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Foreign relations

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PCI WARNS: NO EX-COMMUNICATION OF CHINESE

Summary: As the eight-party committee (including the Italian Communists) meets in Budapest to discuss the agenda for the Moscow conference, Enrico Berlinguer has publicly reaffirmed the PCI's dissenting position on the issues of China and the conference. The PCI's post-invasion stand is that it will not be a party to any form of "excommunication" with regard to China, and refuses even to pass judgement on the Cultural Revolution, so harshly condemned by the Russians. The Italian party has important allies in this renewed challenge to Soviet authority and Soviet interests.

As delegations from the Italian CP and seven other Communist parties meet in Budapest to discuss the agenda for the international conference to be held in Moscow in May, (1) Secretary-General Longo's deputy and heir-apparent, Enrico Berlinguer, has publicly declared that the PCI will oppose any attempt to "excommunicate" the Chinese party.

Berlinguer's statement was made during an Italian Television interview, the text of which was published in L'Unità of February 20. The interviewer, Mario Pastore, had asked: "What will the [Italian] Communist Party do if at the forthcoming international conference of Communist parties a certain line should prevail, leading to the condemnation, the so-called excommunication of Chinese communism?" The new Vice-Secretary of the PCI replied:

We are against any kind of ex-communication on principle, because we think that this method does not facilitate but complicates [the solution of] problems of unity of our movement. As regards China in particular, we start from the consideration that this

(1) The eight parties represented on the working group chosen at the November session of the preparatory commission are those of Hungary, the Soviet Union, France, Italy, India, Belgium, the Sudan and Uruguay.

is a great country, and that the construction of a set-up which would guarantee peace and progress for all peoples is unthinkable if one refuses to recognize the rights of this country, as the American leaders and other governments, including our own, persist in doing. The fact that on many questions our opinions differ from those of the Chinese Communists does not prevent our having a positive attitude toward the solution of the problem, which moreover concerns not only our movement but the whole world situation. Clearly, it follows from this that in all circumstances we shall oppose any form of excommunication with regard to the Chinese Communist Party. [emphasis supplied]

Post-invasion Change

Berlinguer thus reaffirmed, publicly and explicitly, the important change which had taken place in the PCI's attitude to the Sino-Soviet conflict and the international conference, as a result of the invasion of Czechoslovakia. In reaction to that manifestation of hegemonial tendencies on the part of the Soviet regime, the PCI returned to earlier, anti-showdown positions which had blocked Soviet pressure for an international conference up until November 1967, when Longo in a series of Rinascita articles gave conditional approval to the conference plan, on the ground that the Chinese had regrettably cut themselves off from the mainstream of world communism through ideological extremism and the excesses of the Cultural Revolution.

The post-invasion stand of the PCI on China and the conference emerged gradually in occasional statements and articles, until it assumed binding, programmatic form on approval by the 12th Congress in Bologna. Thus, Berlinguer declared in an interview with the magazine Astrolabio early in December that the Italian Communists would not be a party to any "excommunications," whether of China, or of Czechoslovakia, -- or of the Soviet Union. (2) Shortly before the Congress, in his first major statement after three months of illness, Longo told a non-Communist newspaper that, while Italian Communists "criticize and reject many positions of the Chinese Communist Party ... we are and we always will be opposed to every kind of excommunication, with respect to each and every [party]." (3)

At the Congress itself Longo referred briefly and with significant mildness to China in his opening report, expressing the hope that the Peking regime would contribute to the overcoming of

(2) L'Unità, 6 December 1968.

(3) Corriere della Sera, 23 January 1969.

differences in the socialist camp and the world movement. Carlo Galuzzi, the member of the Directorate responsible for foreign affairs, was more explicit in his keynote speech. "We watch with great attention what is happening in China, and we do not wish to advance judgments on a phenomenon so complex and so remote from our experience as the Cultural Revolution," he declared. "We reject, however, any tendency to present this experiment as an absolutely valid model." (This neutralist position, so radically in conflict with current Soviet attitudes, was expressed within the context of renewed insistence on party autonomy and state sovereignty, condemnation of the military intervention in Czechoslovakia and explicit rejection of the Soviet doctrine of limited sovereignty.)

In his closing report, Berlinguer did not, indeed, mention the issue of China explicitly, but his repeated emphasis on the PCI's commitment to a "new internationalism" made the party's position clear. This new mode of inter-party relations would be a development of the Togliattian formula of "unity in diversity and autonomy" -- a "method of tolerance" by which inevitable disagreements would be thrashed out through free and open discussions, without "invective and reciprocal excommunications." Making the relevance of this "ecumenical" attitude to the Sino-Soviet conflict and the conference all but explicit, he added that the PCI wishes "to intensify its relations with all components [of the world movement], without any exception whatever." (4)

Conference Issue

The PCI's new attitude of tolerance toward Chinese heresies is, of course, closely connected with its stand on the conference -- which in turn is linked with its position on Czechoslovakia. In his opening report Longo had expressed only guarded and conditional support for the conference: it would be useful if it helped to restore unity to the divided movement. Berlinguer elaborated on this in his closing speech. In the view of the PCI, the conference must seek to "institute among the Communist and workers' parties, among the anti-imperialist and liberation forces, a method, a system of relationships which would be such as to avoid proceeding to rifts, but instead promote progressive unification in political action and [doctrinal] elaboration." Later he added:

We hope that the conference of Communist and workers' parties, in the preparation of which we are participating, can represent a step in the direction we have indicated. This conference can have a positive result if it is able to unite the element of open and responsible confrontation, even on the most difficult questions on which opinions are divided, and the element of search for a unitary platform of struggle, even for limited objectives,

(4) L'Unità, 16 February 1969; emphasis supplied.

which could extend to parties which do not participate in the conference, and even [to other forces] outside the Communist parties themselves.

When Togliatti's PCI first opposed Khrushchev's campaign for a "showdown" conference in 1964 it had few allies, and was sustained mainly by its own importance in the world movement. Now its position in the movement has been strengthened, and it has a considerable number of allies -- not least due to the invasion of Czechoslovakia. One important ally, for example, is the independent Rumanian regime: at the Bologna congress Niculescu-Mizil deplored "condemnations and labels," and declared that unity in the world Communist movement could be restored only through the avoidance of "any step, any action which could lead to a worsening of relations between parties."

What this adds up to is determined Italian Communist resistance to any attempt at the reassertion of Soviet authority in the international movement, either at the conference or outside the conference. This is a complex political struggle which the PCI is waging through what Longo calls a "policy of presence": whereas other Communist parties and regimes may demonstrate their independence by boycotting the Moscow conference and other inter-party gatherings, the PCI will participate in them even more vigorously than before, in order to fight for its "new internationalism." The current Budapest meeting is merely the latest round in that continuing fight. And the PCI is not fighting only for its own interests: it is also gaining more freedom of maneuver, more possibilities of action, for the progressive Czechoslovaks, the independent Rumanians, and other forces of change in the deeply divided world of communism.

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