone in the party agrees that the large urban centres are so important that they need special attention. Precisely because it is a genuine mass party, with complex links to society and its own militants, the PCI has constantly discovered that there really are no obvious solutions to its structural difficulties—and it has

come close to trying them all.

This sense of wheel spinning, and the recognition that the concerns of party activists genuinely slow down the PCI's freedom to manoeuvre led, at the end of the 1970s, to debate about the need for such a strong commitment to the principles of a mass party. A number of Communist intellectuals proposed a rethinking of the entire concept, emphasizing that with the support of eleven million Italians, the party must represent far more than its activists (and even its entire membership). There were some suggestions that the PCI might be better off as an 'opinion party', free to manoeuvre without much concern for the rank-and-file. A more palatable variation on the same theme, extensively debated among party leaders as well as intellectuals for some time, was that the PCI should at least adopt a 'lighter' structure in the name of modernity and flexibility. The idea was not very warmly received in most quarters in the party, where present difficulties have not diminished the belief in the value of a mass organization, and especially the desirability of its mobilizational capacities. This was one of the rare occasions that found the most bureaucratic interests within the PCI aligned with those who want to see the party more active in the social, as opposed to the institutional, sphere.

Cadres and the Apparatus

Even before the stagnation and decline of the past decade, the PCI was keenly aware that many of its organizational problems derived from the shortcomings of the cadres charged with running the party at the base. But the party's own policies often aggravated this situation. Because the Communists had shifted so many tested veterans into elected positions following the local electoral victories of 1975, the organization was very short of talent at the point of its maximum expansion and greatest political difficulties in the late 1970s.²⁷ Favouring local government in this fashion inhibited the maturation of organizational cadres, and tended as well to make local party activists far too dependent on municipal governments for their cues.

Some observers pass even harsher judgement on the PCI in this period. Rossana Rossanda, referring to the many newcomers who rose to positions of responsibility in the period of the *compromesso storico*, says that these cadres absorbed the culture of efficiency and competence that the PCI espoused at the time. They were distinctive, however, in that they were the first Communist cadres who no longer strongly articulated traditional movement values such as equality. Her observation provides valuable insights into the party's later emphasis on a stronger sense of identity, and the constant stress it put on these traditional themes from the late 1970s on. The PCI not only needed to regain legitimacy in the broader society, especially among the working class, but it also needed to re-educate its

own rank-and-file, having neglected this task during most of the 1970s.²⁸

There is abundant evidence from the 1970s that the PCI began to take the question of the quality of its cadres very seriously indeed. The regular party press began to pay non-stop attention to such issues as the social composition of cadres, and the myriad difficulties they encountered. Moreover, the central unit in charge of the National Party School had only held three national conferences in the thirty years between 1945 and 1975. It then held two conferences in 1976–77. The last of these focused entirely on the problems facing the party in the wake of its electoral victories and organizational expansion.²⁹

A particular aspect of the cadre question concerns the full-time political apparatus of the PCI. Party functionaries are a favourite target not only of external observers, but of the rank-and-file as well. Although they are neither as all-powerful nor as compact as is often believed, Italian Communist functionaries do dominate the party at all levels, and therefore get blamed—quite appropriately—when things go badly. With things going very badly since the late 1970s, the apparatus has been under almost constant attack. Many attacks are simply the healthy airing of complaints against the upper ranks of the party. But the issues that have been raised illustrate how every part of the party organization has been touched by the present crisis.

'Bureaucratism' is a ritual scapegoat when things go wrong in a mass party, and there is always enough evidence of centralized control and disdain for the rank-and-file to make the charge credible. In the case of the *compromesso storico*, grass-roots militants had an especially valid claim. The central organs of the party constantly preached caution, focused on institutional manoeuvring, and insisted that the DC be courted even where the Left was in command of local government with a firm majority. Although not all the new recruits to the apparatus were die-hard *Berlingueriani*, they all had to enforce and defend a line that was never popular among large numbers of cadres.

By the end of the 1970s, there was a range of different positions in the party, some favouring a 'light structure', others calling for more democracy, still others primarily concerned with a more narrowly-defined efficiency. What all had in common was a desire to cut down the weight of full-time operatives. There was—and is—also agreement that the old generalist style that served the party apparatus so well in the past is no longer adequate. Not only does it tend to lead to promotions based mainly on loyalty or willingness to submit to a crushing workload, but it leaves the party disarmed when confronted with many of the sophisticated issues at the centre of today's political struggles (such as nuclear energy, ecology, housing, industrial restructuring, etc.). An increasingly sophisticated public, able to turn to various sources of information, is less willing to settle for a few slogans and ritualistic references. Party militants are them-

selves part of this public, and, as noted above, they are no longer willing to accept old routines and vague generalities.

The party's difficulties since the late 1970s have provided an unintended economic impetus that has made the reform and streamlining of the apparatus easier. Between the drop in members and the loss of direct and indirect benefits as a result of electoral *misfortunes*,³⁰ the PCI has been subjected to a lot of economic distress through the 1980s. There are sound political and ideological reasons to cut down the apparatus and rely more on militants who are not 'professionals'—and it also just happens to keep costs down. Moreover, because of the immense cuts in the industrial workforce over the past decade, there has been no shortage of available activists with plenty of time to devote to the party. Events proceed at their usually slow pace where organizational change is involved, but there has been some trimming of the apparatus, particularly in the provincial federations.

The PCI still functions as a mass party, but with difficulty. We have seen that some of the problems it faces are chronic, but have been exacerbated by the current grim conjuncture. But some problems clearly are more than new editions of old difficulties: how does a party invent a new model of militancy when the old one has clearly been surpassed? Or steer clear of undesirable vagueness, but also avoid becoming little more than a **single-issue** group, or a clearing house for a congeries of fragmented issues?

The recent (and not so recent) history of the PCI organization shows that the party cannot be charged with ignoring its problems. There have been extensive experiments and changes over the past twenty-five years, and not all of these have been cosmetic. As is usually the case with the PCI, the most accurate charge might be that the party dashes off in too many directions at once, and is probably eclectic to a fault in the way it approaches issues. But this eclecticism has provided a great number of experiences that we can evaluate, and the fact is that nothing the party has tried has met with any degree of systematic success, at least not adequate to suggest a reversal of an increasingly serious organizational decline. If there is any cause for optimism, it has been the recent trend, born no doubt out of continual frustration, of avoiding the past practice of imposing one answer as *the* solution to a given problem. If carried out in an open spirit, this will at least allow local party organizations to experiment as much as possible, which appears to be the only possibility for whatever (unlikely) breakthroughs might occur.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE PCI SINCE THE 1960s

One of the most nettling and intractable problems facing the PCI has been the party's tortured relationship with young people, and with its own Youth Federation (FGCI) since the late 1960s. There has been a consistent

tension in the party's behaviour: between openness to new social phenomena and hegemonizing impulses; between flexibility and bureaucratic impulses; between progressive shifts and opportunistic political manoeuvring. On balance, the record has been far more negative than positive, and both the FGCI's membership figures and the best estimates of young people's support for the Communists show a marked downward curve. The organizational situation undoubtedly reflects broad social factors as well as the party's own tactical and strategic blunders, but the situation has reached a critical juncture.

Let us put the situation in context. Through the 1970s, the PCI enjoyed considerable support among younger voters. Only in the 1980s, when it slipped back to under 30%, did the support of young people fall *below* the level of electoral support commanded by the party in society at large. In the 1987 elections, the party's own youth organization estimated that only 20% of those below the age of twenty-one had cast their ballot for the PCI. This downward trend is much more pronounced in terms of the party's ability to *organize* young people. As we have already seen, the proportion of members below the age of thirty has plummeted over the past decade. But even more serious is the situation concerning the very youngest groups, who traditionally have been organized in the Youth Federation (FGCI).

In the heyday of all mass organizations, the early 1950s, the FGCI—under the leadership of Enrico Berlinguer—counted over 400,000 members (against just over two million party members). By the end of the 1950s, this figure had been cut in half, and it was halved again in the sixties (in the same two decades, overall party membership fell by 25%). By 1969–70, an FGCI that had become too radical for the parent party was essentially cut adrift when the student movement had already waned: formal membership fell below 70,000, but the Federation had effectively ceased to exist. It was resuscitated in 1975, but only as a megaphone for the party. It flourished for a few years, but, parroting the *compromesso storico* and celebrating the PCI's institutional manoeuvring, it declined dramatically at the end of the 1970s. In the early 1980s, the leaders of a large local youth federation could write in the party weekly:³¹

The decline of the youth organization as we know it is at such an advanced stage that we can affirm that an experience, an organizational model, an idea of the relationship between communists and younger generations has been exhausted. . .

Faced with an organizational disaster and a serious crisis of confidence in its relationship with young people, the party devoted a meeting of its Central Committee to these problems (this was by no means the first such gathering since the early 1970s). The result has been a thorough restructuring of the organization, essentially breaking it down into groups

that address the single issue areas that seem to attract the most interest among young people: women's problems; environment; peace and disarmament; problems specific to high school or university students, and so on. Painful experience had shown that general ideological appeals simply did not work with the young people of the eighties. The hope is that issue-oriented action may provide the stimulus to eventually bring numbers of youth back into the FGCI as members. An interesting sign of the changes that have taken place is the fact that Naples, an area where the PCI (and all mass organizations) has never fared well, was by 1987 the site of the largest FGCI organization in Italy.³²

The PCI has had recurring problems with the FGCI for at least twenty years, which is a reflection of three distinct, but related issues. One is the limits of the traditional Communist approach to organizing young people in a 'mini-party' that had only limited autonomy; this organizational model began to decline in the mid-1950s, and the FGCI has undergone three complete 'refoundations' since the sixties in an effort to find a more workable formula. The second reason for the party's difficulties lies in its chronic inability to accept that young people are a distinctive social category, and have become markedly more so over the past generation. Evidence of this chronic incomprehension is found in such things as 35-year-old 'youth' secretaries until well into the 1960s. This is one of the many Third International habits that the PCI, in spite of its more flexible organization, took a very long time to abandon. The third reason for the PCI's difficulties is more directly political: the party's policies have generally been far more moderate than the most politically active Italian youth for nearly a generation. The gap was greatest in the middle and late 1970s, when a 'loyalist' FGCI often mouthed a PCI line that was offensive to many young people, on issues ranging from terrorism to civil liberties to the environment. This was also a period in which Berlinguer dismissed the more militant outbursts of some segments of the movement as reminiscent of Fascism in its earliest forms (he used the term *diciannovismo*, 'nineteenism', to evoke 1919). Many committed young people were alienated by the PCI's behaviour, but it is likely that even more simply found it irrelevant.

It is primarily against being viewed as irrelevant that so much of the current effort in the PCI and FGCI, is directed. The road here will not be an easy one, however. The Communists lack solid roots in the younger generations as they never have before, and the PCI's present marginalization can hardly be the springboard for significant advances. The party has accurately read young peoples motivations, but it will prove very difficult to compete with single-issue groups or problems unless something additionalis offered. Why, after all, should someone with environmental concerns be drawn to Communist environmentalists, or a feminist to a Communist womens' centre, unless the party or FGCI are offering

something that the others are not? And thus far, at least, the PCI has been unable to make the sorts of connections that might attract greater interest. That it is not alone in this failed synthesis, but shares the problem with almost all other parties and formations on the Left, cannot be the source of much consolation.

Internal criticism of the party's shortcomings have been widespread since the late 1970s. As the PCI moved into the opposition, but then remained mired in a not-veryaggressive stance, a groundswell in favour of more attention to movements in society grew stronger in party ranks. With the electoral defeat of 1987, this 'movementist' tendency found allies from all points of the political spectrum within the PCI except for the solid right wing. There was incontrovertible evidence that the party's caution has not paid off, and profound concern at the potential loss of an entire generation's support. All but the most committed 'institutionalists' realized that *some* change was necessary. Achille Occhetto, who shortly was to become the heir apparent to Natta, shrewdly realized this and snuck quickly: as soon as the first electoral returns were rolling in, he stated that the party had lost badly to its left because of its inability to represent the various forces of protest in Italian society.

This was not an altogether accurate reading of the party's electoral problems, as my discussion of the Greens' and DP's showing in 1987 shows (see p. 280). In fact, many PCI votes went to the Socialists, and even to more moderate parties. But this was, tactically, a very astute manoeuvre, for it provided a clear sense of direction to the party at a time when that was badly needed. In fact, as the post-electoral debate wore on, everyone acknowledged that the Communist vote had been dispersed in many directions. While the right wingers might have been correct in blaming the party's ineffectual opposition in Parliament, the very nature of their criticism left them devoid of appealing proposals. If there was one thing most Communists were not ready to hear by mid-1987, it was that their salvation lay in further legislative and institutional manoeuvring.

THE PCI, THE WORKERS, AND THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT

Recent debates on Italy in the 1970s may suggest that the radical upsurge had effectively ended by 1970.³³ One can quibble about terms, but it would be a serious error to characterize the early 1970s as a quiescent time. If anything typifies this period, it is its complexity and the often contradictory nature of events and their impact. The most dramatic student demonstrations had already waned by 1969, when the workers' 'Hot Autumn' jolted previous equilibria both inside the factories and in society at large. But social mobilization actually continued *through the early seventies*. Indeed, the overall rate of protest activity rose steadily through 1972, and extraparliamentary activities actually continued to rise

through all of 1973.³⁴ To be sure, much of the action of groups on the Left tended to be inwardly-turned rather than projected toward society at large. But, for all that, the first years of the 1970s were by no means a period without social turbulence, or with the left on the defensive.

More importantly still, to focus excessively on, or exaggerate the influence of the students or urban movements risks undervaluing what was unquestionably the most significant legacy of the late 1960s: the workers' 'Hot Autumn' and its aftermath. A **very** militant cycle of struggles actually spanned 1968–72. By the start of the 1970s, the unions had begun to regain control over much of the energy that had been mobilized from 1968 on. But this 'containment' came at a price, particularly in the first half of the seventies when labour's position was still extremely strong. In order to hegemonize the movement, the unions had to absorb many of the **demands** that had arisen among the newly-radicalized unskilled and semi-skilled workers. The strongest voices in the unions in this period came from the northern, organized working class, which pressed for and achieved a number of radical and egalitarian reforms, including standardized wage increases between blue and white collar strata, as well as a bottom-weighted cost of living wage escalator (*scala mobile*) that dramatically levelled industrial wages (thanks in part to the high inflation) in the 1970s. Naturally, the unions' radical trajectory flattened out as the decade progressed, for reasons of internal conservatism, and also because militancy declined as the workers' position worsened in the course of the decade.

For roughly the first half of the 1970s, the unions in fact tried to bypass the parties of the Left altogether, and attempted to bargain directly with the government. They did so out of a sense of strength and new militant identity, but also because of the Left's electoral and institutional weakness. The PCI leadership was obviously upset by this turn of events, fearing permanent marginalization if the workers' movement demonstrated that the Communists were unnecessary as political representatives and mediators. But the party was also deeply worried, as early as 1971, that the evident polarization in the wake of the 'Hot Autumn' would be aggravated and the workers isolated if the most militant elements within the unions gained control over the political agenda. Although it accused the unions of 'corporate' and 'selfish' behaviour, it was really reacting to the problems that a proletarian strategy centred on the large factories of the North posed in the complex social and political reality of Italy.³⁵ And the unions quickly learned that they could not bargain for political reforms in the same fashion as they bargained for wage increases or improvements in working conditions. After some important initial successes, they soon found that they could only stand by helplessly as important reform legislation was sabotaged by the DC and its allies in Parliament.

These difficulties ultimately forced the major trade union confederations (CGIL, CISL, UIL)³⁶ to recognize that they needed strong institutional representation, and that the only party that could provide it was the PCI. In order to achieve the often precarious unity that had made their victories possible, the confederations—mutually distrustful of each others' motives—had tried to distance themselves from organic, or even close, ties to any party.³⁷ For the non-Communist unionists to conclude that the PCI had to be in, or very close to, the government was a notable achievement.

The confederations' adoption of a reform platform centred around 'austerity' came, not surprisingly, exactly when the PCI was making its serious bid for a governmental role: 1977–78. The PCI certainly pressured the unions, especially the CGIL, to get them to support its ambitions. But the unions' eventual public support was more than a response to Communist heavy-handedness. By the middle of the 1970s, the parliamentary stalemate and the unions' own bitter experience had forced them to conclude that their only hope for concrete reform action lay with the PCI.³⁸

There was not, however, unanimity in the workers' movement about austerity, and there was considerable impatience with the slowness of the government—a government supported by the PCI—to put anything substantial on the books. Not surprisingly, the most critical and impatient of all were a significant part of the FLM (Federazione Lavoratori Metalmeccanici), the unitary Metalworkers' Federation that had been a spearhead of the 'Hot Autumn'. In fact, by late 1977, the FLM was impatient enough to call a massive strike and demonstration in Rome—in spite of the PCI's public warnings (and intense private pressure) not to protest. Nevertheless, the strike was impressive enough to force the Communists to demand far more from the government, and this demand forced a cabinet crisis that lasted until March, 1978. But the crisis ended with the complete humiliation of the PCI. After letting the Communists think he would expand the cabinet and include a few 'acceptable' independents, Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti came back with precisely the same people who had been in the previous government. The Communists continued to support the government,³⁹ but their vulnerability had been exposed and their days close to institutional power were numbered.

It is evident that tactical unity among the confederations could not survive the political strain once the National Unity governing experiment collapsed. In 1979, the PCI returned to the opposition while the Socialists remained in government, overtaxing the often fragile unity among the major confederations. The unity pact was formally renounced during the events leading up to the referendum on the *scala* mobile in 1985, as only the Communist component of the CGIL consistently balked at the concessions their own Socialist wing, plus the UIL and CISL, were willing to

make with the government.

Stagnation, Defeat and Decline

As the main political spokesman for working people in Italy, the PCI's fate is inextricably tied to fluctuations in the fortunes of the working class and its unions. These fortunes have been problematic since 1980, and reached a depressing nadir in 1985, when a referendum to restore a few points cut by the government from the cost of living escalator (*scala mobile*) failed, polarizing even further relations in an already divided union movement.⁴⁰ Although the result was close—46.7% voted to restore the cuts—it was a clear defeat, reinforced by the fact that voter turnout reached the lowest point in any election in the post-war period. Immediately following the vote, private industry's leading interest group (Confindustria) announced it would no longer honour the egalitarian 1975 agreement on the escalator.

This was another poignant illustration of the party's efforts to cope with pressures that pull it in two directions at once. The PCI had to take a solid public stance in favour of the workers, but in so doing it risked isolating itself politically and exacerbating already-strained relationships. And the referendum, in spite of a result that looked good superficially, fully exposed the workers' weakness. Working class bastions like Turin and Genoa could barely muster 50% in favour of restoring the points cut from workers' salaries, and overwhelming majorities in these areas would have been required to carry the whole country—and show that a united class stood behind the PCI and other promoters of the vote. Only the strong showing in the Communist-dominated red zones and a high vote in many southern areas made the final result as close as it was. The decision to lend full support to the referendum infuriated the right wing of the party, which has always been hostile to the idea of popular referendums. The PCI's earlier recourse to obstructionism in Parliament over the *escalator*—something it has done only a handful of times since the Republic was established—had already dismayed the most conservative elements in the party. They wanted to avoid the issue altogether, since they sensed that the party was in a no-win position. They also knew that no improvement in PSI-PCI relations, which was their top priority, would be possible in a confrontational campaign.

The downturn in labour's fortunes has many causes, most of which are well-known to students of western capitalism since the 1970s. But many of these trends have been magnified by specifically Italian conditions, which have further disoriented and disarmed the most militant sectors of the workers' movement. More than elsewhere, the Italian movement's successes in the late 1960s and early 1970s were built around the 'mass worker', i.e. the semi-skilled, often immigrant labour force of the large northern industrial complexes. The struggles of this period had a highly

egalitarian and radical content because they were dominated by mass workers (and the most politically advanced veteran skilled workers). Hence the identity of significant parts of the labour movement—especially its most active cadres—was shaped in this period, and around these issues. Predictably, the weakening of the industrial sector, the fragmentation and diminution of the working class, and the consequent sharp decline in militancy that have characterized the restructuring of Italian (and Western) capitalism have had especially devastating effects on these militant cadres. These changes have undercut the working class's leverage on the labour market, but they have also totally shaken the foundations of its symbolic identity as well.

In fact, while the referendum represents an important watershed, the truly critical turning-point had come five years earlier. Even before the complete degeneration of PCI-PSI relations, the unions' economic vulnerability became apparent in late 1980. In that year, a very militant strike to oppose massive lay-offs and extensive restructuring at Fiat failed, while generating considerable white-collar opposition, and dividing those on the shop floor as well. (The level of solidarity among the workers was insufficient to insure the success of the paralyzing 'hiccough' or 'checker-board' strikes for which the Italians are famous: hence the recourse to a full walkout that lasted 35 days.) As so often happens in Italy, Fiat represented a test case, this time one that signalled that the workers' power had waned. In the aftermath of Agnelli's victory at Fiat, the private sector moved quickly to reassert its control. The dwindling figures for industrial employment through the 1980s, especially in the larger firms, testify to the capitalists' success.⁴¹

The showdown at Fiat gave the Communists the first experience of the problem that would become all too familiar as the eighties wore on. They had to keep close to the workers while also trying to keep some options open with other parties. Badly misreading the PCI's nature, many observers speculated from 1979 on that the PCI, driven into the opposition, might fall into sectarianism (like the PCF) in an effort to re-establish its credentials with the working class. When Berlinguer made a point of visiting the striking Fiat workers in 1980, and told them they had Communist support even if they occupied the factories, critics of the party felt their hypotheses about a sectarian involution were confirmed. They should have known better: while Berlinguer was encouraging the workers, the party was feverishly working behind the scenes to avoid such a crushing defeat for the workers and unions?

If the 1980s have seen the industrial proletariat crouching down in a defensive posture, they have also witnessed a sharp upswing in labour conflict among several categories. In industry, the white collar sectors have demonstrated a rampant 'catch-up' mentality, with many of the more traditionally privileged strata of the working class trying to recoup in the

name of 'professionalism' what they lost in the 1970s when the egalitarian impulse was highest. Thanks to the militancy and leverage of the industrial workers, there really had been a levelling of wage differentials in the previous period; the gains of industrial workers outstripped almost all categories, and the equalizing effect of the *scala mobile* was of course given a tremendous boost by the high inflation rates of the 1970s. Very militant forms of struggle inside the factories often made white-collar strata uneasy, and, when aimed directly against hierarchical privileges, created resentment as well. Signs of disaffection had been evident as the 1970s wore on, but only in the 1980s did both the labour market and political circumstances allow momentum to build. It is nothing new in the history of the working class to see the reassertion of status and skill differentials when the balance of forces changes within the class, as well as between labour and capital. In the words of one of the most consistently perceptive students of the Italian workers' movement (himself a former worker and unionist):⁴⁹

Only ingenuousness could have led to the belief that the homogenization of job descriptions and a unified escalator were socially painless measures because they were just, and that they would not have had [negative] repercussions even on class composition.

An even more notable recent trend has been rampant militancy in the service and public sectors. Strikes and job actions here have generated difficulty—and anger—in the general population, which is usually the group that suffers the most inconvenience as a result of these activities. Although these actions began in the aftermath of the 'Hot Autumn', the disruptions have grown over time and have increasingly emphasized rather narrow sectoral concerns. The dimensions of these activities has become impressive. For example, in 1986, the service sector alone struck for a total of 22.5 million hours—triple the previous year's rate, and double that of all hours lost in industry.*

These groups often organize into 'autonomous' unions, with no affiliation to any confederation. Given the economic policies of the 1980s, these groups have fared well economically, in contrast to normal factory workers. They have shown little of the confederations' historic concern to build class solidarity and carry out actions designed to avoid alienating public opinion. A large measure of the autonomous unions' success is due to the fact that they represent important portions of the ruling coalition's constituencies. And the situation takes on special meaning in Italy, due to the extensive involvement of the state in the economy. Particularly where the state plays a managerial role, the eighties have witnessed astounding concessions to privileged strata and categories, as the Socialists and Christian Democrats rush to cover their clients or the categories they wish to woo. That this favouritism also has the effect of

further dividing the workers' movement is by no means a negligible (or undesirable) consideration for the PSI and DC.

One of the ugly ironies of the current situation is that the disruptive militancy of the non-industrial categories has created a wave of anti-union and anti-worker sentiment, and raised serious discussion of legislation to regulate strikes. These initiatives, which always crop up when the workers are vulnerable, make the major union confederations, and especially the CGIL, understandably nervous, for they could usher in an even greater period of marginalization and weakness for the workers' movement.

The picture is not a pretty one: the workers are objectively weak, and politically and socially divided as they have not been for some time. Many of these divisions are related to resentments that have simmered since the egalitarian phase when the mass workers hegemonized the movement. Add the fragmentation that has accompanied restructuring, undercutting mass workers while multiplying those elements of the workforce (part-timers, holders of multiple jobs, etc.) that have always proven extremely difficult for the unions to organize, and the dilemma facing organized labour becomes clear. For the CGIL, dominated by the Communists and the confederation with by far the strongest industrial representation, the problem is even more acute. There is a strong temptation to leap on the bandwagon of sectoral demands articulated in so much of the new militancy of the tertiary categories. This move might offset the loss of industrial members, but it would be likely to occur at the cost of pushing the broader concerns of 'mass class unionism' into the shadows. Moreover, the traditional confederations would be hard-pressed to outbid the autonomous unions in any event. The weakened confederations have vacillated and frequently shown a bureaucratic insensitivity to the more than legitimate complaints of some categories. (Teachers come readily to mind.) The major unions often exercise a caution that outrages their own constituents, driving them to join, or at least side with, the autonomous unions or spontaneous groups.

For several reasons, the PCI has been much more outspoken in its defence of the workers since stepping into the opposition. As I noted earlier, the party clearly had lost working-class support (and contributed to the workers' disorientation) during the period of National Unity, and it sorely needed to mend fences. Secondly, the failure (and abandonment) of the *compromesso stonco*, combined with declining votes and membership, badly aggravated the party's identity crisis, and defending the workers represents one of the few certainties around which most of the party could rally. Finally, with political marginalization staring them in the face, the leaders of the PCI knew that the party's credibility rests on its leverage with the working class: any hope of influencing national politics, let alone eventually entering the government, depends on this relationship.

But with the workers on the defensive and the Socialists solidly, and happily, entrenched in power and quite willing to stand up to the unions, the PCI has been ineffectual. The referendum on the *scala mobile* was a bold gamble, but it failed. And its failure is ominous. To return to a point I made earlier about deep divisions among the forces to the left of the DC, the referendum shows that the progressive, secular majority that exists on many issues (e.g. divorce, abortion) is not so progressive as to embrace the workers. To cite an emblematic case, Milan might cast 70% of its votes to retain abortion in **1981**, but it also voted 60–40 to cut the *scala mobile*.

Apart from these very serious difficulties regarding potential allies in a *social bloc*, the Communists' major problems reside in the current *political balance of power*. Craxi's PSI, with a 'French scenario' in mind (a Socialist Party that supplants the Communists), has a vested interest in weakening the PCI and demonstrating its irrelevancy. The PCI must play a strong oppositional role to show that it has not been marginalized. At the same time, the Communists know that any hope of an alternative, however defined, must include the PSI. It is for this reason that the right wing of the PCI, uncomfortable in any case with too much militancy, has always made improving relations with Craxi a top priority.

As the summary should make clear, there really are no simple choices for the PCI in these circumstances. A more collaborative attitude toward the Socialists will weaken the party's left flank and probably subject the PCI to manipulation and rebuff by Craxi, whose political ambitions surely do not include the Communists as long as his present strategy keeps paying off at the polls. A stronger oppositional posture will aggravate an already strained relationship with the Socialists, and cast even further doubt on any eventual collaboration between the two historic parties of the Left. The PCI has vacillated between these two positions, but has been on the attack far more than it has been conciliatory. It has also, on occasion, appeared to be making overtures to the DC in an effort to work on divisions between the governing parties. These efforts are inevitably pounced upon by the Socialists and others as proof that the *compromesso* is really not dead, and that the PCI remains as 'totalitarian' as ever. Because it is engaged in a waltz without a partner, there really is almost nothing the party can do on the institutional–political front until something happens to upset the present parliamentary equilibrium. Here, as elsewhere, the Communists can only react, with absolutely no viable options for the foreseeable future.

THE PCI'S MISREADING OF THE ELECTORATE: A RECURRING PROBLEM

In a highly perceptive analysis in the wake of the results in **1985** (the referendum on the *scala mobile* plus local elections in which the PCI lost

its majority in important cities and regions), one observer pointed out that the Communists had fundamentally misread *every* important vote in the past decade.⁴⁵ The basic flaw is a reflex that sees all PCI voters as strongly committed to the party's line, rather than as ordinary citizens who may be exercising a limited choice for pragmatic or other reasons. The DC's sharp decline in 1983 was viewed as a triumph for the PCI's actions in that period. That analysis missed the basic point that 'this crisis was entirely internal to the composite world of the Catholic subculture, to clientelism, and to the Demo-Christian system of power'.⁴⁶ The PCI's huge gain in the 1984 European Elections (to 34%, actually passing the DC) was not read as a sympathy vote for Enrico Berlinguer, who died on the eve of the elections, but as a sign that the PCI had suddenly recovered its earlier levels of support. Finally, the 1985 *scala mobile* referendum was read through rose-coloured glasses. The repeal vote had been powerfully bolstered by results in the South, and the Communists promptly—and erroneously—concluded that a potential progressive bloc exists among the masses of the Mezzogiorno. This reading ignored the record abstention rates, and the fact that southerners notoriously cast a generic protest vote against central authority whenever the occasion presents itself. That the referendum failed, or at most barely carried, in the industrial heartland of the country is the surest sign that support was by no means adequate even among the working class and their most important potential allies.

It is never pleasant to confront a defeat, but it is disastrous to ignore one. Yet to say that the Communists have tended to ignore unpleasant realities, or have engaged in wishful thinking, *describes* their actions, or inaction, more than it explains them. A review of the party's reactions over more than a decade shows that it has been wrong about its victories (in 1974–76) as well as its defeats (in 1972, and most significantly, in 1979–85); it misread social trends when the *compromesso storico* reigned supreme, but it has also done so in the period in which the 'alternative' was official policy. Clearly, the problem is neither conjunctural nor linked to a given strategy: it is probably rooted, ideologically, in the way most leaders view the party and its relationship to social and political actors.

I refer here to a Third International, or, perhaps more properly, a Leninist conception of party supporters as profoundly, ideologically committed. In its softer version, sympathizers and voters are seen as at least actively engaged in support of specific policies. Supporters of the party—and under modern conditions, this means voters above all—are considered to be potential militants, and somehow 'incomplete' if they do not get more engaged. Co-existing with this old model of militancy⁴⁷ is the Togliattian idea, ingrained in the party and transparent in the *compromesso*, that *all* politics and social activity is capable of being organized, and *ought* to be organized, by mass parties. The two phenomena clearly interact: it is the steady erosion of old political bases and sub-

cultures since the 1960s that has also provided the space for so much political fragmentation, and the appearance of new issues and subjects on the political scene. One need not like the implications of these developments to acknowledge that they exist, but the PCI has only begun to shift from denouncing them as degradation and 'Americanization' (under the *compromesso storico*) to incorporating them into its analyses.

As the party has slowly realized that there are areas of public opinion, and increasingly secular, pragmatic voters, who are hard to persuade and almost impossible to organize using traditional methods, it has experimented with everything from radio and television to the sponsorship of rock concerts. But it has remained prone to many of its traditional assumptions, as its behaviour through the 1987 electoral campaign showed.

The 1987 Elections and the PCI's Reaction

When the PCI fell to 26.4% in 1987, this third loss in a row finally forced the leadership to act. A major reason for the sense of urgency derived from the party's—and almost everyone else's—prior belief that little was going to change in the 1987 vote. A closer look at both the campaign and the Communists' behaviour during and after it can help us understand the party's expectations, why they were dashed, and why it reacted as it did.

The elections were interesting for a number of reasons. They were called a year early in an atmosphere of degenerating relations within the *Pentapartito*, especially between Socialists and Christian Democrats. Bettino Craxi, the PSI's prime minister, had held office throughout the entire legislature, and was reluctant to step down to permit someone from the larger DC to have a turn as head of government. When a stalemate arose over a proposed referendum on nuclear energy—the *Pentapartito* was badly divided on this issue—the pretext existed for the dissolution of parliament. Craxi now had the opportunity he had been seeking in any event, namely the chance to go to a vote after a period during which only he had been at the governmental helm.

Superficially, at-least, the PCI appeared to have been in a position to benefit from the way the elections were called. In spite of some appalling blunders (e.g. approving the installation of a nuclear generator in Piedmont), it had finally moved to a firmer anti-nuclear stance and was among the parties favouring the referendum. It had no part in the power-seizing and squabbling that was casting Italy's coalition partners in most unflattering light. And yet, in spite of the belief that its working class and traditionally 'red' bastions would hold, the PCI lost over 3%, which is a sharp defeat by Italian standards. The party's worst losses came in the large urban centres and, amazingly, in many parts of the red belt.

The Socialists, as everyone expected, improved, rising to 14%. This was an impressive gain for a relatively small party, the second straight improvement after being mired below 10% throughout the 1970s. Craxi had to

cede the prime ministership, but he had got what he wanted. The DC was also a winner in 1987, gaining nearly 2%, to the surprise of everyone including opinion pollsters. Since the minor coalition partners lost nearly as much as the PSI and DC gained, the vote had little effect on the political balance of power (the *Pentapartito* gained 0.6%). But the relative shifts in strength, especially between the PCI and PSI, stunned the Communists and led to public speculation about a 'French Syndrome', with the PCI collapsing in imitation of its counterpart from the other side of the Alps. After all, the ratio of Communist to Socialist strength had gone from 3.5 to 1 to less than 2 to 1 in just over ten years.

These are the results, but what accounts for them? The PSI's rise might have been foreseen, but why did the PCI so seriously underestimate its own difficulties, and misread its support even in its historic bastions? What, if anything, can the campaign itself tell us about the Communists' plight?

The campaign itself was notable for the resignation and cynicism which prevailed throughout. Oddly enough, although the nuclear issue ostensibly caused the elections, and Chernobyl was only a year in the past, nuclear energy did not figure prominently in the electoral debate, with the predictable exception of the Greens and various ecologists in the lists of the Left. The ruling parties' campaign was in fact a very 'modern' affair, with the emphasis on personality and image, and lavish use of television spots and 'press opportunities'. This trend followed logically from the evolving nature of politics in Italy (as everywhere else in the west), and was of course given a boost by the nakedly venal crisis that had precipitated the elections in the first place. But this campaign also marked the first time since the 1960s that a general election coincided with a positive economic conjuncture and no heavy air of scandal. Undoubtedly this fact also turned the contest into one of jockeying for position to claim credit for the relative prosperity of the last several years.

For the oppositional left in general, and the PCI in particular, an effort was made to emphasize the negative aspects of the growth that had taken place, especially increased inequalities of income, sharp drops in industrial employment, and severe youth unemployment. The Communists also dwelled extensively on the ruling coalition's divisions, and warned that nothing coherent could be expected if this squabbling band of power-mongers continued in power. But the PCI's alternative was, to say the least, unpersuasive, since the Communists' ostensible 'partners' were the Socialists. The agenda was thus set by the ruling coalition, especially the DC and PSI, who avoided substantive discussions. Devoid of interested interlocutors and any real platform or programme, the PCI's campaign also tended to focus on image and personalities.

Following a by now established practice, the Communists opened their lists to a large number of independent candidates. Counting on its ability to elect whomever it wants in spite of the complexities of Italy's

proportional list system,⁴⁸ the party has increasingly used independents as a means of appealing to groups who are not strongly represented in the party's ranks, and also as a way of recruiting specialized talent for specific parliamentary tasks. This practice creates some tension among militants, who often feel taken for granted and under-represented, and the nominating procedure can be a drawn-out, contested affair in some areas. The kind of independent candidates who make the PCI's lists can be quite revealing. Thus, in **1976**, the lists were notable for the number of independent Catholics of the Left; in **1987**, especially prominent were female candidates, environmentalists, and well-known former Socialists of all tendencies. The Communists' ability to attract some of the most distinguished figures of post-war PSI history was meant to emphasize that it was the PCI, not the PSI, that now represented the best of Italian Socialism's heritage.

The PCI's **1987** lists contained an extraordinary variety of opinions and tendencies. The participation of some people (e.g. nationally-known environmentalists and prominent figures from the gay community) represented dramatic breakthroughs for the party. But while an undeniable pluralism was evident in the party's choices, some critics—even those friendly to the PCI—felt the party had gone too far. Ecologists were present, but so were fervent pro-nuclearists. Representatives of the best of the left's traditions were put forward as candidates,⁴⁹ but so was a Milanese banker and, worse yet, a notorious friend of land abuse speculators in the south. The least generous assessments saw the lists as evidence of degenerate electoral opportunism. There *was* a strong dose of opportunism in several choices, but we come closer to the heart of the PCI's problems if we understand that these lists really reflected rampant eclecticism, a pluralism devoid of central guiding principles.

It is telling that the lists generated heady optimism in PCI headquarters as one prominent figure after another accepted the party's offer of candidacy. The party had been the subject of much discussion emphasizing its decline, disorientation, and identity crisis, and many leaders viewed the independent candidacies as evidence of widespread credibility among important, dynamic sectors of society. This optimism turned out to be grossly misplaced, and reflects an elitist conception of politics that is slow to die in Italy, not least in the PCI. Exemplary figures, those the apposite Italian idiom calls 'flowers in the buttonhole', are thought to exert far more influence than they really have. Groups that may be extremely amorphous are optimistically assumed to have an internal coherence and a capacity for organization and orientation that in fact does not exist.

The party's numerous independent candidates probably did project an image of the pluralistic left the PCI wishes to represent. And, as promised, the party greatly increased its female representatives, while

losing seats overall. Of the 91 women now in Parliament, 60 (14 independents) were put there by the PCI. Yet there is no evidence that the PCI gained any notable support from the diversity of its lists.

In spite of the party's efforts to project an image of pluralism and of occupying a place 'in the mainstream of the European Left'—one of its main watchwords of the eighties—its actions occasionally cast doubt on these credentials. The most notorious gaffe took place as the campaign was winding to a close. Party secretary **Alessandro Natta**, during an interview with a mass-circulation Catholic periodical, hinted that the PCI might be inclined to allow the weakening of Italy's abortion law. This obvious flirtation with retrograde elements in the Church (and DC) led to an explosion of denunciations from all secular forces, and raised accusations that the historic compromise was about to be exhumed. It also led to a very rapid 'correction' from the young head of the Women's Section of the party, who bluntly stated that the law would not be touched. After some embarrassing 'clarifications' in the PCI press, the topic was not raised again.

I have already mentioned that the 1987 election results were used to isolate the right wing of the PCI, yet careful analysis does not really provide firm evidence of an upsurge of social protest that left the PCI in the lurch. Consider the case of the Greens, viewed by many as one of the big winners in 1987. In light of the Chernobyl episode, which had caused widespread panic as well as considerable agricultural distress in Italy just a year earlier, the Italian Greens' showing was not really very impressive compared to what they had achieved in the 1985 local elections. They received 2.5% in 1987, which was not even a full percentage point over their showing in 1985.

A similar result is found in the vote for Democrazia Proletaria (DP), the one list unquestionably to the left of the PCI. DP made a great deal out of its progress as the PCI declined, but there was scant comfort in the vote for those who thought DP's blend of workerist and ecological arguments would lead to important gains. DP only rose by 0.2%, to the far from imposing total of 1.7%. Its showing in some of the most important workers' centres can only be called disappointing: in Turin, for example, where the PCI lost 40,000 votes, DP gained 1,500 (0.2%), while local lists for Piedmontese autonomy, with a fuzzy and in some instances quasi-racist appeal, gathered about 25,000 votes. In Milan, where DP has always done well, the Communists lost 4%, the Socialists gained a staggering 7.5%, and DP remained unchanged.

Hence, while many on the Left *wanted* to read the electoral results as proving the existence of a strong area of radical social protest, it is more accurate to read this protest as extremely diffuse. Inside the PCI, the 'leftist' reading of the results weakened the right, whose own analysis was not very persuasive but, more importantly, whose emphasis on institutional

'diplomacy' offered no hope of constructive post-electoral action. And this, in my view, is the key: whatever the weakness of the 'movementist' interpretation of the 1987 vote, it at least holds out the hope that something active can be done to improve the party's situation. The right can only offer more of the same, in a period in which the PCI would be condemned to react institutionally to the initiatives of others.

Post-electoral Shock in the PCI: A New Internal Equilibrium?

The probability of continued marginalization and slow, inexorable decline has convinced many people inside and outside the party that this is *not* simply another period of bad luck, or a cyclical downturn that will soon correct itself. The 'respectable loss' in the 1985 referendum on the *scala mobile* had created the (false) sense that if the PCI was not regaining ground lost in the eighties, it was at least holding its own. The shock of the 1987 elections, with a further loss of 3.5%—this time even in historic party strongholds—was therefore even greater, and finally pushed the extremely cautious leadership into action.

The electoral results might not have forecast an impending catastrophe, but they did signal just how marginal the PCI had become to Italy's political agenda in the mid-1980s. Although the party has only begun to react to this most recent setback, it has been shocked enough to address the lethargy and indecisiveness that has characterized most of its activities since abandoning the *compromesso*. The sharp debate that began as soon as the first returns were in, and that appeared in the PCI press as well as in the general Italian press, was nothing new: Italian Communists have been violently disagreeing with one another in public for well over a decade.

What *was* new was that the debate focused quite sharply on the reasons for the party's losses, and that discussion almost immediately turned to the top leadership and whether it ought to resign. Instead of the usual endless (and nearly incomprehensible) rounds of mediation and obfuscation that generally 'resolve' debates in the PCI without truly altering pre-existing equilibria, this discussion gave rise to the proposal of a single candidate (Achille Occhetto, though no longer a leftist in the party) as PCI vice-secretary. Occhetto's designation means that he will be Natta's successor, probably in a relatively brief time. The most conservative wing of the PCI openly opposed Occhetto's candidacy in both the Executive (*Direzione*) and the Central Committee. When the Central Committee voted for Occhetto (194 in favour, 41 opposed, 22 abstentions), the leader of the PCI's conservatives, Giorgio Napolitano, announced that political consistency required that he resign from the Executive.

These developments represented a dramatic break with previous practice. In spite of its formidable bureaucracy and strongly centralistic traditions, the PCI's mass party nature has long imposed on it a complicated

system of balances and mediations, particularly since the party has had an obsession with unity typical of Third International organizations. With the exception of Berlinguer's leadership from roughly 1974–78, a consensual style has generally prevailed. Party leaders have always tried to ensure that exponents of diverse viewpoints are represented in its governing bodies (especially nationally), and have usually been intentionally ambiguous in their use of language, allowing all tendencies to offer their own interpretations of the prevailing line. There have always been boundaries beyond which dissent was not permitted, but these have been quite broad.

This style has preserved formal unity in a pluralistic and often sharply-divided party. It has also permitted the PCI to avoid the sectarian and bureaucratic excesses that have often cut off other Communist parties from their own societies. But the price the PCI has paid for this very loose version of democratic centralism (whose only rigid rule is a firm ban on *organized* factions) is a chronic lack of clarity and, as internal disagreements have grown, political paralysis.

This is the situation that had become routine in the PCI by the 1980s. Inaction and a lack of clarity sit well only with the most bureaucratic and unimaginative interests in the party. Various shades of right-wing opinion know that the party must *actively* jettison many traditional organizational structures and practices, and make highly *specific* proposals to become the modern, moderate-left social democratic formation they desire. The leftists who remain in or close to the party are even more disadvantaged, for social activism and mobilization are volatile phenomena that cannot be switched on and off at will: if society is in motion and the PCI gets left in the lurch, an historical opportunity is missed. This in fact is why the Communists' inertia has not always favoured the right wing, whereas it has always hurt the left.

The party's inertia is well illustrated in its chronic inability to spell out anything resembling a programme or platform over the past decade, in spite of unrelenting pressure to do so. The pressure has come from a variety of forces inside the PCI, especially those who want a stronger assertion of the party's traditional identity in favour of the working class and egalitarian values, and those who insist that the PCI must retain a distinctiveness vis-a-vis all other parties. Spelling out priorities—the major reforms to which it is committed, the primary social groups it intends to court—is a way of forcing the party to define itself more clearly, as well as 'keeping the party honest'. It is also a way of attacking those in the party who seem content to keep all possible options open.

On two separate occasions in the past ten years, efforts to pin the party down came to naught. The first time was in 1976–77. At this time, Berlinguer was trying to reassure the party that 'austerity' meant more than sacrifices, and that the PCI had a broader vision, even if it was hard

to discern in the interminable wrangling in Parliament. With great fanfare, the party announced that it would come forward with a 'Proposal for a Medium-Term Project', co-ordinated by Napolitano, then the head of the national Cultural Section of the PCI. After long delays, a document was actually produced, and it was met by deafening silence.⁵² It was never clear whether the Proposal was meant for internal or external consumption, nor whether it was affirming basic values more than proposing serious reform action. Since it tried to reconcile a variety of contradictory perspectives (including those of 'pragmatists' who do not believe that a broad 'project' is even possible), it succeeded in doing nothing at all.

The second effort in this direction was even less impressive. In the run-up to the 17th Congress of 1986, faced with the obvious failure to interest the PSI in its call for a 'democratic alternative', the PCI leadership came up with a proposal for a 'programmatic government', i.e. one that would agree on substance without being obsessed about coalitional alignments. In spite of intensive debate, the leadership refused to be pinned down on what this content might be, and who they had in mind as interlocutors. Many Communists feared that some version of the *compromesso* might again be in the offing. Reflecting the party's isolation, the formulation was obscure even in terms of the PCI's usually vague utterances. Continuing internal pressure finally led to the creation of a Programmatic Office that would co-ordinate activities and eventually call a 'Programmatic Convention' where the party, finally, would spell out its priorities. But the leadership of this Office was entrusted to Luciano Lama, ex-head of the CGIL, and no enthusiast of any programme. By the time of the 1987 elections, more than a year after the 17th Congress, not a single thing had been done in this regard.

But, until the elections, the right wing of the party was fairly content, for what the 17th Congress achieved was the consolidation of a strong centre-right ascendancy in the party.⁵³ For many reasons, the various conservative tendencies in the party were pleased with the way the congress had gone. They were happy with a commitment to attack Craxi less, and to seek a *rapprochement* with the PSI. They were also obviously pleased with the official reiteration of the PCI's identity as an integral part of the European Left. This was for them a slap at those—leftists and *Berlingueriani* alike—who still believe in the party's distinctiveness and think it is important to find a 'Third Way' between Eastern state socialism and Western Social-Democracy. Finally, most of those on the right could only be pleased by the PCI's extremely vague programmatic commitment, for it left so many options open.

This explains why the right was so dismayed at the nomination of Occhetto that it chose to vote openly against him. There had been rumours right up to the last minute that, in classically mediating fashion, *two vice-*

secretaries were going to be named, and it is a tribute to Natta that he did not succumb to such a ploy. It also explains why Occhetto jumped so quickly into the fray with a decidedly more 'leftist' reading of the elections than might otherwise have been expected: he understood that the right's power to delay and condition a consensus would render almost all new initiatives **impossible**. In style (the open division) and content (the splitting of the centre-right agreement that came out of the 17th Congress) the PCI had at least taken a clear step to break old equilibria. Many in the party who are far from enthralled with Occhetto have applauded these developments simply because they finally hold out the promise of action.

Of course, this action grows out of a sense of urgency, and even desperation. And what can be produced under present conditions is very much an open question. The significance of the PCI's recent moves is the realization of the dead end into which the road held out by the right wing of the party leads. One critic put succinctly into words what many were thinking after the 1987 elections: No one can be surprised at these results; if what you want is modernization, efficiency, and social democracy, why should you put your **faith in Giorgio Napolitano?**⁵² Yet nothing the PCI has done since Occhetto's rise suggests any real departure from the past.

This is not, then, a sharp shift to the left on the PCI's part. And even if it were, it is not clear that any solid answers to the party's many problems would be forthcoming from those quarters. The institutional, conciliatory route holds out no promise at all at present. But ritual assertions of working-class identity cannot reunify or recompose a fragmented arid contradictory social reality. Nor can ritual invocations of 'movements' and 'the social sphere' generate the higher synthesis that the Left has thus far been unable to produce anywhere. If the PCI right has always overestimated what could be accomplished institutionally, the left has been equally naive in underestimating the complexity of reality and the importance of institutions. The recent shift in the PCI's orientation—if it endures—will at least make the party less passive and reactive, and that is certainly positive. Under present conditions, all that the Communists can realistically hope for is to reverse, or at least halt, their decline, and thus become a more viable opposition. That may not be much, but it would at least be a new starting point.

NOTES

1. For an excellent summary of these problems, see George Ross and Jane Jensen, 'Post-War Class Struggle and the Crisis of Left Politics', *The Socialist Register 1985/86*, pp. 23-49.
2. He did this in the context of the creation of Centre-Left coalitions that included the Socialists, heretofore the PCI's reliable ally. His proposal was mainly an effort to reconstruct the unity of the frontist period.
3. For more details on the left-right divisions of the 1960s, including the way they

- took shape in internal party struggles, see G. Grant Amyot, *The Italian Communist Party: The Crisis of the Popular Front Strategy* (London: Croom Helm, 1981); also, Stephen Hellman, 'PCI Strategy and the Question of Revolution in the West', in S. Avineri. (ed.), *Varieties of Marxism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), pp. 195–225.
4. Tobias Abse, 'Judging the PCI', *New Left Review*, No. 153 (September–October 1985), p. 18.
 5. A quite restrained version of this position can be seen in Stephen Gundle, 'The PCI and the Historic Compromise', *New Left Review*, No. 163 (May–June, 1987), pp. 27–35. Gundle offers some interesting criticisms of Abse's interpretations of the political climate and possibilities in the early 1970s. Abse responds on pp. 36–39 of the same number.
 6. Both speeches were published in Enrico Berlinguer, *Austerità occasione per trasformare l'Italia* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1977).
 7. See Berlinguer's address in *XIII Congresso del PCI: Atti e risoluzioni* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1972), esp. pp. 54–59.
 8. See the exchange between Abse and Stephen Gundle, *New Left Review*, No. 163 (May–June 1987), pp. 27–39.
 9. The 1972 elections—the first early elections in post-war Italian history—were in fact agreed upon to stall the referendum, since Italian law fixes limits on when in a legislature's life these votes can be held.
 10. See, for example, his cautionary and defensive remarks to the Central Committee meeting of June 1974, immediately after the divorce victory, concerning what he thought were impending conservative counter-offensives. Enrico Berlinguer (Antonio Tatb, ed.), *La 'questione comunista' 1969–1975* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1975), II, pp. 758–759.
 11. Giorgio Amendola is perhaps the most notable example.
 12. Some viewed Rodano as the *emminence grise* of the PCI in the first half of the 1970s, which is clearly an exaggeration. For a sample of his views, cf. Franco Rodano, *Questione democristiana e compromesso storico* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1977).
 13. This influence has been extensively discussed in Italian analysis of the period, but it is rarely mentioned in English. One exception is Abse, 'Judging the PCI', pp. 26–27.
 14. Among other reasons for the limited usefulness of the adjective 'social-democratic', this is an additional consideration. The historic compromise can be faulted in many ways, but labelling it as 'social-democratic' surely does not help us understand its most salient features.
 15. Abse, 'Judging the PCI', pp. 21 and 40.
 16. See James Petras, 'The Rise and Decline of the Southern European Socialist Parties', *New Left Review*, No. 146 (July–August, 1984), pp. 37–52.
 17. Abse, p. 40.
 18. Gundle quite accurately notes that it is simply wrong 'to imply that, through its actions alone, the [PCI] more or less perverted the course of Italian history by blocking the potentially progressive evolution of society in a reactionary design of dubious value and predictable consequences'. Gundle, 'The PCI and the Historic Compromise', p. 28. This criticism parallels my observations about holding the PCI responsible for the PSI's subsequent choices.
 19. For a very interesting study of militants' attitudes right at the time when the party's positions were changing, see Marzio Barbagli and Piergiorgio Corbetta, 'After the Historic Compromise: A Turning-Point for the PCI', *European Journal of Political Research*, 10 (1982), pp. 213–239.
- A study of PCI recruitment in the 1970s made the interesting discovery that

membership peaked *before* the great electoral victory of 1976—i.e. the flow of new members into the party was not affected by the PCI's greatest political triumph. This suggests that the reservoir of recruits above the party's normal turnover was exhausted in the period 1971–76. For details, see Enrico Casciani, 'Dieci anni di reclutamento nel Pci', *Mulino*, XXX (March–April, 1981), pp. 320–321.

Clerical and technical workers have increased in the party's ranks, from around 3.5% at the beginning of the 1970s to 7.5% presently. Blue-collar workers have represented around 40% of PCI members since the 1950s (though an additional 20% have been pensioners, many of whom were themselves workers). The only other categories that exceeded 5% of the members in 1985 were housewives (7.5%) and 'artisans' (5.8%), but many of the latter are really skilled workers. PCI, *Organizzazione dati statistiche* (Rome: ITER, 1986), pp. 40–41.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 44, 39 and 46.

23. PCI, *Organizzazione dati statistiche*, p. 22. The other times the party failed to recruit 100,000 new members were 1957 and 1968.

24. Gavino Angius, 'Valori, politica, organizzazione del Pci', *Critica Marxista*, 24 (January–February, 1986), p. 26.

25. This weakness was, however, well known within the party even earlier. For an interesting discussion of how sections functioned in the early 1970s, see Peter Lange, 'The PCI at the Local Level: A Study of Strategic Performance', in Donald L.M. Blackmer and Sidney Tarrow (eds.), *Communism in Italy and France* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 259–304.

26. See the material in 'PCI, Dipartimento problemi del partito', *Partito e società nelle grandi aree urbane* (Rome: Salemi, 1983). This book contains the proceedings of a party-sponsored seminar.

27. There are many good arguments for putting reliable people into public office; my point simply is that these priorities had very serious consequences for the party organization.

28. Rossana Rossanda (Interview by Carla Pasquinelli), 'Sulla politica culturale e gli intellettuali', *Problemi del socialismo*, 6 (September–December, 1985), pp. 176–77.

29. 'PCI, Sezione scuole di partito', *Formazione dei quadri e sviluppo del Partito. Atti del V Convegno nazionale della sezione centrale scuole di partito* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1978).

30. Deputies and other salaried representatives or members of regional or local cabinets give a portion of their salary to the party. They also hand over their chits for railway travel and other free services. Those who sit on the directing boards of various public and semi-public agencies—and Italy abounds with them—turn over their fees. Thus, when the PCI loses positions of local power, as it did in 1980 and again in 1985, the party's finances really suffer.

31. FGCI of Reggio Emilia, in *Rinascita* (August 5, 1983), p. 15.

32. Figure cited in *Corriere della sera* (June 9, 1987), p. 6.

33. Gundle speaks of the waning of 'the revolutionary impulse'—with, however, emphasis on the student movement—and Abse does not directly contest it in the exchange cited in footnote 5.

Sidney Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder: Politics and Protest in Italy: 1965–1975* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 1988), Chapter 3. I am grateful to the author for permission to cite this material.

35. For an acute analysis of this situation, see Aris Accomero, 'Sindacato e rivoluzione sociale. Il caso italiano degli anni '70', *Laboratorio politico* I (July–August, 1981), pp. 5–34.

36. The major confederations all have close ties to various parties, but there has

been at least an arm's length relationship since the late 1960s. The CGIL is the largest, and is dominated by the PCI but has a strong PSI minority. The CISL is strongest in the public and white collar sectors, and is dominated by the DC, but with strong left minorities in some categories (metal workers, teachers, postal workers, etc.). The UIL began as an appendage of the minor lay parties in the 1940s and '50s, but saw the Socialists gain dominance in the 1960s.

37. An 'incompatibility rule' forbade any union official from holding either elected office or a **position** in a party organization. This was of course intended to keep the parties—especially the PCI—at a distance, but it had the side effect of removing all active unionists from Parliament and local assemblies.
38. Extensive analyses of the unions' strategy exist in Italian; for some of the most thorough discussions in English see Peter Lange, George Ross and Maurizio Vannicelli, *Unions, Change and Crisis: French and Italian Union Strategy and the Political Economy, 1945-1980* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982); also, Miriam A. Golden, *Austerity and its Opposition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988).
39. On the day the new government was to be presented to Parliament, Aldo Moro, former prime minister and president of the DC, was kidnapped by the Red Brigades. The PCI at this point had no option but to support the government, given its extremely forceful rhetoric in favour of 'democratic order' over the previous years.
40. For background and details, see Peter Lange, 'The End of an Era: The Wage Indexation Referendum of 1985', in Robert **Leonardi** and Raffaella Y. Nanetti, *Italian Politics. A Review, Volume I* (London: Frances Pinter, 1986), pp. 29-46.
41. With the largest firms taking the lead in restructuring, industrial employment fell 15% (866,000 jobs) between 1981 and 1986, while investments and productivity rose. Figures reported in Sergio Ginebri, 'Le trasformazioni dell'industria nell'ultimo decennio', in Fondazione **CeSPE—Associazione Crs (eds.)**, *Quali risposte alle politiche neoconservatrici?* Supplement to *Politica ed Economia*, XVIII (January, 1987), p. 173.
42. For an excellent analysis of these **events** and the tensions in both the party's and the unions' positions, see Giuseppe **Bonazzi**, 'La lotta dei 35 giorni alla Fiat: un'analisi sociologica', *Politica ed Economia*, XV (November, 1984), pp. 33-43.
43. Accornero, 'Sindacato e rivoluzione sociale', p. 18.
44. Paolo Forcellini, 'Base per asprezza', *L'Espresso* 21-6-87, pp. 214-217.
45. Oreste **Massari**, 'La questione elettorale', *Problemi del socialismo*, No. 6 [New Series], (September-December, 1985), esp. pp. 205-211.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
47. I discuss these ideas at greater length in 'Feminism and the Model of Militancy in an Italian Communist Federation: Challenges to the Old Style of Politics', in Mary F. Katzenstein and Carol M. Mueller (eds.), *The Women's Movements of the United States and Western Europe* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987), pp. 132-152.
48. Seats are distributed to each list in proportion to the number of votes received, as with any system of PR. But the **order of election** of candidates is determined by the absolute number of optional preference votes received (voters may indicate from two to four preferences, depending on the size of their constituency). **PCI** voters use their preferences much less than supporters of other parties, and thus fewer preference votes are needed to elect a Communist candidate. By instructing party militants how to mark their ballots, the **PCI** is generally able to determine the exact order of candidates' election.
49. These included long-standing critics of the Communists from the left, such as Vittorio Foa and Luigi **Pintor** (expelled from the **PCI** in 1969 for his actions in

the *Manifesto* affair); they also included Antonio **Giolitti**, an 'honourable revisionist' and former Budget Minister who left the **PCI** for the **PSI** in the wake of Hungary in 1956.

50. **PCI**, *Proposta di progetto a medio termine* (Rome: Editori **Riuniti**, 1977). The volume was published at the end of July, when everyone was on vacation and hardly inclined to discuss such weighty matters. This reflects how hard it was to cobble the work together, or perhaps that party leaders knew as it progressed how little would result from the initiative.
51. For a summary of the 17th Congress in English, see Tobias Abse, 'The **PCI** Congress', *New Left Review*, No. 158 (July–August, 1986), pp. 91–97.
52. Sandro **Portelli**, 'Perché si dovrebbe votare **PCI**?', *Il Manifesto* (June 25, 1987): 12. This article contains an excellent synthesis of the **PCI**'s post-electoral problems.