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KOMMUNIST REHABILITATES BERLINGUER: "WE WERE WRONG"

by Kevin Devlin

Summary: An article in *Kommunist*, the theoretical journal of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), says that radical criticism of the Soviet system by the Italian Communist Party (PCI) seven years ago was justified. A member of the PCI leadership has linked the article with the internal Soviet struggle over reforms.

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Seven years ago relations between the Soviet and Italian communist parties had deteriorated to the point of open polemics combined with covert factionalist intervention on the Soviet side and unflinching argument combined with radical criticism on the Italian side. This resulted from the PCI's strong reaction to the suppression of Solidarity in Poland, which led it to criticize sharply the Soviet/East European system in an Executive Committee statement of late December 1981 and a CC resolution of mid-January 1982.

What has happened in Poland leads us to consider that the capacity for development and renewal of the societies set up in Eastern Europe--a renewal that began with the October Revolution--is finally being exhausted . . . ,

declared Secretary-General Enrico Berlinguer. The PCI's Executive Committee made an equally unsparing analysis in its historic resolution of 29 December 1981:

The fact is that the countries of Eastern Europe are now faced with degenerative processes, recurrent and dramatic crises that call into question the monolithic conception of power, the lack of institutions that can effectively represent the different sectors of society, the closed and hierarchical conception of relations within the "socialist camp," the idea of socialism as a model rather than as a historic process that develops on a world scale in the most diverse ways.

This resolution also tranquilly cast the international communist movement as conceived in Moscow onto the scrap heap of history:

The PCI confirms that it no longer considers valid the idea of a communist movement as something homogeneous and separate from the rest of the international workers' movement, that is, from the socialist, progressive, and liberation movements.

The PCI would now maintain no "privileged relations" with any communist or noncommunist-leftist parties and would tolerate "no ideological, political, or organizational restraints" on its complete independence of thought and action.

In reply, *Pravda* accused the PCI in January 1982 of having developed

a platform that on all the most important questions is opposed to that of the CPSU, of the Soviet Union, of the countries of the socialist community, of the overwhelming majority of the communist movement, and of the whole liberation movement.¹

It castigated the Italian Communists for their "gradual abandonment of the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary platform" and accused them of attacking communist regimes "with weapons drawn from the arsenal of the class enemy." A later *Kommunist* article said that the PCI was waging "an ideological struggle against the CPSU, against the socialist community," and that the PCI's stand on Poland "served the plans of imperialist reaction."²

"It Was True." Times have changed, with a vengeance. In early 1989 the same *Kommunist* marked the seventh anniversary of the outbreak of the interparty feud by publishing an article³ that not only lavished high praise upon the PCI's policies and ideological innovations but also strongly criticized the CPSU under Brezhnev for its "undeserved and unjust" attacks on Berlinguer's PCI. The author, Vladimir Naumov, a lecturer in international politics at the CPSU CC's Academy of Social Sciences, even said that the PCI was quite right to maintain that the system that developed from the October Revolution had lost its driving force and power of attraction:

The Italian Communists reached the conclusion that the socialist countries clearly showed negative tendencies, and in some cases even factors of crisis. . . . At a certain stage socialism had begun to lose its power of attraction as a social system. (This is what the PCI said; and it cannot be blamed for doing so, seeing that this was true.)

Naumov's essay began by paying tribute to the PCI as "the most important communist party operating in the nonsocialist

world." With a million-and-a-half members, he noted, it contained nearly a third of all Communists in capitalist countries; yet its prestige and influence were not due only to its numerical strength:

The attention and interest that the PCI constantly attracts are due above all to its theoretical and practical activity, its political initiatives on the domestic and international levels, and the richness of its intellectual potential and its innovative spirit.

The special characteristic of the PCI, he went on, was the primary attention that it gave to problems of democracy, "fighting always under the banner of democracy and the defense of human rights and individual liberties, and always affirming its conviction that 'democracy and socialism are indissolubly linked.'" This emphasis, he added, had "aroused various and not always well-founded reactions"; but the innovative ideas behind it had attracted the attention of Communists all over the world, stimulating discussion and promoting theoretical development. Later, he observed approvingly that the PCI "had developed its own concept of joint action by the [West] European leftist parties in the context of economic integration" but he did not mention that Soviet commentators had long criticized the PCI's support for West European integration and its approach to noncommunist forces, just as his warm reference to the PCI's "new internationalism" failed to note that it all but explicitly challenged and replaced the "proletarian internationalism" dear to the Kremlin.

Crisis of "Real Socialism." Naumov did, however, stress the earlier Soviet failure to react adequately or correctly to the PCI's ideas:

Many ideas and theoretical conjectures of the PCI were not, unfortunately, assessed correctly in our country. Our historians and social and political scientists were unable to grasp their topicality and novelty. . . . Particular irritation was caused by criticism directed at us. . . . The PCI upheld its own opinion regarding the exclusion of [Soviet] workers from important decision making and violations of freedom of research and cultural expression. Criticism of the limitations of Soviet reality never met with the understanding it should have had on our side.

Nowadays, Naumov suggested later, both the CPSU and the PCI were ready to learn from each other; and he linked the Italian party's support for *perestroika* in the USSR with its efforts to reform its own internal life and reassess its policies and strategy. He quoted approvingly from the document prepared for the forthcoming 17th Congress of the PCI:

In all the countries that were described until recently as countries of "real socialism" there has begun, as a result

of the profound crisis affecting all of society's life, a tenacious struggle for democracy, civil rights, and individual liberties as the only way to overcome the grave problems accumulated over decades of centralized, authoritarian, and bureaucratic rule, arbitrarily identified with socialism.

In an interview on this important *Kommunist* article, published in *Rinascita* on January 21, Antonio Rubbi, a member of the PCI's Executive Committee who has long been associated with "interparty diplomacy," discussed the wider significance of Naumov's essay, linking it with

a new [Soviet] vision of socialism, the affirmation of individual liberties and democracy as fundamental values for the experiment now going on, of *perestroika* and the refounding of a state in the Soviet Union under the rule of law.⁴

Struggle over Perestroika. Rubbi said that in his opinion the *Kommunist* article was aimed principally at the CPSU itself "and what is described as 'the international communist movement'" (which no longer exists for the PCI). He explained:

In this article there is a key phrase that most commentators missed; it is the one that blames Soviet scientists and sociologists (it is only out of prudence that Naumov does not refer to political sectors that are quite obvious) for still basing their research and writings on old positions linked with criticism of the PCI, attempting to hide the new and original ideas of this party. . . . For anyone who knows about the political struggle now going on within the CPSU and its leading group, it is not difficult to see in this affirmation a definite attack on the dogmatic and conservative elements that seek in every way possible to resist the new course and new ideas. . . . This *Kommunist* article takes its place in the impassioned and bitter conflict of ideological and political positions taking place over new policies.

Asked whether he was also referring to "other communist parties and other countries," Rubbi said that it was no secret that the new Soviet course was "regarded with apprehension, ill-concealed distrust, and sometimes explicit opposition in sectors of some socialist countries and not a few communist parties." He added:

There is a refusal or hesitation to admit that this is a qualitative break with views, practices, and traditions no longer capable of coping with the enormous novelties of our time or of offering adequate responses in theoretical, cultural, and political terms to the needs of individuals and society today. In giving the PCI the credit that is its due, *Kommunist* in truth intends also to reply to those

who cling to old perspectives and outdated concepts and to goad them on to the path of revision and renewal.

An earlier editorial⁵ in the PCI's daily, reacting to the first reports of the *Kommunist* article, suggested that Naumov's article could be viewed as an effort to refute "the central dogma on which 'real socialism' was based: that it is the only true and possible way to implement socialism," and concluded:

The criticism of "real socialism," of the historical experience and body of doctrine summed up in this formula, far from meaning the renunciation of socialist thought and action, is the condition for restoring its strength and relevance in the world of today. If this reading [of the article] is correct, we can find in it grounds for confidence and optimism.

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1 *Pravda*, 24 January 1982.

2 *Kommunist*, no. 4, 1982.

3 Article by Vladimir Naumov, *ibid.*, no. 1, 1989; a full Italian translation appeared in *Rinascita*, 28 January 1989, pp. 27-30.

4 "To Whom Is *Kommunist* Speaking?" *ibid.*, 21 January 1989.

5 Claudio Petruccioli, "Berlinguer and Gorbachev," *l'Unita*, 8 January 1989.

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