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TERRACINI, PAJETTA SPEAK OUT

By Kevin Devlin

Summary: Senator Umberto Terracini of the Italian CP, a militant veteran who has criticized party policies on various occasions, has renewed his attack on the strategy of the "historic compromise," arguing that the party should aim for a "left alternative," instead of trying to come to terms with Christian Democracy. In this interview he also described the USSR as a country with no internal democracy and an aggressive foreign policy. In another interview the PCI's "foreign minister," Gian Carlo Pajetta, has reaffirmed the party's stand in condemnation of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

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Senator for Life Umberto Terracini, aged 84, a member of the Directorate of the Italian CP and one of the founders of the party 59 years ago, has a well-earned reputation as the vieillard terrible of Italian political life -- a man who can be relied upon to say just what he thinks, whatever the circumstances. Just as he broke with his party in 1939 over its docile endorsement of the Soviet-Nazi pact, so he has been the only leading Italian Communist who in recent years has consistently and publicly criticized the PCI's strategy of the "historic compromise." He is perhaps the Italian Communist who is most unpopular in Moscow (although there are other candidates for that distinction, such as Giuseppe Boffa and Vittorio Strada) because of his outspoken denunciations of Soviet policies and particularly of the treatment of Soviet Jewry (he is himself Jewish).

When Italian journalists are in search of lively copy, they can always look up Senator Terracini and ask him awkward questions; he will answer them. The latest example of this is an interview (1) in the independent-leftist weekly l'Espresso.

- (1) Guido Quaranta (interviewer), "Napolitano È Bravo. Ma Quel Pajetta. . . , " l'Espresso, 16 March 1980.

Commenting on current political developments in Italy, Terracini dismissed with scorn the idea that the PCI can come to terms with the Christian Democrats:

The DC is the party of the Catholic right, even if it has a mass following, as the fascists also had. It's useless to try to run after it or respect its unity. The only thing to do is to break it up, make the real progressives leave it.

Did Terracini continue then to believe in the possibility of a "left alternative?" Indeed, he did, unlike Giorgio Amendola (and Enrico Berlinguer) who argued that one could not govern the country with 51 per cent of the vote. Terracini believed that it would be possible "and without having recourse to the guillotine; all it needs is a little courage." When the interviewer pointed out that Bettino Craxi's Socialists (PS) had ruled out the left alternative, the senator replied buoyantly that that could change, and expressed the hope that the leftist faction around Riccardo Lombardi would prevail in the Socialist Party. (Unfortunately for his hopes, Lombardi has since resigned as President of the PS, and at last weekend's meeting of the Socialist Central Committee, Craxi won a clear 3-to-2 victory over the Lombardists and is now reportedly to enter a possible new Cossiga government as Foreign Minister.)

Other Leaders Assessed

Then came a provocative question. What did Terracini think of other leaders of the PCI, starting with Berlinguer? Nothing loath, he began crisply; "I appreciate the fact that Berlinguer, unlike [his predecessor] Luigi Longo, has introduced a new method of running the party, for example, by allowing all mouths to be opened. However, not all mouths have been opened." And the others? "Gian Carlo Pajetta is a dear comrade, but I don't consider him a model [literally: "a compass"] to be followed, especially when he plays the flying ambassador of the PCI to Third World countries that have come into the Soviet orbit, swallowing everything that takes place under cover of the flourishing of a red flag." Secretariat member Alessandro Natta was another good comrade, but Natta's sardonic smile seemed to suggest that he took other people for idiots (Terracini used a more vulgar term). Gerardo Chiaromonte (Secretariat) was very intelligent, but had more responsibility than anyone else for the line of the historic compromise. Finally, the Senator had warm words without qualification for Pietro Ingrao ("very educated, thoughtful, and isn't always shaking hands") and Giorgio Napolitano.

Had there been any change in his "polemical" judgments on the USSR? No change: "The Soviet Union is a country in which internal democracy does not exist and which is pursuing an aggressive foreign policy."

The questioner put it to him that he was "a confessed heretic." The aged rebel accepted the label cheerfully: "There are not many in my party who can say no, even feebly. I have always said it out loud. But I am a heretic whom my Church tolerates." He added that "if our rank and file could express itself, many would be with me."

Pajetta on Afghanistan

Another leading Italian Communist who is a favorite subject for interviews, because of his salty style and frequently abrasive wit, is Gian Carlo Pajetta, "foreign minister" of the PCI. He has recently given two interviews which deserve attention more for what he said than for how he said it.

The first of these appeared in the same issue of Espresso, (2) and was largely concerned with Afghanistan. Asked whether the Soviets had made "an error of evaluation" in invading Afghanistan, Pajetta said, "Events have shown that the sentiment of national independence is rooted in the Afghan people and has played a greater role than the Soviets could have thought when they intervened openly in favor of the group which had sized power" /sic: what actually happened, of course, was that the Soviets intervened against the group, led by President Amin, that had seized power -- K.D./

Asked whether the Italian CP might "make an attempt at mediation, for example, with the Soviets and the Afghan Communists," he said: "We do not know the Afghan Communists, we do not have relations with them, and for the time being we think that it would not even be useful to have relations with them." As for the Soviets, he noted that when Pietro Ingrao was leading a delegation to North Korea recently he stopped in Moscow for talks with Ponomarev; the result was a short communiqué saying that both sides had expressed their respective viewpoints, "a euphemism which amounts to saying that the viewpoints were quite different."

In another interview (3) Pajetta spoke of the "incomprehension" that marked PCI-CPSU relations with regard to some questions. These questions included Afghanistan, and here he suggested that "the great powers are often inclined to think that the little ones don't count."

The style of this interview was different, with laconic questions and answers instead of a steady development of themes. For example, asked whether Soviet or American missiles aroused more fear in him, he replied, "Since I live in Rome, the Soviet ones. But there is a 'but'. . . . The American missiles in Italy attract the Soviet ones." The missiles on either side could not be considered more or less "defensive," he added; they should all be first reduced and then eliminated. Later, when asked whether NATO gave him a sense of "security" as it did to Berlinguer, he replied, "As long as they don't ask me to go and fight in the Persian Gulf." What would happen, within the framework of NATO, if the PCI entered the Italian government?: "When Iceland took the Communists into its government, did America close down its bases there? And did it intervene militarily in Portugal?"

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- (2) Gianni Corbi, "Pajetta-Afghanistan: Cossiga, Nostro Uomo A Kabul," Ibid.
- (3) Roberto Gervaso, "Pajetta: 'Incomprensione al Cremlino,'" Corriere della Sera, 20 March 1980.

Worth noting, in conclusion, is a series of answers concerning the PCI's relations with other communist parties and regimes, which is Pajetta's special area of responsibility:

Question: With which Western communist party are you most in agreement?

Answer: With the Spanish; it would be hard to find any point of disagreement.

Question: And with the French?

Answer: The divergences are greater.

Question: And with the Communists of the East?

Answer: Don't make me award marks -- I'm a diplomat.

Question: How does your dialogue with the Chinese stand now?

Answer: The latest Chinese stands have not favored it.

Question: On what do you disagree?

Answer: On almost all questions of foreign policy.

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