

**Altri comunismi
italiani.
Dissidenze e
alternative al PCI
da Livorno
al Sessantotto**

**a cura di
Gabriele Mastrolillo
Marion Labey**

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Italian Trotskyism and relations with the Fourth International (1945-1953)

Velia Luparello

Introduction

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The aim of this chapter is to analyse the political relations between the International Secretariat (Is) of the Fourth International and the Italian Trotskyists during and soon after World War II. This approach implies studying the Italian Trotskyists through the prism of the international organisation of which they were a part, which allows contextualizing the course of the Italian groups in the global framework of an international history of Socialism¹ during the 20th century. Our main hypothesis indicates that, from 1943 to 1948, the official Italian section of the Fourth International was the Partito Operaio Comunista (Poc), yet the late formation of this party and the sectarian politics of the Is made it difficult for the Fourth International to assess the political situation in Italy. Likewise, the strong political differences between the Is and the Poc prevented the Italian group from having a real insertion in the workers and mass movement.

This work is based on the analysis of documentary primary sources, such as the party press and the internal bul-

1. See HAUPT (1962).

letins of the mentioned organisations. Specifically, I worked with the theoretical magazine of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) of the United States, «Fourth International»; the party press «The Militant» and «New International»; the internal discussion bulletins of the Is («International Bulletins»); and the epistolary exchanges between that organ and the Italian Trotskyists.

The chapter is divided into three sections arranged chronologically. In the first section, I focused on the connections between the militants of the Fourth International with the Italian Trotskyists and the Bordigist militants who founded the POC at the end of 1944. Then, in the second section, I analysed the Second Congress of the Fourth International of 1948, in which the Is expressed its differences on the political orientation of the POC and its decision to expel it from the international organisation. The third section describes the main characteristics of the new Italian section formed shortly after the Second Congress, the Gruppi Comunisti Rivoluzionari (GCR), which developed at another critical moment of the Fourth International; that is, after the well-known 1953 split. Lastly, the final comments made a recapitulation of what has been analysed, putting the development of the Italian Trotskyist party in relation to the general political situation of the Fourth International during the period of World War II.

The Founding Conference of the Fourth International was held in September 1938. However, almost two years later, from 19 to 26 May 1940, a special Emergency Conference was held in New York as a consequence of the outbreak of the war in Europe and of the crisis in the leadership of the Fourth International at that time. Trotskyism worldwide was going through a major organisational crisis since the mid-1930s. The SWP in the United States constituted the most important section and had had an important presence in some of the main labour conflicts in the country, such as the Minneapolis truckers' strike in 1934². By comparison, the European sections did not have the material and human resources that the SWP had, especially in the case of France under Pétain, where the Parti Ouvrier Internation-

2. See JENKINS (1977), p. 3.

aliste (Poi) had to go underground; and Nazi Germany, where the German Trotskyist section was almost entirely in prison. On 21 August 1940, Leon Trotsky was assassinated and many of the European sections were destroyed by the fascists, while the Asian ones suffered the same fate under the rule of the Japanese Empire.

Although the remaining Trotskyists groups tried to maintain contact with each other, especially the American and the British, the isolation and lack of communication during this period were crucial factors in the political evolution of the Fourth International. When the European sections found themselves decimated and illegal, the leadership of the Fourth International fell into the hands of the SWP: the headquarters of the General Secretariat was transferred to New York in September 1939. For their part, the European sections that managed to rearm within the framework of the Fourth International were the French, the British, and the Belgian sections. They maintained exchanges and, in January 1942, a constitutive meeting of the European Secretariat was finally held in Saint-Hubert (Belgium). The European Secretariat of the Fourth International born of this meeting was based in Paris but, in the absence of collective work, the entire burden fell on Marcel Hic, member of the Poi, who wrote and acted on its behalf³.

Italian Trotskyism did not escape the climate of general crisis. By the beginning of World War II, there was no Italian section of the Fourth International. According to CASCIOLA (1995), as early as the 1930s, ideological and programmatic “clarification” work had begun with the supporters of the Left Opposition in Italy, with the aim of building a revolutionary party that would be linked to Lenin’s Bolshevik tradition. This task, which had been carried out during the political emigration of some of the Italian militants to France, was interrupted in the second half of the 1930s, but was resumed in Italy from the beginning of the 1940s by some militants who had been deported to the Tremiti Islands by the fascist regime, organizing a Trotskyist cell among them. ALEXANDER (1991) affirms that there is no indication of how many other exiled Italian Communists joined the New Italian Op-

3. See LUPARELLO (2021).

position. However, it is certain that there were difficulties in maintaining a functioning Italian Trotskyist organization in exile. Factional conflicts within it had virtually brought its extinction by 1933; and an effort to reorganize the group in 1934 was short-lived. Those of the New Italian Opposition like Alfonso Leonetti, Paolo Ravazzoli, Pietro Tresso, Nicola Di Bartolomeo, Mario Bavassano, and Gaetana Teresa Recchia, who were active in the French section of the Fourth International and also (Leonetti and Tresso) inside the Is, became involved in its internecine disputes and were partially victims of the Nazi persecution as well or abandoned Trotskyism (Leonetti, Ravazzoli, and Bavassano)⁴.

The need for an Italian party of the Fourth International became an urgent matter from March 1943. The wave of strikes that began in some cities in northern Italy, followed by the deposition of Benito Mussolini and the rise of the Italian Resistance, put the political situation in this country at the centre of the Is debates. Would those first steps of revolt be followed by the consolidation of democratic freedoms and parliamentary institutions in the framework of capitalism, or would they be quickly followed by a council movement and a socialist revolution? The dispute between the leadership of the SWP (James Cannon) and its minority tendency (Felix Morrow, Jean van Heijenoort, and Albert Goldman) would originally revolve around that question, raised by the Italian events⁵ and influenced the whole political perspective of the Is concerning the European process.

In the scenario, in August 1943, after been released from jail, the members of the small Trotskyist group led by Nicola Di Bartolomeo gathered at the Centro Provvisorio Nazionale per la costruzione del Partito Comunista Internazionale (IV Internazionale) (CPN) with the intention of becoming the Italian section of the Fourth International. However, the relationship between this party and the Is were tense and showed great deal of political differences.

4. See MASTROLILLO (2022).

5. This issue was discussed in detail in the article of LUPARELLO-GAIDO (2014).

The Italian section of the IV International: The Partito Operaio Comunista (Bolscevico-Leninista)

Starting in August 1943, the CPN, based in Naples, began to carry out propaganda work and opted for the path of entryism in the Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria (PSIUP) and its youth organization as a strategy to win adherents. However, for the first months of 1944, the Italian Trotskyists began to contact various members of the Fourth International and Max Shachtman's Workers Party (WP)⁶, whose militants had to serve in the allied army. According to Paolo Casciola, «Di Bartolomeo began a written exchange with Shachtman himself, an exchange that had some influence with regard to the doubts raised by Italian Trotskyists about the real existence of the Fourth International in their letter of adherence to the International itself, written at the end of 1944»⁷. On the other hand, Sam Bornstein and Al Richardson stated that towards the middle of that year, Charles Van Gelderen, a member of the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL)⁸ of Great Britain, who was in Italy as part of the British Army, collaborated closely with the Italian Trotskyists⁹.

Van Gelderen managed to obtain a pass for himself and Di Bartolomeo to cross the Anglo-American occupation zone and reach Foggia in July 1944, where they had been rumoured that there was a poster of the Fourth International. They established contact with Romeo Mangano, the leader of the Apulian Federation of the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI), who held firm to the positions of the old Bordigist left¹⁰. The Apulian Federation, which had made

6. It was born as a split from the SWP in April 1940. The main reason for the controversy revolved around the characterisation of the nature of the USSR and the position of “unconditional defence” raised by Trotsky. Criticism of this perspective was heard mainly by three party members: Max Shachtman, Martin Abern and James Burnham. As a consequence, the dissident minority was expelled from the SWP and months later organised the WP. The SWP had a membership of around 800 to 1.000 people, and split right down the middle over this conflict, creating the WP with around 500 members. See ALEXANDER (1991), p. 804.

7. CASCIOLA (1995).

8. At the end of 1944, the RSL would be part of the merger with the Workers International League (WIL) that founded the British section of the Fourth International, Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP).

9. BORNSTEIN-RICHARDSON (1986), p. 29.

10. Matteo Renato Pistone, a former Trotskyist militant, and Amadeo Bordiga formed

the poster, was completely unaware of the existence of the Fourth International, which had been founded six years earlier. Charles Van Gelderen remembered it this way:

The walls were full of these posters calling for the Fourth International. The manifesto was a very sectarian document, like the Bordigists, and I managed to get a copy through to England which was published in W.I.N. We had long discussions with them, and eventually they agreed to join us. But it made it even worse, because I wanted them to continue work in Socialist Party. But we were hopelessly outnumbered, and they had money, and contact with people in Rome.

They called themselves Potere [*sic*; Partito] Operaio Italiano. I have a membership card downstairs with No.1 membership on it, and “The Fourth International”. We got to Mangano and we spent two days there, and then I had to be back at the barracks next day so we started back. I could get a lift back, but there was no way that they would accept Nicola. No motor vehicles were allowed to pick up hikers, in the end I had to go back on my own. It took Nicola ten days to get back to Naples. Later on, when things eased a bit, we were able to travel to and fro, and Mangano visited us.

In Italy Nicola di [*sic*; Di] Bartolomeo, who was also in the Molinier Group, told me he had gone over to London (i.e. pre-war) on behalf of the Molinier Group, and the only names they knew in England were Haston and Grant. I have no evidence at all but what appeared in the paper. I knew nothing at all about this until Nicola di [Di] Bartolomeo definitely mentioned Grant and Haston, “Hestoon”, as he used to call him¹¹.

From this testimony we can see that, although during the course of the war several Italian Trotskyist were part of, or were in contact with, the French and Belgian sections of the Fourth International, the relations with the Italian Trotskyists began from the connections with the American mem-

a group within the Pci that resumed the action of the abstentionist Communist Fraction of 1919. Its influence was strong in the cities of Naples, Salerno, and Rome. This group proposed to lead the parties to the field of class politics, and to transform into an autonomous party when this rectification of the other parties proved impossible. To achieve these objectives, the Bordigist militants preached entryism within the Pci until 1945. See BOURRINET (1980), p. 185.

11. BORNSTEIN-RICHARDSON (1986), pp. 31-32.

bers of the SWP and some British members of the Trotskyists groups like the RSL and the WIL due to the massive recruitment that the Allied landings implied between the end of 1943 and the middle of 1944.

The discussions held by Di Bartolomeo and Van Gelderen with the Apulian Federation leaders were sealed with the creation of a political alliance between the Trotskyists and the Bordigists, an alliance that gave rise to the Partito Operaio Comunista (Bolscevico-Leninista) (Poc). Similar to the 1944 merger to create the Parti Communiste Internationaliste (PCint) in France and the RCP in Great Britain, the deal was reached without any preliminary and in-depth political discussion, and, unfortunately, resulted in an unprincipled merger carried out on shaky foundations. However, one of the first tasks carried out by the Poc was the launching of a political program for Italy which was published in its press, «Il Militante», in October 1944. It was reproduced by the SWP newspaper, «The Militant», in its March 1945 edition. The note celebrated the presence of Trotskyism in Italy at a socially and politically critical moment and stated that: «It is clear from this material that our Italian comrades stand upon the principles of the Fourth International». The Poc program had 25 points:

- (1) Abolition of the monarchy and the institution of a democratic republic.
- (2) Freedom of speech, press; freedom to organize, strike, demonstrate, etc.
- (3) A Constituent Assembly and the holding of immediate elections with the participation of all parties.
- (4) The right of universal, direct and secret suffrage for all citizens, soldiers and members of both sexes 18 years of age and over.
- (5) Complete separation of Church and State; application of a progressive tax on the wealth and property of the Church.
- (6) Compulsory free education, with no religious instruction until 18 years of age. Free technical education for all – without taxation.
- (7) Progressive tax on all capital revenue.
- (8) Monetary stabilization.
- (9) Abolition of the black market and all powers of distribution to the cooperatives, trade unions, and consumers' councils.

(10) Stabilization of salaries and a minimum wage and stipend, corresponding to the economic needs and guaranteed by the state, on a sliding scale in relation to the cost of living.

(11) Workers' control of industrial production, insurance, banking, transportation, land, through internal commissions.

(12) Confiscation without indemnity of all industries and capital of Fascists proprietors and societies and their operation by the state under the direction of the trade unions and workers' councils.

(13) Construction of experimental stations upon state territory.

(14) Expropriation without indemnity and nationalization of all fascist landed property; such properties to be assigned to the Agricultural Workers' Councils and poor peasants. The same applies to rich landowners.

(15) Abolition of all peasants' debts and interest owed to banks and rich proprietors.

(16) Industrialization of agriculture with a new scientific system of work and cultivation under the direction of Agricultural Workers' Councils and poor peasants.

(17) The state must assure just prices for agricultural products and enlarge subsidies for direct cultivators and agricultural workers.

(18) Defascistization of all administrations under the direction of the trade unions and workers councils. Abolition of social distinctions. The military is to receive pay equal to that of the industrial workers. Military schools are to be under the direction of trade unions and workers' councils.

(19) The partisans must be considered as regular soldiers and must keep their arms.

(a) Formation of armed squads of workers and peasants under the direction of trade unions for the defence of all democratic liberties and against reaction.

(20) Immediate publication of the armistice terms between the Allies and Italy.

(21) Independence for all Italian colonies.

(22) For an immediate, just and democratic peace for all peoples. At the conclusion of the war, we must demand a socialist peace as against the aims and decisions for an imperialist peace: and the constitution of a government of workers', soldiers' and peasants' councils.

(23) Liberty and national independence for all colonial people from the oppression of the imperialist powers.

(24) Reconstruction of the world based upon the freedom

of transportation and commerce, through an international organization with all peoples having free access to the world's raw materials and raising of the economic and industrial level of all colonies and backward countries.

(25) The constitution of the Socialist United States of Europe as part of the World Socialist Federation¹².

Reaffirming its opposition to the Ivanoe Bonomi government, the POC called on the PCI and the PSIUP to break their coalition with the bourgeoisie and form their own government on the basis of this program. CASCIOLA (1995a) stated that the aim of the POC was to articulate the slogan of the workers' government, denouncing the collaborationist government of national unity and calling on the reformist parties to impose, on the basis of a mobilization of the masses, a government that would carry out a program of democratic and anti-capitalist measures. Such a policy was a constant feature of the orientation followed by the POC between the years 1944-1947 and was aimed at exposing the complete subservience of the Italian reformists (referring to the Communist and Socialist parties) to the logic of the ruling class and alienating the masses from its influence.

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The immediate proclamation of the Republic, the arrest of the king and the royal family, the confiscation of all the assets of the House of Savoy, the creation of a Constituent Assembly, the separation of Church and State, and the agrarian reform, were slogans based in the concrete reality of the Italian situation and to which the leadership of the Fourth International, the Is embodied by the majority of the SWP and the newly created European Secretariat, fiercely resisted. This resistance was verified in one of the first exchanges that took place between the Italian Trotskyists and the Is. The «International Bulletin» of February 1945 published the letter of adherence to the Fourth International drawn up by the POC:

The Bolshevik-Leninist movement which heads The Militant, the Provisional National Center and the Internationalist Communist Workers Party has decided to adhere to the Fourth International. It declares that only a World

12. *Letter of Adherence to the Fourth International*, in «International Bulletin», n. 1, 1945, p. 16, online at <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/ib-1940-45/v03n01-feb-1945-FI-internat-bul.pdf> (last accessed 5 October 2022).

Congress of the parties and movements adhering to Bolshevik-Leninist principles and the program of the Fourth International on the bases of the experience of October of 1917 and of the first four Congresses of the Communist International can definitely build the Fourth International.

The revolutionary movement of Italy is not only tied and dependent on the revolutionary events of Europe but its success depends on its ties with the workers' struggle of all countries. We call the workers everywhere to be vigilant against the intervention of international finance in coalition with reformism, Stalinism which attempt through «bourgeois democracy» to crush the revolutionary movement of the European countries.

The task of the revolutionary vanguard, in this period, is to regroup itself around the program and principles which guide the Fourth International¹³.

The response that the letter received from the leadership of the Fourth International criticised the program of the 25 points:

First, and most important, everything seems to be included in it, but nothing stands out in it. In other words, it reads more like a catalogue of various demands rather than a fighting program of action, a guide for agitation, what to do next. We will discuss this with you more fully another time¹⁴.

Next, the Is remarked on the lack of discipline of the Italian organisation, a party that was not yet even part of the Fourth International, and its apparent lack of recognition of the very existence of the it:

We wish in this letter to discuss with you particularly «The Letter of Adherence». Frankly we are very disturbed by it. It states «only a World Congress of the parties and movements adhering to B. L. principles and the program of the Fourth International ... can definitely build the Fourth International».

13. *Program published by the Italian Trotskyist Party*, in «The Militant», 17 March 1945, p. 3, online at <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/themilitant/1945/v9n11-mar-17-1945.pdf> (last accessed October 5, 2022).

14. *Letter Of Secretariat to Italians*, in «International Bulletin», n. 1, 1945, p. 16, online at <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/ib-1940-45/v03n01-feb-1945-FI-internat-bul.pdf> (last accessed September 7, 2022).

According to this statement the Fourth International is as yet not an organization at all; simply a program. As you know, this is not in accordance with the facts as the letter itself virtually admits, because it declares that its organization has decided to adhere to this “non-existent” Fourth International.

«Only a World Congress ... can definitely build the Fourth International». Thus the letter attempts to wipe off the slate twenty years of struggle and achievement. A lot has happened between «the experience of October 1917 and the first four Congresses of the Ci [Communist International]» and today, to mention just a few things: The proclamation for the organization of the Fourth after Hitler’s rise to power. Five years of struggle against the centrists and opportunists who agreed “in principle” with this program only to oppose it in practice. The 1938 Founding Conference of the F. I., which not only adopted a program, but also formally founded an organization, adopted a set of statutes and elected a leading body, an executive committee and a secretariat. Two years later was held an Emergency Conference, which removed the Shachtmanite turncoats, reorganized these bodies, and issued the Manifesto on the Imperialist War and the Proletarian Revolution. The Fourth International possesses not only a tested program but a firm organization. And the program, we know, cannot be achieved except through the instrumentality of the organization. That is why we are always on guard against all attempts to deny, explicitly or implicitly the existence of the Fourth International: in order to escape from organizational obligations and discipline.

Joining the Fourth International means not only adhering to its program but also to its discipline. We hope your friends will discuss our letter in the comradely spirit in which, it is intended and will arrive at full agreement with us.

We will defer action on the “Letter of Adherence” until we hear from your friends¹⁵.

From this point on, the relations between the Bordigist majority of the POC and the Is of the Fourth International turned out to be quite tense and it was not possible to generate lasting political agreements. The conflict between the two tendencies that formed the POC became more and more

15. *Ibidem*.

acute during 1946, while the Is planned to send a delegate to Italy to achieve, no longer a political conciliation which was considered impossible, but simply some kind of organisational scheme that would allow to integrate the Apulian Federation in a leadership work to create the necessary conditions for a faster organizational expansion. That delegate, Jérôme (another pseudonym for Michel Pablo), attended a session of the Poc Political Bureau in July 1946, during which he suggested the adoption of a series of organizational measures and the recognition of the need for the party to extend its influence in northern Italy. However, sometime later, the leadership of the Poc was weakened by the resignation of one of the three Trotskyist members of the leadership, Leonardo Iannaccone, in August 1946. Thus, the burden of directing the Italian section fell on the shoulders of only two members, Bruno Nardini and Libero Villone, and the entire organizational plan agreed with the representative of the Is, Jérôme, was rendered inoperative.

As consequence of this organizational crisis, the party press, «IV Internazionale», which used to be printed in Rome, ceased publication in January 1947 and resumed four months later in Foggia, after Mangano, taking advantage of the organizational chaos and the demoralization of the main Trotskyist members of the Poc, took over the leadership of the Italian section¹⁶. This political turn led the Is to intervene in the Poc's congress to defend the positions of the Trotskyist program and warn the Poc that adopting the line defended by its leaders would force them to re-examine the question of the Poc's affiliation with the Fourth International.

The Second Congress of the Fourth International

Under these conditions, the Second World Congress of the Fourth International took place in Paris in April 1948. A series of documents published in different issues of the SWP's journal «Fourth International» brought together the resolutions approved by it and the balance made by the organization on its performance in the first ten years of its existence. This balance was drawn up by the Is and presented

16. See CASCIOLA (1995a).

for approval during the Congress. In the document, it was stated that the leadership that emerged from the founding congress of the Fourth International dispersed due to the war, which prevented it from having the possibility of firmly establishing itself as a representative body that politically and organizationally expressed the collective will of the national sections. During this period, the Is tried to maintain the thread of continuity of the International while waiting for a change in the political situation that would allow the reestablishment of the contacts with the other sections and the creation of new representative international organs. But it also demonstrated, on the other hand, the weakness of the Fourth International in relation to both the objective possibilities and the historical needs. The International was only in a propaganda stage at the outbreak of the war and not a single section could be classified as a party in the real sense of the word. It was not until mid-1944 that the official French, British, Belgian, and Italian sections were founded; up to that moment, the fragmented European Trotskyists groups fight to survive and try to get to the working movement clandestinely.

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The resolutions of the April 1948 Conference expressed little analytical progress with respect to the decisions taken two years earlier, at the First Conference of the Fourth International, and had no criticism of the theoretical-political conclusions defended since 1945, especially in relation to the fierce denial of the resurgence of the bourgeois-democratic regimes and the possibility of a «bourgeois-democratic counterrevolution»¹⁷ as a containment barrier to a socialist

17. The concept of “bourgeois-democratic counterrevolution” was developed by Trotsky in his letter to the Italian comrades of 1930 in the *Letter on the Italian Revolution* of May 14, 1930: «Can it be said, for example, that the present German Republic constitutes a conquest of the bourgeois revolution? Such an assertion would be absurd. There was, in Germany, in 1918-19, a proletarian revolution which, deprived of leadership, was deceived, betrayed and crushed. But the bourgeois *counter-revolution* nevertheless found itself obliged to adapt itself to the circumstances resulting from this crushing of the proletarian revolution, which resulted in the constitution of a republic in the “democratic” parliamentary form. Is the same-or about the same-eventuality excluded for Italy? No, it is not excluded. The enthronement of fascism was the result of the incompleteness of the proletarian revolution in 1920. Only a new proletarian revolution can overturn fascism. If it should not be destined to triumph this time either (weakness of the Communist Party, manoeuvres and betrayals of the social democrats, the Freemasons, the Catholics), the “transitional” state that the bourgeois counter-revolution would then be forced to set up on the ruins of its power in a fascist form, could be nothing else than a parliamentary-

revolution. The Congress reinforced its repeated prognosis that questioned the duration of the newly restored bourgeois democracy:

But nowhere in Europe, not even in Greece, has the bourgeoisie as yet been able to inflict a decisive defeat on the proletariat and set up a strong regime with any stability. The working class retains its strength and fighting spirit. This was shown in the great workers' struggles during 1947 in France and Italy, and to a lesser extent in Belgium, Holland and Great Britain¹⁸.

Along these lines, the analysis of the situation in the labour movement speculated on a political break between the workers and the Communist and Socialist parties. The organised labour movement had re-emerged from the last war grouped mainly behind the Stalinist organisations. However, according to the Conference document, the beginning of a differentiation within their ranks was recognised:

The proletariat originally turned toward the Communist parties in the hope that they would play a revolutionary role. In this sense, the gigantic growth of Stalinism at the termination of the imperialist war once again showed the determination of the proletariat to have done with the bloody chaos of the capitalist system. However, nowhere have the Stalinist parties justified the hopes of the exploited masses. On the contrary, their opportunist policy of class collaboration in the face of a situation demanding radical solutions has gradually sown discontent and confusion among the proletariat, while the petty-bourgeois masses, who at first had placed their trust in the Communist party, are turning toward the right¹⁹.

Regarding the Fourth International, the resolution highlighted that its sections managed to considerably increase

and democratic state». See Leon Trotsky, *A Letter on the Italian Revolution* (14 May 1930), in «New International», n. 7, 1930, pp. 215-218 (216-217), online at <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/ni/vol10/no07/v10n07-w088-jul-1944-new-int.pdf> (last accessed 15 October 2022).

18. *World Situation and the Tasks of the Fourth International. Resolution Adopted by the Second Congress of the Fourth International - Paris, April 1948*, in «Fourth International», n. 4, 1948, pp. 98-128 (103), online at <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1938-1949/fi-2ndcongress/1948-congress03.htm> (last accessed 11 September 2022).

19. Ivi, p. 105.

their membership, as well as their influence among the working class. But everywhere, since its founding, the parties of the Fourth International faced the problem of becoming true mass parties. The impossibility of carrying out this transformation was one of the greatest structural drawbacks of the period. However, the issue did not lead to self-criticism but rather reinforced that this situation was due, on the one hand, to the limited number of cadres capable of effectively intervening in workers' struggles; and, on the other, «to the sectarian or opportunistic conceptions that have influenced the politics of certain sections»²⁰.

This so called «fight against sectarianism» carried out by the Is was first expressed with the expulsion of the Morrow – Goldman – van Heijenoort minority from the SWP in 1946 and deepened later on in the 1948 Conference with the partial or complete expulsion of three sections that intervened in central countries of Western Europe: the German, the Italian and the French. The section that was harshly criticized was the Italian. Since the Allies landing, Italy had proved to be the most favourable terrain for the growth of a whole series of experiences of the working class. According to BEHAN (2009), the «partisan republics», installed in the rural areas where the resistance was strongest, were brief political experiments but they proved the existence of a highly radicalized sector of the population that did not advocate the reestablishment of a bourgeois democracy in Italy. At the same time, the resolution of the Conference stated that the majority of supporters of Stalinism in the working class was far from absolute, and because of this, they had witnessed the formation of various opposition currents within the traditional parties or outside them. Thus, the task of the Italian section would be to regroup these elements around the program of the Fourth International²¹. But the problem with the POC was that «it was an unprincipled merger on a purely organizational basis, without any prior discussion to determine a common plat-

20. Ivi, p. 108.

21. *Resolution on the Partito Operaio Comunista (POC) of Italy Adopted by the Second World Congress*, in «Fourth International», n. 6, 1948, pp. 188-190 (188), online at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1938-1949/fi-2ndcongress/1948-congress10.htm> (last accessed 11 September 2022).

form». This type of merger was carried out by the Is and the European Secretariat throughout the entire period, and was also the case for the French (Pcint) and British (RCP) sections. Recognition of the problem did not, however, lead to a reconsideration of that practice by the Conference. On the contrary, the root of the matter was focused on the fight between factions that ended in the takeover of the leadership of the Poc by the Apulian Federation.

The Conference affirmed that between the leadership of the Poc and the rest of the Fourth International there were discrepancies of different kinds. These differences arose because the Poc leadership considered only the decisions of the first two Congresses of the Communist International as valid and rejected the United Front tactic as well as the Leninist theses on the national and colonial question. Added to this was the fact that the Italian section understood that the USSR was an imperialist state of the same type as the United States, dismissing as erroneous the perspective of a «degenerated workers' state»²².

In relation to these topics, Serge Lambert affirmed that, to the material difficulties that the party had to face, was added the fact that the Poc was the result of the fusion of two divergent political orientations. On the one hand, Di Bartolomeo's Trotskyist group relied on the theses of the first four Congresses of the Communist International and on the Transitional Program of the Fourth International. On the other hand, Mangano and his adherents thought that the United Front tactic, as determined at the Third Congress of the Third International, should be considered counterrevolutionary. The programmatic disagreements were also related to the question of the internal regime of the party. The Trotskyists were in favour of democratic centralism, which theoretically should allow free discussion and the existence of political tendencies in the party as long as everyone accepted the decisions adopted by the majority with discipline. Instead, Mangano's revolutionary centralism, analogous to the organic centralism of the Bordigists, denied the right to organized tendencies in the party and gave the leadership absolute power over the militants. Fi-

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22. Ivi, p. 189.

nally, the question of the nature of the USSR was a nodal point of the differences. While the Di Bartolomeo's group considered that the Soviet Union was a degenerate workers state, the Bordigists held the position that it was state capitalism²³.

Among the most important political differences pointed out by the Conference was the fact that «the current leadership of the POC considers that the current international political situation is totally and exclusively dominated by the contradictions between two imperialisms: the Russian and the American. All social struggle or conflict was a direct consequence of this general conflict, in which the workers have no interest». The document also stated that «the POC maintains a sectarian position on the democratic slogans and has refused to present the slogan of the Republic against the Monarchy»²⁴. This last part results quite interesting since, as we have seen previously, the slogan of the Republic was one of the Is points of criticism to the program of the Italian Trotskyists before they became the Italian section of the Fourth International.

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To all these political differences, some other matters were added, like the Italian party's lack of commitment to the Secretariat. This was shown as a matter of serious indiscipline towards the international organization. Not surprisingly, the conclusion reached by the Conference was to declare that «the party called *Partito Operaio Comunista* is no longer the Italian Section of the Fourth International, and that the Italian section has not yet been built». As with the German Trotskyists, the resolution called on all Trotskyist members of the POC to rally around a soon-to-be-published magazine, with the aim of building a «true Trotskyist organization in Italy»²⁵.

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The birth of the Gruppi Comunisti Rivoluzionari and the Fourth International split

After the formal expulsion of the POC in the Second Congress, a minority of its leaders and members, particularly

23. LAMBERT (1987), p. 59.

24. *Resolution on the Partito Operaio Comunista (POC) of Italy Adopted by the Second World Congress*, cit., pp. 188-189.

25. Ivi, pp. 189-190.

in Naples and Milan, remained loyal to the Fourth International. Among the principal figures in this minority were Libero Villone and Domenico Sedran, who had fought in the Spanish Civil War. In 1949, the Trotskyist elements which had come out of the POC and the Socialist elements headed by Livio Maitan joined to form the Gruppi Comunisti Rivoluzionari (GCR). Maitan became Secretary of Organisation of the GCR and, in 1951, this party was accepted as the new Italian section of the Fourth International²⁶.

Having barely survived World War II, there's no wonder that the 1950s found a fragmented Fourth International, with the American section and others in opposition to the leadership of Ernest Mandel and Michel Pablo (the Greek Michalis Raptis). By 1953, Ernest Mandel and Pablo headed what became known as the International Secretariat of the Fourth International, while their opponents headed the International Committee of the Fourth International. In this context, the GCR sided with the Is, headed by Pablo. They accepted the Pabloite thesis of carrying out entryism in the Pci²⁷. By the beginning of the sixties, Maitan was one of the three major figures at the head of the Is and subsequently of the United Secretariat. With the alienation of Pablo from the leadership of the Is, Maitan joined Ernest Mandel and Pierre Frank as the trio who more or less dominated the largest faction of International Trotskyism.

However, the idea of entryism in the Communist Party did not go unchallenged within the GCR. Two leaders took the initiative in establishing a "Trotskyist Faction" within the organisation. One of these was Villone, the other Rado. Villone and Rado had two different tactical perspectives. Villone favoured continuing the struggle against Pabloism within the ranks of the Italian section, while Rado wanted to work outside the GCR, entered the Socialist ranks, and in the 1960s and early 1970s was a leader of the left-wing dissident Socialist party Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria, in Trieste²⁸. Entryism continued for half a decade after the GCR became the Italian affiliate of the United Secretariat.

26. ALEXANDER (1991), p. 594.

27. See GIACHETTI (1988).

28. Between 1943 and 1947 the Italian Socialist party was called PSIUP. After the split of its right wing led by Giuseppe Saragat, it assumed again the previous denomination of

A reunification of many of the forces advocating Trotskyism came only ten years later, in 1963, when Mandel and the SWP's Joseph Hansen co-authored a programmatic statement on the dynamics of world revolution that established common ground on the nature and meaning of the Cuban Revolution and how to approach the revolutionary struggle in colonial and Stalinist environments. When Pablo left the now renamed United Secretariat of the Fourth International in 1965, ending his long and tumultuous tenure in the Fourth International, Mandel positioned himself to become the leading spokesman for world Trotskyism²⁹. Thus, whether through repression or expulsions, the Fourth International faced the «bipolar world» with few of the militants who had lived through the 1930s and World War II.

Final comments

During the war, the positions taken by each section of the Fourth International and the possibilities to materialize its political project were closely related to the social and political conditions in which each European country found itself regarding the fascist regimes and the internal conditions of each organization. The political context forced the Fourth International to develop a clandestine organisational structure and try to capture a working class that suffered a process of impoverishment and dispersion (physical and political) as a consequence of the economic policies of Nazism. Likewise, the organization in cells of few militants and its implications, necessary due to security reasons, favoured both the physical and political dispersion of its members. The Italian Trotskyists were no exception. The fragmented political initiatives of the Fourth International were the product of the formation of new sections that had at least two or more parties within them without clear programmatic agreements other than their adherence to the Fourth International. Thus, we find cases such as the Italian, in which the mergers of groups without clear programmatic

Partito Socialista Italiano (Psi). Instead, in 1964 the Psi left wing led by Tullio Vecchietti split because they did not want to break the frontist policy between the Psi and the Pci despite the Pci support to the Soviet foreign policy even after the 1956 events.

29. PALMER (2010), p. 119.

agreements or that differed in very important points hindered the functioning of the national sections.

The outbreak of a potential Italian revolution after the downfall of Mussolini on 24 July 1943 marked a turning point in the political perspectives of the Fourth International and revealed the difficulties generated by the absence of an articulated Italian section that could intervene in the Italian social and political processes during the war. As we have seen in this work, it was mainly thanks to the British Trotskyists and the new conditions generated by the Allied landing in Italy that, at the end of 1943, it was possible to make contact with the now-liberated Italian Trotskyists.

Although we can talk about the Italian Trotskyists and their work, such as Nicola Di Bartolomeo and Pietro Tresso³⁰, the latter an emigrated militant in the French POI, it is a complex task to make a balance sheet about the Italian section of the Fourth International during this period. From 1943 to 1948 the official Italian section of the Fourth International was the POI, yet the late formation of this party and the sectarian politics of the Is made it difficult for the Fourth International to assess the political situation in Italy. Likewise, the strong political differences between the Is and the POC prevented the Italian group from having a real insertion in the workers and mass movement.

In this sense, observing the first ten years of the Fourth International is relevant to understand and explain the

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30. According to CASCIOLA (1995b), in 1938 Tresso participated in the Founding Conference of the Fourth International. Wanted by the Gestapo, he fled to Marseilles where he contacted Albert Demazière, who was member of the Political Committee for the Fourth International. Under the name of Julien Pierotti, he continued his clandestine work of restructuring the PCInt. By mid-1942, they were arrested by the Gestapo. After several transfers, on December 18, the Trotskyist militants were sent to the Puy-en-Velay prison (Haute-Loire). On the night of October 1-2, 1943, 79 political prisoners escaped from the Puy prison thanks to an action by Franc-Tireurs et Partisans (FTP) led by the Parti Communiste Français (PCF). Most of the prisoners, including five Trotskyist detainees, were taken to a *maquis* in Raffy, near the town of Queyrière, from where they were taken to the “Wodli” *maquis* created by the PCF. The Trotskyists were placed under close surveillance and only one of those five survived the escape. Recent investigations show that Tresso, Jean Reboul, Sadek, and Maurice Segal were executed at the end of October 1943, possibly on the 26th or 27th, by order of the Stalinist leaders of the *maquis*, applying instructions «coming from above». Instead, BROUÉ-VACHERON (1997), spoke of the responsibility of Giovanni Sosso, commander of the FTP *maquis*, in the disappearance and death of not only Trotskyist militants but also anarchists and any other political tendency opposed to the “patriotic” line of the PCF.

beginning of bureaucratization and the factional logics for which it was sadly known in the following decades. By 1948, the year of the Second Congress of the Fourth International, these bureaucratic mechanisms already proved to be part of the dynamics of the parties that comprised it, and above all part of its leadership. It is important not to lose sight of these political, organizational, and personal configurations that were generated among the militants in leadership positions of the Fourth International and/or of one of its most numerous parties between 1944 and 1948, since they were the breeding ground that gave rise to personalities like Michel Pablo and the seed of the 1953 crisis.

The open crisis in the Fourth International was reflected at various levels: in the Is with the expulsion of the Morrow – Goldman – van Heijenoort minority; in the European Secretariat, with the disintegration of most of its sections at the hands of fascist and communist persecution; and in the Second Congress that refused to consider the democratic counterrevolution that was taking place in Europe. Taking all these into consideration, then the crisis of the Fourth International began, not, as often argued, with the controversy sparked off by Michel Pablo's «deep entrism» tactics in 1953, but ten years earlier, due to the Is of the Fourth International inability to adapt its tactics to the new situation that developed in Europe as a result of the fall of Mussolini in 1943, and the subsequent adoption of a policy of democratic counterrevolution by the capitalist classes of Western Europe and by Us imperialism.

These tendencies towards fragmentation only grew in the following decades and its best-known example is the 1953 split, which divided the leadership of the Fourth International. In 1950 the differences with Michel Pablo's ideas ended with the expulsion of the British section leaders (Ted Grant, Jock Haston, and Bill Hunter) and the split of the French section during 1952. By 1953 the struggle between “Pabloites” and “anti-Pabloites” went as far as some national sections starting to leave the IV International and launching a public faction called International Committee (Ic). This division was sustained for ten years, until 1963, when the Trotskyist re-joined again under the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USEC). Yet, this unification was far from solving the problems, since, as Marcio

Lauria Monteiro puts it: «It is a fragmentation that is more than organizational, since each existing “historical branch” that claims to be part of this political tradition in practice bases itself on theoretical and programmatic frameworks very different from each other, making it difficult even to assert what Trotskyism is nowadays»³¹.

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