The Cold War and Socialist Identity: The Socialist International and the Italian 'Communist Question' in the 1970s

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Abstract

Coming about in a phase of renewal and electoral success for the European socialist parties, the rise of the Italian Communist Party in the 1970s elicited differentiated reactions within the Socialist International. While providing an account of the transnational socialist debate on Italian Eurocommunism, this article suggests to understand it in the context of a wider discussion on the political identity and aims of the European left. Divisions on the new 'communist question' amongst the socialist movement mirrored the divergent opinions on how to react to the changes that were taking place in European economics and society, as well as in the international system.

In the mid-1970s European politics witnessed what, in retrospect, appears to have been the Indian summer of Western communism. Italy, first and foremost, as well as the Latin countries of the continent where the communist tradition was most pronounced, saw the rise of an at least partially renewed communist doctrine – and praxis – which increasingly distanced itself from Moscow's ossified canons. The international press gave widespread coverage to the new tendency, dubbed 'Eurocommunism', which attracted attention throughout Western Europe and elicited differentiated responses. In Italy in particular, a dynamic Communist Party (the PCI), able to capture around one third of the votes in regional and general elections, seemed to be a serious candidate for participation in government – a possibility unheard of since the beginning of the Cold War. Yet, despite the stir they caused, Eurocommunist parties had a rather limited concrete influence on European

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politics when compared with what still constituted the major forces of the left: socialist and social democratic parties.[1] For the latter, too, the 1970s were years of ideological renewal and of new domestic and international challenges. At the same time, though, socialist parties were also facing unprecedented governmental responsibilities.

In drawing attention to this parallel, this article examines the impact Eurocommunism – in its Italian version – had on the European socialist parties. It does so by focusing on the interaction between the ideological concerns that traditionally animated socialists' relations with communism and the international dimension of a political development that seemed to challenge the Cold War order in Europe. It is indeed the connection it raised between ideological and international elements that makes the Italian 'communist question' an interesting case study, suggesting wider reflections on the relationship between the Cold War framework and the political identity of European socialists.

In defining the *locus* of 'European socialism', this article devotes to the Socialist International (SI) a level of attention that the association has not often achieved, or indeed deserved, in current literature. This does not mean insisting on the (almost non-existent) importance of the SI as a 'deliberative' agency. Rather, it means identifying it as a forum in which debates were conducted that showed, in spite of the national segmentation and transnational cracks of 'international socialism', the existence of common problems and interests among its members and an emerging awareness of the need to share a coherent political profile: a requirement that became especially evident in an increasingly integrating Europe and interdependent world.[2]

In addressing these issues, the article first provides a political-ideological panorama of 1970s international socialism, examining socialist attitudes towards communism in the years of international détente and the rifts that arose among SI parties on these questions. It then focuses on the responses to the rise of Italian communism, both in terms of ideology and policymaking. Finally, it suggests some generalisations this case study may allow about the debate on social democratic political identity during the Cold War.

A socialist 'ideological offensive'

During the first half of the 1970s, European socialist parties experienced a substantial improvement in their electoral records. After the formation of the Social Democratic party (SPD)-led government in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in 1969,

[1] Throughout the paper, I will generally use the terms 'socialist' and 'social democratic' as synonyms when referring to the parties that adhered to the Socialist International.

[2] On the SI see Guillame Devin, *L'Internationale Socialiste. Histoire et Sociologie du Socialisme International (1945–1990)* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1993); Willy Brandt, Berliner Ausgabe*:* Über Europa hinaus: Dritte Welt und Sozialistische Internationale, vol. VIII (Bonn: Dietz, 2006). For comprehensive histories of the European Left see at least Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1996); Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe,* 1850–2000, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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socialist parties gained the premiership in Austria (1970), Norway and Denmark (1971), the Netherlands (1973) and the UK (1974), and they participated as junior partners in other governments, while retaining (until 1976) their Swedish bastion.[3] A 'turn to the left' seemed to mark European politics, a trend that the end of dictatorships in Greece and in the Iberian Peninsula, occurring in the mid-decade, seemed only to confirm. Even if relations between the 'old' left and the 'new' had not been smooth, the progress of the socialist parties seemed capable of providing politically viable answers to some of the demands that had emerged from the social movements of the 1960s. Socialist leaders proposed the enlargement and completion of welfare systems on the one hand and new prospects for going 'beyond' past accomplishments towards a progressive 'democratization' of society on the other.[4] As for the international situation, the shift in European politics evolved in tandem with developments whose key relevance recent historiography is increasingly highlighting: bipolar and European détente, the emergence of strains in the Atlantic alliance, a new phase in European integration; the rise of the North-South issue and the restructuring and crisis of the international monetary and economic system.[5]

Altogether these elements contributed to the definition of a renewed socialist approach to the international system. At its foundations lay the accomplishments of Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, widely heralded as the decisive push towards détente in Europe. Hans Janitschek, the SI's general secretary, commented in 1972 that *Ostpolitik* was 'a lasting proof of the validity and reality of a socialist alternative in international relations', adding that it was 'in the field of East-West relations, and more especially in European security and co-operation, that socialist . . . parties [had] their greatest role to play in the modern world'.[6] The SPD's détente policies, interpreted as a means to secure peace in Europe and to favour a gradual transformation of the Eastern bloc, reconciled the Western socialist parties with what they saw as their longest-term international goal. After delegating the task of guaranteeing peace to the international alliance led by the US, socialists now provided a contribution of their own, which could influence superpowers' initiatives.[7] Détente was also considered to supply a favourable environment for the further development of democratic socialism – such

[3] Sassoon, *One Hundred Years*, 277–85, 461–8.

[4] See Bruno Kreisky, 'Social Democracy's Third Historical Phase', *Socialist International Information*, 20, 5 (May 1970), 65–6.

[5] For a comprehensive picture see, among others, Philippe Chassaigne, *Le années 1970. Fin d'un monde et origine de notre modernité* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2008); Daniel Möckli, *European Foreign Policy during the Cold War. Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009); Antonio Varsori and Guia Migani, eds., *Europe in the International Arena during the 1970s: Entering a Different World*, (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2011); Giuliano Garavini, *After Empires. European Integration, Decolonization, and the Challenge from the Global South 1957–1986* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[6] Janitschek, 'The Socialist International, 1971 to 1972', box 278, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam (hereafter: IISH), Socialist International Archives (hereafter: SIA).

[7] This point of view challenges the interpretation of détente policies as a conservative response to the 1960s social upheavals most famously proposed by Jeremi Suri in his *Power and Protest. Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003). For others, a distinction between European and the superpowers' strategies should be made. The Euro-socialist approach, in particular, seems rather to take on board certain demands of the protest movements, albeit only after

a development was indeed believed to be impossible in a context of international confrontation.[8]

The new climate widened socialist support for European integration, a process that had traditionally been associated primarily with centrist and right-wing parties. The strengthening of the socialist caucus within European institutions, together with the programme of 'enlargement, completion and deepening' of the European Community (EC) agreed upon at the 1969 Hague summit, seemed to provide a positive conjuncture for the advance of democratic socialist values within the European framework. Again, this was often interpreted as a dialectic process of reconciliation of the socialist movement with one of his long-term features – namely, internationalism – after its incorporation in the Western system. As the Austrian chancellor Bruno Kreisky argued:

> Internationalism was one of the basic principles of Democratic Socialism from the beginning. But in Europe at least the conservatives had a hand in bringing it into being. Monnet, Schuman . . . and Adenauer introduced the first phase. . . . There are many good Europeans who to this day do not know that once the German Social Democrats were abused as a bunch of unpatriotic rascals for holding those very same ideas.[9]

If self-affirmation of democratic socialism and Europe could go hand in hand, this was in the context of a new attitude towards the United States. As transatlantic discussions over détente and *Ostpolitik* had already shown, an increasing assertiveness was perceptible on the European and socialist sides – but an assertiveness that never questioned the Western alliance.[10] The SI's increasingly critical outlook on the Vietnam War provides another example of this trend. Dutch leader Joop den Uyl put it bluntly at a January 1973 SI 'Party leaders' conference': democratic socialists needed to speak up against the bombing of North Vietnam, otherwise 'the world would not realize that there was a third alternative to Communism on the one hand and acceptance of the Pentagon line on world affairs on the other.'[11] The existence of that alternative was instead boldly stated by socialist leaders and commentators, who spoke of social democracy as nothing less than 'the force that is more apt to answer the problems of modern society',[12] and as a movement that was 'on the ideological

cutting off their 'anti-Western' attitudes. See Thomas A. Schwartz, 'Legacies of détente: a three-way discussion', *Cold War History*, 8, 4 (2008), 513–25.

[8] See, for instance, the speeches of Bruno Kreisky and James Callaghan at the twelfth Congress of the Socialist International, Vienna, June 1972, box 263, SIA.

[9] 'Bruno Kreisky Discusses Ideology', *Socialist Affairs*, Apr. 1972, 78–9. See also the debate at 1971 Helsinki SI Council meeting, *ibid.*, May-Jun. 1971, 96–111. One consequence was a wide critique of the Euro-sceptical turn of the Labour Party. See 'Party Leaders' Conference, Salzburg 1971', box 346, SIA.

[10] See, for instance, Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945: from "Empire" by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 168–85.

[11] 'Party Leaders' Conference, Paris, Jan. 13–14, 1973. Confidential Summary', box 347, SIA. See also Guillaume Devin, 'L'Internationale socialiste face à la Guerre du Vietnam', in Christopher Goscha and Maurice Vaïsse, eds., *La Guerre du Vietnam et l'Europe, 1963–1973* (Brussels: Bruylant, 2003), 219–22.

[12] Bruno Kreisky speech in 'Internationale socialiste. Conférence des leaders des 13 et 14 janvier 1973 à Paris', 8FP7/20, Centre d'archives socialistes, Paris (hereafter: CAS), Fonds Robert Pontillon.

offensive.'[13] A distinct 'Euro-socialist' attitude was also displayed in North-South issues, which again tried to connect domestic demands and international interest in 'democratizing' relations with the emergent Third World.[14]

Two episodes of convergence between 'European' and socialist attitudes can be considered the culmination of this phase: the completion of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) process with the August 1975 Helsinki summit and the democratic transition in post-authoritarian Portugal. In both cases, European governments – among which the presence of left-wing forces was remarkable – proved able to implement a view of their own of 'Western' interests, which challenged the American strictly bipolar vision: in the name of 'human security' in the Helsinki negotiations, or in providing a framework for the solution of the Portuguese crisis that prioritised support of domestic democratisation as a means to contain the communist challenge.[15] Socialist influence was particularly evident in Portugal, where SI parties strongly supported Mario Soares' *Partido Socialista* as a guarantor of democratic development but also played a significant role in Helsinki. The connection between the CSCE and *Ostpolitik* was early recognised and turned the conference into one of the international objectives of the socialist movement.[16] Moreover, some SI parties, such as the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA), became determined agents for the insertion of 'humanitarian' issues among European priorities.[17]

Détente and ideological controversy

The onset of détente policies, while prompting a relaxation of the European political climate, seemed to many to pose anew the classic question of the relations between social democrats and communists. Were the distinctions between the divided heirs of the tradition of the European left to blur now that Cold War tensions were

[13] Alan J. Day, 'Social Democracy on the Ideological Offensive', *Socialist Commentary*, June 1972, 3–5.

[14] Sara Lorenzini, 'Globalizing Ostpolitik', *Cold War History*, 9, 2 (2009), 223–42; Garavini, *After Empires*, 230–40.

[15] On the Helsinki process, see Angela Romano, *From Détente in Europe to European Détente. How the West Shaped the Helsinki CSCE* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2009); Andreas Wenger, Vojtech Mastny and Christian Neuenlist, eds., *Origins of the European Security System: the Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965–75*. (London: Routledge, 2008); Oliver Bange and Gottfried Niedhart, eds., *Helsinki 1975 and the Transformation of Europe*, (New York: Berghahn, 2008). On the international aspects of the Portuguese transition, see the special issue of *Journal of European Integration History*, 15, 1 (2009); Mario Del Pero et al., eds., *Democrazie. L'Europa meridionale e la fine delle dittature* (Milan: Le Monnier, 2010); Del Pero, '"Which Chile, Allende?" Henry Kissinger and the Portuguese revolution', *Cold War History*, 11, (2011), 1–33. On the Spanish case, see Antonio Muñoz Sánchez, *El Amigo Alemán. El SPD y el PSOE de la Dictadura a la Democracia* (Barcelona: RBA Libros, 2012).

[16] See the resolution on European Security of the May 1971 Helsinki Council Conference of the SI, box 277, SIA.

[17] See Floribert Baudet, '"It was Cold War and we wanted to win": Human rights, "détente" and the CSCE', in Wenger, Mastny and Neuenlist, eds., *Origins of the European Security System*, 183–98; Sara Lamberti, 'The Dutch Labour Party in the 1970s: Calling for a European integration with a human face', paper presented at the Conference 'European political cultures and parties and the European integration process, 1945–1992', IMT, Lucca, 10–12 Nov. 2011.

abating? From its frontline position, the SPD made clear its outlook: détente did not change at all the ideological controversy between the two movements, and reaching agreements with Eastern European governments did not mean softening the approach to communism. In 1970, as the USSR-FRG treaty was being concluded, the SPD *Präsidium* commissioned from the political scientist and party member Richard Löwenthal a paper on the issue, which was then widely discussed within the party and officially adopted (with minor amendments) as a declaration of principles. The study recalled the traditional SI position: there was an unbridgeable divide with communism, which centred on the question of democracy.[18] To the timid complaints about the paper voiced by Soviet ambassador Semyon Zarapkin, SPD officers plainly answered that it should be clear that 'even in the phase of détente, communists [remained] communists, and social democrats social democrats.'[19]

If the position was coherent with the Western anchorage of *Ostpolitik* and aimed at reassuring domestic public opinion, it also had an essential intra-party motivation: it was designed to rebut the left-wing tendencies that were prevalent among the young party members (*Jusos*).[20] The latter, while largely re-embracing a Marxist political discourse the party leadership had abandoned decades before, displayed a critical attitude towards the 'westernising' trajectory of the SPD that had as its symbol the 1959 Bad Godesberg Conference.[21] For their part, Soviet leaders indeed outspokenly expressed their hope that détente could favour a strengthening of the left wing of the SPD. This aspiration actually mirrored a more urgent anxiety about the possible spread of 'bourgeois' and social democratic influences within the Eastern bloc – due to growing contacts with the West – and exposed again the trans-European ideological struggle going on beneath détente.[22] Pursuing what Janitschek defined as a 'socialist alternative in international relations' also implied certain risks for the social democrats, since old and new challenges to their mainstream identity, which used to be tamed by the 'disciplinary' effects of the Cold War on national politics, both gained room for manoeuvre and became issues of international relevance in the new international climate.[23]

[18] Richard Löwenthal, 'Sozialdemokratie und Kommunismus', box 614, SIA.

[19] Hans-Eberhard Dingels, 'Gespräch mit dem sowjetischen Botschafter Zarapkin am 31.10.1970', in, A.11.4, box 59, Archiv der sozialen Demokratie, Bonn, Willy Brandt Archiv, (hereafter: AdsD, WBA).

[20] For an introduction, see Gottfried Niedhart, 'Ostpolitik: Phases, Short-Term Objectives, and Grand Design', *GHI Bulletin Supplement*, 1 (2004), 118–36.

[21] Leo Bauer to Willy Brandt *et al.*, 10 Feb. 1971, box 5700, AdsD, Helmut Schmidt Archiv (HSA). See also Hartmut Soell, *Helmut Schmidt. 1969 bis heute: Macht und Verantwortung*, (Munich: DVA, 2008), 117–35; Annekatrin Gebauer, *Der Richtungsstreit in der SPD. Seeheimer Kreis und Neue Linke im innerparteilichen Machtkampf*, (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2005).

[22] Andrey Edemskiy, 'Dealing with Bonn: Leonid Brezhnev and the Soviet Response to West German Ostpolitik', in Carole Fink and Bernd Schaefer, eds., *Ostpolitik, 1969–1974. European and Global Responses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 15–38, esp. 20–9.

[23] For this definition see Del Pero, '"Which Chile, Allende?"', 23.

The SPD's concerns were widely shared by the rest of the SI leadership.[24] The German party also began to worry about an international coordination between left-wing socialists. A March 1975 meeting between the *Juso* leader and leftist officials of the British Labour Party, as well as the French and Italian Socialist Parties, was pointed out by the SPD's International secretary Hans-Eberhard Dingels as 'proof of an international network' that was assuming a 'quasi-factionist character'. Dingels added that the Labour Party International Department in particular was now in the hands of a left-wing leadership that was altering the party's traditional stance towards communism.[25]

But it was the French situation that brought about the greatest unease. The long running crisis of the French socialist forces had led in 1971 to the foundation of a new *Parti Socialiste* (PS). The party regrouped several dispersed factions and aimed to provide a fresh start for democratic socialism in the Fifth Republic. The new party's tenets were a marked leftist orientation (noticeable, above all, in its economic programme), as well as a strategy of alliance with the French Communist Party. Within the left-wing coalition that soon emerged (a common platform was agreed upon in June 1972 by the Socialist, Communist, and Left-Wing-Radical Parties) the PS hoped to be able to act as the linchpin of the alternative to Gaullist power.[26] While struggling to have this strategy accepted by SI, the new leader François Mitterrand repeatedly used opposition to mainstream social democracy as a means to bolster his own party's identity, and as an instrument to consolidate its left-wing credentials, thus challenging the communist leadership within the French left.[27] This approach soon put Mitterrand at odds with most other SI leaderships. Together with a controversial trip to Moscow he made in May 1975, the French leader's promotion of a 'unity of the Left' strategy embracing the whole of Southern Europe prompted international concern regarding the PS.[28]

The showdown came in Helsingør, Denmark, at a January 1976 SI Party leaders' conference held just a few days before a scheduled 'Conference of the Southern European Socialist Parties' convened by the PS. Helmut Schmidt (Brandt's successor as German chancellor) unceremoniously lectured Mitterrand about the need to revise

[24] See the frequent rebuffs of Soviet advances for Socialist-Communist collaboration (e.g. Bruno Pittermann, 'A Reply to Zhilin's Pravda Article', and Alvar Alsterdal, 'Little in Common', *Socialist Affairs*, Feb. 1972, 38–9 and 41–7). For an example of discussion on social democracy and communism among party leaders see Dingels, 'Parteiführerskonferenz der Sozialistische Internationale in Chequers am 29–30. Juni 1974', A.11.4, box 126, AdsD, WBA.

[25] Dingels to Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski, 7 Mar. 1975, box 11933, AdsD, SPD-PV.

[26] Alain Bergonioux and Gérard Grunberg, *Les socialistes français et le pouvoir. L'ambition et les remords* (Paris: Fayard 2005), 241–323.

[27] See 'Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers und Parteivorsitzenden mit dem Ersten Sekretär der Sozialistische Partei Frankreichs, François Mitterrand am 27.6.1972 in Wien', box 11585, AdsD, SPD-PV; Christelle Flandre, *Socialisme ou social-démocratie? Regards croisés français-allemands, 1971–1981* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006).

[28] See, for instance, Dingels, 'Gespräche der ersten Sekretärs der Sozialistischen Partei Frankreichs, François Mitterrand, in Moskau am 24. April 1975', box 11933, AdsD, SPD-PV. On this issue, see Giovanni Bernardini, 'La Spd e il socialismo democratico europeo negli anni Settanta: il caso dell'Italia', *Ricerche di Storia Politica*, 1 (2010), 11–4.

his strategy, taking into account its international implications. Schmidt did not conceal his critical assessment of the interventionist economic plans supported by the PS and its allies and expressed his view that alliances with communist parties undermined the voters' confidence in socialist parties all around Europe. Above all, he stressed the detrimental effect that communist participation in any European government would have on the Atlantic Alliance and on the global equilibrium vis-à-vis the Eastern bloc.[29]

A remarkable reminder of the latter issue had been delivered to the Germans by US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who, just before the meeting, wrote a letter to Brandt, by then chairman of the SPD, and in line to be elected as SI chairman. Kissinger reasserted his staunch opposition to any communist participation in Western European governments, regardless of the various degrees of 'reliability' of the CPs. He justified his stance by pointing to the need to preserve the cohesiveness of the Atlantic Alliance, its political and military implications included. The letter ended with a tribute to European social democrats, which could also be read as a warning about the need to preserve their distinctive features. While the German press had reported his alleged fears of a looming 'Marxist' Europe under the political hegemony of social democrats and communists, Kissinger said he knew 'very well the difference between Democratic parties growing out of a Marxist tradition (such as yours) and those that grew out of the Leninist-Stalinist mutation of the Marxist tradition', and that he counted 'many of the leaders of those [Democratic] parties . . . among our staunchest friends and among the most effective political leaders of the Western world today'.[30]

From this point of view, it is revealing that Brandt, often considered to have been far more open than Schmidt on the communist question, did not say a word in Helsingør to soften the positions held by his colleague, which, on the contrary, he backed during a later confidential meeting of the SPD leadership.[31] His silence appeared 'striking' to other delegates at the SI conference but was consistent with the development of the international identity of mainstream social democracy.[32] The alternative that Mitterrand was emphatically voicing – 'should I be forced to choose between solidarity with the French workers, and other solidarities, either Atlantic or European, I let you know my choice is made', he announced in Helsingør – could not attract much interest in the interdependent world of the 1970s.[33] After the

[29] French and German reports of the conference, 8FP/7, CAS; A.19, box 109, AdsD, WBA.

[30] Kissinger to Brandt, 15 Jan. 1976, box 6356, AdsD, HSA. On this Kissingerian view see Del Pero, *Henry Kissinger e l'ascesa dei neoconservatori. Alle origini della politica estera americana* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2006), 90–4. For the allegations of the German press, see 'Grobe Wertung', *Der Spiegel*, 5 Jan. 1976, 19.

[31] 'Protokoll über die Sitzung des Parteivorstandes am 26.1.1976 in Bonn, Erich-Ollenhauer-Haus', 2/PVAS000637, AdsD.

[32] The expression is taken from the report of the Belgian delegates, which was forwarded to the PCI (this was a rather uncommon procedure, but also a sign of fairly close relations between PCI and the Belgian Socialist Party). See 'Conférence des leaders des Partis socialistes et sociaux-démocrates de l'Europe', mf. 211, 1467, Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Rome, Archivio del Partito Comunista (hereafter: APC).

[33] Ibid.

substantive failure of his subsequent 'Mediterranean' socialist conference, Mitterrand himself implicitly recognised this and initiated a rapprochement with the SPD.[34]

The rise of Italian communism

It is within this context that socialist reactions to the rise of the PCI should be examined. The Italian Communist Party had been attracting increasing international attention since at least 1973, when its leader, Enrico Berlinguer, launched the strategy of 'historic compromise', proposing to build a broad alliance with the Italian Christian Democratic (DC) and Socialist (PSI) parties. In this manner the PCI sought to rally the widest political support for a vast programme of social reform, while avoiding the risk of a right-wing backlash. Among Berlinguer's distinctive proposals was the development of 'democratic economic planning', 'structural reforms' and new patterns of resource allocation – investment in 'social' goods and services was to be increased at the expense of 'private' consumption – which together were supposed to gradually introduce into Italian society some 'elements of socialism' without altering the country's constitutional framework. These broad schemes, however, were accompanied by a moderate attitude in day-to-day political life: although in opposition, the PCI was in fact increasingly involved in parliamentary lawmaking.[35]

This domestic strategy, which entailed a staunch reaffirmation of PCI's commitment to democratic and pluralistic models of society, also had an essential international dimension. The PCI emphasised its independence from Moscow, adopted a favourable attitude towards European integration and, strongly supporting East-West détente, asserted in this context its acceptance of NATO. By the mid-1970s, this strategy had gained wide international attention. The press coined the term 'Eurocommunism'. This was a label that stressed the Italian attempt to include the French and Spanish CPs in a new Western European 'reform-communist' caucus and to seek to shape a 'third way' between orthodox communism and social democracy.[36]

The developments in Italian politics represented a difficult case for the SI assumption that social democracy constituted the natural agency for social progress in a democratic environment. The upward trend of communist electoral performance (at the June 1975 regional elections PCI reached its best ever score of 33.4 per cent), while socialist votes languished, epitomised the anomalous features of the Italian involvement in the European left-wing tendency of the 1970s. The Italian Socialists were partners of the leading Christian Democrats in most of the cabinets that followed one another in the volatile Italian political context, but the appeal of these

[34] See Veronika Isenberg, 'Das Verhaltnis der Sozialistischen Partei Frankreichs zur SPD', 26 Jan. 1976, box 11609, AdsD. On the 'Mediterranean' Conference see the booklet *Conférence des Partis socialistes d'Europe du Sud*, 'Conférences des Partis Socialistes d'Europe du Sud', IISH.

[35] See Roberto Gualtieri, *L'Italia dal 1943 al 1992. DC e PCI nella Storia della Repubblica* (Rome: Carocci, 2006), 191–8.

[36] See Silvio Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2006); Idem, 'The Rise and Fall of Eurocommunism', in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45–65.

'Centre-Left' coalitions was waning.[37] During the 1970s, international socialist commentary on Italy typically depicted a gloomy situation of state inefficiency and a looming crisis of the political system, in which the ever-stronger communists challenged the monopoly on power of a divided and inadequate DC. The PSI appeared to be hopelessly weak and increasingly resigned to a minor role.[38] This situation seemed to reach a breaking point by mid-decade. Italy was one of the countries hardest hit by the post-oil shock economic crisis, and the case appeared to be strong for an agreement, aimed at economic stabilisation, with the communist opposition, which increasingly depicted itself – and acted – as a force of order and stability.[39]

The Italian communists' international views remained, however, a source of concern. The party's acceptance of Italy's Western alliances did not imply a corresponding 'choice of civilisation', as its aim remained the transformation of the Cold War order. The long-term vision of the PCI involved overcoming the division of Europe and creating a sort of neutralist ('neither anti-Soviet nor anti-American') and socialist-oriented entity.[40] Thus, when the PCI supported détente and *Ostpolitik*, interpreting them as a stimulus to political change in both Eastern and Western Europe, it not only alarmed both the superpowers (which, on the contrary, were interested in the stability of the European order), it also embarrassed the SPD, which viewed its distinction from communism as crucial. 'Change through rapprochement' – historian Gottfried Niedhart has noted, referring to the famous *Ostpolitik* slogan – 'did not mean change in the West.'[41]

Because of its wide-ranging international role, the SPD was the SI party that had the most relevant contacts with the PCI. These began during the years of the German 'Grand Coalition' government and were originally centred on East-West issues. As SPD officials often made clear, however, the existence of these (confidential) contacts did not entail support of PCI views. The Italian network also encompassed relations of a similar nature (somewhat more cordial but far lower in intensity) with the Scandinavian social democratic parties, and in the second part of

[37] The building of the so-called 'Centre-Left' coalitions between the Italian Christian democrats and socialists in the 1960s was regarded by many observers as a key turn in Italian politics, which could favour reforms and strengthen the Socialist Party at the expense of the PCI. However, in spite of some important achievements, these governments failed to live up to the expectations they originally raised, while also growing increasingly fractious. Accordingly, PSI support in general elections shrunk from 14.2 per cent in 1958 to 9.6 per cent in 1976. See Maurizio Degl'Innocenti, *Storia del PSI vol. 3 – Dal dopoguerra a oggi* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1993).

[38] To mention just a few of the many documents of this tenor: 'Background note on the Italian Socialist Party', 20 Dec. 1972, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester. National Executive Committee Minutes (hereafter: LHASC, NEC); 'The Political Situation in Italy', 24 Jul. 1974, LHASC, NEC; 'Innenpolitische Situation Italiens', 21 Aug. 1974, box 6638, AdsD, HSA.

[39] For instance, Klaus Harpprecht, 'Bericht für Willy Brandt', 17 Jul. 1975, box 401, AdsD, Nachlaß Horst Ehmke.

[40] On this point see Pons, *Berlinguer*, and Antonio Varsori, *La Cenerentola d'Europa? L'Italia e l'integrazione europea dal 1947 ad oggi*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2010), 313.

[41] Niedhart, 'Ostpolitik', 124.

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the 1970s significant exchanges took place with British Labour, as well as with the Dutch and Austrian parties.[42] While demonstrating mutual attentiveness between the Italian communists and the European social democrats, these contacts also often exposed mutual incomprehension and divergence among these forces. In a May 1976 meeting, for instance, PvdA officials challenged their Italian interlocutors with a set of pressing questions:

> Why, in spite of its harsh criticism of the USSR . . . does the PCI not break with the CPSU . . . ? The PCI's views on national autonomy, democracy, freedom, etc., and also the pursuit of an 'historic compromise' with bourgeois forces, contradict the tradition and the practices of the communist movement. Why then does the PCI keep calling itself a communist party? . . . why does not it try to strengthen its relations with German social democracy?[43]

The PCI's relations with other SI parties, such as the French or the Belgian socialists, had different features, as these parties recognised the existence of common objectives between socialists and Eurocommunists, which could be advanced within the European framework.[44] Much to the consternation of the SPD leadership, such a stance also reflected the opinion of wide sections of the *Jusos*, which held quasi-autonomous relations with the PCI. Reporting on a 1971 visit to Italy, a *Juso* delegation made clear its interest in developing a dialogue with those forces that, 'as the *Jungsozialisten* do, aim at achieving structural reforms that respond to an anti-capitalistic thrust, as a basis for a transition to socialism'.[45] The interest in shaping a radical left-wing strategy that could advance gradually and through the democratic institutions would later be boosted by the climate of the economic crisis. Both the PCI and the leftist socialists tended to interpret the crisis as a sign of the limits of what they saw as the essentially 'redistributive' orientation of post-war social democracy and thus sought to devise more interventionist strategies, which were expected to consolidate economic planning and the democratic participation of citizens.[46]

[42] The picture is based on the records of PCI International Department in APC. See also Pons, *Berlinguer*; Bernd Rother, '"Era ora che ci vedessimo". Willy Brandt e il Pci', *Contemporanea*, 1 (2011), 61–82; Michele Di Donato,'Partito comunista italiano e Socialdemocrazia tedesca negli anni Settanta', *Mondo Contemporaneo*, 3 (2010), 91–117; Di Donato, 'Il rapporto con la socialdemocrazia tedesca nella politica internazionale del Pci di Luigi Longo, 1967–1969', *Dimensioni e Problemi della Ricerca Storica*, 2 (2011), 145–71.

[43] 'Delegazione del PCI in Olanda, Belgio, Lussemburgo.' mf. 241, 1157, APC.

[44] See, for instance, the press release of the Mitterrand-Berlinguer talks in Rome (19 May, 1973), in 8FP7/169, CAS; and the letter of Belgian leader André Cools to Berlinguer, 27 Mar., 1975, in, mf. 206, 8, APC.

[45] 'Bericht über dem Studienreise einer Delegation der Jungsozialisten nach Italien (19.09 -01.10. 1971)', box 11633, AdsD, SPD-PV. See also a 1973 'Outline for a strategy of the SPD in the European Community' by the former *Juso*-chairman Karsten Voigt, in, mf. 65, 1103, APC. Interestingly, some of the *Juso* circles that approached the PCI were driven by a specific interest in its experience of 'left-wing' local administration in a 'capitalist nation': see, mf. 046, 83, APC.

[46] See John Callaghan, *The Retreat of Social Democracy*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 35 and 54–79.

Taken altogether, PCI's relations with social democratic parties appeared in any case quite erratic, as compared to its solid ties with Eastern and Western CPs. It was indeed to the latter that the party dedicated its primary attention.[47]

Socialist leaders and Western policymaking

Eurocommunism, however, was clearly not unrelated to the socialist 'ideological offensive' of the 1970s. Inspired by the same *Zeitgeist*, both socialist and Eurocommunist parties were concerned with domestic demands for democratisation and social reform, and, in the international arena, leaned towards East-West détente and the transformation of North-South relations. Of course, their perspectives remained different, reflecting their distinct political cultures: the Italian views, if innovative for a communist party, were hardly viable in a 'Western' context. The socialists' approach was conditioned by these ambivalences. They would not wish to be associated with any communist 'variant', but, given their proclaimed democratic commitment, they could neither easily content themselves with the Kissingerian approach that regarded the renovation of the PCI as politically irrelevant nor look at it solely as a menace to the Atlantic Alliance. This, if vague, was the standard position held by Willy Brandt, who was often asked for his opinions on Eurocommunism. The process of 'de-dogmatisation' of the Western CPs was, according to him, 'interesting', and should be carefully monitored: but neither should social democrats drop their reservations, nor could the Atlantic Alliance blindly trust communist pledges of loyalty to NATO. Brandt also tended to question the definition of Eurocommunism as a unitary movement, stressing instead the different political conditions of the Western countries in which the communist parties were operating, as well as the distinct programmes of the various CPs. [48] In his speech at the SI Geneva Conference in November 1976, Brandt referred to the movement as 'the phenomenon which – vaguely and ambiguously – is termed Eurocommunism' and stated that to him it was 'not yet clear where it is a matter of tactics in the interest of power, and where it is a development based on insight'.[49]

Reporting to his party on his talks on the issue with senior representatives of the American administration, former SPD minister Horst Ehmke, who was politically close to Brandt, described once more the dilemmas of an approach that wished to square stability (as defined within a Cold War framework) with democratic renovation:

[47] Pons, *Berlinguer*.
[48] See the interview '"Da gibt es wirklich sehr Interessantes"', *Der Spiegel*, 26 Jan., 1976, 24–25, and other relevant ones in A.3, box 647, 652, 656, AsdD, WBA.
[49] Willy Brandt, 'Future Tasks of the International', *Socialist Affairs*, Jan.–Feb., 1977, 6.

The real problem is whether we can influence the development of Western European Communism in the direction of further separation from Moscow, and of recognition of pluralism and basic rights, and, if so, how we can do it without at the same time further building it up.[50]

Animated by similar concerns, Swedish socialist Premier Olof Palme proposed instead to put full trust in the ideological strength of social democracy. The evolution of Western communism, he argued, proved 'the attraction and strength of democratic socialism'. If not interrupted, the process could lead to a dismissal of what had been the distinctive tenets of communist parties (dependence on Moscow, the principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the centralistic organisation of the party) and to an embrace of the basic values of democratic socialism. Only in the event that communist moves turned out to be just tactical should 'a tough and implacable line' be taken.[51]

Former European Commission President Sicco Mansholt (of the PvdA) likewise suggested understanding the new 'communist question' in the context 'of the fundamental changes in our society, where we enter the post-industrial period'. Mansholt saw this phase as characterised by the need for 'other forms of participation of the mass of the people'. SI parties, he argued, were 'strong enough' to lead an open debate on these issues. Accordingly, in the countries where the communist presence was of great import, 'when there is a strong development inside the communist parties towards our forms of democracy . . ., then . . . a collaboration cannot only be a wishful undertaking, but even an obligation' for the socialists.[52]

This kind of confidence in the strength of European socialism failed to notice that many of the factors that had accompanied the 'self-affirmation' phase of the 1970s were fading. When the Italian 'communist question' fully emerged as an issue of primary international concern, détente was already showing the strains that in a few years would cause its collapse. The 'democratic' appeal of socialist realisations in that field was starting to be eroded by the resurgence of the anti-totalitarian theme among American and European intellectuals. At the same time, the continuing troubles of Western economies forced socialists to revise socio-economic strategies once thought to be panaceas for meeting the demands of 'modern' societies.[53]

Among those socialist leaders who were particularly aware of these problems were Schmidt and the new Labour Prime Minister of Great Britain, James Callaghan,

[50] Ehmke, 'Meine Reise nach New York und Washington vom 2.-10. September 1975', in box 6817, AdsD, HSA.

[51] Olof Palme, 'Communists in Crisis', *Socialist Affairs*, May-June 1976, 64–9. For a West German reading of this view, see a study of the FRG Embassy in Sweden (4 Mar., 1976), 'Zusammenarbeit oder Abgrenzung – der westeuropäische Reformkommunismus in schwedischer Sicht', in box 408, AdsD, Nachlaß Horst Ehmke.

[52] Mansholt to Janitschek, 8 Mar., 1976, in box 682, SIA.

[53] See John Callaghan, *The Retreat of Social Democracy*; Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe Since 1945*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 535–66; Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004); Leopoldo Nuti, ed., *The Crisis of Détente in Europe. From Helsinki to Gorbachev*, (London-New York: Routledge, 2009); Jan-Werner Müller, 'The Cold War and the intellectual history of the late Twentieth century', in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. III, 1–23.

who had replaced Harold Wilson in April 1976, both of whom came from the right wing of their parties and were known for their Atlanticist commitment.[54] Their role in transatlantic policymaking on the Italian crisis has been highlighted by recent research.[55] These studies have shown the American administration's propensity to manage the Italian situation by cooperating with European powers such as the FRG, the UK and France as well as the widespread concerns about the broader implications of the new communist challenge. During the Italian political crisis of spring 1976, when the collapse of DC-PSI collaboration had engendered a situation in which no majority could be formed in Parliament, and general elections had been called for June, the four powers agreed on the undesirability of communist participation in the government but found it hard to reach an agreement on how to achieve this goal. The British government in particular stressed the need to avoid direct interference.

Studies by historians Duccio Basosi and Giovanni Bernardini suggest that a key contribution to Western policymaking came from the German chancellor, who proposed using economic constraints as a means to contain communist influence. During the G7 economic summit that took place in Puerto Rico at the end of June, a few days after the Italian elections, the idea was put forward to make the concession of the international loan that Italy needed to put in order its balance of payments conditional on a strict programme of economic adjustment guided by a 'technical' institution, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The authors contend that the implications of this attitude went beyond the Italian context and were connected to the broader issue of the structuring of a 'neo-liberal' world economic order. Schmidt's ideas would then typify a specific answer to the social democratic *impasse*.[56]

The results of the Puerto Rico summit have been the object of a sharp controversy. Two weeks after the conference, Schmidt declared to the press that a loan agreement had been reached on condition that the PCI be excluded from the government.

[54] Soell, *Helmut Schmidt*, 401–15; Kenneth O. Morgan, *Callaghan: A Life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 392–5.

[55] Antonio Varsori, 'Puerto Rico (1976): le potenze occidentali e il problema comunista in Italia,' *Ventunesimo Secolo*, 16 (2008), 89–121; Duccio Basosi and Giovanni Bernardini, 'The Puerto Rico Summit and the End of Eurocommunism,' in *The Crisis of Détente in Europe*, 256–67; Laura Fasanaro, 'The Eurocommunism Years: The Italian Political Puzzle and the Limits of the Atlantic Alliance,' in Valérie Aubourg and Gilles Scott-Schmidt, eds., *Atlantic, Euroatlantic, or Europe-America?*, (Paris: Soleb, 2009), 548–72; Umberto Gentiloni Silveri, *L'Italia sospesa. La crisi degli anni Settanta vista da Washington*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2009), 163–90; Bernardini, 'Prove di vincolo esterno. La Repubblica Federale Tedesca e il "compromesso storico" come problema internazionale', in *Aldo Moro nell'Italia repubblicana*, eds. Francesco Perfetti *et al*. (Florence: Le Lettere, 2011), 532–549; Alessandro Brogi, *Confronting America. The Cold War between the United States and the Communists in France and Italy* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 331–7; N. Piers Ludlow, 'The Real Years of Europe?: U.S.–West European Relations during the Ford Administration', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 15, 3 (2013), 136–61; Frédéric Heurtebize, *Le péril rouge. Washington face à l'eurocommunisme*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2014).

[56] Basosi and Bernardini, 'The Puerto Rico Summit'. See also Federico Romero, 'Refashioning the West to dispel its fears: the early G7 summits', in Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol and Federico Romero, eds., *International Summitry and Global Governance. The Rise of the G7 and the European Council, 1974–1991*, (London-New York: Routledge 2014), 117–58.

In the wake of hostile reactions amongst the Italian public, the British and French leaders publicly denied any such direct interference in Italian affairs, while Schmidt himself tried to downplay his statement.[57] In any event, the elections had ruled out the establishment of a left-wing majority, in spite of a new peak of PCI votes at 34.4 per cent. The DC once again emerged as the strongest party, without which no governing coalition could be formed. The main goal of the Western powers – keeping Communists out of the government – was achieved, as a cabinet composed exclusively of Christian Democrats was formed. The latter could count on support from most other political forces (communists included) in the form of benign abstention votes: this uneven yet broad backing allowed the new government to embark on a harsh austerity programme.

A wider socialist debate

Schmidt's declarations indeed went beyond his party's standard line. But the distinctions were of tone rather than of substance when it came to the issue of a communist participation in government in Italy. Party officials reacted with understanding to the chancellor's remarks, the novelty and importance of which they tended to minimise. They connected his viewpoint to the general atmosphere surrounding the impending German elections: safeguarding ideological boundaries was deemed opportune, as a hostile Christian Democratic campaign – conducted under the electoral slogan 'Freedom or Socialism' – targeted the outcomes of SPD's détente policies.[58]

In any event, Brandt-style alertness regarding the democratic evolution of Western communists could hardly provide an alternative policy strategy for addressing the Italian situation. Something new emerged as the PSI, after its meagre result at the polls, elected a new leader, the relatively young Bettino Craxi, who showed his interest in strengthening ties with SI parties and in countering the rise of the PCI. The SPD did not spare energy supporting the new leadership, in which it saw a chance to gain leverage on the Italian situation and to rebalance forces on the Italian left. If Craxi's strategy was partly successful in challenging the communists' position, in the medium term it proved less favourable to Brandt's international goals than was initially thought. The PSI's own 'ideological offensive' against the PCI, in fact,

[57] See esp. Varsori, 'Portorico', 110–3.

[58] See the Bruno Friedrich (MP) declarations of 21 Jul. 1976, box 401, AdsD, Nachlaß Horst Ehmke; the note of 27 Jul. 1976, box 1083, AdsD, Nachlaß Egon Bahr; and the paper presented by Horst Ehmke at an April 1976 roundtable organised by the SPD political foundation, Ehmke, *Socialisme Démocratique et Eurocommunisme. Politique de Détente et Controverse Idéologique* (Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 1977). On the 'Freedom or socialism' campaign see Susan Miller and Heinrich Potthoff, *A History of German Social Democracy* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1986), 199–200. As an example of the use of the Eurocommunist issue in this framework, see the Brandt interview in *Deutsche Zeitung*, 18 Aug. 1976, A.3, box 664, AdsD, WBA.

entailed an uncompromising stance on issues related to communist rule in Eastern Europe, which often put it at odds with SPD's handling of détente policies.[59]

The German outlook on Italy was little influenced by other international developments. After the American elections of 1976, SPD officials saw in the new Carter Administration a tendency towards a more 'liberal' handling of the Eurocommunist question.[60] But they did not do much to cultivate this attitude and showed few regrets, as Carter's approach, when put to test, proved to be less innovative.[61] Afterwards, it was the prospect of the first direct elections to the European Parliament that stimulated a revival of the SPD's concerns about the impact of Eurocommunism, both on the party itself and on international socialism. As the party drafted its European platform, officials focused on the need to distance the social democrats from Western CPs, to contain domestic promoters of collaboration with Eurocommunist parties and to rebuff allegations of a looming European 'popular front'.[62] Tellingly enough, a new edition of Löwenthal's 1970 paper was published in July 1977, with an epilogue by Willy Brandt in which the party chairman discussed again the Eurocommunist question.[63]

The SPD was not the only SI party to be concerned with Eurocommunism. An interesting debate was taking place, for instance, within the British Labour Party. As was noted, Callaghan cooperated in the Western powers' effort to hinder the PCI's participation in the Italian government, but he also stressed the need to avoid any direct intervention. During the tenure of Anthony Crosland as Foreign Secretary (April 1976–February 1977), alternative schemes were also sketched out that tried to evaluate possible positive outcomes of communist involvement in government (could it favour a final split between Moscow and Western CPs? And what would its consequences be?). As it turns out, however, these were not put into practice, and, after the sudden death of Crosland, his successor, David Owen, reverted to a traditional uncompromising frame of reference.[64]

[59] Divergences between Brandt and the PSI, flavoured by sharp remarks of the former chancellor, emerge, for instance, from the notes of Berndt Carlsson, SI general secretary. See Berndt Carlsson Papers, boxes 28 and 34, IISH. The argument for the importance of SPD support of Craxi has been put forward by Giovanni Bernardini, 'La Spd e il socialismo democratico', 14–9. For a different understanding, see Rother, 'Era ora che ci vedessimo'. On PSI-PCI relations see Gennaro Acquaviva and Marco Gervasoni, eds., *Socialisti e comunisti negli anni di Craxi*, (Venice: Marsilio, 2011).

[60] Ehmke, 'Vermerk für Willy Brandt und Helmut Schmidt über mein Gespräch mit Cyrus Vance am 30.10.76 in New York'; Karl Kaiser, 'Carters außenpolitische Konzeptionen und Berater', boxes 6817 and 6843, AdsD, HSA.

[61] See Njølstad, 'The Carter Administration and Italy: Keeping the Communists out of Power Without Interfering', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 4, 3 (2002), 56–94.

[62] Dingels, 'Sitzung der Kommission für Internationale Beziehungen, 16.09.1977'; 'Europawahl. Bestandaufnahme und Problemenkatalog', 11615 and 11617, AdsD, SPD-PV.

[63] 'Zum Verhältnis von Sozialdemokratie und Kommunismus. Neuauflage mit einem Nachwort von Willy Brandt', box 505 a, AdsD, SPD- Arbeitsgruppe Europäische Union.

[64] An account based on a thorough investigation of Foreign Office documents and Crosland personal papers is in Riccardo Portolani, *L'Italia e il Pci nel giudizio del British Labour Government (1975–1978)*, MA Thesis, Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata, 2010.

If the cabinet echoed a variety of 'mainstream' attitudes towards Eurocommunism (looking at it as a development that was foreign and most likely a threat to socialist parties), the situation was very different within the wider Labour Party. The 1970s witnessed a rise of Labour's left wing, which came to dominate party politics from the middle of the decade until the early 1980s.[65] Among the rallying themes employed by the group was the criticism of the social democratic tradition of the party and the proposal of an 'Alternative Economic Strategy' centred on public ownership and economic planning. These opinions were strongly influenced by the study of state intervention in various European economies, especially Italy. The left's chief economist, Stuart Holland, set out the group's views in an influential 1975 book, *The Socialist Challenge*. The study acknowledged the existence of broad uniformity between the Labour programme and those of the Italian and French Socialist and Communist parties. Holland called for an international strategy to be worked out in cooperation with these parties, thus dropping the allegedly ineffective collaboration with 'moderate' forces of international socialism.[66]

These views, although largely marginalised insofar as government policy was concerned, nevertheless boosted attentiveness to Eurocommunism and the PCI within the party. The Labour International Department produced a number of studies on the Italian situation, maintaining a firm position against external meddling regarding the formation of governments.[67] In a long and well-researched paper that the department issued at the beginning of 1977, positive comments about the evolution of PCI were expressed along with an assessment criticising as anachronistic the division of the European Left into the 'rival and bitterly antagonistic camps' of communism and social democracy. It argued that, after overcoming the 'grim days of entrenched Cold War orthodoxies', a more precise picture should acknowledge at least five currents within European socialism: the revolutionary left, orthodox communism, Eurocommunism, 'left-wing' democratic socialism and 'moderate' social democracy. In this context, 'whilst not yet an ally, the PCI [could] no longer be considered an antagonist to democratic socialists'.[68] Confidential contacts with the Italian party were thus initiated, and in 1977 delegates from the Eurocommunist parties were invited to the annual Labour Conference for the first time.[69] A West-European Sub-Committee of the International Department was established in early

[65] Patrick Seyd, *The Rise and Fall of the Labour Left* (London: Macmillan, 1987).

[66] Stuart Holland, *The Socialist Challenge* (London: Quartet Books, 1975), 341–61. On the influence of Holland's theories see Mark Wickham-Jones, 'The New Left', Raymond Plant et al., eds., *The Struggle for Labour's Soul* (London: Routledge, 2004); Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism: From New Left to New Labour* (London: Verso, 2001), 66–85. Noel Thompson, *Political Economy and the Labour Party: The Economics of Democratic Socialism, 1884–2005*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 189–204.

[67] 'The Italian Communist Party and the Italian General Election', 23 June 1976, LHASC, NEC.

[68] [Eric Shaw], 'The Italian Communist Party and Italian Politics', 23 Feb. 1977, LHASC, NEC.

[69] Franco Calamandrei, 'Incontro con un rappresentante del Dipartimento Internazionale del Labour Party sullo sviluppo dei rapporti fra i due partiti', 13 Feb., 1977, box 417, file 61, in APC, 1977, Esteri. The invitation letter to the PCI issued by the Labour Chairman Ron Hayward is in mf. 299, 1153, APC.

1978, whose initial research focused on Eurocommunism. Committee members produced papers and studies that were then offered as a contribution to the on-going international socialist debate.[70]

Rather than questioning the definition of Eurocommunism, or its conceptual consistency, these studies tended to focus on the movement's political implications, which they regarded positively. Eric Heffer, a prominent Labour backbencher and one of the most active members of the West-European Sub-committee, commented for instance that the label 'Eurocommunist parties' was 'likely to stick', regardless of whether the interested CPs themselves 'liked it or not'. Contradicting those who viewed the position of the Eurocommunists as 'purely tactical', he quoted instead a statement by the Spanish communist leader Santiago Carrillo: Eurocommunism, he wrote, 'is not a tactical manoeuvre. . . . It is an autonomous strategic conception in the process of formation'.[71]

'Mainstream' leadership reactions did not fail to emerge. In November 1977, David Owen delivered a speech in which he warned the party about the risk of being led by an erroneous understanding of Eurocommunism to a dismissal of the traditional hostility to communism.[72] During the same period, harsher tones were used by former Prime Minister Harold Wilson. Wilson underlined the threat Eurocommunism posed to socialist action within Atlantic framework and singled out for condemnation Mitterrand's 'unity of the Left' strategy. Socialists throughout Europe, he wrote, should shun 'Mitterrandisme' 'like the plague – for its infection would recognise no international boundaries, the Channel not excepted'.[73] Criticised by Brandt for his public attack on the leader of a member party of the SI, Wilson answered with affected surprise, recalling the SI chairman's solidarity with the anti-Mitterrand front in Helsingør. His reply emphasised again the internal implications of Eurocommunism:

> I think we must all govern our approaches to these matters by our judgment on how such developments offset the international cause of Socialism in general and in our several countries. . . . Perhaps the best commentary on your letter is the fact that in *The Guardian*, this very day, there appears a main-page article by Eric Heffer, attacking Labour's Foreign Secretary for his speeches. . . and emphasising the important role of Eurocommunism in the fight for the future, as he sees it.[74]

[70] See esp. the Sub-Committee meeting of 28 Apr. 1978, 26 Jul. 1978, LHASC, NEC. Articles by committee members Eric Heffer and Stuart Holland, both with the title 'Social Democracy and Eurocommunism', appeared in *Socialist Affairs*, Nov.–Dec. 1977, 148–50, and Nov.–Dec. 1978, 163–68. The studies were then collected in a booklet published by the party, with a foreword by Heffer, *The Dilemma of Eurocommunism* (London: Labour Party, 1980).

[71] Heffer, 'Foreword', in *The Dilemma of Eurocommunism*, 7–9.

[72] 'Owen lashes the Eurocommunists', *Labour Weekly*, 25 Nov. 1977, 2.

[73] Harold Wilson, 'The impact of Eurocommunism on the Western alliance', *Labour & Trade Union Press Service of the Labour Committee for Transatlantic Understanding*, vol. 11, 9, (1977), A.11.15, box 26, AdsD, WBA.

[74] Brandt to Wilson, 22 Nov. 1977, box 971, SIA; Wilson to Brandt, 30 Nov. 1977, box 971, SIA.

Conclusion

After its peak in the mid-1970s, international interest in Italian communism gradually declined, as the PCI failed to make further breakthroughs in domestic politics. The local elections of spring 1978 showed a downward trend of the party's results, which the following year's general elections confirmed: the communists lost nearly one million votes compared to 1976. By this time, the PCI, after failing to obtain any direct participation in government, had definitively withdrawn its support for the Christian Democratic cabinet. The Eurocommunist project soon reached a dead end too, derailed by its internal contradictions, by the inconsistent support of the PCI's communist allies in the West and by the harsh campaign that the Soviets eventually initiated against it. Part of this picture was also the absence of a comprehensive strategy towards socialist parties, going beyond the mere development of a network of contacts.[75]

The far-reaching debate among SI parties about Italian communism revealed divergent viewpoints. The Italian developments indeed transcended the schemes by which socialists had become used to interpreting international realities. If a generalisation can be made, what emerges, beyond the intricate distinctions on the attitude to PCI and Eurocommunism, is a major chasm between a 'mainstream' socialist identity and its various internal opponents. Though far from univocal in its positions, the first group shared a view of socialist identity as a multi-layered construction which held together national and international concerns. The action of socialist parties could not therefore be understood outside of the Western framework in which they operated: the more so since in the 1970s they perceived an increase of their influence – and of their responsibilities – within that context. Here lay the key difference with the 'unorthodox' forces, which instead stressed the need to pursue what they saw as distinct 'socialist' goals, overlooking any international implications or describing them as conflicting with working class interests.

Occurring in the context of détente policies, the rise of Italian communism contributed to the unleashing of centrifugal forces within European socialism which had previously been contained by the Cold War order. This association was especially threatening to 'mainstream' socialists, as it blurred the links between the democratic European Left and the Western system. It is the interconnection between this ideological concern and the international one regarding the consequences for the Atlantic Alliance of a communist participation in government that defined the varieties of socialist approaches, thus highlighting a complex and dynamic correlation between Cold War context and socialist identity.

[75] See Pons, 'The Rise and Fall of Eurocommunism', 56–65.