

Antonio Gramsci: the roots of Italian communism

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Abstract

Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, based on the importance of consensus, is the antecedent of the recognition of the democracy by the Italian Communist Party (terrain that would be fully acquired by its successors, Togliatti and Berlinguer). Gramsci takes the word and the concept from the debates at the top of international communism and –adapting it to his theory of the “revolution in the West” – changes and innovates it profoundly in the *Prison Notebooks*, making it an idea that is today widespread and used throughout the world. Palmiro Togliatti, who returned to Italy in 1944, became a protagonist in the writing of the post-war democratic Constitution and theorized on the “national ways” to socialism and polycentrism; Enrico Berlinguer theorized on the universal value of democracy and the acceptance of many liberal principles for the construction of an idea of “communism in freedom”.

Keywords: Gramsci, communism, hegemony, revolution, democracy, national ways,

Introduction

This work intends to investigate the historical and theoretical reasons for the specificity of Italian communism, focusing on its peculiarities through the life, action, and ideas of its three main political and theoretical representatives: Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), Palmiro Togliatti (1893-1964) and Enrico Berlinguer (1922-1984).

The point of starting point from which I approached this work was the following hypothesis question: is there a continuity of thought among the major theoreticians and politicians of Italian communism? Does this possible “red thread” identify a specific tradition rooted in Gramsci’s thought? Moreover, does Gramsci indicate, as Togliatti says, the “Italian way” to socialism? The question I tried to answer was therefore whether there was a red thread in this long and varied history, whether the thought was coherent that in some way linked the Gramscian elaboration at the basis of the re-foundation of the Party after the very early years dominated by the sectarianism of Amadeo Bordiga, and the subsequent policy of the PCI in the post-war period.

The intention is to demonstrate that the originality of Italian communism, its progressive conquest of ever more extensive reciprocity between democracy and socialism, did not arise suddenly and accidentally, but was achieved through the development of a precise theoretical-political tradition, which takes its origins from the thought of Antonio Gramsci: as has been said, (Magri, 2009) it was the development of the “genome” contained in his elaboration of the *Prison Notebooks* that profoundly characterized the Party that he had contributed to the founding in 1921 and to which he had then been able to give his very personal imprinting from 1924-1926 (Giasi,2019: 157-175). This does not mean that the outcomes of this path – which culminated in the theory of democratic communism developed by Enrico Berlinguer in the 1970s, under the names of “Eurocommunism”, “third way” or “third phase” – were already taken for granted or decided from the outset. Nor did it proceed linearly, without problems, backtracking, contradictions, and “duplicity”. The final point of arrival was undoubtedly the result of precise

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political choices in the face of the developments in the history, in many ways unpredictable, of the PCI and its position in the national and international spheres. However, this point of arrival could hardly have been reached if the history and theoretical elaboration of the Italian Communist Party had not had solid foundations in the thought of its main exponents and a unitary conception of the Party's tradition. It was based on Gramsci's thought and reading of the *Prison Notebooks* that Palmiro Togliatti culturally as well as politically substantiated the conception of the "new party" to which he gave life once he returned to Italy in 1944 (Liguori, 2012: 58-88). He was able to be one of the protagonists of the writing of a democratic Constitution (1946-1948), and led the PCI to understand the political struggle in the country no longer as a search for a revolution of an insurrectionary and third-internationalist type, but as a struggle for the conquest of hegemony, of consensus, according to Gramsci's dictates of the "war of position", of the conquest of the cultural and ideological "trenches and casemates". Later, in this same direction, Enrico Berlinguer took a new step forward, basing himself on the *Jalta Memorial* and on Togliatti's "Italian way to socialism", which he had been pursuing since 1944 and with even greater consistency and conviction after 1956. The method I have chosen for my research is a qualitative one, which implies a plurality of approaches:

- (a) a historical-descriptive approach, which has tended to place theoretical reflection in the becoming of twentieth-century history.
- b) an analytical-textual approach: the three main authors' works were read and analyzed with the help of secondary scientific literature and concerning the most advanced studies in this field.
- c) an interpretative approach.

This work is divided into three paragraphs, each of which is dedicated to one of the three great protagonists in the history of Italian communism who developed the cornerstones of the Italian way to socialism when they were at the top of the PCI. The first paragraph is dedicated to the figure and thoughts of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's Marxism is very original because it was formed in a cultural climate – that of the first two decades of the last

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century in Italy - which saw the strong affirmation of philosophies opposed to positivism. These influences led to an anti-deterministic, anti-objectivist, and anti-economic correction of Marxism, which made Gramsci's Marxist thought extremely original. This is probably the reason for his fortune today, the fact that Gramsci is, along with Marx, perhaps the only Marxist who is widespread throughout the world, on all continents, and that he has even increased his presence and influence in many currents of thought after the end of Soviet communism and the PCI itself. Although for historical reasons the PCI had to accept in the 1930s the sectarian and dogmatic orientations of the Comintern, now dominated by Stalin, in prison Gramsci elaborated a theoretical heritage that would be the basis for the development of Togliatti's elaboration starting from his return to Italy (1944), where he could operate freely, without the heavy constraint of Stalinist control. The political and historiographical categories that Gramsci elaborated in prison – hegemony, enlarged state, traditional and organic intellectuals, passive revolution, East/West, common sense, subaltern classes, etc. – have been taken up politically by the PCI but also studied in many contexts (from English-speaking countries to Latin America, from India to Japan, as well as in many European countries) up to the present day. Moreover, the contrast between Gramsci and the Russian Communist Party in 1926 constituted a precedent which, if it weighed heavily on how the PCI was looked at in the 1930s, in the long run, proved to be a prophetic view of Stalinism itself, which Togliatti himself ended up adhering to, albeit with some ambiguity.

In the second section, I focused on the figure of Palmiro Togliatti, especially since his return to Italy in 1944. In the 1930s-early 1940s, Togliatti had been able to safeguard Gramsci's legacy, fighting for him to be recognized as a martyr to fascism and for the *Notebooks* were written in prison to be entrusted to his care. He published them quickly in Italy after the end of fascism and Gramsci became a very well-known intellectual, first in his own country and then in the world (Liguori, 2012: 89-132). I have therefore tried to show how Togliatti took up Gramsci's teaching, but in a "creative" way, not slavishly, adapting it to the new historical context of Italy and Europe liberated from Fascism, as well as conditioned by the new division of the world and the

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years of the “cold war”. Togliatti with the “Salerno turning point” of 1944 and the foundation of the “new party” (mass, open to society, attentive to intellectuals, fully inserted and respectful of the democratic “game”), the “national” and “democratic” choice of the Italian communists, the “Gramsci operation” (making him the vehicle to “conquer” democratic and anti-fascist intellectuals and to instill in the Italian Communist Party a point of view far removed from Marxism-Leninism), elaborated a new policy, albeit respecting the division of the world decided at Jalta. The result was first and foremost the new Italian Constitution, “founded on work”, and due primarily to the collaboration between communists and Catholics. From Gramsci, Togliatti assumed above all a fundamental conviction: the rethinking of the concept of revolution, the assumption of the “war of position” and the conquest of hegemony that is consensus, as the only possible path in the West. The democratic choice of the PCI after the end of Fascism stemmed from this, more than from “Jalta”. The “Italian way to socialism” – the resumption after 1956 of the specific features of the “Salerno policy” – was the “way to socialism” suitable and necessary for all modern societies, as the *Jalta Memorial* also shows. These were the foundations on which Enrico Berlinguer’s development began, and he grew politically by working, at a very young age, with Togliatti and Luigi Longo. I have devoted the third and last chapter of this work to his figure and thought.

When Berlinguer became the highest executive of the PCI, formally in 1972, but in reality already in 1969 (when he was elected Deputy Secretary), he had matured the conviction that Soviet communism could not be reformed after the invasion of Prague. He was chosen as Secretary of the PCI also because of the great ability and obstinacy with which, in relations with the Soviets, he defended the particular features of Gramsci’s and Togliatti’s work, deepening them in a democratic sense and refusing to align himself with the Soviets.

The launch of the policy of Eurocommunism in the 1970s was an attempt to establish an organic alternative platform of democratic communism that was different from and opposed to that of Eastern Europe. Enrico Berlinguer can be considered in some respects a synthesis, but also an overcoming, of Gramsci and Togliatti. From the former, he drew the ethical charge, the

“long thoughts”, the idea of a “great policy” that aspired to refund the entire political scenario, primarily that of the communist movement. From the latter, Berlinguer drew both the political realism of the great Italian tradition (from Machiavelli to Gaetano Mosca) and the new international vision contained in the *Jalta Memorial*: the world, not just the communist movement, was now polycentric, no longer dual. Starting from this conviction Berlinguer deployed his attempt to affirm new democratic communism, not only national, whose main characteristics will be investigated.

1. ***Gramsci and the idea of hegemony***

There is a red thread running through the entire history of the Italian Communist Party, which was founded in 1921 and a few years later began to have very original characteristics, under the leadership of Antonio Gramsci. Through the examination of historical facts and the writings of the three major theoretical and political exponents of the Party – Antonio Gramsci, Palmiro Togliatti, and Enrico Berlinguer – it’s possible to see how throughout their history the Italian Communists gradually succeeded in elaborating an idea of democratic Communism, respectful of the parliamentary method, of individual rights, but always critical of the free market and the fundamental mechanisms of capitalism. (Agosti, 1999: 17-25).

This search for a democratic version of communism was made possible, in my opinion, by the fact that at the basis of this party was a thinker like Antonio Gramsci, who in 1924 assumed the leadership of the Communist Party of Italy, putting an end to Bordiga’s sectarian politics (D’Orsi, 2018: 239-255), and then above all with his theoretical-political reflections entrusted to the *Prison Notebooks*, written in prison between 1929 and 1935, where he stressed the need for a rethink of socialism compared to how it had imposed itself in Russia, the impossibility of repeating in more advanced countries (“West”, as he called them) the Leninist model, the October Revolution, the taking of power as an armed insurrection. This reflection opened the way for Gramsci to re-evaluate the necessity of conquering the consensus.

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In particular, the central focus of Gramsci's mature reflection is the theory of hegemony (Cospito, 2011: 77-127), which at the beginning of the *Notebooks* takes on a different meaning from that we find in the earlier Bolshevik debate, because in Gramsci the emphasis is primarily on political leadership and then also on cultural leadership, which must be conquered for him even before going to the government. Looking at the Italian Risorgimento, Gramsci notes that Cavour's Moderates could lead other social and political forces before the conquest of power, building consensus around the role of Piedmont and the Savoy bourgeoisie (Gramsci, 1975: 40-42; Gramsci 1992: 136-137).

Gramsci writes that the Moderate Party was the representative of a cohesive social class, while the so-called Action Party (Mazzini, Garibaldi, etc.) was not organically connected to any particular class and this was the reason for its intrinsic weakness. Moving from historiographical discourse to political theory, Gramsci affirms, like Machiavelli, that a force in power must be both "lead" and "dominant", but in his elaboration, the importance of leadership, the element of consensus to obtain especially from civil society, became more and more important as he proceeded in writing the *Notebooks*.

The Sardinian thinker insists on the necessity of conquering hegemony before taking power and on the fact that, once in government, it was not necessary to count only on the "power and material force" but it was necessary to continue to count on consensus even after having conquered power, so that "lead" and "political hegemony" are equivalent (Gramsci, 1975: 41; Gramsci 1992: 137). Even if it remains true that in every type of state there is also a component characterized by its repressive apparatuses, a fact that Gramsci recognizes, the Sardinian author in the course of his prison reflection seems to have better focused on how the "direction" took place: it was no more only political, but it was also and above all "intellectual and moral", cultural in a large sense.

This Gramscian reflection opens the way for a democratic theory of power, which contemplates the conquest of power through consent (Cospito, 2021: 114-128). The battle to conquer or maintain hegemony developed for Gramsci, in the contemporary era of mass society, through the decisive role

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of the state. The starting question at the basis of the whole prison reflection was the following: why, even in the face of profound economic crises, had the existing power in the “West” resisted and the revolution been defeated? This was the starting point for Gramsci’s original reflection on power in complex societies (Gramsci, 1975: 168-169). The conception of the state as a place for the formation of consensus emerged from §. 47 of *Notebook 1*, entitled *Hegel and Associationism*, in which Gramsci asserted that “Hegel’s doctrine of parties and associations as the ‘private’ fabric of the state prefigured the “consensus of the governed, but with an organized consent, not the generic and vague consensus which is declared at the time of elections”. In other words, one arrived at elections with a consensus around the ruling class that had already been actively obtained thanks above all to the role of public and private institutions, which for him were also part of the enlarged or integral state. Gramsci continued by writing:

The state has and demands consent, but it also “educates” this consent through political and trade-union associations which, however, are a private organism, left to the private initiative of the ruling class. Thus, in a certain sense, Hegel already goes beyond pure constitutionalism and theorizes the parliamentary state with its regime of parties (Gramsci, 1975: 56-57; Gramsci 1992: 153).

Even if the concepts of hegemony or integral state – which for Gramsci means precisely the strict dialectical relationship that exists in modernity between the state as traditionally understood and civil society (Liguori, 2006: 13-42) – are not made explicit, Gramsci finds in Hegel the first form of understanding of the new morphology of the State, characterized not only by repressive-coercive apparatuses, but also by the correlation between state and civil society (which for Gramsci is not the economic society of Marx but, following Croce’s influence, is the set of places where public opinion is formed). These are the hegemonic apparatuses of modern societies, that is, the set of cultural, ideological and organizational structures, the so-called “trenches and fortifications of the ruling class” (Gramsci, 1975: 333; Gramsci, 1996: 53), the “robust fortresses and emplacement” (Gramsci, 1975: 866;

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Gramsci, 2007: 169) – as Gramsci calls them using the metaphorical language of the First World War – which served to form public opinion, to obtain and guarantee consensus; a public opinion that was influenced precisely by schools, newspapers, churches, parties, associations, no matter if public or private. It was the “hegemonic apparatus” (Gramsci, 1975: 59; Gramsci, 1992: 156) that stands behind all political and social power, and indeed constitutes its most important and enduring element. Normally, the hegemony exercised through the parliamentary regime was for Gramsci characterized by a “combination of force and consensus”, with the fundamental role of the organs of public opinion. So, in the parliamentary regime, hegemony turned out to be a balancing act between “force and consensus”, and the conditioning of public opinion is aimed at trying to prevent a revolution from happening, without the need to repress it by force (Gramsci, 1975: 58-59; Gramsci, 1992: 155-156). If the convincing work done by the hegemonic apparatuses were not enough, the use of force was always possible.

Gramsci, with this new conception of the “integral state”, photographed the new reality of the twentieth-century state that actively intervened in society. This state was no more than the state of 1800, which was only repressive, the liberal “night watchman”: the twentieth-century state was interventionist, both in the economy and in the organization of consensus (Liguori 2006: 14-19).

For Gramsci, Hegel had intuited the characteristics of modernity, and the first moment of the manifestation of mass society was the French Revolution. He uses the expression “private fabric of the state”, which is the intervention of the state in society, which was, however, carried out through private associations, that were the moments through which consensus was built.

Gramsci asserted that democracy presented itself as a spontaneous consensus, behind which, however, there was a great action of conviction through these apparently “private”, but also public, organisms that produce a diffused culture, a mass “common sense”, a “conception of the world”, therefore a hegemony (on the set of Gramscian concepts: Liguori and Voza, 2009).

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Gramsci was therefore aware that in the 1920s the Communists had underestimated the importance of consensus and that was one of the reasons why their attempt to replicate the Russian Revolution in the West had failed. Once again, it should be emphasized that this Gramscian awareness opens up the prospect of the future reevaluation and acceptance of democracy in the Italian Communists, in Togliatti, and especially in Enrico Berlinguer.

Gramsci saw the social and political reality as a battlefield in which a struggle for hegemony was fought, as each fundamental class of a given historical period fielded its ideas, its worldviews, and its intellectuals, to fight this battle. Because of this vision of the political struggle, the Sardinian thinker can be considered the one who opened the way for a democratic conception of the same, and the class struggle, because the fundamental problem was the search for consensus, as one could not govern without it.

Gramsci, however, went beyond formal or parliamentary democracy, as he did not share the naive view of democracy itself as something limited to election day, the electoral vote, in which the citizen would be called upon to express his opinion: the leading classes for Gramsci permanently organized consensus, and election day is only the culmination of this process (Gramsci 1975: 929-930; Gramsci, 2007: 225-226).

Gramsci also proposes “a study of how the ideological structure of a dominant class is organized, that is, the material organization meant to preserve, defend and develop the theoretical or ideological ‘front’” (Gramsci 1975: 332; Gramsci 1992: 52). He speaks about the press, which at his time was the most important mass media, but also to everything that could influence public opinion: “libraries, schools, associations, and clubs of various kinds, even architecture, the layout of streets and their names” (Gramsci 1975: 332-333; Gramsci 1996: 53). The model to which Gramsci looked with admiration was the Catholic Church and its ability to influence society (Gramsci 1975: 333; Gramsci, 1996: 53).

Gramsci’s conception of ideology in the *Notebooks*, which is complex and articulated, can be described as a “conception of the world”. The ideology of different social subjects is influenced by the struggle for hegemony. Subjects

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are influenced by the different worldviews that not only exist –, but also fight each other in society. In particular, for Gramsci, the revolutionary party is an agent that seeks to oppose the existent hegemony by proposing a different and alternative conception of the world, which also reflects the economic needs of the social classes it represents –, but incorporates them into a broader proposal for the organization of national society. Gramsci's thought is profoundly anti-economic –, and distinguishes it from most existing versions of “orthodox” Marxism.

Consequently, Gramsci gives much importance to the role of intellectuals, who are those who elaborate on common sense, and conceptions of the world, and are among the main protagonists of the fight between different hegemonies. About this vision, Gramsci speaks of traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals. The first are those who are usually defined as intellectuals. The second are those who operate in closer contact with the world of production and who organize society on the behalf of the social classes in power or struggling for power (Gramsci, 1975: 1512-1540).

In the identification of the figure of the intellectual – the Sardinian thinker asserts – we often make the mistake of considering only those who do work defined as intellectual and not all those who instead carry out an “organizational and connective” function, both on the level of structure and on that of superstructures. In this way, Gramsci expanded the category of intellectuals, going so far as to say that “all men are intellectuals”, but “not all men have the function of intellectuals in society”, adding ironically that anyone can cook two eggs without being defined as a cook. In other words, “specialized categories are formed for the exercise of the intellectual function” (Gramsci, 1975: 1516). Consequently, for Gramsci, everyone is an intellectual because every human being, regardless of his activity in life, theoretical or manual, is a thinking being. Every action requires thought, and an understanding of practical action. For this reason, Gramsci believed that philosophy, a vision of the world, is always implicit in every action.

Then it remains true that, regardless of this large conception of the intellectual, each class has its organic intellectuals and tries to conquer the

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traditional intellectuals, that is, those who are generally defined as such (who have more historical-theoretical knowledge, more ability to think coherently and rationally). This analysis of the role of the intellectual in the *Prison Notebooks* is connected with the fact that intellectuals are decisive in the conquest of hegemony. The struggle for hegemony develops when the subordinate class launches its own challenge for consensus, seeking to assert its own “conception of the world”, which allows for revolutionary change. One example that Gramsci gives is that of the Enlightenment. In this case, we are talking about intellectuals often coming right from the ranks of the nascent bourgeoisie (lawyers, entrepreneurs, judges) or the more progressive aristocracy who prepared the French Revolution and became the leading group of the revolution, representatives of a new type of class, who lived off their labor. The latter were “organic” intellectuals, but at the same time the bourgeoisie had won over to its cause the great philosophers, ideologies, etc., who had been decisive in creating the cultural climate that made the revolution possible. We can say, following Gramsci, that the bourgeoisie had conquered hegemony before coming to power, and it was precisely this fact, the new climate created by Enlightenment thought, that allowed the French Revolution, undermining in advance the cultural and ideological basis of traditional power.

In the vision of the Sardinian thinker, politicians also perform the function of intellectuals. For the proletariat, which has difficulty in elaborating its intellectuals because of the unfavorable starting conditions in which it finds itself in the capitalist social order, the function of its political party is of fundamental importance. For Gramsci, it was the party of the working classes that had to organize and carry out the struggle for hegemony, collectively making up for the shortcomings that workers may have in becoming intellectuals in the strict sense. For the “subaltern classes”, the political party was the specific place where organic intellectuals were formed. In the opinion of Gramsci, “all members of a political party must be considered as intellectuals” (Gramsci, 1975: 1523) because they all must, or should, perform a function of political-intellectual leadership, that is, as Gramsci put it, the party must have a “function that is directive and organizational, that is educational, that is, intellectual” (Gramsci, 1975: 1523).

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Therefore, the party is the place where members do not enter as defined by their social and professional status: they carry out a different function, which is not (or should not be) the “corporate” one, of only defending their economic interests, but is (or should be) a political function, that is, one that looks at general relations between classes in a national and international context. For Gramsci, the political party must have also a pedagogical mission, meant in a broad sense: it must dedicate itself to education and the social and cultural progress of the less privileged classes.

About the political party, Gramsci uses a metaphor that refers to Machiavelli, the metaphor of the “modern prince”: Gramsci’s prince – a leader capable of changing the existing situation – is no longer like the Machiavelli’s one, also because Gramsci’s prince is not represented just by a single person, but by a collective entity. The *Modern Prince* is also a book that Gramsci would like to write, combining political principles and the ability to inflame minds to call for action. It is a book that should have the power to stimulate, persuade and inspire a “collective will”. It is a “political manifesto” like that of Marx and Engels. For Gramsci, *Notebook 13* is the first draft of a “manifesto” that he would like to compose to educate the militants of his party, to get them out of determinist and economicist Marxism, and let them come into the concrete and realistic analysis of the relations of forces.

Furthermore, because he was an attentive reader of Italian elitism, especially of Gaetano Mosca and Robert Michels (also exponents of the “realist” tradition), although he criticizes in some notes of the *Notebooks* the conclusions arrived at by these authors, Gramsci pays attention to the problems about the relation between rulers and ruled.

Through the notion of hegemony, therefore, Gramsci gave an important and innovative contribution to the development of Marxist political and philosophical thought, not only the Marxist one, as proved by the great international and multidisciplinary success that this category had and still has today.

Despite introducing the need for the consensus conquest to take political power, Gramsci does not fully theorize a democracy definition, but he lays

its foundation. We will see how these thoughts will be at the basis of Palmiro Togliatti's political choices regarding the relocation of the PCI within the Italian parliamentary and constitutional framework, since the fall of fascism in Italy.

2. Togliatti and the “Italian way to socialism”

After Gramsci's arrest on 8 November 1926, Togliatti became the leader of the Communist Party of Italy. Moving between Paris, Moscow, and, later, Spain, he remained in exile for almost twenty years. During this period, he approved Stalin's policies: first, the policy of social-fascism, justifying this choice due to the “state of necessity” in which his small party was, forced into hiding by the fascist dictatorship. Then, since 1935, Togliatti contributed with a leading role to the policy of the “popular fronts” and during the experience of the civil war in Spain, he wrote interesting reflections on the importance of democracy (Agosti, 1996). When he came back to Italy in March 1944, he felt free to elaborate and try to implement a policy that was in many ways new, certainly not in contrast with the policy of the Soviet Union, but innovative and convincing in pursuing the scope of a new relationship between socialism and democracy.

First of all, he realized the “Salerno turning point”, convincing the Italian Communist Party (which had changed its name in 1943) and the other anti-fascist parties to postpone the institutional question (the alternative between monarchy and republic) and form a government of national unity to continue the fight against Nazi-fascism and the liberation of the Italian peninsula (Agosti, 1996: 279).

Second matter Togliatti convinced his party to abandon any insurrectionist temptation or any hypothesis of taking power by force and to accept parliamentary democracy: there was no longer to be any contradiction between democracy and socialism. Italian communists should just participate in the democratic dialectic.

Given these assumptions, after the end of the war and the victory of the referendum in favor of the Republic, the Italian Communists, and Togliatti

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personally, were the protagonists in the writing of the new democratic Constitution, whose elaboration continued even after the beginning of the Cold War, coming into effect at the beginning of 1948. To ensure in the country the alliance between the major political forces, mainly the new way with Catholics, Togliatti accepted put in the new Constitution the so-called “Lateran Pacts”, the “Concordat” between the Catholic Church and the Italian State that in 1929 had been one of the greatest successes of Mussolini and the whole Fascism.

In these same years, Togliatti re-founded the Italian Communist Party in a very different way from the third-internationalist tradition model. The PCI became a mass party, turned into a deeply so deep-rooted one, respectful of the institutions, capable of dialogue with the Catholic Church and the “Democrazia Cristiana”, the political expression of Italian Catholics (Togliatti, 1984: 5-38).

This new path for Italian communists was also a kind of new way throughout Togliatti tried to “translate” Gramsci’s teaching due to the new situation. He had to adapt some of the main teachings of the Prison Notebooks (which he had been able to read during the war) to the new landscape following the end of fascism. Especially the conviction that the revolution (understood as profound change, as social and political transformation) in Italy and the West, in general, could not have the same characteristics as the Russian Revolution of 1917.

According to Togliatti, Italian communist’s action had to be in keeping with the tools of parliamentary democracy, it should aim to get consensus, through the conquest of a political, social, and cultural “hegemony” and follow Gramsci’s “war of position”, refusing any hypothesis of “war of movement”, insurreccional, as the Greek communists had done with catastrophic results.

Togliatti, in other words, agreed with Gramsci on the need for hegemony achievement. For this reason, the PCI’s relationship with intellectuals became fundamental. To get this, Togliatti also tried to attract to the party a generation of intellectuals who had grown up in fascist culture, often students of Benedetto Croce, who had begun to look with “sympathy” to the Communists since the mid-thirties (Vittoria, 2014).

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Indeed, one of the main points of Togliatti's way to the conquest of intellectuals, was the "Gramsci operation": the introduction of his figure and his writings, to promote a new approach to intellectuals, detaching them from the hegemony of Benedetto Croce on one hand, but without proposing them the "Marxism-Leninism" on the other hand, emphasizing the political and cultural autonomy of the Italian Communist Party from the Soviet Union thanks to Gramsci heritage (Liguori, 2012: 58-59).

The kind of democracy Togliatti wanted to establish in Italy was very far from the political regime implemented in the Soviet Union and later in other Eastern European countries. This idea comes from Togliatti's look at what has happened during the anti-fascist struggle for liberation, the Italian Resistance: the encounter and the collaboration between different social classes and different ideal and political currents. This is the reason why he proposed the realization of an "organized democracy" in different political parties of various tendencies, a pluralistic democracy, with a strong role played by the mass parties.

Furthermore, Togliatti was proposing neither a socialist economy like in the USSR, nor a return to the liberal capitalism of the past, but an economy based on solidarity, aimed at the common good, with an active but not totalitarian presence of the State. These proposals would be acknowledged by the Italian Constitution of 1948. Who largely realize the expansion of the public sector in the economy were the Christian Democrats through the publicly owned company, such as Iri, Eni, etc. (Agosti, 1999: 300). (Agosti, 1999: 300).

Due to the intensification of the Cold War, Togliatti, on one hand, was under pressure by the Soviet Union and other socialist countries to align himself with them and their models. On the other hand, Togliatti had to face a hard dispute with the Christian Democrats, induced by the United States to break off any kind of partnership with the PCI. For all these years until Stalin in 1953, there was a "cooling" of Togliatti's Salerno way.

However, Togliatti always prevented his party from abandoning the democracy field. Even when in 1948 he was personally the object of a Fascist attack. Another example of Togliatti's idea of democracy was the tough

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battle Communists engaged in the early 1950s against the introduction of a majority electoral system, the so-called “fraudulent law”. To do that he did a temporary alliance with small liberal minorities, playing a key role, against a law seen by many ones in Italy as a distortion of the democratic regime designed by the Constitution (Sassoon, 2017: 154-155).

Moreover, in 1951 Togliatti rejected Stalin’s demand to move to a country of the communist bloc to direct the Cominform: an act of great importance that makes us understand the detachment between the Italian leader and the Stalinist leadership of the international communist movement (Höbel, 2016: 105-106).

In 1956, there was the XX CPSU Congress. It’s a new age for the whole international communist movement. During the same year, Togliatti, referring to Gramsci’s lessons as the creator of an “Italian way to socialism”, strongly revived the item of the original characteristics of the PCI, stating, for example, on March 13, 1956: “the search for our own, Italian way of development towards socialism has been our constant concern. I believe I can say that it was already Antonio Gramsci’s constant concern” (Togliatti, 1984: 110-111).

Even after the Soviet intervention in Hungary, which severely tested the stability of the PCI and especially the relationship with intellectuals, Togliatti had been inspired by Gramsci. The PCI Secretary highlighted the mistakes of the Hungarian leaders, who, in his opinion, failed to create an organic relationship with the masses, a relation that would have prevented a Soviet intervention. There had been a lack of hegemony. Related to the invasion of Hungary, Togliatti’s attitude was too aligned with the decisions taken by the USSR. However, in the Report to the VIII Congress of the PCI, a few weeks after the Soviet invasion, in December 1956, Togliatti recalled the Gramscian method as a necessary tool “to avoid the errors of the Communists in power”. A method of anti-dogmatic confrontation based on the “concrete analysis of the concrete situation”. In any case, as Guido Liguori affirms, “the PCI lost a historic opportunity to propose a different model of communism, distancing itself from the USSR, without breaking with it” (Liguori, 2009b: 20).

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The VIII Congress of the Italian Communist Party, however, relaunched the watchwords of polycentrism, which Togliatti had begun to spread since the previous June in the important interview with the journal *Nuovi argomenti*, namely the hypothesis of different routes to socialism in different countries and of the “unity in diversity” that had to characterize the international communist movement.

In the opening report to the VIII Congress (Togliatti, 1984: 184-239), Togliatti once again backed the need for a world policy based “on the renunciation of the organization of military blocs” and therefore the need for a structure of international politics that was articulated and not based on the opposition of the two blocs.

But above all, the leader of the PCI moved a strong criticism of those Eastern European countries that had adopted a “slavish imitation of the Soviet model”, affirming the “principle of different routes of development towards socialism”, which also included the need to respect the sovereignty of smaller countries. The socialist states were to have their own, respectful of their respective diversities, realizing, once and for all, that there was no more and could no longer exist a “leading state or a leading party” (Togliatti, 1984: 206).

For the first time, Togliatti officially proposed the overcoming of the “leading party” by proposing an “Italian way to socialism”. It had to be based on “structural reforms”, not yet socialism, but an “economic structures transformation” that could open the way towards socialism within the democratic-parliamentary framework established by the Constitution. The first step was “limiting and breaking the economic power of the monopolies” through the nationalization of strategic sectors, provided for by the Republican Constitution (Togliatti, 1984: 211).

After 1956, the divergence between the USSR and China began, while the dualism of both with the United States continued and international tensions and dangers of war increased, as in the case of the “Cuba crisis” of 1962. In front of the “terrible, frightening ‘new’” represented by the atomic bomb, which could destroy mankind (Vacca, 2021: 126), Togliatti relaunched the

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appeal to the Catholics to defend both peace and that detente so much desired by the communist leader.

In March 1963, in fact, in Bergamo, the city of Pope John XXIII, Togliatti gave a speech that became famous – later known as *The Fate of Man*, which in content and form anticipated one of the most important encyclicals of Pope John, the *Pacem in Terris*. In this speech Togliatti took up the theme of collaboration between Communists and Catholics for the salvation of mankind, against the dangers of a nuclear war, asserting that the division of the world into two opposing military blocs should be “modified and removed from the way” because peace had now become “a necessity, if a man does not want to annihilate himself” (Togliatti 1984: 699).

For Togliatti, the main aspect of this new relationship was not only the peace matter, but also the new issues that emerged along, with the development of the “consumer society”, which had led to the “alienation of modern man” and the “destruction of the family in industrial society”, with the corollary of new oppression of women. Togliatti hoped for a socialist society as opposed to that “solitude of modern man”, who, even when he has all material goods, is no longer be “to communicate with other men” (Togliatti 1984: 706).

The Secretary of the PCI concluded his speech by affirming that Catholics could not be insensible “to the new dimensions that the world is taking on” and reiterated that the aspiration to socialism could find in religious faith a new stimulus “meeting the dramatic problems of the contemporary world” (Togliatti 1984: 707).

It was a theoretical innovation of great importance, without any precedent, since Togliatti, addressing the Catholic world in these terms, asserted that they could contribute to the construction of a socialist society. In the Western European scenario, the Italian communist leader intended to provoke a structural change in capitalist society through the creation of a platform that would unite all the working-class and democratic forces of the left. It was necessary for Togliatti that the left fight within the existing society to change its economic direction, creating a different model with democratic bases. For Togliatti, the left needed to fight within the existing society to change its economic direction, creating a different model with democratic foundations.

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For the secretary of the PCI, the Western communist parties could determine the construction of a new united European left (including socialists and social democrats), able to bring new changes on the international scene; it was a new internationalism, different from the Soviet one but also the Chinese one.

Moreover, throughout the communist movement, “the concept of socialist democracy”, a real mass political participation, had to be restored. Togliatti insisted on the need for democratic reform within the Soviet party-state, also in the other socialist countries, that it would affect the whole system.

The Soviets asked Togliatti for a summit meeting. He, although reluctant, decided to go to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1964. Togliatti, while he was waiting to meet the Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, wrote some notes in Yalta entitled Memorandum on the issues of the international workers’ movement and its unity. It represented an opportunity for him to take stock of the position of the Italian Communists about the Soviets and within the international Communist movement.

The meeting between Chruščëv and Togliatti never took place because on August 13 the Secretary of the PCI suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and went into a coma: on August 21 he died. The Memorandum was not intended to be published, as it was conceived as a note given the confidential meeting between Togliatti and Chruščëv, but the new Secretary of the PCI, Luigi Longo, decided to publish it, defying Soviet hostility, and it became Togliatti’s political testament, which would go down in history as the *Jalta Memorial*.

Togliatti put in words a proposal for a polycentric structure of the international communist movement, which would reflect the new multicentric world order: in other words, he called for the coexistence of different parties and experiences within the communist movement, which had to continue to remain united despite its differences, but with full recognition of the different national ways to socialism.

Togliatti also openly criticized the hypocrisy and triumphalism of the communist parties in power, saying: “The worst thing is to give the impression that everything always goes well, while suddenly we are then faced with the need to talk about difficult situations and explain them” (Togliatti, 1988: 45).

Fundamental appears the great matter of an “overcoming regime of the limitation and the suppression of democratic and personal freedoms” that had survived the end of Stalinism.

Togliatti was not listened to by the Soviet leaders, not only because he died suddenly on August 21, 1964, before meeting Chruščëv, but also because the problems he raised and the recipes he proposed were too hard to be accepted by the Eastern communists.

3. *Enrico Berlinguer and the democratic Communism*

The importance of Enrico Berlinguer lies in the fact that he consistently developed some ideas already present in his predecessors, in particular, the idea of hegemony as consensus we find in Gramsci, and Togliatti's elaboration of political action according to the democratic principles of the Italian Constitution, who contributed to writing as a prominent protagonist.

Berlinguer will develop a mature autonomy from the model of the Soviet Union, as he will demonstrate in 1956, when there was the Soviet invasion of Hungary: Berlinguer agreed with the trade unionist Giuseppe De Vittorio on the fact that the democratization of socialist countries was the condition for their salvation (Guerra and Trentin, 1997).

However, as Adriano Guerra asserts, Berlinguer became a protagonist on the international scene in 1964, when the French communists, aligning themselves with the Soviets, proposed to the Italian communists the convocation of a world conference to excommunicate the Chinese heresy (Guerra, 2010: 57-58). Berlinguer rejected this proposal, affirming the principle of the “national way to socialism”, saying that the Chinese had every right to build in their country the socialism that they wanted. This position was maintained, even though the Chinese Communists were very far from the ideas of the Italian Communists, and indeed, two years earlier, they had attacked Togliatti for his idea of democracy and peace.

Berlinguer's maturity in to regard the idea of a “new internationalism” began with Eurocommunism -, when he tried to create a first nucleus of the communist movement different and alternative from the Soviet communist

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movement. He wanted communism based on the recognition of civil and political freedoms: freedom of opinion, of the press, political and trade union organization, religion, etc. (Liguori, 2014: 63-65). In this way, it claims the legacy of liberal freedoms (established by the Italian Constitution of 1948).

Eurocommunism was a project that from 1976 involved the three largest communist parties in Europe: the Italian Communist Party, the French Communist Party, and the Spanish Communist Party. It also had support from the Yugoslav, Japanese, and British Communist Parties as well (Barbagallo, 2006: 359).

The official birth of Eurocommunism is usually considered the 1977 meeting among Enrico Berlinguer (PCI), Santiago Carrillo (PCE), and Georges Marchais (PCF), in Madrid, where the so-called “new way” was theorized. PCI had already for many years developed a line of independence from Moscow, starting with the explicitly declared dissent on the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. In 1975, the PCI and the PCE solemnly declared that they wanted to “march together towards socialism” in “peace and freedom”. In 1976 in Moscow, Enrico Berlinguer, in front of an assembly of communist delegates, had spoken of a “pluralist system” (which the interpreter prudently translated as “multiform”) and expressed the PCI’s intentions to build “a socialism that we think is necessary and possible in Italy”. For Berlinguer, Eurocommunism meant, first of all, detachment from the Soviet Union, according to the principles summarized at the 25th Congress of the PCI in February 1975.

In this regard, the three affirmations that sanctioned the “tear” are fundamental for understanding the terms of the question and the political-cultural context in which the PCI action was moving:

:

We fight for a socialist society that is the highest moment of all democratic conquests. A society that guarantees respect for all individual and collective freedoms, religious freedoms and freedom of culture, art, and science. We think that in Italy we can and must advance toward socialism, but also build a socialist society with the contribution of political forces, organizations, and different parties; and that the working class can and must face its historical function in a pluralistic and democratic system (Berlinguer, 1976: 115).

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At that time, with the proposal of Eurocommunism, Berlinguer was thinking above all of Europe as an autonomous political subject and force and of the progressive liberation of the great Euro-Western countries from the straitjacket of US-USSR bipolarity. In this way, the foundations of new socialism were established.

Certainly, Berlinguer did not ignore the fact that the process of European unity was also led by forces linked “to capitalist structures that we want to transform”, but he thought that the challenge had to be accepted. A struggle that had as its objective the democratization of the European Community, the construction of “a Europe of peoples and workers”, as a prerequisite for “socialism in freedom”. The solution – Berlinguer asserted – could not be “retreating” to the old nation-states.

On this basis, Berlinguer met Altiero Spinelli, who was fighting to pass “from a simple common market” to a “political unification of Europe” (Berlinguer, 2014:185). The father of European federalism was elected in the lists of the PCI both in the Italian parliament and in the Strasbourg one, and he also became vice-president of the European Communist Group: he began with Berlinguer a dialogue made of some dissonance, but above all of the convergence and common battles.

When the French Communist Party, following Moscow’s orders, caused the failure of Eurocommunism, Berlinguer went ahead without denying his ideas. In November 1977, in Moscow, on the anniversary of the October Revolution, he defied the Soviets by asserting that democracy was a universal value, that he considered the only possible way. He later advanced the idea of a “third way”, different from both authoritarian Soviet communism and social democracy, because the second one was too accommodating to capitalism (Berlinguer 2014: 53). Later, he developed the concept of a “third way”, which meant that it was not possible to conceptualize democratic communism as a contemporary way to follow along with the two. The Italian leader asserted that the era of both social democracy and the Soviet Union was over and it was necessary to look for other ways to build a post-capitalist society (Berlinguer, 1982: 225).

In internal politics, becoming Secretary of the PCI, Berlinguer tried an accord with the main Italian Catholic party, the DC, to overcome the residues of the Cold War. However, the Christian Democrat leader, Aldo Moro, who was in favor of this agreement, was killed by terrorists, it is suspected with the support of foreign secret services (Liguori 2014: 83). Certainly, Berlinguer's policy provoked strong hostility from both the United States (which in any case did not want a communist party in government) and the Soviet Union (which feared that the ideas of the PCI would also conquer the communist parties of Eastern Europe, as had happened to Dubcek's communist party).

After Moro's death, the Christian Democrats moved towards conservative positions. Berlinguer tried to redefine the identity of his party, focusing on the moral question, that is, on the relationship between ethics and politics; on the opening of the party to civil society, and the dialogue with feminist, pacifist, and environmentalist movements (Tortorella, 1994).

Unfortunately, during this attempt at a theoretical-political rethinking, Berlinguer died suddenly, leaving this project unfinished.

Immediately after his death, for the first and last time, in the 1984 European elections, the PCI obtained more votes than the DC, as a final tribute of the people to this leader who was also recognized by his opponents as a morally upright person, guided politically only by his ideals and not by interests.

Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to demonstrate the strong elements of continuity existing in the most relevant political thinkers of the PCI tradition. The most important representatives of the Italian Communism tradition are, above all, Antonio Gramsci, Palmiro Togliatti and Enrico Berlinguer. This field is different from the others due to its specific ability to approach and bring into dialogue the themes of democracy and socialism, both on a national and international level.

In the last stage of his life, Togliatti indicated in the *Jalta Memorial* to all socialist countries the way to a partial autonomy from the USSR. "Unity in diversity"

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was Togliatti's proposal to the international communist movement, but all the parties "loyal" to Moscow did not follow him. This led to very serious consequences, as was evident, especially with the "Prague invasion" of 1968.

Since those years, Berlinguer continued without hesitation to proclaim a way to socialism that was democratic, but that did not renounce the will to transform society, proclaiming the need for a revolution in a new and democratic way, as indicated by Antonio Gramsci.

Through the three stages of "Eurocommunism", "third way" and "third phase", Berlinguer came to an idea of socialism that was completely different from the "Soviet model". Furthermore, in 1977 in Moscow, he proclaimed the "universal value of democracy" (Berlinguer, 2014: 170), questioning the actual legitimacy of Soviet "real socialism"; if it could be defined as Socialism, because of the lack of any space for democratic values and individual freedoms.

It was the culmination of a long historical, political, theoretical, and cultural process, the salient points of which I have tried to outline and I believe I can say they confirm my hypotheses.

For Berlinguer was necessary the recognition of the value of personal, political, and social freedoms, as well as the idea of a socialist and democratic solution to the economic matters, planning that would allow the coexistence of various forms of economic initiative and the public and private management of enterprises.

The fundamental assumption of the democracy concept is the peculiarity of Italian Communism, fully implemented by Berlinguer. It came from Gramsci: from the "maneuver war" to the "war of position", the idea of hegemony, the look for consensus; and from Togliatti: the explicit acceptance of multiparty, republican democracy, represented by the Italian Constitution of 1948, and the Italian way to Socialism.

Berlinguer went to the end of this path: *democracy as a universal value* meant not only the will to fight for socialism by following a democratic route, but also criticizing without hesitation the experiences of authoritarian socialism

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of the twentieth century (the “real socialism”), which persisted and were still strengthened after the initial situation of emergency following the October Revolution.

In the long period that goes from Gramsci to Berlinguer, “Italian Communism” was well known; it was a quite homogeneous and wide-ranging theoretical and political phenomenon, a benchmark for different intellectuals and political forces from all around the world.

After Berlinguer’s death, this propulsive thrust towards the construction of a democratic communism alternative to the Soviet one failed. On the one hand, a component of the PCI proclaimed the need to become “social democratic”. On the other hand, in the 1980s, a new neoconservative hegemony was affirmed on an international level, also because the technological revolution of those years (computerization, automation) considerably diminished the working-class component of society, traditionally a reserve of votes and consensus for the Communists.

The attempt, after 1989, to turn PCI into a force that was no longer communist, not even a democratic communist one, as Berlinguer wanted, failed. Even a further step toward a new social democratic or liberal democratic force did not go well and all the parties “heirs” of the PCI and its legacy (PDS, DS, PD) have lost the role of great popular political force that the PCI had for decades.

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