

RAD Background Report/240
(World Communist Movement)
14 October 1983

COSSUTTA RENEWS PRO-SOVIET CHALLENGE TO BERLINGUER

by Kevin Devlin

Summary: Armando Cossutta, a member of the top leadership of the Italian Communist Party whose pro-Soviet positions were overwhelmingly defeated at the last party congress, has renewed his challenge to the PCI's independent line in an interview given after his return from a stay in Moscow. He blames the leadership (specifically Secretary-General Berlinguer) for failing to mobilize the masses against the planned installation of American missiles and for holding both superpowers, and not just the USA, responsible for the present situation. The party newspaper has criticized Cossutta's stand, but it seems unlikely that any further action will be taken against him.

* * *

Armando Cossutta, the pro-Soviet member of the top leadership of the Italian Communist Party, has broken the "truce" that had prevailed since his challenge to the party line was heavily defeated at the PCI's 16th Congress last March. In an interview given shortly after his return from a stay in Moscow, he has gone further than in the past by making a direct personal attack on Secretary-General Enrico Berlinguer. The party newspaper has reacted promptly with an uncompromising editorial in which one commentator¹ finds "the tone of excommunication": "Cossutta -- and this is something disconcerting in a leader [of the party] -- manifests attitudes alien to the political and cultural heritage of the PCI."²

It seems significant that Cossutta's renewed challenge comes after his return from a holiday in the Soviet Union, where he was received with conspicuous honors, reportedly had talks with Boris Ponomarev and Vadim Zagladin, and helped to launch the Russian version of his book, *Lo Strappo* [The Break], in which he criticizes the PCI's changed attitude to the Soviet regime.³ Also

significant is the fact that the main terrain of attack this time is the alleged inadequacy of the PCI's response to the planned installation of American "Euromissiles" in Italy. This probably does reflect dissatisfaction on the part of Cossutta's Soviet hosts over the so far somewhat muted performance of the PCI in this area and its tendency to balance criticism of the "automatic" installation of the missiles with the observation that the Soviet SS-20 missiles already installed do represent a threat to Western Europe. On the other hand, this theme gives Cossutta a chance to emphasize anti-American -- rather than directly pro-Soviet -- militance; and this could prove a more promising basis for an appeal to malcontents within the party.

"No Commitment." Cossutta noted in his interview with the weekly *Panorama* that Italy had the strongest nonruling communist party, a powerful trade union movement, and a tradition of "a very strong struggle for peace"⁴; and yet --

There is no commitment; one does not see the necessary mobilization of the fundamental forces, the working masses. We have not heard of a single factory that has already discussed and adopted at the very least (and much more would be needed) a resolution against the installation of the missiles.

Reminded of the demonstrations sponsored by the PCI, to be held in many Italian cities on October 22 to coincide with those being held in other West European countries, Cossutta said that this was not enough.

In order for the voice of peace to be heard and to be transformed into effective political action, there must be an intervention of the masses -- workers, women, youth. . . . The struggle for peace is the number one task today. . . . The energy of our people must be applied to this task.

Asked if the PCI intended to mobilize this energy, he said that that was the core of the problem. To get that kind of mass mobilization, it was not enough to note "the objective gravity of the international situation and the objective dangers of the arms race." It was necessary to determine clearly who was responsible for this situation and "struggle against them." For Cossutta, it was the US and its allies alone that were clearly responsible; and his chief complaint (and that of the Kremlin) against the PCI leadership was that it failed to accept this:

If one insists on saying (as Berlinguer has done) that the responsibility lies on both sides, not only is one not telling the truth, but one brings about in public opinion a sort of passivity and even resignation.

Putting all the blame on the American side meant, of course,

absolving the Soviet side for its actions and reactions: the USSR "can certainly not give up [working for] the balance of strength, even at the cost of new sacrifices."

This "choice of camp" naturally extended to the controversial destruction of a South Korean airliner by a Soviet fighter, with the loss of 269 lives -- an action promptly condemned by PCI spokesmen. Asked if he shared this condemnation, Cossutta said: "I do express the firmest condemnation -- but against these American [intelligence] services that sent so many innocent victims to such an atrocious fate."

Within this partisan context, his call for political action was clearly aimed at dissatisfied militants. The PCI, he declared, must mount a campaign of unrelenting opposition to the Euromissiles, linking parliamentary action and mass demonstrations, "as it did in the struggle against the Atlantic Pact: we must make a new start, because we are faced with a general capitalist attack on peace and on the conquests of the workers."

At another point in the interview Cossutta admitted nonchalantly that he knew he was expressing personal opinions divergent from the official party line: "But if some are allowed to speak freely, why not others?" Berlinguer himself, he noted, had also sometimes expressed "personal" opinions: "His well-known judgment on NATO as a shield or umbrella remains his own, completely personal, opinion, never taken over in the official resolutions of the party."

The Leadership's Reply. The leadership's reply to this attack came promptly in an unsigned editorial,⁵ even before the Panorama interview had been published (extracts having been issued to the press). This said that in talking about the grave danger to peace, Cossutta adopted the tone of a wise person "not understood within a leading group and a party insensitive to the disturbing risks of the present international tension." It went on:

The most surprising thing, even for those who know his positions, is that Cossutta holds that the peace movements, mass commitment, and struggles for détente and disarmament can develop and gain ground on the basis of a complete identification with the policy of the USSR and the positions of Soviet diplomacy, which among other things are subject to change in the bitter international confrontation.

Noting Cossutta's argument that the struggle for peace should be linked with the workers' struggle against capitalism, the editorial said disdainfully that in the days of the struggle against the Atlantic Pact, evoked by Cossutta, this kind of thinking would probably have earned the rebukes of Stalin

himself, who had called on the bourgeoisie of capitalist countries to join the peace movement. The reply went on:

Such a stand certainly does not acquire credibility through the caricaturization of PCI policies or the crude attempt to isolate Berlinguer's positions, as if he did not express a precise line adopted by the congress. The PCI is presented as a sort of agnostic party, which goes around saying the fault lies on both sides, and not as an autonomous political force that judges the respective responsibilities, starting with a comprehensive analysis of international reality, on the basis of concrete behavior, of facts and proposals . . . and not of the USA and the USSR as perennial and immobile entities.

This was more difficult but also more effective, even in terms of the peace movement's objectives, than "substantial identification with the official judgments of the USSR, whether it is a matter of Afghanistan or Poland, of the original proposals on missiles in Europe or the more recent ones, quite different and encouraging."

Turning to the affair of the South Korean jumbo jet, l'Unita said that no one could rule out the involvement of US intelligence services, and the party newspaper had also denounced American attempts to exploit the incident propagandistically.

But does this cancel out the seriousness of what happened, the shooting down of an aircraft with 269 people on board? It is a pity that Cossutta did not comment on this when the news broke, because the sequence of Soviet communiqués, it seems to us, did not facilitate the imperative certitude that he displays today.

The editorial said it was significant that Cossutta had turned to a newspaper headline (the famous question of the NATO "umbrella") to avoid having to pass judgment on positions defined and clarified at various party congresses. In calling for a return to the attitudes of 35 years ago, he was not simply expressing disagreement with this or that congress. "In a way disconcerting in a leader [of the party], he is manifesting attitudes alien to the political and cultural heritage of the PCI."

Speaking at Assisi on October 9, at the end of a speech in which he repeated the PCI's call for a postponement of the installation of Cruise missiles in Sicily, Secretary-General Berlinguer expressed full agreement with the editorial:

When one identifies the struggle for peace with the struggle against capitalism, one restricts it instead of extending it to all those concerned, beyond ideologies and classes, with

the cause of coexistence. Well, this identification is alien to our heritage.⁶

Unrepentant. Cossutta for his part was unrepentant. He sent the party newspaper a letter, to be published with an editorial reply in the issue of October 11, in which he both defended himself and counterattacked:

L'Unità could have had the full text of the interview sent to it before polemicizing with the one who gave it; if it did not do so, it is because it has adopted a prejudicial attitude of condemnation and polemics toward the pro-Soviet wing.⁷

This stand suggests that there may be some stormy exchanges at the Executive Committee meeting scheduled for October 11. It seems unlikely, however, that any disciplinary measures will be taken against Cossutta. The most important question is whether his challenge to Berlinguer will find any resonance in the ranks of the party. His previous efforts to rally a pro-Soviet constituency, in connection with the 16th congress, failed rather dismally. Pro-Soviet amendments modeled on those presented by himself and another Central Committee dissident, Guido Cappelloni, were presented at many local pre-congress assemblies but were everywhere rejected by heavy majorities, getting little more than 5% of the total votes. At the congress itself Cossutta and Cappelloni finally withdrew their amendments; and when one federation maintained its own separate pro-Soviet amendment, this was overwhelmingly defeated, with only 5 votes in its favor and 14 abstentions out of 1,109.

1 Ezio Mauro in *La Stampa* (Turin), 9 October 1983.

2 *L'Unità*, 9 October 1983.

3 According to a report by Antonio Padellaro in *Corriere della Sera*, 9 October 1983, the Russian edition of Cossutta's book "is being recommended by the leading group of the CPSU and distributed among middle and upper-level party officials." Cossutta remarked with satisfaction in his interview that "very many copies" had gone to militants of the CPSU.

4 The text of the *Panorama* interview is not available. This account is based on the reports in *La Stampa*, *Corriere della Sera*, and *La Repubblica*, all of 9 October 1983.

5 "But Should One Really Struggle for Peace in that Way?" *L'Unità*, 9 October 1983.

6 *La Stampa*, 11 October 1983.

7 *Ibid.*