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The Italian Socialist Party in postwar Europe: a study of its relationship with the USSR and the October Revolution from the 1940s to the 1960s

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The main goal of this article is to analyse the relationship between the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) – a party that followed a different trajectory from other Western social democratic parties following the Second World War – and the October Revolution and the USSR from the 1940s to the 1960s. In particular, given the political context of postwar Europe, it aims to use this relationship to understand the party's political and programmatic evolution from a new perspective. To this end, the article is largely based on archival investigation and on a wide examination of press sources from the period.

Keywords: Italian Socialism; October Revolution; Cold War; Italy; USSR; European social democracy.

Introduction

In June 1964, at a conference organised in Milan during the crisis of prime minister Aldo Moro's first organic centre-left government,[1] local PSI federation secretary Giovanni Mosca insisted that his party discuss 'the problems of the leading state, of the leading party' and 'the bureaucratic degenerations' that had occurred in the Soviet Union.[2] This shows that as late as the early 1960s, despite the Socialists being involved in centre-left governments, the relationship with the USSR was still a matter of internal debate.

The PSI's relationship with the Soviet Union, a question that differentiated the Italian party from other Western social democratic parties (Loth 2002, 138–48), originated from positions taken by the party during the initial phase of the Cold War. While most important European social democratic parties, despite their varying perspectives on domestic and international subjects, maintained their pro-Western Bloc disposition, the Italian party took a position in favour of the Soviet Union.

In addition to this particular fracture between the PSI and other Western European socialist forces, the Italian party aligned itself with Eastern Europe socialists, who were directly linked to the USSR. As Ettore Costa has argued in a recent and innovative study, there were three different tendencies within European socialism after the Second World War. The British Labour Party and Scandinavian social democracy were planners: 'socialist parties which, thanks to their hegemony over the working class and their strong organisation, could form majority governments or coalition governments from a position of strength'. The French, Belgian and Dutch parties were federalist: 'those socialist parties that operated in coalition governments and could not convert the state machinery to socialist goals'. The leftists, which included the PSI and the Eastern socialist parties, represented forces that 'rejected bourgeois democracy, emphasised the revolutionary nature

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of socialism and wanted unity of action with the Communists and the Soviet Union' (Costa 2018, 148).

The historiographical debate has investigated the influence of the Soviet myth on the Western and Italian left (Degl'Innocenti 2005; Di Maggio 2017; Flores 1990; Flores 2017; Zaslavski 2004), and has discussed the perspective of Eastern European socialists in the Cold War (Costa 2018; De Graaf 2019). This article explores the connections between the postwar PSI and the October Revolution in the 20 years between the mid-1940s and the late 1960s, during which the PSI moved from being a pro-Soviet party to a part of the Western social-democratic family. Historians have worked on these aspects previously (Höbel 2017) and have analysed the different modalities used by Italian and French Socialists in celebrating October during the postwar period (Cirefice 2017). Here, I will first highlight the ideological and political reasons that led the PSI to consider the October Revolution as a key turning point in the history of the global workers' movement; and, second, the route by which this interpretation was transformed.

This survey will lead to a better understanding of the multiple positions regarding the October Revolution held by socialist representatives concurrently with changes in national and international frameworks: the purpose is to identify the various different ideological and political perspectives present in the PSI by expanding on the stimulating studies at our disposal. At the same time, the party's attitude towards the October Revolution is a pivot for discussing the theoretical, programmatic and political evolution of Italian Socialism up until the late 1960s, thus enriching the historiography on the 'transition from East to West' pursued by the PSI in the postwar period (Perazzoli 2016; Mattera 2017). In other words, this case study will help to highlight changes within the Italian Socialist tradition, tensions between the PSI leadership and the party's rank and file, and the PSI's evolving evaluation of European social democracy, in order to renew the study of revisionism developed by historians at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century (Sassoon 1996; Orlow 2000).

The PSI officially entered the Socialist International in 1966, having not taken part in the supranational reorganisation of the Western European socialist movement after the Second World War (Imlay 2017, 282–300), and, parallel to this long political route, the perception of the October Revolution changed within the party. This article will show how the party moved from considering the revolution as a turning point in working-class history during the late 1940s and early 1950s to viewing it as simply one episode in the history of the international workers' movement. Another dimension that will be explored is the PSI's relationship with the Italian Communist Party (PCI). Taking the October Revolution as a prism through which we can read the political history of Italian Socialism, this article will stress the fact that interpretations at various levels of the PSI organisation changed in line with the degree of its unity with the PCI: a positive reading of October supported a Socialist-Communist alliance; a negative reading illustrated that the two parties were taking different routes.

This article will largely use archival sources (e.g. police reports and correspondence between the national leadership and local party activists) as well as press sources. A variety of sources allows for a better understanding of how the October Revolution was received as a global episode; its impact on the behaviour and political choices of different ranks of PSI militants; and how the party's interpretation of the October Revolution changed with the evolution of the Cold War. Gareth Stedman Jones has underlined the centrality of language in the 'new political history' (1983, 19–24), and focusing on the PSI's public discourse about the October Revolution will contribute to identifying the end of the old language – the pro-Soviet dimension, and the development of the new – the inclination to the West.

The connections between the October Revolution and Italian Socialism will be examined during several major phases in the PSI's history up to 1976, when Bettino Craxi became party secretary: the post-Second World War period and the united front policy; the 'autonomist' period in the 1950s;[3] the centre-left; and the crisis following the failed merger with the Italian Democratic Socialist Party (PSDI). With Craxi's appointment as party leader, the party's Soviet-dominated symbolism began to be replaced with symbols used by Italian Socialism at the end of the nineteenth century. While this did not imply a complete dismissal of the 'ideological hot air' (Sabbatucci 1991a, 117), some changes did take hold – for example, a reduction in the use of the symbolic image of a hammer and sickle on a book: instead, a red carnation became the dominant emblem in the party's logo (Colarizi and Gervasoni 2005, 62–5).

The united front and after: the PSI and the October Revolution in the early 1950s

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the PSI adhered ideologically to 'Marxism-Leninism of the Stalin period' (Galli 2010, 267). Basically, it embraced three main elements of Soviet ideology. First, its determinism, since 'bourgeois and proletarian alike had little choice but to obey history's iron law'. Second, the dismissal of 'liberalism's emphasis on gradual change'. Third, the rejection of capitalist institutions as 'creatures of the ruling class' (Engerman 2010, 23). This alignment, which distanced the PSI from other parties in Western Europe, originated with the USSR's response during the Spanish Civil War: as Pietro Nenni – the most important exponent of postwar Italian Socialism – repeatedly explained, Soviet influence on the party could be traced back to Soviet support for the Republican cause in Spain (Nenni 1977, 80). The anti-fascist attitude of the Soviet Union during the Second World War was also centrally important for Italian Socialism during the years of struggle against Nazi-Fascism.

However, there was a further factor which led the Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (*Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria*, PSIUP) – the name used by the PSI during the years 1943–47 (Degl'Innocenti 1993, 3–9) – to accept the USSR as its supranational reference: an interest in 'the construction of a communist economy in Russia'. For Rodolfo Morandi, an influential intellectual and political leader who supported Socialist-Communist unity (Pinto 2008, 17–33; Panaccione 2015, 34–7), the focus was not on 'copying the experience of Bolshevism' in Italy: instead, his intention was to consider the Soviet example so as to plan a 'collective system of production' that took account of Italy's distinctive traits (Morandi 1975, 73–5). Given the conditions of capitalism's interwar economic crisis, which impelled many Western states to revaluate planning and state regulation (Patel 2016, 171–90), and the fact that European economies had not boomed immediately after the Second World War, the Soviet model (planning, state regulation, nationalisations) exerted a significant appeal for Italian Socialist leaders (Eley 2002, 287–99).

The experience of the 1930s Popular Fronts in Spain and France, the role of the USSR in the resistance to Nazi-Fascism, and the development of a different economic policy, helped to solidify the alliance between the PSIUP and the PCI in Italy (Fedele 1978, 71–2). The Socialist-Communist agreement and Italian Socialism's loyalty to Moscow were reinforced by another no less important factor: the PSIUP reliance on financial aid from the USSR in the early postwar period (Zaslavsky 2004; Mattera 2004, 151–95).

To fully comprehend the PSIUP's fascination with the October Revolution, a consideration of the Cold War and its various reflections on the European continent is central. The geopolitical space left by the fall of Nazi Germany and the disappearance of the nineteenth-century empires was soon filled by the ascent of the United States and the Soviet Union as global 'superpowers'. This new rivalry was not simply geopolitical, it was also a battle of ideologies between capitalist nations and Socialist countries (Gould-Davies 1999, 90–109; MacDonald 2000, 180–206) – an ideological conflict that shaped the initial phase of the Cold War (Westad 2017, 98–127).

Such evolution of the global framework made for an unstable balance within the PSIUP, since it acted as a 'border party' that tried to bridge the separation between the Eastern and Western blocs to avoid repercussions for the entire international Socialist movement (Mazower 2000, 294–96). There were those among the Socialist ranks, such as Pietro Nenni, Aldo Morandi and Lelio Basso – another key exponent of the PSIUP's left wing – who, despite having reservations, were inclined towards loyalty to Moscow and consequently towards combined action with the PCI (Di Nolfo and Muzzi 1981, 211–15); but there were also those, such as the faction around Giuseppe Saragat, who pressed for an Italian Socialism that was unaffiliated to the Communist Party so as to strengthen ties with Western Socialist parties (Donno 2009, 105–6).

During 1946–7, the geopolitical situation turned towards the crystallisation of the two blocs (Etges 2013, 160; Maier 1978), leading to the dissolution of those margins of independence in which Italian Socialism had thrived (Sabbatucci 1991b, 69). Global events during those two years led to another division among Italian Socialists – the Palazzo Barberini schism of January 1947 – with considerable consequences for the Socialist movement in both Eastern and Western Europe (De Graaf 2019, 21–41). The decision of Saragat's faction – which had named itself the Partito Socialista dei Lavoratori Italiani (Italian Workers' Socialist Party, PSLI) – to position itself on the side of European social democracies, corresponded to the decision of groups close to Nenni, now collectively known as the PSI, to firmly side with the Soviet cause (Pipitone 2013, 24–34).

While in Western Europe, notwithstanding a few nuances (e.g. hesitations within German social democracy or the persistence of a pro-détente wing within the British Labour Party led by Aneurin Bevan), the majority of the socialist movement sided with the US in the Cold War, in Italy most socialist militants were in favour of the Nenni alliance project with the USSR and the PCI (Mattera 2017, 21–2). Nevertheless, to reinforce the party machine after the 1947 division, the symbols of the Soviet Union and the October Revolution constituted a sort of identity apparatus.

During 1947, combined action with the PCI led the Socialists to put aside their differences and take a stance more inclined towards the interests of the Kremlin. While the PSI's definitive expulsion from the Committee of the International Socialist Conference (COMISCO – the precursor to the reconstituted Socialist International) did not take place until 1949 (Colarizi 2005, 17–23), the party regarded the USSR as its supranational reference as early as November 1947, during the electoral campaign for the first Republican legislature, in which it stood as part of the Popular Democratic Front (FDP) alongside the PCI (Zaslavsky 2004, 156–69).

The PSI specifically restated its adoption of the USSR as its international model around the 30th anniversary of the events of 1917. In October 1947, the seizure of the Winter Palace was remembered in celebratory tones, which regarded the Bolsheviks' rise to power as having fostered Russia's social and economic development. 'The thirtieth anniversary of the October Revolution', ran an editorial published in the socialist newspaper *Avanti!* 'once again finds Italian socialists in close contact with the successes, the victories, and the difficulties of the Soviet Union', where 'the socialist revolution' had 'opened the path to workers' emancipation' (*Avanti!* 1947*a*, 1).

Nenni believed that the Italian left had to refuse the United States' attempt to raise 'barbed wire around the Soviet Revolution' (*Avanti!* 1947*b*, 1). In this context, the events of 1917 were used as a motivation to reinforce the distance between the United States and workers' interests, which were instead defended by the one country, the USSR, where the working class had come to power (Colarizi 1996, 142–51). The 26th national congress in January 1948 declared that the PSI regarded the Soviet Union as the example to follow, considering it 'the leader of the peace front'. Conversely, the US – so stated the final resolution – operated as the front-runner of the 'war party' (*Avanti!* 1948). Given this direct reference to the two camps theory espoused by Zhdanov (Mawdsley 2017, 15–37), the PSI presented itself as a proponent of the Eastern Bloc within the Italian political landscape. The PSI, together with the PCI, founded the Popular Democratic Front, a decision that symbolised the Socialist choice of alliance with the Kremlin (Degl'Innocenti 1993, 92–4).

After the elections of 18 April 1948, which resulted in the decisive victory of Christian Democracy (DC), with 48.5 per cent of the vote, and the blatant defeat of the FDP (31 per cent), the polarisation of the international and internal situation was confirmed by the PSI's maintenance of its pro-USSR position. Although Riccardo Lombardi, the former secretary of the Action Party who had joined the PSI in 1947, had warned that 'the communist system would not allow the West to grow' (Scirocco 2010, 98), on several occasions at the end of the 1940s various Socialist exponents commented on the USSR's growth after the October Revolution in extremely favourable terms.

For example, Ada Alessandrini, a representative of the Movimento Cristiano per la Pace and correspondent for the official magazine of the party, the revue *Mondo Operaio*, pointed out that on arriving in Moscow one was thrown into 'a different world', where 'falsehood' was not 'a habitual condiment of everyday life' (Alessandrini 1949, 7; Saresella 2011). Aside from the moral viewpoint, the strong relation with the USSR was sustained on various levels. Ideologically, objectives fulfilled in the Soviet Union were made to coincide, in a way that was probably forced, with the teachings of the old fathers of Italian Socialism: 'the *kolkhoz* [collective farm]', wrote Nenni in his diaries upon returning from Moscow in August 1948, represented 'a specimen for a new humanity', which transformed 'property and production relationships, but also human relations' and therefore brought to completion 'the dream of our pioneers, Baldini, Prampolini, Massarenti' (Nenni 1982, 455).

Politically, this tendency materialised in a strong alliance with the PCI. Barely grazed by the autonomist detour between 1948 and 1949, the PSI's sovietisation restarted at full steam after the return of Nenni and Morandi's left wing to the leadership of the party. Inspired by the principles of Leninist theory, the party's reorganisation took place through the adoption of democratic centralism as the method of party governance. As seen by Morandi, the main supporter of the PSI's new organisational inclination, this necessity was justified by 'the great duel between the capitalist world and the world of workers' (Agosti 1971, 426). Furthermore, as Francesco De Martino, a former exponent of the Action Party who entered the PSI in 1947, explained much later, even though 'you may like them or not', 'the communists' represented 'the same social interests as socialists' and 'before the offensive' facing the entire left in the early 1950s, these two forces must form a united front (*Mondo Operaio* 1977, 58–9).

In the light of this general tendency, the celebratory interpretation of the 1917 Revolution was a logical consequence. Unlike European social democracy, whose main parties – the German SPD, the French SFIO, the Belgian Socialist Party and the Swedish Socialist Party – rebuilt the Socialist International under the influence of the British Labour Party with a declared pro-Western bloc stance (Imlay 2017, 300–8), Italian socialists could draw inspiration from the 'perspectives opened by the experiences of the popular democracies', considered to be a direct consequence of the October Revolution, which were capable of transforming 'the face of the earth by changing the balance of power' (*Avanti!* 1951, 1).

During the early 1950s, the PSI's disposition towards the Eastern bloc was confirmed by the attitude of Nenni, who did not have a Marxist theoretical position (Cafagna 1996, 30–4). The general secretary of the PSI returned from Moscow in June 1952, where he had received the Stalin Peace Prize. Despite not considering the USSR to be a 'paradise on earth', Nenni professed himself fascinated to see the 'red stars' of the Kremlin from the aeroplane taking him back to Italy, regarding them as 'the beacon of the triumphant proletarian revolution' (Nenni 1982, 540). In the Soviet Union, Nenni had observed 'a transfiguration of the world': he believed that 'the true miracle of the Soviet system' had been to 'allow engineers, specialists, artists, and manual workers … to communicate with one another with joy and mutual trust'. Besides being a 'transformation of things', existing socialism seemed to him to have also helped bring about change 'within people', who seemed to be endowed with 'a superior morality' (Nenni 1952a, 1).

Another factor in the same year confirmed the PSI's choice of a pro-Soviet ideological position. In August, which was the sixtieth anniversary of the party's foundation, instead of giving rightful attention and due emphasis to Filippo Turati – not coincidentally considered the 'father' of Italian socialism by the historiography (Arfé 1962) – the Socialist leadership decided to promote Andrea Costa to the position of founder of the national Socialist movement. Given that Costa was just one contributor, alongside Turati and Antonio Labriola, to the foundation of the party (Della Peruta 1982, 89–108), his upgrading was an exaggeration. However, it had a political logic: Turati, who was particularly disapproving towards Lenin and the Bolsheviks (Caretti 1974, 139–141), did not fit with the route taken by Nenni and Morandi (*Avanti!* 1952, 3).

Confirming the perspective adopted during the most sombre phase of the Cold War (Hanhimäki 2013, 1–10), in autumn 1952 the PSI proceeded to expel all militants who theorised a strategy of autonomy from the PCI and from the geopolitical course set by the USSR.[4] Taking sides in favour of the PCI and the USSR was also confirmed in a transnational dimension. While the Socialist International, officially established at the Frankfurt am Main congress in July 1951, formally rejected any form of dialogue with the Communist movement or with Socialist parties which maintained such contact (Braunthal 1980, 207), the PSI persisted in systematically applauding the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc (Mattera 2017, 33). Thus, the centrality of 'Red October' in the party's collective consciousness was reiterated. On the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the 1917 events, Tullio Vecchietti, editor of *Avanti!* and one of the most impressive exponents of the PSI's left wing, asserted his party's intention to take advantage of 'the celebration of the October Revolution' to 'review the victories and achievements of socialism'. The arrival of the Bolsheviks had determined the 'fall of Tsarist Russia' and at the same time a profound transformation of the labour movement on a global level, which it was impossible to disregard (Vecchietti 1952, 1).

Vecchietti's position was widely shared by the PSI's leading representatives in the early 1950s. Regarding the flurry of political activity by European social democracy during the same period,[5] Nenni declared, after reading some of Stalin's writings published on the occasion of the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, that the USSR was 'an example of courage and tenacity'. Furthermore, the USSR should be considered 'a formidable element of safety'; Nenni believed that 'if the October Revolution had failed …, the entire working class would have paid a very high price for its defeat'. Therefore, anyone who considered themselves a socialist should reaffirm their 'eternal gratitude … to the pioneers' (Nenni 1952b, 5).

Nenni's opinion, which made loyalty to Moscow a political and sentimental matter, appeared to be a symptom of the basic attitude of a party, which, between the end of the Second World War and the early 1950s, had elevated the USSR to the position of an international point of reference. The PSI's inclination was also revealed by its position regarding domestic policies: the Socialist party aimed to oppose every attempt to isolate the working class (Cacciatore and Morandi 1948, 2) and, therefore, promoted unity of action with the PCI. This alliance was strengthened by the Soviet myth and confirmed by the celebratory spirit in which the events of October 1917 were commemorated, a dynamic common on the Marxist left during the 1950s (Mattera 2004, 202).

The ‘shock’ of 1956 and the beginnings of differentiation

Analysing the impact of the Soviet experience and the October Revolution on the cultural policies of Italian Socialism, Alexander Höbel defined the beginning of a new phase in 1956 (Höbel 2017, 206). In fact, an initial turning point towards a more objective judgement of the Russian events in 1917 and the evolution of the USSR began to take shape between the end of 1952 and the beginning of 1953 (Ardia 1987, 399–406). In the context of an improvement in the global scenario, especially after the death of Stalin, the armistice between North and South Korea and the election of Eisenhower to the US presidency (Di Nolfo 2010, 238–44), a large section of the PSI, around Nenni and his faction, developed a new perspective on both domestic and international topics. Given the interdependence between the external and internal dimensions – the intermestic – of the Cold War (Westad 2010, 8–10), such global changes promoted a new dynamism in Italian politics. The defeat of the DC, through opposition to the mechanism of the so-called ‘Scam Law’ (Scoppola 1997, 263–76),[6] and the positive results for the PSI in the 1953 general election, reopened discussion within the party. Although the unity pact was still solid, grassroots activists began to demand greater freedom in the alliance with the PCI (Mattera 2004, 224).

New ferments appeared in both international and domestic spheres that influenced the position of Italian Socialism towards the USSR and its evolution, as well as interpretations of the events of ‘Red October’. These internal changes were reflected in the reopening of communication with the German SPD,[7] a party with whom the PSI believed it possible to establish relations due to its neutral position on foreign affairs in the early 1950s (Klotzbach 1996, 281–92), and with Aneurin Bevan and Richard Crossman’s left wing of the British Labour Party (Nuti 1999, 189–247; Favretto 2003), a group which shared with the PSI doubts regarding international relations.

While in 1952 the interpretation of Soviet evolution after 1917 appeared to be exclusively positive, in 1955 the readings were far more ambiguous and some doubts regarding the choices made by the Communist establishment began to appear. Nenni, at odds with the theories of several scholars who stressed the positive impressions that Soviet technological and economic achievements had on Western people (Gilman 2003, 146–9), highlighted after a further visit to Eastern Europe, ‘the signs of poverty and overcrowding … in old houses and even in basements’. What Nenni had seen reminded him of ‘the narratives of refugees from Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia at the General Council of the Socialist International regarding Moscow’s unstoppable struggle to eliminate any desire for independence and all kinds of national culture’ (Nenni 1982, 686).

A similar more impartial propensity also developed in the PSI regarding the cultural field. During an event to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the foundation of *Avanti!,* Raniero Panzieri, the head of the PSI’s cultural department, declared that ‘historical research’ on the labour movement had become ‘simple philology’.[8] Panzieri’s affirmation symbolised an emerging tendency in the PSI: instead of simply adopting a premeditated position, every aspect of socialist action – cultural, as well as political – should reject bureaucratic inflexibility (Scotti 2011, 54–81).

Public disassociations from Communist Russia, indicated by the appearance of new doubts regarding the USSR and its dogmatism, arose and took hold as a consequence of the 20th Congress of the CPSU, Khrushchev’s condemnation of the totalitarian management of power conducted by Stalin, and the intervention of Soviet tanks in Hungary. The events of 1956 and their theoretical, programmatic and political repercussions on choices made by the PSI led to a new interpretation and evaluation of the October Revolution by the party (Agosti 2013, 16–26; Haslam 2011, 164–173).

The end of ‘ten winters’, as the title of a famous book by Franco Fortini put it (Fortini 1973; Favretto 2000, 25–45; Scotti 2011, 127–47), was represented by a new era in relations with

Saragat's PSDI (successor to the PSLI): although the reunification of the two organisations of Italian Socialism would not occur until 1966, new exchanges between the two parties symbolised *de facto* the intention of Nenni's faction to reopen a dialogue with European Social Democracy (Nuti 1999, 67–88; Perazzoli 2016, 94–119). The intention of Nenni's wing to assume more distance from the Soviet Union is also highlighted by the PSI's interpretation of the October Revolution on the occasion of its 40th anniversary. In 1957, *Mondo Operaio*, which just five years earlier had dedicated abundant original commentaries to the political reinterpretation of the events of 1917, decided to publish only historical material, namely the *April Theses*, the *Revolutionary Committee Manifesto*, some of Lenin's essays on the relationship between socialism and state, and some poems by Mayakovsky and Pasternak.

Despite the fact that there are no primary sources to tell us whether the Italian Socialists were aware of the Soviet decision to prohibit the publication of Pasternak's masterpiece, *Doctor Zhivago*, in November 1957 (Muscetta 1958, 1–2; Feltrinelli 1999, 117–54; Finn and Couvée 2014), the decision to print only historical documents was consistent with the editorial line of *Mondo Operaio* under the direction of Nenni and, especially, Panzieri. The editorial policy applied on this occasion can be traced back mainly to Panzieri, given that Nenni was primarily concerned with managing the complicated political phase that had opened after the Venice Congress in February 1957. The theoretical logic of the autonomist line had triumphed, as shown by conference's acceptance of the democratic parliamentary road, but it was defeated in political terms, as confirmed by the left majority on the central committee (Favretto 2003, 35–6). Working as the real overseer of the socialist magazine in 1957 and 1958, Panzieri's purpose was to convert the journal into a training ground for the party, while publishing historical socialist documents (Panzieri 1957, 1). However, in his view, republishing writings from before 1957 had a clear purpose: to reiterate the PSI's connection with 'Red October' and with Lenin's example, while at the same time distancing the Italian party from Stalin's distortions (Panzieri 1958, 1–3).

After the political earthquake of 1956 (Agosti 2013, 16), although the October Revolution was still considered to be a turning point in the history of the labour movement (Fedele 2016, 64), some voices in the PSI took the position of revising the political line to support new strategies, given the Italian political context of the precariousness of the centrist government (Scroccu 2011, 90–117). Three main tendencies emerged within the party regarding both the USSR and the alliance with the PCI.

Firstly, Nenni's faction, or the future autonomist wing: especially after the 20th CPSU Congress and the Soviet military intervention in Hungary, Nenni declared that Italian Socialism would not stand as a supporter for a 'generic post-Stalin anti-Stalinism, but rather as a coherent criticism of Communism in power, in other words of a system of dictatorship of the proletariat' – which was becoming 'a dictatorship of the party' (Nenni 1977, 88). De Martino and Lombardi, two national leaders with a common past in the Action Party, supported the reasoning of the national secretary, but both stated that the party would have to accept social democracy as the *modus operandi* for the transformation of Western societies (Lombardi 1956, 1; De Martino 1957, 4). However, Nenni, De Martino, Lombardi and other autonomists shared a key assumption: the Khrushchev report and the Hungarian uprising called into question the entire Soviet system and, therefore, the relationship between the PSI and the PCI (Degl'Innocenti 1993, 208–9).

Second, the future internal left-wing opposition: the arguments of Nenni, De Martino and Lombardi were rebutted by Lelio Basso, who, in the *disgelo* (thaw), was once again becoming a central voice in the PSI's internal debate after enduring marginalisation in the early 1950s (Colozza 2010, 119–98; Monina 2016, 49–70). Basso aimed at launching a new and lighter interaction with the PCI (Paolicchi 2011, 176–8), but he also expressed his doubts about the USSR's evolution after 1917 (Basso 1957, 1). In line with his previous studies of Rosa Luxemburg's criticisms of the Leninist administration (Colozza 2010, 218–43), he highlighted the inadequacies of the Soviet system: 'Socialism as we understand it requires political transformations which will guarantee full exercise of popular sovereignty, which is something that in the USSR has not yet been attained, and which not just the degeneration of Stalinism but also more recent political events', such as Hungary, 'the cases of defenestration and subsequent conviction', such as that endured by Marshal Zhukov, 'due to the way they have occurred and the mysteries surrounding the debates, prove that this cannot represent a model of socialist democracy for us' (Basso 1957, 1). Nevertheless, as asserted by Aneurin Bevan in the same period (Thomas-Symonds, 2015, 210–21), Basso believed that, on the one hand, the USSR had overcome the technological and social gap which separated it from the United States and, on the other hand, that its citizens lived in better conditions, as shown by a general improvement in social, economic and industrial indicators (Basso 1957, 1).

Third, Basso's evaluation of the evolution of the USSR (Nencioni 2006, 437–51), was not completely shared by De Martino and Lombardi, the latter being an even more committed supporter than Nenni of the need to move past the conceptual framework of Marxism-Leninism (Ricciardi 2004, 71–2). At the same time, Tullio Vecchietti, despite being opposed to the military intervention in Hungary called for by the Kremlin, linked the future of the PSI to that of the Eastern bloc, and rejected 'the resurgence of the same old anti-Communism' (Vecchietti 1956, 1). His attitude, mixed as it was, implied 'the fear of dividing the world of labour and working to the advantage of the class enemy' – twin concerns which added themselves to 'those caused by the tanks in Budapest' (Mattera 2004, 271; Scirocco 2010, 214–20). Indeed, Vecchietti reiterated the solid connection uniting the PSI with revolutionary ideologies and, consequently, with the Soviet-led bloc. As a member (along with Sandro Pertini, Aldo Venturini and Alessandro Menichelli) of the PSI delegation that took part in the celebrations in Moscow on the 40th anniversary of the seizure of the Winter Palace, Vecchietti considered the mark left by 'the October Revolution … on Italian socialists' to be 'indelible', requiring them to commemorate 'the anniversary as if it was their own celebration' (*Avanti!* 1957, 1).

Accordingly, neither did Vecchietti share Basso's positions, although he was also opposed to Nenni's course of action. It is clear from the emergence of such differences within the national leadership of the party that the shock of 1956 generated a general reconsideration of the route taken by the Soviet Union. Different and opposing views started to emerge within the party, forewarning of the schism of 1963–4 over the PSI's position towards the USSR. Nenni and the autonomists seemed to be moving towards a future programmatic alliance with the DC, which provoked a distancing from Moscow. On the other side, some left-wing exponents such as Panzieri and Basso reaffirmed the party's affinity with the PCI while rejecting the idea of the Soviet Union as a model. In a further differentiation, Vecchietti argued that the USSR was still an example to be followed (Agosti 2013, 27–8).

The events of 1956 had significant consequences for the relationship of the PSI to the Soviet Union and the PCI (Degl'Innocenti 1993, 218–19). In denouncing the Hungarian revolutions, its activists widely criticised both the USSR's conduct during the Budapest protests, and the behaviour of the PCI.[9] To quote two among many examples, Mario Franzone, a Socialist militant from Milan, wrote to Nenni that the PSI had to definitively distance itself from the PCI and the Soviet Union after the Hungarian Revolution.[10] Another militant, Alfredo Monti from Ravenna, explained to the general secretary his doubts about Eastern Europe and the people's democracies, which were unable to develop wealth for the whole population.[11]

Besides these dilemmas, several Socialist militants, including prominent members such as Sandro Pertini, considered the PCI to be a workers' party that shared everyday political struggle with the PSI (Mattera 2004, 271–2). Although in political terms the PSI was divided, in theoretical terms the situation was different. As Höbel has shown, the October Revolution persisted as a sort of 'uniting factor' for the Italian Socialist movement (Höbel, 216). In fact, Basso wrote, 'No other date, no other anniversary raises as many warm feelings all around the world, nor as much burning passion, as the commemoration of the 7th of November …: this is how great the trace left by the October Revolution was in the history of humanity'. In 1957, as in 1917, Socialists had welcomed 'the first revolution enthusiastically', as it had 'finally declared the establishment of socialism', so a positive judgement of the revolution should be 'fundamentally confirmed' (Basso 1957, 1).

However, initial signs of change were emerging. The Nenni wing of the PSI started to reconsider the Western social-democratic route for the transformation of society (Nencioni 2014, 163–83). Ideologically, this meant that these Socialists dissociated the revolutionary event from the USSR's evolution and also began to judge it as a revolution led astray. In effect, they welcomed the position held by the majority of Western socialists: one leaflet, for instance, described the Soviet intervention in Hungary as 'the degeneration of the people's power into bureaucracy and policing' (Cirefice 2017, 33).

The centre-left years: the 'Prague Spring' as a symbol of an irreformable Soviet system?

Although there were difficulties in the PSI instigated by the revisionist course – illustrated by the above-mentioned discussions on Italian Socialism and the USSR after 1956 – from 1959 the PSI emphasised its identification with the European democratic left. After the Popular Democratic Front and unity with the PCI, the Italian Socialist Party now considered itself 'something separate from the communist world' (Favretto 2003, 29). In parallel with a new openness within European social democracy – symbolised by the British Labour Party's decision to launch formal links with the PSI to support its 'Westernisation' (Nuti 1999) and new formal exchanges between Nenni's party and the German SPD (Perazzoli 2016, 182), as well by the PSI's political and programmatic opening towards the DC – Nenni's autonomists, the majority of the party after the 33rd National Congress in January 1959 (Degl'Innocenti 1993, 259–60), needed to find an ideological background that could support its shift to the centre-left.

In order to promote this political operation, the PSI did not only distance itself from the Soviet model by replacing it with the symbols and principles of the Western social democracies (Höbel 2017, 238–9). The party also decided to rediscover a forgotten part of its history. The PSI publicly stressed the relevant role played by a few exponents of the pre-Fascist reformist wing, particularly Filippo Turati and Anna Kuliscioff, who, following 1917, had not hesitated to show their opposition to the Leninist road to socialism (Caretti 1974, 138–41). A confirmation of this new orientation came from the decision to name most of the Socialist cultural centres inaugurated in Italian cities after Turati or Kuliscioff.[12]

During the phase marked by the dialogue between the Socialists and the DC to definitively constitute the centre-left majority (De Felice 1997, 5–133), De Martino outlined the autonomists' new inclination towards the historical evolution of the USSR. Replying to a letter from Luigi Ottini, a Socialist exponent who visited the Soviet Union in 1936 and observed the distance between the USSR and the Turati position, the PSI spokesperson stated that the October Revolution clearly represented a breakthrough, but that 40 years later, his party must denounce the errors and horrors of the Russian experience (Scroccu 2011, 288).

This rediscovery of the quintessential couple of Italian Socialism heralded the beginning of a recalibration of Socialist history: instead of Andrea Costa, who in 1952 had been elevated to founder of the PSI, the restoration of Turati and Kuliscioff corrected a distorted reinterpretation and re-established the centrality of the party's reformist element, an obvious necessity during a political phase in which active consideration was being given to the possibility of radical reform of the Italian economic and political system.

The discovery of its reformist past, politically enabled by the decision of the US administration under Kennedy to support 'the opening to the Left' in the early 1960s (Nuti 1999), was an indication of the PSI's desire to achieve greater objectivity towards the USSR. This is confirmed by the attitude of the Socialist press towards the 22nd CPSU Congress of 1961.

Since the CPSU programme had reaffirmed the idea of the leading party and the leading state, one could infer, as Antonio Giolitti wrote, that the Soviet Union did not yet have 'the foundations for a socialist democracy'. The October Revolution, according to Giolitti, maintained its 'immeasurable historical perspective', but the representatives of the PSI as 'Socialists and Marxists' believed 'with steadfast certainty that no historical experience, not even the Soviet one', could ever 'become a universal rule for political direction' (Giolitti 1961, 17–24). This line was not shared by the left-wing tendency, which criticised the autonomists for favouring 'revisionist positions',[13] but the reasoning of Giolitti, Lombardi and Nenni's group was consistent with the project of creating a centre-left formula (Cafagna 1996, 99–102) – a perspective reaffirmed by a large majority at the PSI's 34th National Congress in 1961 (Pinto 2008, 138–42).

In the Cold War context, Kennedy's 'new frontier' coincided, for Italy, with the goal of fighting Communism by adopting a new reformist perspective (Gentiloni Silveri 1998, 86), and the PSI declared that it would work to support the 'democratic way' on the road to socialism. This public position was welcomed by European social democracy (Mattera 2017, 214): while the Italian party made efforts to reopen relations with European socialist parties, Western social democracy launched a programmatic perspective that was more in line with the route taken by the PSI. In 1962, the approval by the Socialist International of the Oslo Declaration – a new programme that highlighted the role of the state in the economic process and the necessity of overcoming 'East-West rivalry' (Braunthal 1980, 558) – allowed for reconciliation with the PSI, which approved the spirit of the new document (Mattera 2017, 221–2).

This new attitude among the PSI majority could also be seen in its relationship with the Soviet Union. To demonstrate a discontinuity with the previous political phase, Nenni decided not to visit the USSR in the summer of 1961 (Scroccu 2011, 283). Instead, Lombardi went in May 1961, where he met Mikhail Suslov, one of the most powerful delegates to the Supreme Soviet. During his encounter with Suslov, Lombardi declared that his party had the right to total autonomy of judgement regarding international affairs involving the USSR.[14]

The PSI's general behaviour towards the Eastern bloc conformed to the emergence of autonomist inclinations in both domestic and international spheres. The Eastern European countries had, until a few years earlier, represented a model to be emulated; by the 1960s, instead of being regarded as a prototype for an actual socialist society, many Italian Socialists noted the problems of authoritarian-dictatorial regimes. For example, the *Avanti!* journalist Luigi Vismara, on returning from a visit to Prague in autumn 1962, related his experiences without celebration: despite being a pleasant country, students in Czechoslovakia, tested by the scarcity of primary resources, had 'valid reasons to protest' (Vismara 1962, 3).

The alliance between the PSI and the PCI had been definitively damaged, as was clear during the 1963 general election campaign, when Socialists and Communists disagreed over political direction (Gervasoni 2013, 15–25). This fracture was consistent with the PSI's new pro-Western stance and its consequent distance from the USSR and the Socialist states. European social democracies, logically, appreciated the new course: the results of the 35th Congress of 1963 were welcomed not only by the British Labour Party, which applauded the Italian party's 'ideological reconsideration',[15] but also by the German SPD, which shared the PSI's new reformist direction.[16]

The *rapprochement* with Western social democracy was confirmed by the successful conclusion of a London meeting between Nenni and Harold Wilson in September 1963. In Wilson's words, the 'times when people were expelled from the Labour Party for the Nenni telegram are long gone' (Nenni 1982, 295). In 1948, some 70 Labour Party members had been expelled for sending a message of support for Nenni's opposition to President Truman; simultaneously, during the Italian elections of that year, the Labour Party had switched to supporting the pro-West Italian social democrats because the PSI had supported the Communist *coup d'état* in Prague (as a result of which Czechoslovakian Communists removed the democratic republic and established a Communist regime).

Some 15 years later, relations between the two parties had become official, reflecting the theoretical, programmatic and political revisionism in the PSI and greater openness within European social democracy towards a more fluid foreign policy rather than rigid Atlanticism. The merger between both sections of Italian Socialism took place in October 1966 (Scirocco 2019, 144–65), after the PSI's acceptance of NATO, and with the PSDI merger around the corner. Nenni's party became a member of the Socialist International in May 1966. As a result of mediation by the British Labour Party, which strongly supported the PSI's cause during this period, Italian Socialism – an anomaly in comparison with other Western Socialist parties – returned to the fold (Mattera 2017, 273–80).

In this political context, it is unsurprising that the October Revolution was given a more detached reading. In 1967, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the 'ten days that shook the world' (Reed 1919), which occurred in the middle of the brief period of unity between the PSI and the PSDI (from 1966 to 1969), *Mondo Operaio* and *Critica Sociale* did not even comment on the occasion. *Avanti!* published Nenni's speech in Mentana on the centenary of the battle there between Garibaldi and the French and Papal troops, as well as that of the Soviet premier Kosigyn at the Moscow celebrations, as if to symbolically mark the distinction between the two paths, as Höbel rightly mentions (Höbel 2017). At the same time, two articles by Gaetano Arfè and Aldo Garosci published in *Avanti!* took a critical approach, based on historical research.

The editorial by Arfé, who managed the Socialist newspaper at the time (Becherucci 2012, 26–36), could be interpreted as a brief but effective reconstruction of the USSR's history. After identifying 1956 as the turning point at which could be pinpointed 'the definitive and near-explicit abandonment of the Soviet State's function as a guide for the international revolutionary movement', Arfé specified that Communist Russia had 'freed itself from capitalism', but 'the pillars of the passive revolution remained', in 'the mass terrorism once used, the bureaucratic oppression still functioning, the suppression of workers' autonomy internally and of revolutionary autonomy on an international level, and all the incalculable damage of unexpressed thoughts, of unrealised works, of the mortification of the creative capabilities of a great population' (Arfé 1967, 1).

The essay by Garosci can also be considered a critical analysis of the entire Soviet experience (Pipitone 2017, 316–22). According to the historian from Piedmont, a fundamental weakness could be glimpsed in certain originating principles. As a result of its failure to spread, the revolution had displayed 'a brutal push', 'detached from its origin as a messianic bringer of justice, it had deviated and took on horrific shape during fascism and Nazism, leading to the end of its European domination, but not in the way Lenin had expected' (Garosci 1967, 6).

Absorbed by centre-left coalitions within the national government and having rejoined the Socialist International in 1966 after a long period of ‘exile’ (Nencioni 2010, 450–70), both Arfé’s editorial and Garosci’s article illustrated a fact: 50 years after the seizure of the Winter Palace, Italian Socialists largely considered the October Revolution to be a historical event of primary importance, but one that needed to be critically examined. Considering specific crises in the Eastern bloc, it could no longer merely be regarded reverentially as the starting moment of a clearly defined Socialist country. It is evident that this distanced view of the October Revolution was not only ‘a polemical cue towards the (Italian) Communists’ (Höbel 2017, 228), in a phase marked by reunification with Saragat’s Social Democrats. On the contrary, this new interpretation of October as an important historical fact that was no longer seen in dogmatic terms, served the ideological revision that the PSI had been carrying out since the early 1960s, which had now blossomed in definitive rapprochement with the organisations of Western social democracy (Mattera 2017, 273–80).

The argument that in the 1960s the idealised image of the October Revolution was fading is reiterated in *Un socialismo possibile*, a pamphlet published by Antonio Giolitti in 1967 (Scroccu 2016). Despite being primarily focused on a critique of the opulent society, and the theme of development governance from the perspective of the relationship between economic power, state, and democracy in an advanced society, the book strove to break the connection between the construction of socialism and the need for revolution. ‘For a socialist party’ such as the PSI, which was pursuing ‘its objectives of social transformation and civilisation through the strict and effective use of the democratic method’, it was ‘indispensable … to establish a new form of politics without mythical images, to guarantee plurality and autonomy for the various institutional functions’ (Giolitti 1967, 20).

Italian Socialists in the mid-1960s seemed – either implicitly, as in Giolitti’s essay, or explicitly, as in Arfé and Garosci’s writings – to have changed their opinion regarding the October Revolution from it being an unquestionable turning point to be celebrated, as in the early 1950s, to merely a fundamental historical moment for the international workers’ movement. Considering the revolution as a historical episode meant casting doubt on the successive evolutions of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc. In addition, the PSI, once the governmental option had been embraced, had abandoned all revolutionary plans – with the exception of the revolutionary colouring that Lombardi gave to the reformist method.

These signs of change surfaced at the beginning of the 1960s, but the real break with the idealised image of Red October occurred as a consequence of the Prague Spring. In January 1968, as Antonio Novotný was succeeded by Alexander Dubček, Italian Socialists highlighted the obvious vulnerability of democratic freedom (Gozzano 1968, 1). However, the positive signs which emerged over the following weeks, specifically the Journalists’ Union request to abolish censorship and the criticisms of procedures under Stalin, led the PSI-PSDI to view early attempts at reform optimistically. After the first reforms from Dubček and his group, this confidence became open support (*Avanti!* 1968*a*, 7), to the extent that in *Critica Sociale*, a paper that had never warmed to real-socialist countries, the Czechoslovakian events were being considered a valid example for Western socialism (Vegas 1968, 1).

In spring 1968, in the middle of the Italian general election campaign, the pages of *Avanti!* often contained articles that were extremely critical of the illiberal methods used by Czechoslovakian Communist leaders to proceed swiftly on internal reform (*Avanti!* 1968*b*, 1). Nonetheless, to Italian socialists the new political course in Prague still represented ‘an experiment of extraordinary importance’ (Fedele 2016, 145).

After the August summit in Bratislava, where the main leaders of the USSR, Bulgaria, the GDR, Hungary and Poland had shown tolerance towards the Czechoslovak experiment (Bracke 2007, 198–200), a Gaetano Arfé editorial pointed out that Czechoslovakia provided 'the answer to a dramatic question', whether it was 'possible within the Soviet-conforming communist world' to have 'an evolutionary process in an autonomist and libertarian sense … without clashing with the armoured divisions' (Arfé 1968a, 4).

The question raised by Arfé, which was indicative of how invaluable the PSI-PSDI considered the democratic method to be as the basis for the fulfilment of any socialist programme, was, however, followed by the arrival in Prague of troops from the Soviet Union, Poland, Bulgaria, the GDR and Hungary. In addition to a public statement in which the Italian Socialist leadership stated their disapproval of the Soviet show of strength (*Avanti!* 1968*c*, 1), Arfé also asserted that the intervention of the Warsaw Pact demonstrated how 'in countries within Moscow's orbit, no government' had 'the right to exist' if it didn't show itself 'fully loyal to the Soviet directives'. For Socialists, he remarked, the only possible flag was one showing the symbols 'of freedom and of peace' (Arfé 1968b, 7).

As recent historiography has highlighted, the Prague events coincided with the PCI moving away from Russian Communism and with the opening of communication with the most important social-democratic parties in Western Europe (Di Donato 2015, 55–84). During this phase, the Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (PSIUP) was the only party on the Italian Left that defended the USSR (Agosti 2013, 165–86), justifying intervention in Czechoslovakia on the grounds that forces operating with Dubček were 'uninterested in the autonomous and democratic development of Czechoslovak socialism' (*Mondo Nuovo* 1968, 3). Given its accession to European social democracy, the PSI could no longer share the thesis of the PSIUP: however, as a British Labour Party internal report stated, the PSI's revisionism coincided with 'acceptance of NATO' and with 'the consideration that the problem of foreign military bases has been solved after the dismantlement of American missiles on Italian territory' (Mattera 2017, 265).

To Italian Socialists, Soviet repression highlighted the irreformable character of not only the Czechoslovak system, but also that of the entire Eastern bloc. Despite the adoption of different tones by various currents, the rejection of the Kremlin seemed to be generally shared. This was also the opinion of De Martino, who was now a representative of the faction Riscossa ed Unità Socialista (Scirocco 2009, 71–2). According to him, certain 'motions of freedom and democracy' were present in Prague,[17] the aggression suffered by Czechoslovakia was a symptom of 'the Soviet Union's function as a leading country', a role which was 'now outdated'.[18] According to Bettino Craxi, a prominent figure among the autonomists, the intervention ordered by the Kremlin represented a physical demonstration of 'the Soviet Union's politics of power' on the European continent.[19] Nenni himself, during a meeting on this topic at the Foreign Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, admitted that the Soviet intervention showed that Moscow hadn't accepted 'the heresy of freedom seen as a human characteristic'. The Kremlin's reaction led to an erosion of the USSR's reputation among Western workers and implied justice for Dubček's new course, which originated with the strain of dogmas and myths that had been the foundation of the Communist world for decades (*Avanti!* 1968*d*, 1).

In the light of what the three leaders asserted, the Prague Spring and the military reaction ordered by the Kremlin caused a definitive distancing from the Soviet Union. For this reason, the symbolic image of the October Revolution dissolved among Italian socialists. In 1977 the events of 'Red October' were still being defined as 'the most important revolutionary event of contemporary history' (Craxi 1977, 1; Di Scala 1988, 174–94); however, the historic change that it had brought about clashed with a reality that was denying autonomy to individual national leaders. By admitting that there could be no socialist policy without democracy, the Italian Socialists had *de facto* replaced the model of Lenin with that of Karl Kautsky (Salvadori 1976, 201–208).

This metamorphosis surely had its roots in the youth protests of 1967–9, which helped to shuffle the cards and question the political cultures of the left (Höbel 2017, 230). However, the change itself came from the profound ideological overhaul initiated by the PSI in its attitude to centre-left governments. In order to re-embrace the values of democratic socialism, an operation Craxi looked on with conviction (Scirocco 2018), the path passed through a reconsideration of the October Revolution: certainly it was an essential passage in the history of the workers' movement, but, for the PSI, what had emerged in Russia was an undemocratic social reality. Therefore, to create a socialist society in Italy, democracy – a concept that was not part of the October Revolution – became an essential concept.

Conclusion

Overcoming the early Cold War climate allowed the Socialist leaders to interpret the events of 1917 and the entire evolution of Russia in a more detached manner. This tendency reflected the evolution in the PSI's domestic perspective: from being one of the factors that fostered the alliance between Socialists and Communists during the late 1940s and early 1950s, the October Revolution became merely an important historical fact in the long arc of the world labour movement, as shown in the comments from both Arfé and Garosci in 1967. Accordingly, interpretations of 'Red October' changed in line with the state of unity between the PSI and the PCI. Essentially, these interpretations were used as value-related cement to reinforce the left-wing front. In parallel, more detached readings of the October Revolution corresponded with the 'Westernisation' of the PSI: as Italian Socialism evolved from dismissing bourgeois democracy to accepting that there could be no socialism without democracy, it aligned itself with the Socialist International and European social democracy (Perazzoli 2018, 21–68).

To better comprehend this dimension, it has been necessary to consider, on the one hand, the changes in how the October Revolution was celebrated and, on the other, the theoretical-political discussion within the PSI regarding the evolution of the Soviet Union. In my opinion, the remodulation of the PSI's position towards the October Revolution had its turning point in 1956. While in the previous decade the reading of 1917 was mainly hagiographic, beginning in 1956 and continuing with the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet repression of the Budapest revolt, cracks in the orthodox interpretation embraced by the PCI began to emerge – cracks that became chasms during the 1960s and 1970s. The process that took the PSI back into the ranks of Western social democracy was carried out under Craxi, but it had already taken hold during the leadership of the centre-left. The repositioning with respect to the October Revolution was a central passage in the process.

After the détente and embarking on a political path of more independence from the PCI and the USSR, the PSI's connection to the Soviet experience was considered less binding and even became the subject of confrontation during the 1970s and 1980s (Lomellini 2010). At the same time, once revision of the relationship with the USSR had begun, the PSI set out with increasing certainty on the opening of relations with the main parties of the Socialist International, and not only with the left-wing elements – such as Bevan's current in the British Labour Party – who were already favourably disposed towards Italian Socialists. Moreover, the PSI realised a new political autonomy, substantiated through various specific programmatic principles, such as the structural reforms conceived by Lombardi.

In conclusion, to fully understand the complicated relationship between the PSI and the October Revolution, one must revisit Vittorio Foa's consideration of April 1950, according to which 'the extremism of symbols and myths in turn implies resignation and surrender' (Foa and Ginzburg 2003, 149). As soon as internal policy opportunities opened up that were directly connected to the détente in relationships between both blocs, the PSI, or at least a considerable part of it, didn't have many problems reflecting on 'Red October' in a far less dogmatic manner – continuing to highlight its values but no longer concealing its weaknesses.

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Notes

1. The term 'organic' meant that Socialist ministers were members of the government along with Christian Democrats.
2. Central State Archives (CAS), Ministry of the Interior (MI), Cabinet collection, box 65, folder 175P/48, Milan Prefect, 22 June 1964.
3. 'Autonomism' refers here to attempts by Pietro Nenni's wing of the PSI to establish a party independent of the PCI and the USSR.
4. CAS, MI, Cabinet collection, box 65, folder 175P/48, Milan prefect, 12 November 1952.
5. CAS, Pietro Nenni (PN), Correspondence collection, box 1395, folder 26, Dino Gentili to Pietro Nenni, 11 December 1951.
6. The government introduced a superbonus of two-thirds of seats in the House for the coalition which obtained the absolute majority of votes. This was referred to as the 'Scam Law' by its detractors, although the general electoral system remained uncorrupted.
7. Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FEF), Social Democracy Archive (SDA), Carlo Schmid collection, box 1409, Giorgio Fenoaltea to Carlo Schmid, 25 June 1953.
8. Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Foundation (GFF), Raniero Panzieri Archive (RPA), folder 10, speech by Raniero Panzieri, 1955.
9. GFF, RPA, folder 24, Mario Zanata to Raniero Panzieri, 8 November 1956.
10. CAS, PN, Correspondence collection, box 2060, folder 54, Mario Franzone to Pietro Nenni, 30 October 1956.
11. CAS, PN, Correspondence collection, box 2060, folder 54, Alfredo Monti to Pietro Nenni, 31 October 1956.
12. CAS, MI, Cabinet collection, box 70, folder 175P/48, Milan Prefect, 11 July 1961.
13. CAS, MI, Cabinet collection, box 67, folder 175/69, Rome Prefect, 4 February 1961.
14. Filippo Turati Foundation, The Italian Socialist Party Archive, box 57, folder 191, Summary of the Meeting between Suslov, Presidium's Secretary of the CPSU, and Riccardo Lombardi, 9 May 1961.
15. People's History Museum, The Labour Party Archive, International Department collection, Italy, box 1952–1968, folder 16, 1963, Congress of the Italian Socialist Party, 1 November 1963.
16. FEF, SDA, collection Partei-Vorstand, Internationalen Beziehungen, box 2683, Bericht über den XXXV. Nationalkongress der Sozialistischen Partei Italiens vom 25. bis 29. Oktober 1963 in Rom, 14 November 1963.
17. CAS, MI, Cabinet collection, box 13, folder 175P/31, Florence Prefect, 20 September 1968.
18. CAS, MI, Cabinet collection, box 13, folder 175P/48, Milan Prefect, 9 September 1968.
19. CAS, MI, Cabinet collection, box 13, folder 175P/48, Milan Prefect, 22 October 1968.

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Italian summary

Il proposito di questo articolo è di analizzare il rapporto tra il Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI), il 1917 e l'URSS alla luce del contesto europeo del dopoguerra. Si basa su ampie indagini di archivio e su un ampio esame delle fonti di stampa del periodo. Prendendo come punto di riferimento la Rivoluzione d'Ottobre, contribuisce all'ampliamento della letteratura storica sul PSI, un partito che ha seguito una traiettoria diversa rispetto agli altri partiti socialdemocratici occidentali del secondo dopoguerra.