

CHAPTER 4

1955-6 La Seyne and Monfalcone

1956 was a pivotal year for the International Communist movement and indeed in Cold War history. In order to evaluate and compare the ways in which and the extents to which the momentous events of 1956 impacted on our communities in La Seyne / Toulon, and in Monfalcone / Gorizia, this study will situate then contextualise the communist culture in each of these case-locations in the immediate pre-1956 period. In order to do this, and using primary source evidence, it will examine the conditions and *modus operandi* of the parties at local levels, revisit the political environments communists in each of these locations inhabited on a day-to-day basis, and reconstruct the prisms through which they perceived the world. It will also consider the histories of these two communities as experienced by the informants themselves, and in so doing it will identify and address in context the key events and developments that had brought them to that point, and which they saw as part of their political identity.

4.0 Electoral viability

In 1955, the political self-awareness of the PCF / PCI at the local level was inevitably reflected in and based on its electoral viability. Both parties recognised that if they were to have any legitimate influence at the local (and indeed national) level, it would be by being elected to political power.¹ Electoral viability in their local

¹ Being the industrial hubs of their regions and communist bastions La Seyne and Monfalcone were also the political centres of gravity vis-à-vis their Federations and the natural focus here for an analysis of electoral viability. There are two distinctions between Toulon and La Seyne that should be noted. The first is that Toulon was different to La Seyne in terms of its socio-economic composition and therefore in its political nature. In many ways this was comparable to the situation between Monfalcone and Gorizia. Toulon was not a 'working class' town as such, although there was a virulent working-class element. Indeed it was intrinsically conservative in certain key aspects. There were two opposing political interests in the town: the State / military interests of one France's most important naval bases; and the communist controlled shipbuilding workforce in the Arsenal itself, including many who lived in La Seyne at eight kilometers distance. Communists in Toulon represented a redoubtable, far-left element in what was in many respects a right-wing town that was itself anomalous in a region that defined itself otherwise as 'Red' (of the working classes across the region rather than in the town of Toulon itself. The second distinction is that the Communists in Toulon have not historically experienced the political discrimination or marginalisation that they have in La Seyne. There were numerous examples of alliances at the level

contexts was different in each case, according to a range of historical factors and contemporary realities. In the French study, it was a question of holding on to local political power against the bitter and vociferous opposition of the Socialists, at that point relegated to second place after a twenty year mandate in local government. In the Italian study, it was a case of battling away to shorten the gap between themselves as redoubtable and virulent majority opposition to the Christian Democrats, who were a ‘national’ institution that had been able to put down firm roots in all areas of political, economic, and cultural life at the local level in the immediate post-war period.

The Communist vote in La Seyne:

Date	Events & developments	Principle effects
1912- 41	Radical –Socialists / SFIO in local government	General situation is that Socialists dominate local politics
1941-44	Vichy installed local government	
1944-45	Pierre Fraysse elected President of the Municipal Commission nominated by the Liberation Committee of La Seyne	
1945 April 29	Dr. Jean Sauvet: Single List of Republicans and Anti-Fascists	Toussaint Merle Senator for the Var region 1946 à 1948 MP for the Var region 1956 à 1958
1947 October 25 –	PCF elected to local council with Toussaint Merle as Mayor (1947, October - 1969 May 24)	PCF, and then PCF / PS hold the Local Council in an unbroken mandate for the next 38 years
1969 - 1977 PCF Single List 1985 – 1985 PCF / PS 1995-2001 PCF / PS		

of local government after the between Socialists and Communists, and not least in 1956. In fact at this time it was hoped that the town would become a *tache d'huile* or exemplar of Communist and Socialist collaboration at the level of local politics.

For Communists in the French case-study, electoral viability effectively represented much less of an obstacle than it did for their Italian counterparts. Popular support for the PCF in La Seyne had increased steadily from the moment it was first elected in 1947 (with 46% of the vote), to April 1955 (with 54%).² Over the course of that period, the Communists had consolidated their position in the town as *the* party of local government. Nevertheless, for the party, performing well in local elections was still key to its identity and credibility, and there could be no resting on laurels. What drove the Communists in La Seyne in 1955, were collective memories of interwar ‘ghettoisation’ in a local political context of institutionalised Socialist hegemony; together with the on-going post-war political rivalry between themselves as ‘newcomers’ and their arch ‘enemies’, who lost no opportunity to damage their reputation and thwart their efforts with the aim of regaining power. In a town of this size, the fight was personal as well as political.³

Electoral support for the PCF in La Seyne in 1955 came from the town’s mainly working class population, significant numbers of which being first or second generation Italians,⁴ and across the categories of retailers and trades people and professional classes in the town. Many of these people had initially voted communist for the first time in 1947, at the local level, because of the Party’s groundbreaking Resistance record, and had continued to support it as a result of its outstanding performance in office. The fact is, that despite La Seyne’s having been a long-

² 1947 Municipal elections: PCF 4.599 (54%) 2.501 (37%) RPF 2.247 (6.73 %)
 1950 Municipal elections: PCF 5.187 (54.9%) SFIO 2.644 (27.57) %
 1951 Legislative elections: PCF 5.698 (52,6 %) SFIO 2.611 (24,1 %) Radical Socialists 233 (2,1 %)
 M.R.P. 502 (4,6 %) R.P.F. 1.337 (12,4 %)
 1953 Municipal elections: PCF 6.216 (54,78 %) SFIO 4.300 (37.90 %) RPR 7.64 (6.73 %)
 (Marius Autran, n.d.)

³ It is eloquent that in Toulon, just eight kilometres away, there was not this type of antagonism between Communists and Socialists. Similar situations to the one in La Seyne may have existed to greater and lesser extents in other local contexts in France after the war where the Socialists had previously enjoyed majority or sole political power although it must be said that until 1978 La Seyne was the only town in France with more than 30.000 inhabitants not have a common list of left-wing candidates in local elections.

⁴ This important contingent of Italian immigrants also added to the working class consciousness and militancy of the town, as they had either been economic immigrants escaping penury in their home country, or political immigrants escaping Fascism, and often both (Girault, 1995).

established and the most important industrial centre in the region, the historical voice of its working class had been the socialists and not the communists.⁵

The situation for communists in the town before the war was to a large extent replicated elsewhere in France i.e. communists were seen by many people as extremists, rebels, despite the degree of electoral success the Party had achieved at the national level during the Popular Front era of 1935-9. Furthermore, given that the socio-economic conditions in La Seyne were (paradoxically in the national context) adequate or tolerable in the interwar period due to the relative productivity of the shipyards; and given the general tendency in the country at this time towards seeking peaceful solutions to political issues;⁶ there had been little inclination amongst the local working population for industrial struggle or political militancy, and not surprisingly the policy of the centre 'left' Socialist administration 1919-1940 had preferred to pursue a policy of 'maintaining the status quo'. General feeling amongst the informants as regards this interwar period is expressed here in a shared interview by **Josette Vincent** and **Jean Passaglia**, local councillors and party militants during our period:

Vincent: 'Here in La Seyne it was right-wing before – it was never left ...'

Passaglia: 'Well - Socialist – in La Seyne the Socialists were anti-communist – they played 'to the right' of course ...',⁷ (**Vincent / Passaglia**, personal communication, July 27, 2009).

⁵ During the interwar period, local government in France in general tended to be entrusted to Socialist-led centre coalitions. The level of popular support attained by the PCF in general during the Popular Front era was not enough to change this state of affairs. The fact that before the war, there were five departments in France in which a Communist mayor had been elected as opposed to over forty after the Liberation testifies to this phenomenon.

⁶ The heavy human losses France suffered in WW1, the Great Depression of 1929 had taken real effect in France in from 1931 onwards, and the rising threat of Fascism in Europe had led to a policy of containment in domestic matters in the interwar period, as far as was possible.

⁷ This view is shared by **Dr. Paul Raybaud**: 'The Socialist Party had been oriented towards reformism and an accord with the centre right by Albert Lamarque – and they were anti-communists of course – but in any case there is always ambiguity there – in the Socialist Party you've got everything – they're reformists ... and nepotism is king with them - The Socialists i.e. Lamarque - was kept in the local council because he was allied with the right – in order to keep the communists out – and that continued after (the war) ... Socialists have always been linked to anti-communism in France ...', (**Raybaud**, personal communication October 4, 1956).

Jean-Claude Autran is the son of **Marius Autran**, a long term communist militant and town councillor in 1956 alongside Communist mayor **Toussaint Merle**. **Jean-Claude Autran** explains how the PCF had been unable to gain any real sway in the town during the interwar period before being outlawed in 1939 as a result of the Nazi-Soviet Pact:

‘... the shipyard was *important* – when it was going well ... the extreme left, the unions, had a hard job convincing people their ideas were the right ones ... at that time the Communist Party didn’t have that many members in the region ... it didn’t have the leaders it did after the war ... its members back then were mostly hard-core extremists,



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quite violent ... you’d never imagine that a school teacher would be a member,⁹ they were known as trouble-makers and they couldn’t convince the local population that they were capable of running the town - or being able to tackle national problems ...’, (**Autran**, personal communication, October 21, 2008).

Perhaps because of this specific local history, the place in the informants’ memories of the Popular Front *per se* appears to be slightly less prominent than might be expected in view of its key role in international communist history, not least in

⁸ (Association Mémoire Vivante des Communistes dans le Var, 2005, p. 267).

⁹ **Monsieur Autran** here alludes to **Toussaint Merle**, the iconic post-war Mayor of La Seyne who was originally a socialist, but who became a communist during the war as a result of his frustration and dissatisfaction at what he saw as the Socialists’ lack of commitment to the Resistance effort.

France.¹⁰ It is also possible that the memory of this era, although a permanent fixture in the ‘collective communist memory’ as a defining moment in twentieth century history, had been overshadowed in the minds of the informants, displaced in a post-war context by more immediate, more pressing, more concrete issues.¹¹ When the Popular Front was mentioned in interviews, it was usually as a comparison to what informants had seen (in 1955-6 in particular) as the futile and wrong-headed attempt on the part of the PCF International Communist Movement / the Var Federation, to re-create this movement as a means of returning to power. Certainly, what comes across as preminent in the collective memory of this community as revealed in discussions of 1956 and in local documentary evidence, is *WW2 Resistance experiences and its legacies*, and *post-war successes in local government*, together with the *unremitting battles between the Socialists and the Communists* during that period.

The communist vote in Monfalcone:

Date	Events & developments	Principle effects
1920-45	Fascist regime	PCI outlawed
1945	40 day rule of Tito	Reprisals against / deportation to Yugoslavia of fascists in town of Gorizia by Yugoslavian partisans damages reputation of the
1945-Sept. 1947	<i>Venezia-Giulia contested territory, under AMG rule, PCI changes to Yugoslavian- led CPRG, runs campaign in the region to transform the region into the 7th Republic of Yugoslavia; 3000 approx</i>	Communist Party in the town Influx of Italian speaking Istrians from Tito’s new Yugoslavia Time of confusion and turmoil in the region, polarized politics, PCRG

¹⁰ Although, it should be noted that in 1935 Jean Bartolini (PCF) was elected MP for La Seyne in a by-election (see Association Mémoire Vivante des Communistes dans le Var, 2005, pp. 32-8).

¹¹ The lack of prominence given to the Popular Front era and all that it signified in the minds of the informants, or rather, its apparent abstract or ‘referential’ representation, could have a generational explanation i.e. that informants were simply too young at the time to have strong, personal memories of the Popular Front era itself.

	<i>workers</i> from Monfalcone go to live and / work in Yugoslavia, depleting numbers of Party militants in the region	sectarian party by necessity, large body of supporters waiting for outcome of territorial contestation; <i>DC meanwhile establishes</i> itself in Gorizia and Monfalcone with help of State apparatus
1947 Feb. Treaty of Paris decision to return the region to Italy	PCRG starts to reinvent itself ideologically and politically as an Italian organisation	Little or no reaction to this development by communists in region
1947 June	PCI expelled from government	<i>Public defeat</i> of communist campaign to annex region to Yugoslavia to irredentist State interests
1947 Sept.	Handover of the region to Italy, Communist Party changes back to PCI	<i>Communists</i> in the region become <i>Italian</i> , part of PCI and all that entailed in terms of political and ideological re-orientation
1948 June Tito-Stalin split	<i>600 Slovenian communists</i> immediately desert the Party in Gorizia (80% of membership in Gorizia) <i>Counter-exodus</i> of workers expelled from Yugoslavia / some imprisoned and tortured there (some remained incarcerated in 1956)	Party morale and influence in seriously weakened Gorizia, and to a lesser extent across the Province - an ideological divide between <i>titini</i> and <i>cominformisti</i> ; vast majority of Italian communists support the Cominform resolution

A very different situation existed for the Communists in Monfalcone in that since becoming a mainstream national political party in 1947 it was *they* who had fulfilled the role of majority opposition (in terms of PCI membership and popular support since in the first elections in the region in 1948) to the majority Christian Democrats (Cernigoi, 2006).¹² Although the Communists' influence had grown *over-all* in the

¹² As indeed they were destined to, until 1983, although by the early 60s the gap had narrowed drastically. It is not difficult to understand why the centre, centre-right and far-right factions in

region / Province between 1947-55,¹³ electoral support was largely concentrated in Communist strongholds such as Gradisca, Cormons and the ‘red belt’ of PCI localities around Monfalcone (referred to as the *Monfalconese*). In 1955 therefore, doing well in local elections was their number one priority, all the more so as they were still making-up for lost time.

After the war, Marshall Joesep Tito had wanted to extend the borders of the new Yugoslavia westward as far as the Isonzo river to include Gorizia and Monfalcone, and this was also the objective of the vast majority of communists and communist sympathisers in the region. From 1945-7 the Communist Party in the region became the Communist Party of Giulian Region (PCRG) and directed all its efforts exclusively to this end, neglecting local politics in the process and thereby leaving

Monfalcone were able to combine in a Christian Democrat majority, taking into account post-war events and developments. Non-communist (and non-communist-sympathising) voters ranged from:

- left / centre-left of the Social Democratic tradition: the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) / (PSDI)
- centre / centre-right: Christian Democrats (DC)
‘wait and see’ contingent of the local population in the period 1945-7 / conservative and liberal tendencies / Catholic (and non-Catholic) / irredentist
(in Monfalcone, as in the rest of Italy, this ‘centre-right’ Party functioned in many ways as a ‘catch-all’ for those of non-Communist / non-Socialist political orientation i.e. nationalist rather than internationalist, espousing liberal rather than state interventionist economic models, and therefore firmly located notionally in the western sphere of political and ideological influence)
- far-right: the Italian Socialist Movement (MSI)
(the neo-Fascists were a conscious political entity in post-war Italy and not least in Monfalcone due to a failure to purge the state institutions at this time. Fascism had found particular expression in this region before the war in the form of the regime’s ‘Italianisation’ programme, and from 1945-7, communists had been feared and contained by the Allied Military Government. From 1947 onwards, the neo-Fascist constituency in Monfalcone merged seamlessly into the majority Christian Democrat party as Cold War issues, including the Tito-Stalin Split and its fall-out locally, intensified and delineated political choices and responses to events and developments)
- the majority (but not, it must be stressed, the totality) of Istrian exiles that had come to the region and to Monfalcone in particular to make a new life following Istria’s annexation to Yugoslavia.

¹³ The electoral picture is more complicated in the Italian case study than the French. In the two council elections in Monfalcone itself prior to 1956 (when the Communists lost votes following our events), the PCI vote had actually decreased from 33.2% in 1948 to 30.6% in 1952 (Turrini, 1988, p. 284). This is due to the combined factors of the consolidation of the DC, and a growth in communist support in the commuter towns surrounding Monfalcone (the demographic changes in the town / region’s composition due to the influx of Istrian exiles occurred mostly between 1945-7). In 1948, the Communists in the region paid for their defeat in the campaign to annex Venezia-Giulia to Tito in that at that point they received the majority in only 3 out of 25 municipalities in the Gorizian Province. The Christian Democrats had the absolute majority in government and also in the region, (Puppini, 2003). What is important to note however, is that throughout the period September 1947-55, and despite fluctuations in levels of support and areas of support, the Party retained its position as the second political party in the region / Province / town of Monfalcone.

the way clear at the local level for their main political rivals to establish their power-base, which they were able to do with disturbing ease (Cernigoi, 2006).¹⁴

¹⁴ The resurgence of the political establishment interests gradually increased in Monfalcone in the post-war period and these were to influence sections of the non-communist population and especially in the crucial period 1945-7. This non-communist (and non-communist-sympathising) population ranged from

- a majority centre / centre-left
 - a 'conservative' / (political) Catholic constituency
 - to a barely disguised far right-wing element that had flourished during the Fascist period.
- The vast majority of this composite group favoured the return of the region to Italy as opposed to the communist position of wanting the region to become part of the new Yugoslavia. In the years following the war the Christian Democrats were able to become the political majority in Monfalcone, where more logically the Communists would have taken power, due to a number of factors:
- a) the communists' having directed their attention exclusively to becoming part of Yugoslavia from 1945-7
- although in itself this political campaign was well-run and can be judged to have been successful in terms of the ideological and organisational mobilisation of communists in 1945 in the area via its vast and effective flanking organisation UAIS; and as a political statement in a show of volition and determination to become part of a new socialist federal republic; it also meant that the Party neglected local economic issues such as unemployment, unfair working conditions, discriminatory recruitment policies etc.
 - it also neglected local political issues such as consolidating their new-found standing and influence vis-à-vis the community in order to stand as candidates for local power in the event of the territory's being returned to Italy; and in winning new political allies. This should have been possible in the wake of the Fascist regime, which apart from its natural supporters, had been highly unpopular with a significant proportion of the local non-communist population
 - instead it alienated some of the non-communist population who were witness to daily PCRG demonstrations in the town square in support of Tito's claim on the region, during which the communists would be kept in check, often with force, by the Allied Military Government and this had the effect over time of making the communists appear 'in the wrong'
 - these situations were frequently exacerbated by far-right provocation (that was frequently ignored by the AMG), which had the net effect of making the communists appear not only in the wrong but troublesome and contentious
 - the local non-communist population were subject to anti-communist propaganda on the part of the continuing political and cultural establishment that portrayed the communists as traitors who could not wait to deliver the region into the hands of Tito, (Cernigoi, 2006).
 - in this way the image and reputation of the communists as Resistance heroes or patriots was deftly compromised at the local and regional levels
 - by neglecting local politics the communists were leaving the road clear for the right-wing to consolidate (which had remained intact to all intents and purposes due to a failure to purge the public institutions)
 - the Catholic Church was able to step in easily after Fascism to advise those in the non-communist local population who were undecided as to whether they favoured the annexation of the region to Yugoslavia or a return to Italy, who by definition mostly came from the political centre or centre-left (because there were also Socialists of an irredentist persuasion). Because of the pivotal role the church had played during the *ventennio* or twenty year Fascist regime, and because the phenomenon of cultural Catholicism is anyway diffuse in Italian society, the extended networks, practices and influence of the Catholic Church enjoyed during Fascism now served to further the Catholic anti-communist agenda. Had the communists engaged in local issues between 1945-7 much of this could have been pre-empted or minimised.

In 1955, electoral support for the Communists in Monfalcone came from the long-standing far left-wing sectors of the majority Italian-speaking population, their close allies amongst the minority Slovenian population; and increasingly from newcomers to far-left progressive politics in the town who had been attracted to the *Partito Nuovo* or ‘New Party’ of mass appeal i.e. the PCI.¹⁵ This support had been built-up

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- b) the decision on the part of many communists to go directly to Yugoslavia between 1945-7 (a choice promoted by the PCRG itself at one point)
 - for ideological reasons – to help build socialism ‘over there’
 - for economic reasons – the push factor was that there was no work to be found for a high percentage of communists and communist sympathisers in Monfalcone and the surrounding areas. If employees had worked in the shipyards before or during the war they could in theory return after the war, or if they were highly skilled workers they had a better chance of employment however achieving career progression and employment security was always more difficult for communists
 - c) the Istrian exodus of ethnic Italians into the area post 1945 of those who had not wished to remain under a Communist regime for political and ideological reasons, who had been compromised in some way from their participation in or association with the former Fascist regime and who therefore could not remain in Yugoslavia for security reasons, or who simply wished to make a new life in Italy for cultural-socio-economic reasons
 - this shifted the political demographic further to the right
 - the political establishment in Monfalcone were delighted at the exchange that was taking place of migrating communists and immigrating ‘white’ Italian-speaking Istrians and did all in their power to encourage and facilitate this dynamic
 - d) the gradual move towards the right in Italian national politics since the liberation that received an ideological and material boost in 1947 with the ejection of the Western Communist Parties from their national governments; international factors that had the effect of underlining political divisions such as the Berlin Blockade, Korea, the arms race etc.

¹⁵ Acutely aware of the country’s lack of national unity in 1944, the PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti had set about building his *Partito Nuovo* or New Party that corresponded to his vision of a modern Italy on his return to Italy from exile in the Soviet Union. This decision to turn his back on the sectarian model of the CPSU in favour of what he saw as a more progressive, enlightened and more contextually appropriate political model that would bring about the transition to socialism via a soft revolution, building a strong consensus *throughout* Italian society, is referred to as the Salerno Turn. Ideas of creating national cohesion around a new collective self-awareness and a new reality based on a socialist hegemony dictated what was in key ways its Gramscian blueprint, function and form. Togliatti had worked closely with Gramsci in the early years of the PCI before it was disbanded by the Fascist regime in 1926. His pre-prison writings already contain Whilst Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks were smuggled out of prison during the 1930s it is not clear at which point Togliatti had access to them. His pre-prison writings already contained ideas of a less ‘reductive’ interpretation of revolutionary theory as this excerpt from a letter to Togliatti in 1926 demonstrates: ‘today, nine years after October 1917 it is no longer *the fact of the seizing of power by the Bolsheviks* which can revolutionise the western masses – because this has already been taken into account and has produced its effects; today ideologically and politically the conviction is active (if it exists) that once power is seized the proletariat *can construct socialism*’. The objective was that via this vanguard party the Italian working classes would form a new ‘historic bloc’ by *assuming* their national identity and make it theirs, *bringing about* ideological consensus at all levels of Italian society in forming and maintaining working alliances with those of other political parties and especially the Socialists but also by proselytising on a community level, *leading* the transition to socialism in a ‘soft’ revolution by *using* and not smashing the institutions and forces of their own industrially advanced state, in their own interests, and from within. A party structure to accommodate and facilitate Togliatti’s

over the period 1947-1955 as a result on the one hand of the party's change in orientation and practices following its defeated Yugoslavian campaign and on the other, its engaging fully with local politics from that point and maintaining an active and effective presence in local industry via the CGIL. After the signing of the Paris Treaty in February 1947 that scheduled the handover of the region to the Italian authorities for September that year, communists in the region had single-mindedly gone about transforming the Yugoslavian-led PCRG, which had been a cadre party with a deliberately restricted membership,¹⁶ into the Italian Communist Party Federation of Gorizia. **Guido Russi** (formerly '**Rusij**') is a life-long communist militant and photojournalist for the PCI working in Monfalcone and the Venezia-Giulia region in 1956. Here he explains succinctly the practical, political and strategic logic of such a choice:

‘When the PCI came we joined immediately because we understood that the PCRG was (had been) a local thing ...’, (**Russi**, personal communication, December 9, 2009).

From this moment, and although starting from a disadvantage, communists in the region put the same drive and purpose they had into their thwarted efforts to make the region the 7th Republic of Yugoslavia, into becoming *Italian*, or rather, into

New Party was rapidly effected and an extensive system of federations, sections and cells was constructed / consolidated. The New Party therefore had to be electorally viable, reasonable, credible, and a mass party of integration in order to fulfil its role. This understanding of the PCI, this working model, endured until the dissolution of the party itself in 1990 despite the changing fortunes of post-war communist electoral politics (and it took-on a heightened importance after the Soviet interventions in Budapest). This was not a model that pleased all in the party however, and there existed a visible tension between Togliatti and the more conservative elements within the party leadership, and its membership. These elements often comprised those who had suffered during the Fascist period and / or been most prominent in WW2 Resistance and who favoured a more Leninist programme based on the international class struggle.

¹⁶ The PCRG had functioned under the auspices of Yugoslavian Communist Party. Highly selective, highly structured, it used the same networks, organizational base and procedures it had as an underground party before, and as the major Resistance force in the region during the war designed to prevent outside infiltration, retain ideological integrity and ensure political efficacy. It had had to, it had enemies. In difficult times, and the immediate post-war period was a difficult time for the Communist Party in the region, mass parties like the PCI were ideologically and operationally inappropriate. During the campaign however, it had had a strong flanking organisation (UAIS) of *de facto* members and supporters. After September 1947 were organisational changes that took place at this time in that the former cadres of the PCRG who had been ‘compromised’ by their previous internationalist stances were redeployed temporarily in other Federations in Venezia-Giulia or the nearby Veneto region whilst the Party re-formed and regrouped. Nothing should now compromise the Togliattian project.

becoming part of a fully functioning mass movement that sought to bring about consensus at all levels and all sectors of Italian society. Considering the political and ideological differences there were between the PCRG and the PCI, this had not been an automatic transition.¹⁷

Nonetheless, these people were communists first and foremost, and accustomed in the region by necessity to the politics of pragmatism. **Renato Papais** is a lifelong communist militant, a Resistance fighter at age sixteen (aka ‘Leone’ – *nom de guerre*), who in 1956 was a PCI / CGIL mid-level cadre. Here he describes the thinking at the time, and especially for those in positions of responsibility within the party structure:

‘From September ’47 we changed direction, if you came here with a tricolour before that you were classified as a reactionary, a fascist - the *Long Live Tito* flags came down and up went the *tricolore* – so we who wore the Yugoslavian flag with the star said “No use banging your head against a brick wall” ... you’ve got to go where you can create solidarity - so we kept the pole but changed the flag ...’, (**Papais**, personal communication, October 20, 2008).

The Communist Party in Monfalcone, as part of the PCI Federation of Gorizia,¹⁸ soon made its mark in the region and in the town, confirmed as the second political power in Monfalcone in the general elections of 1948, which had been the first post-war elections in the area. This electoral result was achieved despite the public defeat of the communists’ Yugoslavian campaign in the region and despite the PCI’s being

¹⁷ For some individuals it had not been without its problems, as **Dino Zanuttin** explains: ‘The transition was a confusing ‘leap’ people thought – “well that means we’ve been wrong all this time?” - personal feelings – whilst at the same time they were all communists – it wasn’t an official conflict but an internal conflict – for individuals – because in this region we weren’t exactly strong ‘patriots’ in that sense – we’d only been part of Italy since 1918 – and it had only brought us bad things – even after all this time – 65 years after the war we have difficulty presenting the tricolour!’ (**Zanuttin**, personal communication, October 17, 2009). **Guido Russi** expresses a commonly felt sentiment, especially amongst the rank and file: ‘When we came back from Yugoslavia, we supported the PCI with all its defects ...’, (**Russi**, personal communication, December 4, 1956).

¹⁸ There were also several other localities of strong communist support across the Gorizian Province (notably the centres of Gradisca and Cormons) due to an industrial presence and because there had always been a virulent anti-Fascism in these parts; and a smaller, fluctuating representation in the regional capital Gorizia due to the lack of industry connected to the town itself, historic factors and international issues and events over the next decade.

expulsed from national government the year before. By 1955 they had consolidated their position in the town itself and had a growing number of communist commuter towns of shipyard workers in the surrounding towns and villages that included what was jokingly referred to by all as *il triangolo della morte* or ‘the triangle of death’ i.e. the historic communist bastions of San Pier d’Isonzo, Turriaco, San Canziano d’Isonzo.¹⁹ Nonetheless, it would not be until 1983 that the Communists were elected in Monfalcone itself, in place of the Christian Democrats.

In 1955 the party’s core voters had been formed politically during the twenty year Fascist or *ventennio* in the CRDA shipyards, where it had continued to function as a clandestine organisation after being disbanded by the regime in 1926.²⁰ What comes

¹⁹ This political distribution of communist support in the area is linked organically to the development of the shipyards during the early twentieth century and to that of the administration of the town itself during the Fascist period. With the growth of the shipyards, there was a parallel growth of Monfalcone centre as the new home of local trade and commerce, a burgeoning public sector, many of these from Southern Italy, and professional classes coming to the town from more socio-economically advanced areas to make their careers. Those in such secure jobs also chose and could afford to make this new nucleus their homes. As the shipyards increased in size and output, new workers coming in to the area located themselves in the small towns and villages on the peripheries of the town, where rents were more affordable. Some of these towns and villages were communist strongholds from the outset, whereas others grew over time with the PCI to create a ‘red belt’ around Monfalcone of particular militancy, and political importance. Also germane to the question is that unlike La Seyne, where the shipyards have been in existence in one form or another since the late 16th Century, in Monfalcone they were established in 1907. This has meant that in La Seyne, they are adjacent the town centre; whereas in Monfalcone, they are located at a distance of a kilometre from the town centre and separated from it by a river outlet. Although they are both industrial towns, La Seyne and Monfalcone are different in terms of micro-geopolitics, (Cernigoj, 2006).

²⁰ In the Venezia-Giulia region, clandestine anti-Fascist resistance was centred in and around the Monfalcone shipyards, where there was a high concentration of communists and communist sympathisers. Communists were of course the prime targets for the Fascist regime, and particularly in this inherently problematic North East border of Italy that was potentially open to outside influences and a natural conduit for the long hand of Moscow. A close second however for the regime in this region, was the Slovenian population who had lived in Gorizia and in the hills and areas around Monfalcone for centuries. The Fascist regime lost no time in implementing its political, ideological, cultural, linguistic and potentially ethnic and demographic ‘Italianisation’ programme. Nationalist, not internationalist politics and ideology were the order of the day. During this time known communists and other dissidents risked consequences, if found-out, of repression and discrimination in the workplace, being sentenced to imprisonment or internal exile by Special Tribunals, severe beatings by the Fascist Secret Police (OVRA), similar treatment at the hands of *squadristi* or thugs, and in some cases murder. As **Guido Russi** states: ‘Everyone knew someone who had suffered under fascism – internal exile, prison, death camps...’, (Russi, personal communication, December 4, 1956). All Slovenians were marginalised as regards securing employment, or at their place of work, with regard to housing, education, in official and civic contexts. They were also subject to discrimination and intimidation in the wider community, that is to say, when they ventured

across very strongly in interviews when discussing the 1950s, is the way in which informants look-back on this period as having been seminal in their collective history. For these people, the most important legacy of Fascism in Monfalcone and the surrounding areas, had been to unite the various progressive currents that existed into a coherent whole within the framework of a communist-led Resistance; and a key factor in this collective consciousness was the natural political and ideological affinity that existed between the Italian communists and Slovenians. As **Italico Chiarion**, intellectual, who in 1956 was a mid-level cadre in the Federation of Gorizia and Secretary of the *Federazione Giovanile Comunista Italiana* (FGCI) states:

‘You can’t understand the history of the communists in this Province if you don’t understand the relations between Slovenians and Italian *compagni ...*’, (**Chiarion**, personal communication, October 19, 2009).

Guido Russi echoes the sentiments expressed in many of the interviews:

‘We were brothers with the Slovenian people in the Venezia-Giulia region – Fascism hadn’t managed to destroy that – *la fratellanza italo-sloveno ...*’, (**Russi**, personal communication, December 15, 2009).

This *fratellanza* or brotherhood between these two communities was born of the centuries of cohabitation in the region; their predominantly common history of pre-WW1 left-wing politics that was tolerated by the relatively moderate Austro-Hungarian authorities at that time; the repression and discrimination communists and Slovenians (whether communist or not) in particular had endured under twenty years of Fascism; their shared Resistance activity from 1942 onwards (the first in Northern Italy) in the Slovenian Resistance in Italy and in what would become Yugoslavia;²¹ and their shared internationalist leanings resulting from these experiences that took on concrete political form after the war in their shared fight to prevent the region

outside their own communities, (for the clandestine anti-fascist resistance in the Monfalcone shipyards see also Giuliano Fogar, 1982.)

²¹ In Monfalcone, the Italian and Slovenian communists from the shipyards were the first contingents to engage in Partisan activity in Italy in 1942 and after 1943 the communist Garibaldi divisions in this region were the largest and most important in the country. Five hundred and three shipyard workers died in the Resistance movement between 1943-5, and their sacrifice has become legendary in the region, a symbol of the communist-led anti-fascist Resistance movement. A large plaque outside the shipyards bears the names of those comrades.

becoming once again part of Italy which, it must be remembered, they had known only in the form of the Fascist regime, (Puppini, 2003).

4.1 Socialists and Communists

Unlike the situation that existed in La Seyne 1945-55 between Socialists and Communists, where it was the Communists who were in power, and an intense hostility defined the relationship between these two camps; in Monfalcone, the Communists were not in power, the Socialists were not their main rivals, and indeed the relationship between these two parties was amicable (however, there would be changes in the balance and nature of this relationship from 1956 onwards). An important difference between the relations between Socialists and Communists in our two cases is that in Monfalcone (as in the rest of Italy), the Socialist Party (PS) under Pietro Nenni ²² had not been the enemy of the Communists, but rather their *brothers on the left of the political spectrum*. Whereas in La Seyne the rivalry that existed between the SFIO and the PCF at national levels, was magnified and intensified as *each party vied to become the first party of the left*.

Senatore Silvano Bacicchi, from Monfalcone, who at fourteen was an apprentice in the shipyard, went on to be a Vice Commander in the *Natisone Garibaldi* ²³ division in the War of Liberation, member of the PCI Central Committee Plenum, ²⁴ Regional (County) Councillor and Senator, was the Secretary of the PCI Federation of nearby Udine during our period. Here he defines the positive relations that existed between the two parties in 1955:

‘The Socialists were our first allies ...’, (**Bacicchi**, personal communication, December 12, 2009).

²² Despite the split in the PSI that occurred in 1948, when its right-wing left to form the PDSI under Giuseppe Saragat in protest to Nenni’s having joined forces with the Communists, and many Socialists had chosen at the point to join or support the PCI.

²³ Formed two Italian Garibaldi brigades i.e. Natisone and Friuli (see Cernigoi, 2006).

²⁴ I.e. one of 120/130 CP cadres around the country who convened at intervals as an extension of the PCI Central Committee.

As does **Alberto Clemente**: life-long communist militant, former Resistance fighter, shipyard worker and Secretary of the Section in communist bastion Turriaco (outside Monfalcone) at the time:

‘In the shipyards the Socialists were in a minority, the faithful stayed with Nenni and the others went with Saragat, those with Nenni didn’t get promotion, like us, but those with Saragat became foremen, white collar workers, they did what the bosses wanted ... but we got on very well with those from the PSI (Nenni) ...’, (**Clemente**, personal communication, November 26, 2008).

Elise Bernard is a long-standing communist militant who in 1956 was a mid-level cadre in Toulon. She describes the very different situation that existed as regards the relations between these two parties as regards the French example:

‘It was bad between Socialists and Communists in La Seyne – violent, malicious, it made you sick ...’, (**Bernard**, personal communication, October 23, 2008).

As does **Jeannine Bechet**, life-long communist militant and social worker in La Seyne in 1956:

‘The antagonism between the Socialists and Communists in 1956 was at its worst ... the Communists were really strong at the time – that had a lot to do with it – we were sure of ourselves – and the Socialists were much less important – so they were wary of us – every vote for us was one less for them ... I think they were more bitter towards us than we were to them – we used to say “but these are our brothers in arms” ... there were reactionary elements in the Socialist Party ...’, (**Bechet**, personal communication, July 30, 2009).

What is framing the hostile attitude of the Socialists in La Seyne at this time, apart from a particular pre-war / post-war local history already discussed, is the litany of grievances the SFIO harboured towards the Communists at the national level dating from the decisions taken at the Congress of Tours in 1920. The most important of these, in the context of the constant and high profile attempt on the part of the PCF in 1956 to re-form the Popular Front, is the fact that the Socialists’ memories of that period were not those of the PCF. In the eyes of the Socialists, it was the Communists who had gained more than they from the movement, by way of:

- obtaining automatic access and benefitting from the Socialists' parliamentary experience, know-how and solid representation
- being seen as a truly *French* party, as opposed to pre-1936, when it (the PCF) had been seen by many as intrinsically *foreign*, and '*unpatriotic*'
- acquiring for the first time legitimacy and credibility as a mainstream political party by joining forces with the Socialists
- the proselytising of socialists by communists that occurred especially at the grass roots levels during their collaboration
- the communists having inherited the moral high-ground in regard to the question of whether to support the Republican struggle in Spain, particularly in light of and combined with the PCF's WW2 Resistance record
- the Socialists' position as the first Party of the French Left being open to question from then on
- the Socialists having been tainted as they saw it by the association with the Communists at the time of the post-war Show Trials in the Eastern Bloc linked to the Tito-Stalin split, and especially as the revelations of the Great Purge of 1936-9 were made in 1956 (as part of the de-Stalinisation process).

French Socialists in general terms had very little interest in getting together with the Communists. Why should they? They had no need. They were not the ones who were out in the cold. They were in national government already, albeit a coalition. For the Socialists, reforming an alliance with the Communists could only spell trouble. The reluctance of the SFIO to entertain notions of Popular Fronts with the PCF that manifested itself at national levels in 1956, was magnified and distorted in La Seyne due to the rancour of the Socialists towards the Communists at being usurped by them after a twenty year tenure in local government.²⁵

²⁵ Other lingering grievances on the part of the Socialists vis-à-vis the Communists: the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the memory of the 1947-8 communist-led strikes following the PCF's expulsion from national government, the Socialist parties in Eastern Europe being eliminated by the Communist one-party regimes, the post-war Eastern Show Trials, the post-war reversal of circumstances as regards the popular vote etc.

4.2 Militancy & resilience

In terms of political hegemony, the situations for communists in La Seyne and Toulon, and in Monfalcone and Gorizia in the post-war period were therefore distinct, indeed paradoxical. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that mindsets in each of those communist communities were in fact parallel in many ways, despite these reversed circumstances and dynamics. Both case-communities were defined by their levels of militancy and resilience that went beyond the levels that could be expected in all communist communities, by definition.²⁶ For example, with regard to the French case-study, the reputation of our communist community is conveyed concisely here in one of many Police Intelligence documents²⁷ that allude to the levels of militancy present in the PCF Section in La Seyne. Also mentioned in the report is the Mayor of the town, **Toussaint Merle**, who was a prominent communist activist - indeed a self-confessed 'Stalinist' - elected after the war on the strength of his outstanding Resistance credentials.²⁸ He is referred to in the document as though he were the personification of this Communist Bastion, which in many ways he was:

‘The Communist Party Section in La Seyne whose Mayor is Toussaint Merle, Communist Member of Parliament is renowned, it

²⁶ That is to say, that Communist Party membership automatically entailed militant political struggle on a daily basis.

²⁷ With regard to the reliability of these sources, French academics and archivists consulted during the course of the project hold that Police Intelligence documents such as those eliminating from the French Ministry of the Interior, Information / General Information, National Security etc. have a relatively high level of credibility in the French historical context and several of the informants in this study in addition to those who make up the extended sample have attested to the probable authenticity of the essential content of those in question (although clearly, apart from the key question of the objectivity of the informer, the fact that they are compiled reports means that they may also have been interpreted to some extent). **Françoisque Luminet** was a PCF member whose job it was to oversee work on nuclear submarines in the naval dockyards because of his professional expertise in Toulon in 1956. He explains that the RG service was relatively objective in his view, that sometimes these people were known to the Party and accommodated at reunions, some of them were Party sympathisers. Consequently these documents have credibility although they need to be analysed in context along with other types of document: ‘I did the same sort of thing in the naval dockyards for security reasons, I had to follow every aspect of the projects closely, so I was a controller of sorts, but I was a communist, I worked for the State because that was my job, National Defense, National Security’, (**Luminet**, personal communication, May 7, 2010). Where used in the study, the content of these documents has been compared to that in sources of a different type.

²⁸ Merle’s roles in 1955-6 were fourfold: as Député / Conseiller Général (the elected body that governs the region or département), Maire of La Seyne and member of the Federal Bureau of the PCF in Toulon. He had joined the communist clandestine Resistance in 1941 deeming that the SFIO was not doing enough to oppose the enemy occupant and had duly become head of the Chamonix liberation committee.

must not be forgotten, as being the most combative in the Var region ...', (Information, 1956, March 17, p.1).²⁹

As regards the Italian example, **Italico Chiarion** is able to attest to the militant nature and reputation of the Sections in Monfalcone (town and industry-based):

'Monfalcone? - it was a real 'blue collar' environment over there – they used to call us '*borghesi*' (middle class) and we used to call them 'extremists!'³⁰ (**Chiarion**, personal communication, October 19, 2009)

One way in which the resolve of communists in La Seyne is communicated in interviews, is by what appears to have been a shared sense of determination in 1955-6 that their local administration be not just the best the town had known, but a veritable 'Communist Beacon Council' of regional and national repute - as living proof that the communists were capable and deserving of political office. Indeed this imperative, this objective, was central to the party's vanguard identity and a source of pride within the community as a whole - because as **Josette Vincent** explains - there was hardly a distinction between the party itself and its members at this time, such were the levels of commitment. Therefore, to all intents and purposes, all card-carrying communists were, by definition 'militants':

'Everyone was 'active' in the Party in those days ...', (**Vincent**, personal communication, October 6, 2008).³¹

²⁹ What concerned the authorities was the connection, via this 'man of the people', with WW2 Resistance, because this was inherently linked in the minds of many people, to communist heroism. This was a myth in the making.

³⁰ This perspective was not unrelated to the political and socio-economic nature of the Provincial capital Gorizia itself, which has historically been a middle class town (the summer residence of the Austrian nobility), with a public sector/ administrative economy. It was distanced from the Province's industrial hub by 35 kilometres, and what industry it had was located on the outskirts of the town itself, and this was light in nature i.e. mainly textile, with a predominantly female workforce that commuted from outside Gorizia. This is as opposed to the departmental capital of Toulon, which is just 8 kilometres from La Seyne, and which although had a right-wing presence as France's main naval base in the Mediterranean, had also always had a strong communist presence in the naval shipyards, (Cernigoi, 2006).

³¹ **Jo Pentagrossa** makes a similar point: *Can you become a member of the party and not militate?* In principle no – when you make the step of becoming a member you're almost a militant then – what separates a sympathiser from someone has a card is 'action' – sticking-up posters, going to meetings, campaigning – on a day to day basis ...', *So in a sense you're a militant by definition?* 'Especially in those days ...', (**Pentagrossa**, personal communication, August 17, 2009). In effect, it appears from statistical data that not all party members across the department or in all sectors of the economy were militants, or were equally committed to the cause, if membership figures are correct for the period 1956-7 (see Chapter 8).

She recalls the precarious working conditions in the Town Hall but also the levels of solidarity and sense of common purpose that existed during the 1950s. There were times, she reveals, when she had had to forego her state contributions because available funds would be spent instead on communal projects:

‘On my contributions there are one or two years missing – I earned a wage but they didn’t declare me – it was a period that imposed special circumstances but we did it with pleasure – I don’t regret it ...’, (**Vincent**, personal communication, October 6, 2008).

Jean Passaglia was in charge of Sports Development, which was crucial in its drive to bring young people into the Communist Youth (JC) movement describes another obstacle they faced at the time, which was that Communist-led councils had had to fight hard to obtain the government funding they needed:

‘After the war it was difficult for a Communist council – we had to fight for what we needed ... you know, subsidies to a Communist council? ... well ... luckily we had Merle who fought for us ... at one point though, in an attempt to bring sport to the people, there was a piece of land and Communist Party members and sympathisers used to go and build walls whenever they could and such because we didn’t have enough money ...’, (**Passaglia**, personal communication, July 27, 2009).

In the Italian example, one of the ways in which the party’s resolve stands out in 1955-6 is in the community’s fight against macro political and economic trends that were taking concrete form at the level of the local economy, exacerbated by the local political situation in which communists suffered systematic discrimination. Informants speak of *gli anni duri* or the harsh years 1950-55 in Italy (that lasted until 1966 in the local context)³² during which corporate Italy, emboldened by the US backed political marginalisation of the PCI since May 1947, had launched an unprecedented and relentless attack on what they perceived to be the last stronghold of communist power – the trade unions.³³ As a result, in 1955, and for the first time

³² In the rest of Italy the economic boom begun circa 1958, however in Monfalcone it began much later, from 1966 onwards. The CRDA shipyards was taken over at that point by the new ‘*Italcantieri*’ company, which chose to concentrate the production of the modern large oil ships in Monfalcone rather than Trieste, (Puppini, 2008).

³³ Economic conditions in France and Italy had been very different during the post-war period. In France, these had been more favourable, reconstruction therefore more rapid and more structured,

since war, the CGIL lost the election for internal commission in FIAT.³⁴ In Monfalcone, where there remained a strong anti-communist element from the pre-war period, reinvigorated by the influx of Italian speaking Istrians leaving Tito's new Yugoslavia post 1945, and where the public defeat of the communists' Yugoslavian campaign had further empowered established interests, this coincided with 800 out of 1.600 workers, many of them communists, being made redundant from the shipyards and feeder industries. **Senatore Avvocato Nereo Battello**, a long-standing communist intellectual and militant, responsible for Press and Propaganda in the Federation of Gorizia in 1956 and future Senator, describes the way in which national agendas affected Monfalcone directly. As might be expected in view of his connections with the Party, he starts from the wider point of reference:

'In 1955-6 there were big battles over contracts ... the US Ambassador Clara Booth-Luce led a big campaign against the communist monopoly in the factories – they said: “there won't be any more commissions in the shipyards!”, and in 1955 there was a drop in membership of the CGIL in Monfalcone it was a crisis – it was a big victory over the unions...’, (Battello, personal communication, December 5, 2009).

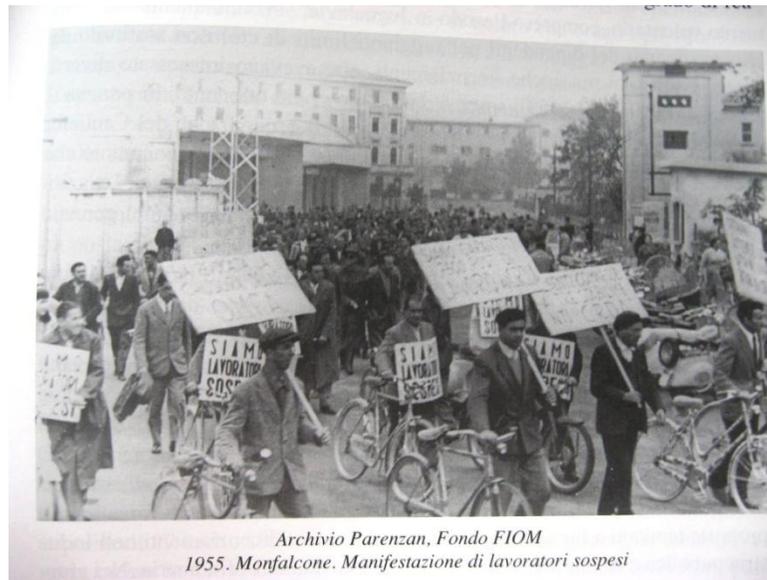
Alberto Clemente remembers 1955 well:

'They trotted out an excuse of having US commissions they could lose because the strong communist presence in the shipyards was a security risk but it was just an excuseso they laid us off – 800 of us – it was political all right, but *officially* it wasn't – I think we stayed at home for about four months ... we organised peaceful protests on bikes in single file to Gorizia to the Police Commissioner's house - then the

due mainly to the *dirigiste* policies applied by successive governments. Whereas Italy had emerged from WW2 a vanquished nation, despite its change of allegiance post 1943. Its chaotic economic and political situation in the immediate post-war period did nothing to establish the conditions for steady and unified economic recovery.

³⁴ In the Italian context especially, the extent of Communist influence in its industry had been the target of the western-oriented political establishment since both the PCF and the PCI had been expelled from their national coalition governments in May 1947. This was, in a way, ironic given that the PCF's response to the expulsion from government and political marginalisation that followed, was the more militant. The greater attack on Communist Trade Union monopolies in industry was made on the PCI largely because of geo-political reasons, as there was perceived to be a greater risk of Italy's falling under Soviet influence. The Communists' near monopoly of the labour movement in the post-war period was directly related to the War of Liberation and reflected the Party's still considerable popular support and their efficacy in defending workers' interests.

next day we'd go somewhere else – and they got tired of that ...',
(**Clemente**, personal communication, November 26, 2009).



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What comes through very strongly in all of the interviews as informants automatically refer to their earlier history as they discuss the events of 1955-6, and which is evidenced in myriad local documents, is the resilience of this community over the period 1945-55 in its refusal to allow geopolitics determine its fate. Indeed, it can be said that since the Liberation, communists in the region had never ceased fighting in one way or another, including in the literal sense. In this sensitive border region in which Fascism had found particular expression in an ‘Italianisation’ programme,³⁶ forcing the Slovenian population to speak Italian and branding all

³⁵ (Puppini, 2008, p. 103).

³⁶ Here, **Vilma Braini**, a communist sympathiser and then Party member describes how things were for her, her family and her community during Fascism: ‘My family always said to me ‘be careful when you’re out to speak Italian, and if anyone asks you what you speak at home you must say *Italian* – it was difficult because my grandmother didn’t really speak it’. **Signora Braini** had been spent time in Bergen Belsen during the last months of the war, because she was Slovenian, and when she returned to Gorizia she explains that she, like so many others, had supported the campaign to transform the region into the 7th Republic of Yugoslavia. She says that a large part of what motivated her at that point was that she equated becoming Yugoslavian with being able to speak her native language (although under the AMG language restrictions introduced in the Fascist era were of course lifted and interim measures put in place for the rehabilitation, protection and promotion of Slovenian in the region): ‘We wanted to be Yugoslavian after war – it was logical, a liberation, we could express ourselves in Slovenian! - sing, poetry ...’. *After the war did you ever think of leaving Italy and going to Yugoslavia?* ‘I could have gone – I had a chance to go to school

communists and their sympathisers as at best unpatriotic and at worst 'evil'. Informants are at pains to emphasise the particular levels of anti-fascist sentiment on the part of communists and communist sympathisers in the region, and by the same token, a commensurate anti-communist sentiment on the part of sectors of the political right that existed in the region and especially in Monfalcone, both before and after the war.³⁷

In the immediate post-war period, the Communist Party in Monfalcone was held in high esteem by the local population due to its Resistance record, much in the same way as the PCF in La Seyne. However, whereas in La Seyne, this resulted in the party's going from strength to strength, in Monfalcone, this state of affairs was to be

there – also to the Soviet Union – but it was a difficult time you know – when I got back from Germany – all those memories of being away from home – I nearly went but then I thought: 'To go away again, away from my family and friends? and that's what kept me here, otherwise I would have gone ...'. When asked whether she felt herself to be Italian, her response was: 'Slovenian nationality – Italian citizenship', (**Braini**, personal communication, December 16, 2009).

³⁷ Discrimination and repression for this community on the part of local employers and the political establishment had begun immediately after the war, and it is a dynamic that must be understood as a precursor to later developments. **Danilo Verginella** explains: 'They thought we (communists)'d be a disruptive influence – then the *esuli* arrived and took all our places – in the shipyards – for housing ...', (**Verginella**, personal communication, December 10, 2009). For the duration of their campaign to become the 7th Republic of Yugoslavia communists in Monfalcone and Gorizia in particular had been subject to blatant discrimination on the part of the local 'civil authorities' along with associated far-right provocations and assaults that were regularly ignored by the incumbent Allied Military Government i.e. Anglo-American armed forces, and English in Monfalcone. This institutionalised discrimination that had consolidated as a result of the PCRG's single-minded pursuit of its internationalist goal, only became more accentuated when the battle was lost in 1947. This high profile local *sconfitta* or defeat for the Party had practical, ideological and psychological implications for the Party locally, both in terms of how it viewed its own role, and in terms of how it interacted as a political entity with the wider community. It was also a gift to its enemies. Prominent historian and Monfalconian Marco Puppini, describes the predicament of the communists in the town: 'During the hand-over from the AMG to the Italian authorities there were grave incidents of violence on the part of Italian nationalist squads that went about destroying the premises of Slovenian and left-wing organisations. There were also 'purges' on the part of neo-fascist squads that pressured workers known to have been active in the Yugoslavian campaign to quit jobs in the shipyards and factories,' (Puppini, 2008, p.95). This was only exacerbated by the influx of 'white' Istrians after the war. Not all Istrians who came to Italy after the war were politically conservative, although, by definition, none of them were communists or communist sympathisers. They were in fact right-wing in the main, whilst some could be categorised as centre-right. The Italian DC was the automatic and convenient home for this constituency. Reasons for wanting to leave the new Yugoslavia for this group of people ranged from a clear ideological and political incompatibility with the new regime; their having been politically compromised in one way or another during Fascism, in the eyes of the new regime; the linguistic and cultural problems of remaining in a country as an ethnic minority owing to the demographic changes that historically accompany such annexations, as new populations are moved in to areas in the process of Slavisation and the expropriation of land and property of former residents by the new regime to that same end, (for post-war history in Monfalcone and surrounding areas see also Di Gianantonio, 2005).

short-lived. The Venezia-Giulia region was destined to become almost overnight one of the first theatres of the Cold War, and its inhabitants embroiled a political and ideological battle between two worlds being played out on their very doorstep. Liberated in April, occupied briefly in May and June by Yugoslavian partisans, the territory was transferred that same month to Allied Military Government (AMG) jurisdiction, and by August the communists in the region had formed the Communist Party of the Giulian Region (PCRGR) and embarked on their relentless but doomed campaign to make the region part of Yugoslavia. **Renato Papais** is able to recount how things were for communists between 1945-7. His testimony is typical of many that describe what it was like for communists at this time:

‘Back then we used to do 5 or 6 demonstrations a day in Monfalcone and the English soldiers used to but us – push us around with their rifles - there were Fascist attacks too ... they used to come round on trucks from the shipyards ... the management was helping them! but they found strong resistance in the *comuni* (red belt) – they were frightened of going there ...

... I was marked out as a trouble maker at the start – from 1943 when Mussolini fell to 1954, I was arrested 18 times – they could never make anything stick though ...’, (**Papais**, personal communication, October 1, 2008).

It was within this time frame, in March 1946, that Churchill had made his ‘Iron Curtain’ / ‘Sinews of Blood’ speech in Fulton Missouri. This macro moment and the effects it engendered only added fuel to the particular and acute anti-communist sentiment that existed in the region. Communists were already seen as traitors, as ‘foreign’, by local right-wing irredentists, due to the CPRGR’s campaign to have the region annexed to Yugoslavia between 1945-7. **Dino Zanuttin** explains that when the communists lost their campaign and region was handed back to Italy in 1947, it was clear to all at that point who had the upper hand:

‘It was a victory for those who had opposed us ...’, (**Zanuttin**, personal communication, October 17, 2009).

In May that year the PCF and PCI were expelled from their national governments, but whereas in La Seyne this was followed months later, perhaps paradoxically, by the party’s being elected to power, in Monfalcone the anti-communists immediately pressed-home their advantage. Added to which, there had been a post-war influx of

exiles from Istria, the former part of Italy now annexed to the new Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia. They had come to the region aided by the Italian State, local employers / authorities and were, in large part, anti-communists. **Elda Soranzio**, a textile factory worker and long-time CGT representative and communist militant describes the situation:

‘The ‘*esuli*’ damaged us a lot round here – when they came they had a job and a house – there was a district just outside Ronchi with new houses – then there was an Istrian mayor and he put all the *esuli* in them – he lived here already – he was DC so he wanted their votes ... and these people extremists – they threw a bomb in front of my house - because we were communists ...’,

It is interesting that she talks of Italy almost as though into were another country, conveying the more natural leaning of many communists in the region towards international class solidarity rather than towards feelings of Italian national identity:

‘Lots of our people went into Italy to get jobs ...’, (**Soranzio**, personal communication, June 12, 2010).³⁸

Meanwhile any excuse was good for the political establishment to justify discrimination against their natural enemies: if communists had campaigned for the region to become part of Yugoslavia between 1945-7 they were traitors, if they had chosen instead to go to work in Yugoslavia between 1945-8 they were traitors - regardless of their Resistance record.³⁹ **Danilo Verginella** had gone to Yugoslavia just before the Paris Treaty in 1947 and was expelled along with thousands of others a year later. Here he describes the situation in Monfalcone in the 1950s:

‘There was no work – and no-one would give us any work because we’d gone to Yugoslavia ... it was hard – I was a manual worker – digging

³⁸ **Silvano Morsolin** describes how things were in the shipyards in the late 1940s ‘We had to earn a crust under dire conditions - back then the foremen in the shipyards were almost always *esuli* from Istria – they used to march around the shipyards in twos with rifles – we couldn’t talk on the job or put up CGIL literature ...’, (**Morsolin**, personal communication, December 1, 2009).

³⁹ In this regard there was also a certain ambivalence towards those communists who had chosen to go to Yugoslavia on the part of some of those communists who had remained to participate in the campaign for the region to made part of Yugoslavia. As Alberto Clement said: ‘*È complicata la musica sai ...*’ – ‘It was a complicated situation ...’, (**Clemente**, personal communication, November 26, 2009). In some close communities and indeed some families there would be people at odds with one another for the choices they had made, and due to the consequences of those choices.

rocks – that sort of thing – people went away to work – to Germany and Holland – I went to sign-up for both – I said to my wife – we can't go on like this ... I went to Holland in 1955 and came back in 1958 ...', (Verginella, personal communication, December 10, 2009).

4.3 Party structure

Membership numbers (fully subscribed) in the Var Federation and in the Federation of Gorizia, located in the regional capitals of Toulon and Gorizia were very similar, with a total number in the French example of 4. 564 in 20 sections across the region, and in the Italian example of 4. 966 distributed across 25 sections. The memberships of sections and cells in La Seyne and Monfalcone were also very similar, with 410 members and 207 (1.455 including the surrounding areas) ⁴⁰ respectively. The similarity was not just in terms of numbers of members but also in terms of their socio-economic composition, due, as would be expected, to the industrial natures of both locations. The sections in these towns were the largest and the most important vis-à-vis their federations in terms of the political kudos they provided. ⁴¹ These membership bodies were effectively core communist constituencies i.e. the industrial working classes and their families in La Seyne where approximately 1 / 5 of the population was directly employed in the FCM shipyards, and in Monfalcone, where the town itself (irrespective of political catchment) was economically dependent on them. Communists from all over the Var region and Venezia-Giulia took their lead from their comrades in La Seyne and in Monfalcone.

⁴⁰ The figure pertaining to the membership of the Section in Monfalcone centre needs to be contextualised because the town itself was not a communist stronghold as such, with the majority of its industrial workforce and therefore communist voters commuting from the surrounding towns.

⁴¹ This obvious gap between effective members of the parties and the number of votes each received at election time (see p. 72), reflects the high numbers of communist sympathisers in each location, and is to a large extent typical of national patterns. In the case of La Seyne, evidence suggests that it also reflects numbers of people who voted for the Communist in local elections, on the bases of performance, and differently in national elections.

Democratic centralism or centres of power?

That is not to say however, that this always made for easy relations between the federations and sections in our two communities in 1955-6. In the case of La Seyne, specific relations and dynamics between different centres or representatives of communist authority were particularly complicated due, arguably, to such factors as:

- the phenomenon of Jacobin centralism that existed in the French party - no less at the regional level - and a triangle of power politics
 - electoral
 - shipyard
 - Federation
- the element of competition in the equation as regards who was to be the centre of left-wing representation in a region known historically as the 'Red Var'⁴² i.e. the region's capital, also seat of the Communist Party Federation? or the region's industrial 'capital' and communist bastion La Seyne? (for the far-left / progressive contingent in the region, La Seyne was more important politically and symbolically)
- the strong personalities of the people involved at the local and regional levels of the Party structure.⁴³

In the case of Monfalcone, the tensions that come through in the oral and written evidence are similarly to do with power and interpretation of Italian communism at that time, but appear to have more to do with:

- the authority of the shipyard workers, in particular, in relation to the Federation
- a discernable sectarianism and reluctance to change on the part of those especially who had suffered under the Fascist regime
- being complicated by differing interpretations according to ideological conviction and experience as regards the Tito-Stalin split and its

⁴² 'Red' in this context, as we have seen, has historically meant the left-wing of the Social Democratic spectrum and not as communist as such – but still – it is a reference that begs interpretation.

⁴³ This phenomenon of there being strong, iconic personalities who were determinant in local politics in the French example, reflects the phenomenon of the *notable* in French politics.

consequences in the region (Gorizia / Province), locally (Monfalcone), and internationally

- by Khrushchev's 'thaw' in relations with the Yugoslavian leader and its implications
- and there does not appear to have been the same emphasis on individual personalities as such, rather on 'contingents' or 'understandings' of communist militancy.

With regard to the French example, as proud as the Var Federation was of La Seyne, with its popular council administration and its impressive industrial base, this communist bastion also represented contradictions and challenges in terms of democratic centralism. The federation resented, and was wary of, the power and influence the charismatic Communist Mayor and elected MP, **Toussaint Merle**, wielded in its most important constituency, even though he was himself a member of the Federation Committee. His critics within the party structure had accused him of engaging in 'Merlism', not communism. Party politics and local politics were not the same thing.⁴⁴ At the same time, the federation was aware that much of the party's enduring post-war success in La Seyne was directly due to this local Resistance hero.

As may be expected, there also existed a degree of reticence on the part of **Merle** towards the federation that escalated at certain times to confrontation, as is illustrated here in a Ministry of the Interior document reporting on his having attributed not being appointed to the Central Committee of the PCF to the federation's bad handling of his candidacy:

'... the breach between Communists in La Seyne and Toulon widens ...

Monsieur Merle ... is furious with the PCF Federation Committee in Toulon. He blames his not being appointed to the PCF Central Committee on their lack of organisation ... ', (Ministère de l'Intérieur, 1956, July 27, p. 1)

⁴⁴ This therefore begs the wider question: was the Communist Party organisation in general inherently better suited to the role of opposition or to that of coalition partner, as was the case in Toulon, than it was to full political engagement in the democratic system?

A comparable source a few months later indicates that the situation had not improved:

‘The relations between communists in La Seyne and Toulon have not improved. Monsieur Merle was defensive this implies that there is a cabal in the Federation Committee directed against this ‘very ambitious’ MP who, in the eyes of the cadres in Toulon, is too subservient to the CC and to Marcel Servin ⁴⁵ in particular ...’, (Ministère de l’Intérieur, 1956, October 23, p. 1).

René Merle describes his father’s relative autonomy in terms of where he derived his authority and the problem that posed for the federation, because as they saw it, it made him less biddable:

‘My father wasn’t a party cadre he was a municipal cadre, his legitimacy came from the people, not the Federation Committee ...’, (**Merle**, personal communication, June 28, 2010).

The second extract conveys a sense in which the Var Federation at that time was selectively centrist i.e. keen to implement democratic centralism ‘from the Federation downwards’ - circumspect as regards policy decisions and directives coming down from the party leadership. ⁴⁶ The friction and even discontinuities that existed between the different levels at which the party interacted, undermines the notion of a seamless and non-contentious democratic centralism in operation, as it does the notion that individual members of the party – be they militants or cadres - were mere apparatchiks. This is as true of the PCF at the local level as it is of the PCI (see below).

The situation between the council and the shipyards was not all plain-sailing either. **Merle** regularly clashed with Trade Union cadres from the shipyards and affiliated

⁴⁵ In 1956 Marcel Servin had been a member of the Politbureau for two years. He was considered to be Maurice Thorez’s right-hand man, however he was to adopt a progressively less rigid position, which would result in his being marginalised within the Party leadership in 1959 and then his eviction from the leadership body in 1961.

⁴⁶ The internal dynamics of all Communist Parties operated according to the operative model provided by the CPSU i.e. according to the principles of democratic centralism. This was a mechanism that ostensibly delivered a democratically elected leadership, free political discussion and debate by members at all levels of the party, combined with a strict hierarchical structure and discipline in the implementation of any majority decision. Factions within the party were prohibited.

industries, who distrusted and disdained what they saw as the ‘electoral’ politics of the Town Hall, 300 yards away. This is ironic given that **Merle** was considered a Stalinist by communists and non-communists alike, and regularly referred to by his political rivals as ‘Merleskoff’. Surely such a man, even in political office, would understand and support any *cégéto-communiste* (CGT / Party) stance? Should there *be* different perspectives in the Communist Party?

Suzanne Bertrand remembers one occasion when she was waiting outside the Town Hall for a ferry home. She was talking to Merle, who was intent on discussing revolutionary theory:

‘Toussaint Merle had a very strong presence – he above all of the others marked the town – one day I was waiting for the ferry to St Mandrier and Toussaint was talking to me and he was saying – ‘you know for the revolution to happen conditions must be right etc.’ and I said ‘OK but I have to get my boat now’ and he said to people passing: “do you realise I’m talking to this young lady about revolution and she says she’s got to get her boat!” (**Bertrand**, personal communication, May 24, 2010).

What undoubtedly factored in these tensions and in particular directly between municipal and shop floor communism in this instance, was the fact that **Merle** was an intellectual,⁴⁷ whereas many factory workers preferred to see others from a corresponding background in positions of responsibility within the party structure. Relations between intellectuals and the federation could be problematic and it is worth remembering in this regard that in large measure, regional cadres were promoted from the ranks, often having fulfilled a cadre role within the CGT before moving over to the regional party leadership. An informant in La Seyne who wishes to remain anonymous, and who had been a shipyard worker and CGT representative in 1956, explains that although in this close-knit communist community in which comrades at all levels of political engagement would normally get along well, most having known each other all their lives, there were times when different ‘interests’, different interpretations of militancy, clashed:

⁴⁷ The term ‘intellectual’ here is used in its wider sense of having been of the professional classes such as journalists, medical doctors, teachers etc. Merle had been a Primary School teacher before the war (as were many communists, as opposed to secondary school teachers who were predominantly Socialists).

‘The comrades from the shipyards thought they were more important ...’,
(**Anonymous**, personal communication, July 1, 2009).

Here the same informant describes the situation between one of his colleagues in particular, and the Mayor:

‘The fights they had were terrible – ‘You don’t understand what we have to face every day of our working lives!’ he’d rant – I had to pull those two apart on many an occasion - literally!’⁴⁸ (**Anonymous**, personal communication, October 5, 2008).

Dr. Raybaud is a life-long communist militant and had been a prominent Resistance fighter:

‘We knew that the Party cadres should come out of the unions – they were the best recruits for the party, in principle that’s where they came from – and that was dictated by Lenin, that tight link, that interaction ...’,
(**Raybaud**, personal communication, October 4, 2008).

Jeannine Bechet is able to add to our understanding of the distinctions between factory and municipal militancy in La Seyne:

‘In the shipyards they came up against capitalism every day, so they led a fight that was in many ways harder than ours – it was real class war – I was social worker in a communist council so I was militant in another manner ...’, (**Bechet**, personal communication, July 2, 2009).

Over in Monfalcone, **Renato Papais** describes the natural reticence on the part of many grass-roots Party members in Monfalcone as regards intellectuals fulfilling roles as Party cadres:

‘Workers like to see workers as their Party cadres – but also CGT Unionists - they were popular, they were known to the rank and file, trusted, Trade Unionists have to answer workers’ questions – politicians can hedge ...

⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that the communist working in the shipyards in La Seyne thought of themselves as particularly militant because they had to deal with their capitalist bosses on an everyday basis, and because their jobs were not safeguarded; whereas their counterparts in the nearby Arsenal of Toulon considered that they were the more militant because although they were state sector workers and their jobs were more secure, they had to function in accordance with the restrictive rules and practices that dictated working conditions in the naval dockyards, that in many cases had not changed since the time of Pétain.

... and intellectuals went their own ways ... but they were as rare as white flies around here ...’, (**Papais**, personal communication, November 30, 2009).

Jo Pentagrossa:

‘I came from workers’ origins and I became an intellectual – when I came to work in the Council, certain comrades and union men rejected me – for certain people ‘noble’ people are only manual workers ...

... we can’t forget that the foundation of the Party is proletariat Maurice Thorez was (had been) a miner and it’s true he had a lot of respect for that ...’, (**Pentagrossa**, personal communication, August 17, 2009).

Guido Russi:

‘They’ve got full stomachs! - what can they understand about working conditions - *really?*’ (**Russi**, personal communication, December 15, 2009).

Implicit in this workerism *ouvriérisme* / *operaismo* is also the fear that the unity of thought and action, which is the very essence of communism, could be compromised by these ‘free-thinkers’. **Silvino Poletto** (*aka Benvenuto*) was the son of a factory worker and had worked briefly in industry before joining the Resistance in 1944. After the war he had become a journalist and for that reason was considered an intellectual by many in the party. Secretary of the Federation of Gorizia from 1950 to 1958, he is able to describe the working relations between the federation and the shipyards in Monfalcone during that period. In the autumn of 1956, this basic difference in attitude, in interpretations of what constituted the best interests of not only communists in the region but Italian communism *per se*, would be tested to the limit when **Silvino Poletto**, **Avvocato Battello**, **Italico Chiarion** and other members of the Federation Committee challenged the national Party leadership regarding reactions to global events (see Chapter 7):

‘I was Secretary of the Federation of Gorizia but the most important centre in terms of communist support was Monfalcone ...

We had a rapport that was difficult – there was one comrade ... who was Stalinist ... sometimes the rapport was quite bitter but we had a point of reference and that was the War of Liberation, I mean, if I hadn’t been a

partisan during the war I wouldn't have been able to hold my own with the old guard revolutionaries of the PCI ...', ⁴⁹ (Poletto, personal communication, December 10, 2009).

Such testimonies, whether pertaining to the inter-relations and dynamics of:

- Federation vs. Municipal
- Factory-based vs. Municipal
- Factory-based vs. Intellectual
- or Federation vs. Factory-based,

imply that membership of the Communist Party in either case-location did not automatically make for a common understanding or approach as regards core political issues, contrary to what might be imagined, or indeed expected; and that differences in interpretations and perspectives where they existed, were often multi-

⁴⁹ WW2 Resistance is a fundamental reference that is very much present in the minds of informants in both case studies and it is an equally salient feature in local documentary evidence. The personal and collective memories of the Resistance experience, its significance, and the values and associations attached or attributed to it in the post-war decades within these communities, cannot be over-estimated. It is also a 'constant' reference in that although this experience was clearly personal in terms of individual engagement, it was, by definition, collaborationist to a greater extent. Therefore the 'transferability' of these memories, values and associations, achieved via a process of essentialisation, automatically does away with ambiguities, and mediates polyvalence. Thus these memories, values, associations are rendered accessible, sharable by extension, and applicable to various existing situations, conditions and realities. At local and regional levels in the context of this study links between the Resistance and the collective communist identity can be found in the Party press and other Party literature and in the naming of cells and community centres after fallen comrades or historically relevant dates. In the case of La Seyne where the communists controlled the council this included schools, colleges, medical centres and other public buildings, streets and landmarks (e.g. in 1956 it was the only town outside Rumania to have a street named after Stalingrad). It is also visible in both case-locations in the publication of books and pamphlets up to the present day about individuals or battalions that had distinguished themselves during the war, and apart from the essential purpose of this body of literature that was and is to consolidate and conserve a particular collective memory, it effectively provided / provides an alternative to the mainstream and partial versions of history that dominate the wider cultures. Another link between the Resistance and these collective political identities and especially in Venezia-Giulia is in the retained use of Resistance nomenclature or *nomi di battaglia* in both formal and informal situations to the present day. These names such as 'Banffi', 'Leone', 'Benvenuto', 'Nanò', were used by partisans originally for obvious reasons of security and after as metaphors for Resistance values, purpose and authority. This is a point at which individuals can pass into a collective memory. They were, are, legends in their own time. As was the case in La Seyne, former Resistance fighters were also important role models in their communities and those in positions of trust and responsibility within the Party structures and in the CGT / CGIL, certainly during the 1950s were invariably former Resistance fighters in post-war decades.

layered, complex and dependent on local and regional histories. The findings of this research present a picture of communist cultures in La Seyne and in Monfalcone as being, in fact, full of potential tensions and conflicting ‘interests’. The picture also reveals however, that at key moments, and to differing extents, tensions were instantly / duly replaced by a unity of thought and action (see Chapters 7, 8).

4.4 The life of the Party

As would be expected in view of the universal structure and organisation of Communist Parties around the world modelled on the working model of the CPSU, party meetings appear to have been analogous in La Seyne and Monfalcone as regards frequency and content. **Silvano Morsolin** was a former Resistance fighter and in 1956, Secretary of the party section in Staranzano a commuter town outside Monfalcone. He describes the party meetings in the shipyard cells (for certain other informants cells were located in communities or alternative work-places), and in the sections (in the town or village an individual was subscribed) during our period. He explains that unless prevented from doing so:

‘Almost every day at lunch-time, 12 – 1pm, we used to have a Party cell meeting ...

... and after 5 o’clock we’d go to the Party Section and have another meeting at the Party reunions the ex-partisan Secretaries ... read out their own reports ... we’d discuss work related issues but political as well – with an agenda decided by the Secretary - but the political stuff came from the Federation – always from the Federation ...

... the CGIL meetings were done publically – in the changing rooms in the shipyards or outside the main gates with all the workforce ...

... but the political ones were for Communist Party members and certain known sympathisers ...’, (**Morsolin**, personal communication, December 11, 2009).

Robert Gourvenec, is a life-long communist militant who would go on to become a union cadre, was working in the naval shipyards in Toulon in 1956. It is eloquent that he does not consider the CGT to have been a separate organisation to the party:

‘We didn’t have time for ‘flanking’ organisations – we were working all the time – there were repercussion on family life too - I was active all over the place - in the CGT and the Party – the meetings were frequent – they’d go on midnight or one in the morning sometimes - Saturdays or Sundays too ...’, (**Gourvenec**, personal communication, July 28, 2009).

Renato Papais describes the situation in Monfalcone at this time:

Were Party activities done in free time?

‘Yes, naturally, after we clocked-off at 5 pm – yes, and most of all Sunday mornings – some people couldn’t make it in the evenings – they had to go home to wash, eat – they could stay an hour, an hour and a half – but most of us would stay longer – but on Sundays we could get everyone - for marriages it was difficult – wives weren’t politicised – we knew who had problems at home when we’d get a cadre resignation – in the factory there’s understanding - wives understood that when we went on strike there was less pay but it was for long term benefit, but that same wife didn’t like it when the husbands were out all the time at meetings - but these things aren’t in documents ...’, (**Papais**, personal communication, October 8, 2009).

Although families in both locations were expected to participate in many party related activities, this was not always possible, and it clearly did not include party meetings if family members were not also active party members. Here, **Madame Meunier**, whose husband was a mid-level cadre in La Seyne in 1956, and **Josette Vincent**, talk about family life in our period:

Mme. Meunier: ‘I hardly saw my husband - no I’m serious – he used to work all day then go to Party meetings – sometimes he’d come home at 1 – 2 – 3 in the morning and he’d have to up for work at 5!

Josette Vincent: Yes – you know there were marriages that broke-up for that reason – the husbands didn’t recognise their children! (**Vincent / Meunier**, personal communication, October 13, 2008).

Mario Mauchigna, member of the Communist Youth at fourteen, actively involved with Red Aid in the region, a life-long communist militant and a former party Secretary describes how things were in Turriaco:

‘I had a very intense political life – I neglected my family because of it – after work every night - Saturday – Sunday - any holiday I spent doing *Festa dell’Unità ...*’, (**Mauchigna**, personal communication, June 6, 2010).

Another insight into the family life of a communist is provided here by **Signora Visintin**:

You must have seen little of your husband in those days Signora?

‘That’s right – he was always out! but it’s a passion – it doesn’t hurt the family – I didn’t grumble – he could have been going out womanising! and it was for *us* – you have to fight in life – things don’t just come like that ...’, (**Visintin**, personal communication, June 15, 2010).

As does that of **Maria Ferfoggia** and **Giuseppe Ferfoggia** from Doberdò, a communist bastion in the hills to the north east of Monfalcone. Signor Ferfoggia was a prominent party activist who had also spent twenty five years on the Communist Town Council of, including as Deputy Mayor.

Signor Ferfoggia: ‘When I came back from Germany – I was 16 when they took me off – along with 7 others from this village – I lost my dad there to – I worked in the shipyard – I was on the Council too - my wife had to stay at him a lot – I was always busy ...

Signora Ferfoggia: ‘Oh yes – he was always busy!’

Signor Ferfoggia: ‘In the shipyards, at meetings, 25 years on the Council – as Deputy Mayor too – for Party meetings I’d travel all over the place – Trieste, Monfalcone, I was President of ANPI too ...’, (**Ferfoggia**, personal communication, June 6 2010).

Flanking organisations

In terms of affiliated organisations, informants in both locations indicate that it was the Communist Youth organisations *Jeunesse communiste* (JC) and the *Federazione giovanile comunista* (FGC) that constituted the key activity for young communists, and for adult Party members, apart from Party related activity, it was that of the CGT / CGIL and / or the *Union des femmes françaises* (UFF) in the French case (see below), and the Resistance associations that took up most of their ‘spare’ time. (It

should be noted that workers in 1955 had not yet obtained the 40 hour week in either location.)



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Membership of additional affiliated organisations during the post-war period such as Red Aid and the Peace Movements, appears to have been higher at certain times more than others, and on the part of some informants more than others (and in the case of Peace Movements, more in the French study than in the Italian). The important role of the communist-affiliated trade unions the CGT / CGIL and their close ideological and political link with the Communist Parties themselves at that point is laid bare in the bulletin issued by the CGT in La Seyne protesting the London Accords in September and October 1954 on German rearmament:

‘Say NO!’⁵¹ The management of the *Forges et Chantiers de la Méditerranée* supports the politics of FASCISM and WAR – Together

⁵⁰ Illustration provided by **Jo Pentagrossa** (centre-front).

⁵¹ West Germany’s re-armament and admission to NATO in May 1955 had been highly problematic for the Soviet Union, the PCF and all Western Communist Parties, and indeed it resulted in the Soviet Union’s immediately establishing the Warsaw Pact. The Communist movement saw German rearmament in the light of historical experience and contemporary power politics (and in this stance the French Party found itself sharing notional space, bizarrely, with the Gaullists). After twists and turns of Soviet policy in response to the events of the 1930s, the Soviet Union was invaded by Nazi Germany in 1941. The Soviet Union had entered WW2 as an ally of the West, and forming as strong an alliance as possible against Germany was its immediate objective. After the war its foreign policy was informed by the perceived need to contain Germany through the Western alliance. ‘Containment’ entailed acquiring and maintaining at all costs a protective buffer of satellite states along its Western frontier. Moscow and the PCF alike were opposed to German rearmament, seeing this move in the light of historical experience and contemporary power politics (and in this stance the French Party found itself sharing notional space, bizarrely, with the

with thousands of fellow French citizens, the patriots from the FCM suspended production for a quarter of an hour on Tuesday, Wednesday, to protest against German re-armament ... This evening, we learned that the London Accords have been ratified by a small majority ... Comrades ... we must raise our level of protest in order to prevent return of the jackboot – this time bringing misery and death by way of nuclear war! (Le POUVOIR de dire NO! 1954, p.1) ⁵²

Over in Monfalcone **Renato Papais** talks of the rationale behind the CGT's 'autonomous' status and inclusive operational base that was open to all, and not just party members or known sympathisers:

'It's not in our interests that they're part of us because being autonomous means that people who don't necessarily want a card can be *in the fold* - those who want to work with us – like the young ones - the door is open ...', (**Papais**, personal communication, October 8, 2009).

It is true to say that membership of the CGT / CGIL was relatively high in the shipyards and subsidiary industries in La Seyne and Monfalcone amongst workforces that were, for the most part, unionised. These were the largest and most influential of the three main union bodies in each location. ⁵³ Not only party members but

Gaullists). For the PCF, a re-armed Germany strengthening the power of NATO was part and parcel of the 'European' project, which was ultimately the servant of capitalism i.e. the United States.

⁵² The link is both overt and tacit. The use of the word 'patriots' in the text, which has always been a leitmotif in Western Communist Party literature but is especially redolent in the French context for historical reasons; is territorial and assimilatory. It praises the working classes in this working class town as honourable, courageous and living examples of French Republican values whilst taking 'ownership' of them as the Party that truly defends them; it reminds the reader of the Party's impressive and undeniable WW2 Resistance record, and not least in La Seyne, whilst it lends this identity by extension to all who support the Party; and in this way it establishes a legitimate, favourable, shared identity with the wider workforce, and population. The inclusive use of the term 'comrades' here, which was of course the term used between Communist Party members but is used here to denote 'co-workers', is designed to convey solidarity between communists and their sympathisers and the many non-communists workers who also belonged to the union for pragmatic reasons. In this, the CGT was functioning in its essential capillary role in the community.

⁵³ The exclusions of the PCF and the PCI from government in 1947, were in due course followed by a systematic and co-ordinated assault on the communist controlled unitary trade union apparatuses: the CGT in France (united as a single body since the Popular Front era) and the CGIL in Italy. These split when reformist, Catholic and / or more conservative factions broke off to form their own organisations. The largest of these in both countries were of a Social Democratic tendency; Workers' Force (FO) founded in 1948 and the Italian Confederation of Trade Unions (CISL) founded in 1950, and they were backed by the CIA. This, in turn, was used as a riposte to Socialist / Christian Democrat accusations that the PCF / PCI were being funded by Moscow. Since the splits, the Parties never ceased to re-establish unity of action across the Trade Union apparatuses.

communist sympathisers and also those of other or no political persuasion subscribed, because it was these organisations that defended all workers' rights the most determinedly and most effectively. These high subscription levels meant that communist influence on the factory floor and indeed outside the workplace in both case-locations was also significant. This influence extended into other areas of the regions and their economies, for example, to agricultural communities, as family members working in La Seyne or Monfalcone but who lived outside the immediate areas would inevitably bring home with them attitudes perspectives that were inevitably more politicised. This was especially the case in Monfalcone, where most workers commuted to the shipyards on a daily bases from outlying towns and villages. **Mario Mauchigna**, former Secretary of the PCF Section in Turriaco, which was a communist bastion commuter town outside Monfalcone, attests to this phenomenon:

Was it normal for agricultural workers in these parts to vote communist?

‘Well they had the influence of the shipyards – they often had family members who worked in the shipyards ...’, (**Mauchigna**, personal communication, June 13, 2010).

Evidence suggests that there were differences in the nature and efficacy of the communist women's organisations, the *Union des femmes françaises* (UFF) and *Unione donne italiane* (UDI). In the context of this study, the UFF appears to have been the more political of the two bodies and the more successful, in relative terms, in engendering popular support. Its higher profile during the post-war period linked to the PCF's anti-imperialist stance regarding Indochina and Algeria will no doubt have been a factor in this finding.⁵⁴ What is conveyed in oral accounts in the Italian case-study, is that it was the party itself, the Communist-led CGIL but also the post-war Resistance organisations that were the lynch-pins of adult communist political engagement.⁵⁵ **Alberto Clemente** provides a typical account of UDI in the

⁵⁴ Although with regard to Algeria, critiques have accused the PCF of not giving enough support to the FLN.

⁵⁵ The parties themselves, the Communist-led unions, the Resistance organisations were, essentially, in both the French and Italian examples, male centric, at least in terms of organisation. This does not however, appear to have been an issue at the time in either case-location. Female informants in France did address this phenomenon objectively, in retrospect, but usually without rancour. Only

Monfalcone area. It should be noted that his account is provided in a neutral, straightforward and value free manner:

‘UDI? - it never took off – it was simply the women of the party – they didn’t even have a card ...’,

But did it attract non-communists?

‘What happened in practice was that the members were mostly PCI members anyway ...’,

So what was the purpose of it?

‘It was to intended expand party membership but it didn’t work ... the Partisan organisations were the strong ones, and the other was the CGIL - UDI used to organise superficial stuff – like ‘Women’s Day’ etc. ..They didn’t even have an agenda that addressed equality, violence against women that’s around today ...’,

That is quite different to the French example ...

‘Well - they had the concrete function of opposing the war in Algeria, whereas here they used to limp from one San Tomaso (Women’s Day) to another no?’⁵⁶

he concludes:

‘The party was already a strong organisation, in Turriaco, out of 300 members, 100 of them from the shipyards, 150 were women ...’, (Clemente, personal communication, November 20, 2009).

This account, which echoes many others provided, implies that any specific political interests of women communists tended to be *assimilated* or *subsumed* into those of ‘the party’ at that point (and at no point during interviews was this phenomenon

one of the female informants in Italy made a mildly critical observation in this regard. What comes across in interviews is that in 1956 the French women felt themselves to be communists plain and simple, whether or not they were represented in equal number to men in the regional party leadership body. The Italian women, who factored less than their French counterparts in their regional Party leadership body, appear to have accepted that their interests were addressed via the party programme.

⁵⁶ Perhaps his former role as mid level cadre, which entailed having an understanding of the wider context and including international issues, had led him to make the link between the levels of political engagement on the part of women communists in France and the Algerian War, more readily than several of the other Italian informants, for whom this question had been peripheral.

remarked upon by female informants). **Mrs. Ferfoggia's** (Italianised from the original '**Ferfolja**') account gives weight to this hypothesis:

'Women hardly got involved in politics at that time ... we used to celebrate 8th March – Women's Day – we used to meet in each others' houses ...', ⁵⁷ (**Ferfoggia**, personal communication, June 16, 2010). ⁵⁸

In the French context, the UFF had been highly active in the campaign against the war in Indochina and also, of course, from 1954 onwards in campaigning for a peaceful solution on the Algerian question. This organisation was involved in many different types of direct action in La Seyne but mostly in Toulon and Marseille (for strategic purposes local members would travel to these high profile locations and major departure points for conscripts, arms etc. to make their protests) until the war in Algeria was brought to an end 1962. During this time UFF members and their exploits featured prominently in the Communist press, literature and in other local sources. The Police Intelligence document below describes what was perceived to have been the Communist Party strategy behind this phenomenon:

'The Var Federation of the Communist Party's principle weapon in their an extensive press campaign for a peaceful solution in Algeria – led by Mrs. Noelle Thomazo, the Secretary of the Var Federation - are the 'women' of the UFF – The Communist Party tactic is to push them to the front ... what it seeks to do is to instigate a mass movement of all French women ...', (Information, 1956, March 27, p. 1).

⁵⁷ The fact that UDI appears to have been less effective as a political or capillary organisation and less representative of women communists in Monfalcone than its sister organisation in La Seyne, does not mean women were completely absent from the Party structure in the Federation of Gorizia. Nevertheless, apart from a number of notable exceptions, evidence does point to there having been significantly fewer women cadres in the Federation of Gorizia than in the Var Federation during the 1950s. With regard to the CGT / CGIL, evidence suggests that in both locations those in positions of responsibility tended to be male, with the exception of a number of mid-level positions occupied by women in predominantly female industrial contexts such as in the textile factories in the Gorizian Province.

⁵⁸ At this point in the interview, **Signora Maria Ferfoggia's** daughter-in-law, who is originally from Slovenia, describes how things had been in the area even years after the period in question. Her testimony adds to understandings of how things must have been for many women in 1956. The younger **Signora Ferfoggia** states that when she first came to Doberdò from Slovenia in 1974, she had found that Italian women communists were distinctly less politicised than their Slovenian counterparts: 'In Slovenia (Yugoslavia) we were more advanced – more political – I was the first around here to join the party, and UDI ... imagine that in those days women here didn't go into bars alone – but in Slovenia it was normal to do that ...', (**Signora Ferfoggia**, personal communication, June 16, 2010).

French women Communist Party members therefore, and not least in La Seyne and Toulon, were extremely active at this time in opposing the conflict in Algeria. Furthermore, in the French case-study in particular, the social and cultural activities of the women often overlapped with those of a directly political nature, whether they came under the official ambit of the party or the UFF (which was at that point, to all intents and purposes, the same thing) and especially those activities that were scheduled for weekends and holidays. This is connected to the fact that the families of all Communist Party members in general were expected to involve themselves in these activities, but also because women were usually obliged to combine child care responsibilities with anything else they did. Fundraising activities; distributing the party press, literature, propaganda, usually at weekends and often on Sunday mornings; organising and participating in discussion groups and in/formal training programmes; participating in all but the most potentially dangerous demonstrations, marches, rallies as and when the need arose would often involve spouses, sons, daughters etc. **Elise Bernard** was a life-long communist militant and on the Section and Federation Committees in Toulon during our period. Here she describes the party's attitude towards women's active contribution to the cause that gives an idea of expected commitment levels:

‘The Party expected a lot of women - they were always berated for not doing enough – even though they did! - I felt sorry for them - they used to drag their kids along to demos - after a long day's work ...

We used to do demonstrations and lots of other things – I used to sell *l'Huma* on Sunday mornings – we worked all the time – weekends, evenings – meetings happened after dinner ...’, (**Bernard**, personal communication, October 23, 2008).

As we have seen, organisations that were central to our communities throughout the post-war period were the regional branches of in La Seyne and Toulon of the Resistance organisations *The Association of Former Resistance Fighters* (ANACR) and *The National Association of Italian Resistance Fighters* (ANPI).⁵⁹ These

⁵⁹ Reference here to ‘Resistance’ and to the values and associations attached to that notion by both our communities and wider populations is essentially to the various French and Italian partisan movements that existed from the early war years and which consolidated under the National

organisations were (are) not Communist Party affiliated, as the French and Italian Resistance movements had comprised, by definition, individuals and groups that spanned the anti-Fascist political spectrum, and included those who did not belong to a particular political party or indeed who, other than their desire to fight the enemy occupant, did not have particular political leanings (in the Venezia-Giulia region, this last category would comprise, rather, those who preferred not to be linked in any official way to the Communist Party for pragmatic reasons, during and after the war). However, by virtue of the predominant and important communists' representation in and contributions to their respective Resistance movements, communists often constituted the majority membership of these organisations after the war. Therefore to a large extent, these organisations were synonymous with the PCF / PCI. Their existence and their endeavours were / are constant reminders to all, of the parties' Resistance records, yet at the same time, their 'aggregate' membership made them particularly valuable to the parties as true flanking organisations in that aspects of their post-war programmes could be furthered via these organisations in a *more general* and therefore *less party political* manner. These organisations also fulfilled an important capillary function as membership is predominantly but by no means exclusive to those who participated directly or indirectly in WW2 Resistance. As well as commemorating local and national individuals and events, they functioned (and

Resistance Council (CNR) and the National Liberation Committee (CLN) from 1943 onwards (1942 in Venezia-Giulia). There were of course significant levels 'non-violent' resistance in both countries and not least in our case-locations all through the periods of occupation ranging from non-cooperation with occupying forces and collaborationist governments, the production and / or propagation of information / misinformation and / or propaganda, the determinant and often as dangerous role of providing aid and / or shelter to Resistance fighters, the engagement in strike action - in demonstrations, sabotage, espionage etc. that included participation of women and in some cases even children. However, whilst this type of contribution to the war effort is duly recognised (usually when pointed-out), it is without doubt the *Maquis* and the *Partigiani* brigades of ordinary men and boys, political dissidents, former militia, and patriots of diverse political orientations joined together and actively engaged in guerrilla warfare in the mountains and rural areas that symbolise 'Resistance' in these countries, and which is foremost in all dominant discourses (it should also be retained that active resistance activity was also, in some cases, carried out by women). Discretionary membership to individuals who had not been associated with WW2 Resistance is extended to date to individuals who declare themselves anti-fascist and who subscribe to the Associations' statutes and programmes. This is especially the case in the Venezia-Giulia region of Italy.

indeed still function)⁶⁰ as debating societies and as ‘unofficial’ but highly effective anti-reactionary forces in themselves, as this Police Intelligence document illustrates:

‘For the attention of: Police Superintendent, La Seyne

Issued by: Police Headquarters Toulon ...

Re. ‘Commemoration of Armistice Day ... Raybaud, MD, made a public address attacking German rearmament ... in the procession a banner was visible with the words; “ANARC ... La Seyne Local Committee ...”, (Le Commissaire de Police de La Seyne, 1955, May 8, p. 1).

In 1955, a mere 11 years after the Liberation, memories and associations of WW2 Resistance were still vivid - not yet of the past. In fact the importance of WW2 Resistance to all of the informants, then and now, cannot be overestimated.

There is no doubt that WW2 Resistance was an intrinsically politicising enterprise, engendering or furthering in those involved not only discipline, direction and confidence, but also an intensely personal and an indelible collective identity. It was formative and transformative in both case-contexts. In these movements there were of course long-standing ideological communists who had joined the parties in France before or during the Popular Front era and in Italy who had made a moral and / or active commitment to the cause during Fascism, as well as the thousands who had come to the parties by virtue of their war experience. **Silvano Morsolin**, a Party militant and middle level cadre in Monfalcone during our period, explains how and why he became a communist:

‘... what I learned I learned in the mountains as a partisan - I had my 18th birthday up there ... I joined the Party up there in August ’44 there was a Political Commissioner who went round trying to get young men to join a political Party - and the majority up there were communists - so I joined them ... I saw that most of them had a level of authority, or were corporals, unit commanders – leaders no? and then bit by bit – well there were men who taught us things, political leaders - older than me - and there I took the first steps ... I started getting responsibilities like transmitting instructions, orders to the ranks ... and up there you know,

⁶⁰ Former Resistance fighters and members of these societies with diverse war experiences also go into schools in each case-location to date, to give talks to children about some of their experiences and answer questions.

well life wasn't easy ... and I had to set an example to others, I was hungry but I had to show courage and encourage the others – I had the same conditions as they did – poorly clothed, hungry, but at the same time being a communist I had to give an example to the others ...', (Morsolin, personal communication, December 11, 2009).

Signor Morsolin's testimony is typical of those describing their wartime resistance experiences in the Gorizian Province and how this drew them to the Party, as is that of **Charles Galfré** below, with regard to those expressed in La Seyne and Toulon. **Galfré** was a young journalist during the war years in Toulon and went on to become the Deputy Editor of the Communist Party newspaper in the Var region *Le Petit Varois la Marseillaise*. He would leave the Party acrimoniously in protest to the Soviet interventions in Hungary and suffered public exclusion by the party leadership as a consequence (see Chapter 7). However, he explains why he first became a member of the Party in 1941:

'I joined the official Resistance movement in May 1941 .. before that I'd been a Socialist ... I was secretary of the Socialist Youth Movement ... I joined the Communist Party in 1943 under the occupation ... I worked in the print room of the *Petit Var* newspaper (LPVM) and there I was able to see for myself the fighting spirit of the underground Communist Party militants ... they were so courageous ... they really ... you can say that they were examples ... and I who used to be wary of them, well that all changed ... then as a partisan I found myself fighting alongside the Communists, I witnessed their courage ... and their fraternity ... so I joined the Party ...', (**Galfré**, personal communication, June 30, 2009).



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WW2 Resistance had left practical, psychological and motivational legacies for those individuals and groups that had taken part. These legacies had proven invaluable after the war in terms of a collective reference for orientations and strategies. For our communities, the Resistance spirit, that mindset, that resolve in the face of adversity, was directed in the post-war period and not least in 1955, towards building new societies, and what is communicated in oral and written evidence gathered for this research is that many of these communities' post-war struggles such as the expulsions from national governments of the PCF / PCI and the ensuing period of political tension and industrial unrest, the Ridgeway demonstrations⁶² and the Henri Martin affair were seen as extensions of Resistance values and principles.⁶³

⁶¹ (Association Mémoire Vivante des Communistes dans le Var, 2005, p. 149).

⁶² Following the expulsion of the PCF / PCI from their national governments in 1947 there were communist-led strikes, agitation and violent confrontations in the capital and all over France (in Paris 3 million workers came out) culminated in the derailment of the Paris – Tourcoing express train resulting in twenty one fatalities. The Socialist Minister of the Interior Jules Moch ordered a crack-down on the strikes and demonstrations deploying riot police and state troops in the autumn of 1947 in order to crush a potential insurrectionary situation. The CGT ceded, the strikers were called-off and from that point the PCF took-up the only option available - that of semi-official opposition to the government and its Atlantic Alliance agenda including its symbolic Marshall Aid programme. General Ridgeway was Eisenhower's successor as Commander of Allied Forces in Europe. He had been accused of deploying chemical weapons in Korea and was known to his detractors in France as '*Ridgeway la peste*' which may be translated literally as 'Ridgeway the scourge / plague'. The anti-Ridgeway demonstration took place on

4.5 Local media

As elsewhere in Europe during our period, daily newspapers were the main font of local / national information. All of the informants in this study indicated that in 1955-6 the daily newspapers they read were the official organs of the PCF or PCI. In the French case the majority indicated that their main font of information was the regional publication i.e. *Le Petit Varois la Marseillaise* (LPVM) published in Toulon. In this publication there was a page dedicated to news of La Seyne. Others stated that they also read national party daily newspaper *l'Humanité* although not as regularly. Invariably, those in positions of responsibility within the party structure said that they regularly or always read both publications (party meetings required that the secretaries of cells and sections be informed about national party strategy, and directives issued from the federations were based-on / in sync with the national party line set-out in these publications). In the Italian case, informants indicated that they read the Northern Italian edition of *Unità* published in Milan, which featured news of the Venezia-Giulia region and as the industrial centre of that region, also political news regarding Monfalcone (see below).

28th May but it turned into a series of violent clashes with the police in which a North African and six communists were killed. Added to which, Jacques Duclos was arrested along with 718 demonstrators. What ensued was in many ways a farce, but one that would turn into an anti-communist witch-hunt.

⁶³ Another high profile communist-led anti-colonial post-war struggle was the Henri Martin affair. This was particularly relevant to the informants in this study because this three year drama played out in Toulon, just eight kilometres from La Seyne, and all of them at the time were directly involved. This had been the first political trial relating to France's war in Indochina and the decision on the part of the state to incarcerate the man who symbolised the fight against it became deeply significant, highly controversial, and ultimately counter-productive. In response to his sentence, the PCF Var Federation instigated an intensive '*Libérez Henri Martin!*' campaign at the local, regional and national level that was to run for the next three years and which mobilised all the mass forces of the Left including the CGT, *Le Mouvement pour la Paix* (the Peace Movement), *le Secours populaire* (People's Red Cross) as well as prominent intellectuals including Jean-Paul Sartre, Hervé Basin and Jacques Prévert. The Henri Martin affair had the effect of politicising a generation of post-war communists who had not participated in the Resistance personally, and it gave all communist militants in La Seyne and Toulon an indelible link with anti-war protest in the post-war context.

For communists in La Seyne, having their own PCF organ regionally / locally added to their levels of self-consciousness and confidence as a political community in the post-war period. This was especially important due to the animosity and antagonism that existed in the town / Town Hall between Socialists and Communists post 1945 that was reflected in a reciprocal and on-going propaganda campaign in the local press. LPVM was their own publication, and it reflected, reinforced, moulded a collective mindset. It featured ordinary day to day news, local events, local news stories of those in their own community, covered from a communist perspective. The importance to this community of LPVM was therefore immense. Over in Monfalcone however, things were very different. Communists there did not have a dedicated local or regional daily newspaper.⁶⁴ The Northern Italian edition of *l'Unità* of course addressed issues that were important to communists, but by necessity these were of a more macro nature, even when treating local matters such as industrial action in the shipyards. What all political / social / cultural communities want, is to see their identities and interests (i.e. themselves) recognised, validated and reflected in a collective narrative. What communists in Monfalcone had in the way of a local newspaper, in contrast to their comrades in La Seyne and Toulon, was a centre - right / right-wing publication that either ignored or openly criticised their party and therefore their community on a daily basis, *Il Piccolo*, which informants used to refer to ironically as *Il Buggiardello* or the 'The Little Liar'. **Mario Mauchigna** attests to this general sentiment:

‘We used to say that you couldn’t even believe the date on the front of it!
(**Mauchigna**, personal communication, June 13, 2010).

⁶⁴ As the second political power in the town / province / region post-1947, it is counter-intuitive that the communists did not have a more regionally based representative publication. The fact that they did not, is testament to the ‘legitimate authority’ interests that were politically and economically weighted against this community. No support, in any form, could be expected from that quarter. The lack of communist representation at the local level obviously had implications in terms of self-identity, and in how this community related to non-communists, and anti-communists, at the local level. However, as usual, this situation is made light of in interviews, treated with a philosophical pragmatism as informants recall this period - much in the way that they appear to have responded to the many other forms of political and economic discrimination.

These information contexts help to explain the reactions in our communities to the events of 1956. In La Seyne, the ‘polarisation on the left’ of local politics to a large extent informed the responses from our community; and in Monfalcone the ‘polarisation left vs. right’ of local politics exacerbated by the media monopoly of their political rivals, to no less extent, informed the nature of the responses from our community.

The content of national and regional Communist Party organs in France and Italy in 1955 reflected the Cold War issues of the day and, naturally, the Soviet perspective. Hardly a day passed without a news feature describing the ‘outstanding performance and achievements’ of the Soviet Union in all sectors of political, economic, technical, social, cultural and diplomatic activity. This was juxtaposed, automatically, with criticisms of those of the United States / the West. These criticisms ranged from those specifically targeted on American society and politics such race-relations, the repression of the American Communist Party (CPUSA), America’s intransigent stance on its military capacity and strategy in contrast to the Soviet Union’s overtures for peace; those regarding European integration and its capitalist, imperialist, U.S. serving agenda, the French and Italian governments’ misguided / acquiescent / disingenuous stance on this as epitomised by its agreeing to German re-armament; and those that were country specific such as the French government’s stance on Algeria and the importance of re-forming the Popular Front of the French Left in order to influence government policy.

What is communicated in interviews in both case-locations, is the sense that what links these two communities, these individuals, to the Soviet Union, is not so much the October Revolution, although this is indeed a staple reference in much of the communist propaganda typical of this period - but instead:

- Stalin / Stalingrad and the War of Liberation

- The unshakable belief at this time in the moral and political superiority of the Soviet Union based on what it had achieved and was achieving in terms of creating true socialist societies.⁶⁵

With regard to the enduring reverence that was felt by these communities in particular towards Stalin and the Red Army for what they had achieved in single-handedly turning the tide against the German war machine in WW2, **Robert Gourvenec** echoes sentiments expressed by informants in La Seyne and Toulon:

‘Let’s not forget the Soviet’s role in the war – I’ll certainly never forget that it’s due to the Soviet Union that Europe was liberated – if it weren’t for Stalingrad – the steam roller of the Red Army in action – maybe the Normandy landing would never have taken place ... our dear allies at the time tried by all means to bring about through the Germans the destruction of the Soviet Union and when they saw that it was Russia that was about to liberate Europe they made a mad dash to do it themselves ...’, (**Gourvenec**, personal communication, August 20, 2009).

Renato Papais expresses the sentiments amongst communists at the Liberation in Italy in general, but in Venezia-Giulia especially, given that communists and communist sympathisers in these parts had had particular reason to favour the internationalist perspective. He expresses the levels of hope that had been invested in and the recognition towards Stalin and the Red Army after years of Fascist rule and occupation:

‘We were hoping that the Red Army would reach Rome no? not stop at Berlin, but liberate the Italian people – that’s what we used to say – ‘why can’t they forge on to Rome! at that time that was our dream – to explain to you how faithful we were to the credo of the Soviet Union ...’, (**Papais**, personal communication, June 17, 2009).

In 1955-6, this recognition towards and faith in the Soviet Union appears to have lost none of its strength within our communities.

As regards attitudes towards the Soviet Union and its successes in realising socialism across the Eastern Bloc, it has to be remembered that at that conjuncture i.e. pre-

⁶⁵ That is to say, socialist in the process of becoming communist societies.

1956, the socialist states were, in the eyes of the informants, concrete examples of this on-going triumph. Consciously retrospective in this instance (for retrospective analyses *per se* see Chapter 8), and communicating objectivity, **Lucien Conac** describes the general feeling amongst communists in La Seyne and Toulon at this time:

‘We had certainties – it was like a river going into the sea – the emancipation of peoples – the socialist countries were the only way ...’. Before we used to say ‘there is an alternative to capitalism – you just have to look at the Soviet Union ...’, (**Conac**, personal communication, October 2 2008).

Dino Zanuttin explains that for communists in Venezia-Giulia region, this had been all the more ‘real’:

‘We had the example right next door of a functioning Socialist State - where people like us ran the country ...’, (**Zanuttin**, personal communication, December 3, 2009).

4.4 As 1955 approaches

The situation for communists in La Seyne especially in the immediate prior to 1956 was in fact very positive, due on the one hand to the fact that they were still ‘Resistance Royalty’, and on the other, to their undeniably successful handling of local politics. ⁶⁶ This community was confident, in fact ready to take-on the world,

⁶⁶ The most pressing concern for the newly elected administration in 1947 had been planning and managing the reconstruction of the town and not least of the shipyard, which would kick-start the local economy and taxed appropriately, would constitute a sustainable source of revenue for the town’s short / long term reconstruction and development programme. The reconstruction of the town and its economy however was an enormous task that effectively lasted into the early 1960s. The town itself, which was awarded the *Croix de Guerre* or Cross of War in 1947 in recognition of the level of devastation it suffered and extent of industrial and political sabotage carried out in the shipyards under occupation (many shipyard workers from La Seyne had been involved with the scuttling of the French fleet on 27th November 1942 in the naval shipyards in Toulon including), had been 60% destroyed by allied bombing, and the shipyards had been 100%. Added to which, the near destruction of this working class town had been particularly felt by the local inhabitants as it was already significantly less developed than the regional capital and home to France’s Mediterranean naval base Toulon. The new Communist administration lost no time in putting in train an on-going public works programme that would provide housing, infrastructure, transport, schools, medical centres and a raft of new services for all who needed them. By 1955 reconstruction was at its peak and in place unprecedented levels of social provision. It was obvious to all that the Communist controlled council was accomplishing more for the town than the Socialists had in their twenty year tenure.

however, what drove these comrades politically, was also the weight of unprecedented responsibility. Long-standing communist militant **Jeannine Bechet** had come to La Seyne in 1954 to take-up a position in this *Municipalité Phare* or Beacon Council. In an extract from an interview in which she describes the attitude of Communists in the Town Hall by 1955:

‘I was social worker in a Communist council - so I wanted to succeed because we had a reputation to live up to – maybe it was arrogant of us but it made us fight to be the best at everything and I can tell you my career was exultant – I was free to make decisions, they were great employers ...’, (**Bechet**, personal communication, November 1, 2008).

In this extract **Madame Bechet** echoes the mixed sentiments of pride, passionate political conviction and elation expressed by a number of her former colleagues and others in the community with regard to this period in their collective history. What is nonetheless discernable in interviews, is the ever-present feeling that the communists had something to prove. This reflects the permanent predicament of many French communists who felt themselves to be inherently French, good Republicans, and yet acutely aware of being viewed in certain quarters as being intrinsically ‘foreign’ and unpatriotic. The feelings expressed by **Madame Bechet** are also no doubt linked in the local context to a collective communist memory of pre-war political exclusion in the town (although she herself did not come to La Seyne until after the war), combined with post-war recognition, opportunity and the widespread expectations on the part of the local (and by extension national) electorate. Beacon Councils were nothing if not high profile, and the communists in La Seyne could not afford to fail.

Over in Monfalcone in 1955, the Communist Party could perhaps best be described as the tenacious, indeed redoubtable underdog; beaten but not cowed by what was on many levels a hostile political and economic environment. The Christian Democrats may have held sway in the Town Hall since 1948, but the Communists were, after all, the majority opposition, a fact in itself that was testimony to a) the significant and unshakable far left-wing tendency in the region of ‘Italian’ militants and the vast majority of the local Slovenian population and b) the Communist Party’s post-1947

performance as an astute and responsive representative organisation. In a town dependent on its industry, on its industrial working classes, whether they lived in or on the outskirts of Monfalcone, whether they were card-carrying members of the PCI or not, the communists were a force to be reckoned with locally. **Senatore Silvano Bacicchi**, former shipyard worker, senior Party cadre in 1955 explains that:

‘The strong communist presence in the shipyards and the widespread support for the Party amongst its unionised work-force, was a determining influence electorally’, (**Bacicchi**, personal communication, December 12, 2009).

Italo Chiarion:

‘The communists were always strong anyway - because of the shipyards ...’, (**Chiarion**, personal communication, December 11, 2009).

The thinking amongst communists and their sympathisers in Monfalcone in 1955 was that they would sooner or later be successful in their attempts to represent the interests of the working classes at local government level, as would have been the case all along if history had taken another course. In many respects, history had been their enemy, and yet, as is often the case, it was this very history that had given them the strength to persevere. If they had survived

- twenty years of repression and clandestine resistance to Fascism
- the public defeat or *sconfitta* of their Yugoslavian campaign
- the fact that there was an influx of thousands of exiles from Yugoslavia coming to settle in Venezia-Giulia and many of these in the regional industrial hub Monfalcone, many of them natural right-wing voters, all of them aided financially and in practical ways by State relocation programmes and initiatives on the part of local employers
- the fact that approximately 3.000 communists, mostly from the shipyards and therefore the most militant individuals, had chosen to go directly to Yugoslavia between 1946-8 to ‘help build socialism over there’, depleting the number of *compagni* in Monfalcone in the process and therefore, inevitably, weakening their effectiveness as a body politic
- the 1948 Tito-Stalin split that resulted in;

- 600 Slovenian communists instantly leaving the sections and cells in and around Gorizia (80% of the membership), where their numbers were higher and the politics more problematic, more immediate, due to its border position,⁶⁷ seriously weakening Party morale, and its influence in an already predominantly ‘middle-class’ / ‘public sector economy’ town
- the imprisonment / torture in Yugoslavia and / or expulsion from Yugoslavia of Italian communist migrant workers, who in the vast majority supported the Cominform resolution and were therefore classed as ‘the enemy’
- a consequent mass counter-exodus of these workers or *cominformisti* returning mostly to Monfalcone and surrounding areas, only adding to the already high unemployment figures amongst our community; many of these returning workers were obliged to leave again to find work elsewhere either permanently or temporarily, whilst others made the decision to stay and endeavour to find work
- this affected family relations and dynamics as individuals had made different choices, taking different paths to ‘the construction of socialism’; the reception the *cominformisti* received by their comrades on returning home was at times ambivalent
- the reception they received from the wider community could also be problematic, they were seen by some as ‘un-Italian’, and only likely to add to existing problems of unemployment
- the right-wing of course gave them an especially cold welcome, branding them ‘foreign’, ‘traitors’, ‘opportunists’ (the PCI / PCF’s recent expulsion from national government in May that year together with the attempted

⁶⁷ The split this development caused was also felt on intensely personal levels because of course in this border region in which Italian and Slovenian speaking communities have co-habited for over four hundred years, many families were made up of individuals from both. ‘The question of ‘national identity’ was more straightforward for Italian speakers post 1947 than for Slovenian speakers, although all Slovenians also spoke Italian. Here **Alberto Mauchigna** elaborates: ‘We suffered a lot because of ‘Cominform’ – not in the sense that we didn’t know what side to be on – but because our relationship with the Slovenians – ever since the War of Liberation – and many Slavs – or comrades – at that point went to Yugoslavia – they were like our brothers – WW2 and everything ...’, (**Mauchigna**, personal communication, June 13, 2010). As does **Alberto Clemente**: ‘After ’48 there were numerous people who had suffered torture over there – but they kept their ideology – no-one remained in Yugoslavia ...’, (**Clemente**, personal communication, November 26, 2009).

assassination of Togliatti in June, gave their detractors further ammunition and intensified and already difficult situation)

- the ideological effects on all communists in the region of this ‘slap in the face’ by Tito, were complex, deep, diverse, and long-lasting, and not surprisingly they had a direct influence on reactions to the Soviet interventions in Budapest six years later (see Chapters 7, 8)

post-1955:

- the thaw in relations between Khrushchev and Tito that symbolised by the former’s first visit to Belgrade in May 1955 and that started to have results relatively quickly in the form of Slovenian communists returning to the Party in Gorizia
- the multiple effects and significance of this latest about-turn in strategy on the part of the Soviet Union were starting to be considered by communists in Monfalcone and Venezia-Giulia but in different ways by a) ordinary communists and b) the regional Party elite in Gorizia
- the ideological effects on all communists in the region of this development that are directly relevant to reactions to our events (see Chapters 7, 8)

plus:

- the years of repression and discrimination on the part of the local political and economic establishment that had endured in one way or another 1945-5,

..... they could survive anything – including the 1955 US backed governmental onslaught on their Trade Union monopoly in Italian industry that was striking right at the heart of their community, (Puppini, 2003).