

## RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

RAD Background Report/84  
(World Communist Movement)  
18 April 1983

### DISCORDANT ITALIAN NOTES AT EAST BERLIN CONFERENCE

by Kevin Devlin

Summary: Aldo Tortorella, a member of the Politburo of the Italian CP, has made a notably outspoken contribution to the international conference on Marxist thought in East Berlin. He described the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan as a "gravely negative" development. He also differed from other speakers in emphasizing that the peace movement should not identify itself with one bloc against another. Finally, he suggested that the failure to give the workers real participation in decision-making was the basic cause of the crises that had occurred in "some countries of a socialist type."

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By all odds the most notable contribution to the international Marxist conference being held this week in East Berlin under the auspices of the ruling SED has been that of the leading delegate of the Italian Communist Party, Aldo Tortorella; and it was notable because it added a number of discordant notes to what was clearly meant to be a symphony of orthodoxy. Speaking with the weight of his position as a member of the PCI's National Secretariat, Tortorella pointed to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan as a "gravely negative" development, spoke of the need for contemporary Marxists to tackle the contradictions of socialist as well as of capitalist societies, stressed that the peace movement must not identify itself with one bloc against another, and suggested that "the crises that have opened up in some countries of a socialist type" were a result of the failure to give the workers real participation in the administration of the state.

Tortorella began with a brief discussion of current debates and discussions on Marxist thought but stressed the need to update and revise that body of thought:

One cannot explain the enduring influence of his thought by claiming that he has said the last word on all the problems of man and society or that every one of his theses is correct. What is completely topical is the overall thrust of his thought. (1)

The Marxist analysis, he went on, had been verified not only in capitalist countries, where it had been shown that the only way to meet contradictions and crises was through an increasing "socialization" of functions formerly in exclusively private hands. He went on, however, to introduce the first challenging note: "Today a critical Marxist must know how to tackle present contradictions -- those present in the capitalist countries and those present in countries of a socialist type." It may be noted that this last formula, which Tortorella used again later, would itself have been offensive to his East German hosts. In the historic manifesto that the PCI leadership adopted in late December 1981, after the military takeover in Poland, the significant reference is not to "socialist countries" but to "countries of a socialist type," the obvious implication being that, while these regimes have some attributes of a socialist society (capitalism abolished, etc.), they do not correspond to the PCI's idea of authentic socialism.

Noting that the first and most lacerating contradiction of our day was that between the needs of thousands of millions of people living in poverty and hunger and the enormous resources spent on an

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(1) The SED newspaper, Neues Deutschland, which by previous arrangement carried all contributions in full, published the text of Tortorella's address in its April 15 issue. For once, the East German paper gave a fuller report of an Italian communist speech that diverged from Soviet positions than l'Unità did.

arms race that threatened the destruction of mankind, he said that the struggle for peace was consequently of primary importance. He immediately added another discordant note, however, by insisting that this movement must not promote the interests of one bloc against another, and the contrast with the Soviet line was clear enough: The peace movement "must not coincide with alignment in favor of one camp against another, just as it cannot be the patrimony or instrument of any one state or group of states, of any party, or of any class."

Effect of Afghanistan. Tortorella duly criticized the Reagan administration for allegedly increasing international tension in various parts of the world, such as Latin America, but balanced this by noting coolly that there was blame to be placed on the other side, too:

Before the advent of the Reagan administration and after the victorious conclusion of the Vietnamese people's struggle, there have not been lacking acts, of big-power policies on the other side, for example, the armed intervention in Afghanistan, which have also had a gravely negative effect.

The way out of the present international situation, he stressed, was not to be found through

the attempt to establish the superiority of one side over the other. . . . The Italian Communists support the need for a global balance and a freezing of nuclear armaments, to be the starting point of a mutual and balanced reduction [of forces], a position also held by many in the United States.

With reference to his party's acceptance of Italian membership in NATO, he added: "The policy of equilibrium demands the avoidance of unilateral departures from the historically created blocs but also full respect for the independence and national sovereignty of each state and each nation."

In the closing part of his speech, Tortorella emphasized that Italian Communists

cannot conceive of the advance toward socialism and the socialist transformation [of society] without the full safeguarding of political democracy. It is no longer a matter of governing in the name of the working class and the workers but of making them real participators in the overall government of society and the state. In the opinion of Italian Communists, this is also the essential question when it comes to tackling the crises that have opened up in some countries of a socialist type.



It may be noted that the earlier speech by the French CP's chief delegate, Francette Lazard of the Politburo, contained no such affronts to the susceptibilities of the pro-Soviet hosts. She did, however, stress the PCF'S domestic political commitments as a (weaker) partner in a leftist government, commitments that have led the party to diverge on some issues from Soviet positions; but she did so without mentioning these divergences and with significant vagueness: "The PCF directly links its fight for a solution of the French crisis in the direction of a French-type socialism with its fight for new forms of international solidarity for disarmament and peace." It sought to promote "the balance of forces through diminution, and not through augmentation." (2)

As a further contrast one might mention the speech by the leader of the tiny, pro-Soviet Austrian CP, Franz Muhri. Roundly rejecting the gradualist, reformist approach adopted by the Italian CP and others, he boldly presented his KPOe, which can get little more than 1% of the national vote, as a revolutionary party prepared some fine day to become the gravedigger of capitalism. He also paid gratifying tribute to the achievements of "the countries of real socialism," stressing "our internationalist solidarity and links with the Soviet Union and [other socialist] states." But even he felt the need to end with a gesture of revisionist adaptation to national realities: "We are for socialism in Austrian colors." (3)

More interesting was the contribution by Ton van Hoek, a member of the Politburo of the Netherlands CP, which since its recent congress has been following an independent, Eurocommunist course (marked, among other things, by severing relations with the Polish and Czechoslovak CPs because of their treatment of Solidarity and Charter 77). (4) Van Hoek stressed that today it was more necessary than ever to restore the critical function of Marxism, "the liberation from dogmatic rigidity in the scientific, cultural, and political fields." (5) The struggle against the arms race, he went on, should also be directed against the division of the world into political-military power blocs, and it was also necessary to oppose attempts to divide the whole world into spheres of influence. He also noted that the socialism that the KPN was working for could only be the result of cooperation of different political forces, through the maintenance and development of parliamentary democracy. If criticism of the East European regimes could be read into this, it was, however, implicit and explicit. Aldo Tortorella holds his place as the most outspoken delegate at the East Berlin conference.

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(2) L'Humanité, 13 April 1983.

(3) Volksstimme, 13 April 1983.

(4) See Kevin Devlin, "Dutch CP Congress Strengthens Independent Stand," RAD Background Report/260, 28 December 1982.

(5) Neues Deutschland, 15 April 1983.