

CHAPTER 6

1956 – May – August

6.0 Chronology: international and national events, trends and developments

May	1st	Labour Day
	9th	50.000 reservists called-up for Algeria leading to large-scale demonstrations in France
	10th	In Czechoslovakia rehabilitation and release from prison of certain individuals sentenced in the Slansky trial in 1952, others have sentences reduced and wives of those hanged given state pensions
	16th	British atomic device detonated in Monte Bello Islands
	18th	Palestro massacre
		Demonstration in Grenoble: 1000 approx. young men block trains leaving for Algeria, police use tear gas, 50 demonstrators and 20 police injured
		Tunisia gains independence from France
	20th	Administrative elections in Italy: Christian Democrats gain especially in provinces and PCI lose ground to the Socialists following the revelations in Khrushchev's Secret Speech
	21st	US nuclear tests in Bikini Atoll, first airborne hydrogen bomb
	20th	Mendès France resigns over the illiberal handling of the Algerian question
	23rd	First withdrawal of 50.000 Soviet troops from East Germany, 1.200.000 in all to go as part of the disarmament proposals inscribed in the de-Stalinisation process
	25th	Municipal elections in Italy (not in the Gorizian Province), centrist parties do well
29th	Togliatti goes on a friendship visit to Yugoslavia, stops-off in Trieste on his return to Rome	

June	1st	On the eve of Tito's visit to Moscow, Molotov 'resigns' as Soviet Foreign Minister and is replaced by Scepilov who was more 'sophisticated' in political outlook
	2nd	Tito receives hero's welcome in Moscow
	4th	New York Times publishes 'unabridged' (see below) version of the Secret Speech; most Western Communist Party members became aware of / were obliged to confront the issues contained in the Secret Speech at this point
	6th	Le Monde publishes the full text of the Secret Speech
	17th	Togliatti gives interview on the Secret Speech to the left-wing cultural review <i>Nuovi Argomenti</i>
	24th	Intergovernmental Conference of '6' on Common Market and Euratom
	28th	Gamal Abdel Nasser elected President of Egypt Workers' protest in Poland escalates to rioting: Soviet-led troops kill 53-75, 277 injured
July	1st	US Secretary of State Foster Dulles arrives in London for talks on Egypt
	4th	Togliatti's response to Polish riots in <i>l'Unità</i> in an editorial entitled: <i>The Enemy Within</i>
	5th	General strike in France and Algiers
	9th	Military service reintroduced in West Germany
	18th	Political reforms in Hungary
	18-23rd	XIV PCF Congress in Le Havre, heading the agenda: the twin policies of promoting the Socialist-Communist Popular Front and calling for negotiation on Algeria (le fait national' officially recognised)
	19-20th	UK / US inform Nasser that they will not be funding Aswan Dam
19th	Nasser, Nehru, Tito, non-aligned summit at Brioni, Yugoslavia	
26th	Nasser nationalises Suez Canal	

Aug	2nd	British Prime Minister Anthony Eden announces dispatch of jet bombers to Cyprus along with a recall of reservists
	12th	20 French troops killed, 15 wounded, 20 missing in Algeria
	16th	US / UK / French International Conference on Suez in London to establish independent agency to oversee key operational arrangements in the functioning of Suez Canal, Nehru to negotiate peaceful solution, French Mediterranean fleet assemble in Toulon
	17th	Federal Republic of Germany bans Communist Party
	27th	V Congress of CGIL in Italy
	28th	Nenni and Saragat meet in the French Alps to discuss the reunification of PSI (Left) and the PSDI (moderate Left) parties in Italy
	30th	First French troops fly out to Cyprus

Key events in context

	France Knock-on effects of XX Congress / Special Powers	Italy Knock-on effects of XX Congress Full impact of Secret Speech for communists
May	50.000 reservists called-up for Algeria Palestro Massacre	Administrative / Municipal elections Italy: PCI loses votes nationally due to impact of XX Congress of CPSU (explains Togliatti's reticence in preceding months as regards addressing publically the cult of personality etc.) No elections in the Gorizian Province at this time (moved to December for administrative reasons) Togliatti visits Tito in Belgrade 28 th - 30 th , stops-off in Trieste
June	New York Times publishes 'full' version of Secret Speech Poznan: scant coverage in party press / informants' lack of interest	Tito to Moscow, Molotov resigns As France <i>Nuovi Argomenti</i> interview / article Di Vittorio expresses CGIL solidarity with Poznan workers, but no evidence of its initial or long term impact vis-à- vis informants
July	General strike in France re Algeria	
Aug		Nenni and Saragat discuss Socialist alliance, and the existing 'Joint Action Pact' between PSI and PCI becomes a mere 'Consultation Pact'.

Algeria

The drama of the war continued apace in Algeria throughout spring and summer of 1956. Following what might be called Mollet's *volte face* on Algeria and the vote for Special Powers, the conflict entered into its second, more delineated, more violent phase. The French government's new hard-line policy required extra man-power and

the repeated call-ups for reservists together with increases in the length of service from eighteen to twenty seven months became deeply unpopular with the French public as the year progressed and it became clear that its policy of ‘pacification’ was not working.

The Palestro Massacre had been the most serious and disturbing incident of the war to date, and it has remained the most notorious. On 18th May 1956, a mere 80 kilometers south-east of the city of Algiers, a platoon of nineteen reservists from Paris was ambushed, fifteen killed, two taken prisoner and four left to die where they fell, one of whom survived. When the bodies were found, they had been horribly mutilated, (Evans, 2006). It was not the first incident of its kind, and casualties on both sides already numbered in their thousands, however it had been the first such incident in which the victims of such an incident had been non-professional soldiers. In metropolitan France media coverage of the war was highly selective, highly censored, and as a consequence, the Palestro Massacre became symbolic overnight of the ‘barbarity’ of the insurgents and the sacrifice of young French men mercilessly and cruelly slaughtered. Its net effect would seriously undermine the reservists’ revolt. These reports were exploited as further proof of the validity of the mission and to bolster support for the need to ‘maintain order’ at all costs:

‘THE TRUTH ABOUT PALESTRO - IMMENSE WAVE OF EMOTION IN FRANCE – OUR BOYS ARE GETTING KILLED ...’, (‘La vérité sur le massacre des rappelés de Palestro’, 1956, p. 1).

‘PALESTRO, MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS ...’, (‘Palestro: Massacre des Innocents’, 1956, p. 1).

At the same time, and predictably, the Palestro Massacre was used by French commanders in Algeria as a perverse incentive to soldiers on the ground, and especially to reservists, to desensitise them, to instill in them a sense of collective revenge to be meted-out to the rebels with like ferocity. Despite the efforts of the commanders, it became clear as the months went by that the campaign to root out the rebels was having little success.

Meanwhile, the PCF's response to the incident was consistent with its general policy of opposition to the war in and of itself and its insistence that the way forward was via negotiation:¹

‘AFTER THE TRAGIC END OF THE PATROL IN PALESTRO – ENOUGH BLOOD SPILT IN ALGERIA! Negotiate to stop this war of hate ...’, (‘Après la fin tragique de la patrouille de Palestro ...’, May 22, 1956, pp. 1, 5).

Poznan

Since the XX Congress there had indeed been reforms, rapprochements and amnesties effected in the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia as part of Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation process.² In Poland too, such changes had taken place, notably the rehabilitation of Wladyslaw Gomulka, former leader of the Polish Workers' Party, and the release of 28.000 political prisoners.³ However the process of de-Stalinisation coincided there with growing dissatisfaction amongst the working population in the industrial sector in particular over pay and working conditions. On the 28th June, more confident since the reforms, 80% of the workforce of the *Ceglielski* industrial complex in Poznan came out on strike. It had started as a peaceful demonstration in the centre of the city regarding traditional grievances and a lack of factory democracy, by workers with banners featuring slogans such as ‘We are hungry’, ‘Down with Exploitation of the Workers’ and ‘Down with Red Bureaucracy’, (Kemp-Welch, 2008, p. 87).

¹ By the end of spring it had been clear that the Popular Front with the Socialists was inexistent in real terms, however it continued to feature, at least nominally, as a key Communist Party strategy. The Party shifted its focus at this point towards the war in Algeria, without supporting Algerian nationalism *per se* and without being specific as to how ‘Peace’ was to be achieved.

² Nevertheless, these were never meant to be ‘revolutionary’, they were never meant to destabilise let alone bring down existing regimes. Rather, they were about making public statements and gestures that would delineate a break with a prejudicial past, herald a new era in Soviet politics, and legitimise its new leader's power base.

³ Gomulka had effectively been released in December 1954, during a period of ‘silent de-Stalinisation’ in which many rehabilitations, including posthumous exonerations, occurred behind the scenes, (Kemp-Welsh, 2008, p. 65).



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The mood changed however, when it was rumoured that some of the organisers of the strike had been arrested, and workers were joined by insurgents, angry students and ordinary citizens. The first shots were fired from the Headquarters of the Secret Police into the crowd, and from that point the situation escalated irreversibly to two days of large scale rioting against the communist government. ⁶

The authorities were anxious to quell the unrest as quickly as possible, and they brought in Soviet officers to put down the uprising with military troops and tanks, so as to avoid a situation similar to the one that had occurred three years earlier in East Germany when it had taken sixteen Soviet divisions with 20,000 soldiers as well as 8,000 People's Police (*Volkspolizei*) to crush an uprising that narrowly missed becoming a *coup d'état*. ⁷ Conservative estimates of civilian casualties that incurred

⁴ (Institute of National Remembrance, n.d.)

⁵ (Institute of National Remembrance, n.d.)

⁶ General disenchantment with the Soviet style planned economy, worsening living standards, inefficient, unfair and undemocratic practices on the part of factory management system had led to months of industrial dispute that culminated on 23rd June in a deputation of 27 workers' from Poznan, home to one of the largest industrial complexes in the country, going to Warsaw to present their demands to the Polish Ministry of Machine Industry. Initially pleased with the reception they had received in the capital, the workers realised on their return three days later, that few if any concessions would in fact be forthcoming.

⁷ Following the death of Stalin in March 1953 a wave of anti-communist feeling emerged in Eastern Europe and the peoples of these states began to protest against their repressive regimes. There were strikes for improved pay and conditions, a general frustration at and dissatisfaction with the repressive Soviet styled, Soviet controlled one-party systems in those states, mixed with nationalistic sentiment initially in Czechoslovakia in June that year and almost simultaneously in German Democratic Republic. However it was the uprising in East Germany that constituted the first major popular uprising of the post-Stalinist era. On the morning of June 16 a strike by approximately 80 construction workers in East Berlin over unfair pay and conditions quickly

over the two days of street fighting in Poznan are at approximately 57 fatalities and over 500 people wounded. 250 people approximately were arrested at the time followed by several hundred others over subsequent weeks, many of whom were brought to trial in the autumn of that year, (Furet,1999).

Although the uprising ‘failed’ in that Soviet styled order was restored almost immediately with protestors branded as fascists, *agents provocateurs* and counter-revolutionaries, it was obvious to the Polish Communist Party hard-line leadership that concessions would need to be made to the people. Over the next few months some of the workers’ demands for economic and industrial reforms were met, a number of democratic reforms were introduced in the political system, and in October, the moderate Wladyslaw Gomulka was appointed as First Secretary of the Communist Party.⁸ All this nonetheless, overseen and micro-managed by the Soviet leadership in Moscow, who had not been blind to the significance and potential implications of the episode - and neither had the people of Hungary.⁹

The problem of the elections in Italy

On his return from the XX Congress of the CPSU on the 6th March, Togliatti had adopted a policy of public silence on the cult of personality, with attention in the Italian party press being directed almost exclusively towards the political and ideological innovations announced at the Congress.¹⁰ He also however, demonstrated

escalated into a demonstration in the capital involving 100.000 protestors who stormed the government seat and a two day general strike across the country involving more than one million people. The East German authorities appealed to Moscow for help to put down what was taken to be an insurrection. 16 Soviet divisions as well as 8,000 East German ‘People’s Police’ (*Kasernierte Volkspolizei*) were deployed to quell the uprising. Conservative estimates of civilian casualties, either killed during or executed after the events are at 300, nearly 10,000 others were tried and imprisoned for their part in the unrest and 330.000 East Germans fled as refugees to the West. (Furet, 1999).

⁸ For ‘Polish October’ see (Prażmowska, 2010).

⁹ It had been, in fact, the via the Polish contingent at the XX Congress of the CPSU in February that copies of the Secret Speech had been passed to the rest of the world, and this was proof in itself for the Soviet authorities that the situation in Poland should be closely monitored (although it is probably true that they the same authorities had ‘managed’ the leaking of the document in the first place). (Kemp-Welch, 2008).

¹⁰ It is understandable that maximum attention would be directed in the Italian Party press to the political and ideological substance of the Congress i.e. the non-inevitability of war, the possibility of different roads to socialism and the peaceful coexistence of the two blocs, as these were in-keeping with Togliatti’s long held advocacy of an ‘Italian road to Socialism’, predicated on a

a singular reticence in regard to the discussion of the criticisms of Stalin and related issues even within the PCI leadership body itself - a strategy that exasperated several of his contemporaries.¹¹ This course of action, or rather non-action, could be seen as ironic given a) the fact that the PCF, as well as instructing its press machine to promote the key themes of the Congress, had at least also taken measures to rebut the negative propaganda in the mainstream media in February,¹² and yet it was the PCI¹³

moderate, democratic and constitutional approach to national politics that had been expressed in what became known as the Salerno Turn, or in his rejection in 1944 of a specifically internationalist stance for one of continuity with the PCI's Resistance position of national solidarity. Indeed the main themes of the XX Congress were a vindication of all that his New Party stood for. What is possibly more difficult to understand is his strategy of silence on the 'cult of personality' over the following weeks and months.

¹¹ Giorgio Amendola, Giancarlo Pajetta and Umberto Terracini, had pushed from the beginning for the critiques to be addressed openly by the party leadership. In fact allusion to the cult of personality and to the existence of the Secret Speech would be studiously avoided in the Italian Communist Party press until that was no longer an option following the publication of the 'full' text in the New York Times on 5th June. This is despite the fact that the issue was the subject of much debate in the Italian mainstream media during the course of the Congress itself - as it was in all Western European countries - and despite the widespread speculation from 16th March onwards on the content of the Secret Speech after a report of its existence appeared in the same publication, (for more on tensions within the PCI leadership regarding Togliatti's handling of this issue see Luciano Canfora, 2008).

¹² In France the PCF's daily accounts of the Congress between 14th and 25th February in the communist press and associated publications addressed for the most part the main points put forward. Much was made of the economic and technical achievements of the Soviet regime (as per usual) and of the constructive nature of the political content of the Congress itself. Also addressed were some of the critiques made of Stalin including those of Anastas Mikoian who repudiated the former leader's analysis of capitalism and recognized the errors he had made regarding Yugoslavia in 1948. Briefly addressed was the 'cult of personality' however comment on this was minimal and circumspect (despite the fact that it was being eagerly discussed at the time in the mainstream media) and all criticisms were presented as a sign of Soviet integrity and timely objectivity. The first reference to Krushchev's 'special séance' on the 'cult of personality and its consequences' appeared in *l'Humanité* on March 19 after news of the existence of secret speech appeared in the New York Times on March 16. However the article in *l'Humanité* was innocuous, speaking only of Krushchev's having given a deeper analysis of the phenomenon the night of the 24th - 25th February than was reported during the daily proceedings of the Congress. The first real reference to the Secret Speech or 'the speech attributed to Khrushchev', as it would be referred to by the party leadership, would only be made when it could no longer stay silent on the matter after the full version appeared in France on June 6 in *Le Monde* following its publication the previous day in the New York Times. Therefore reactions to it on the part of ordinary party members were suspended until that moment. By the penultimate day of the Congress itself in February the Central Committee of the PCF had given instructions on measures to be taken immediately that would counter the damage done by the commentary and speculation on the revelations that had already started to appear in the mainstream press. The first point of Directives from the PCF Secretariat for February 24 includes:

'In order to popularise the works of the XX Congress PCUS:

- Ask the editors of *France Nouvelles* to publish a double spread article that refutes some of the lies in the bourgeois press, notably that of Martinet in *France Observateur* (Florimond Bonté).

that was widely perceived to be the more autonomous organisation and therefore presumably the more likely to adopt a more pragmatic line in regard to such problems and b) Togliatti's personal reputation as a communist intellectual and highly skilful political strategist as opposed, arguably, to the more earthy proletarian political persona and style of Maurice Thorez. Whether a more open approach to the handling of the Secret Speech would have effectively served the Italian party better that spring is a moot point. Probably not much, given the enormity of the problem.¹⁴

- Publish a rousing and hard-hitting article in Monday's *l'Humanité* rebutting the lies in the bourgeois press and give the first evaluations of the party leadership on the Congress (François Billoux).

- Answer the letters received by Etienne Fajon on the review of the Congress that was published in *l'Humanité*, indicating that it is not exhaustive and that it pertains only to the political lines addressed (E. Fajon). (*Secretariat du PCF*, 1956, p.1).

¹³ In Italy the PCI's daily accounts of the XX Congress addressed the main points much in the same way as the PCF, however markedly less attention was given in *l'Unità* to the question of the 'cult of personality' than in *l'Humanité*. Mention of it was minimal and contained in discussions of the CPSU's need to return to a working model of 'collective leadership', and there was no direct reference in this context to Stalin. The only mention of the 'cult of personality' was the one below which appeared on page eight of *l'Unità* on the 17th February.

'The question of collective leadership and the forms of transition to socialism discussed at the XX Congress of the CPSU ...

With regard to the party (CPSU), Souslov emphasized how important it was to reintroduce those Leninist principles that had been so often violated in the period prior to the previous Congress. "The theory and practice of 'the cult of personality' he said 'brought considerable damage has done considerable damaged to the Party's organizational and ideological base. This diminished the role of the people and of the party itself, decried collective leadership, undermined the internal democracy, suffocates the activity of party members, their initiative, their autonomy ... affected critical awareness and exegesis, lead to unilateral solutions to problems that were at times erroneous. Therefore the return to collective leadership has been extremely effective, especially in regard to the work of the Central Committee. This principle must be applied continuously and rigorously in all moments of the Party', (*l'Unità*, 17th February 1956, p. 8).

It is understandable that maximum attention would be directed in the Italian Party press to the political and ideological substance of the Congress i.e. the non-inevitability of war, the possibility of different roads to socialism and the peaceful coexistence of the two blocs, as these were in-keeping with Togliatti's long held advocacy of an 'Italian road to Socialism', predicated on a moderate, democratic and constitutional approach to national politics that had been expressed in what became known as the Salerno Turn, or in his rejection in 1944 of a specifically internationalist stance for one of continuity with the PCI's Resistance position of national solidarity. Indeed the main themes of the XX Congress were a vindication of all that his New Party stood for.

¹⁴ One of the reasons for his recalcitrance as regards the revelations may have been that during the latter years of his exile in the Soviet Union Togliatti had been, along with Georgi Dimitrov, a senior member of the Politburo and close Stalin himself. This then begged the question: 'Surely he must have known of these things? However, his initial reserve in dealing with the question of the cult of personality owed much to the fact that he had been assured that news of the Secret Speech would be censored and that other details of the de-Stalinisation process such as for example the changes in effect with regard to the internal workings and the political

Both the PCF and the PCI had been pursuing closer ties with the Socialists (SFIO / PSI) and the accusations against Stalin threatened to compromise any such projects as well as the parties' standing in their national contexts. Added to which, Togliatti faced another problem at this time – that of the Italian administrative elections (important for Italian communists) scheduled for the 27th May. This was not the moment, he deemed, to instigate an internal party polemic by way of a post-mortem on Khrushchev's condemnation of the former Soviet leader and an in-depth analysis of the purported attendant problems within that current political system.¹⁵ Such a move would bring into question the core beliefs and undermine the certainties of the party faithful, and especially those of the rank and file who had all reason and no cause at that point to think of Stalin as anything other than a God.¹⁶ Here, François Fejtö describes the impact the contents of the Secret Speech had on the party membership:

‘Imagine a church – because the party was a church – and the Pope declares that the bishops, previous Popes etc. are criminals who had killed people – wouldn't you be hurt as a Communist party member? Communists were hit by the Secret Speech to the foundations of their beliefs ...’. (Fejtö, n.d.)¹⁷

Roy Medvedev offers a similar description:

‘It's as though the Pope had called a meeting and told the clergy God didn't exist ...’, (Medvedev, n.d.).

orientation of the CPSU would be fed to the Soviet press and then the world press in stages. (Righi, 1996, p. XXX11) It was on this understanding that he set the tone of Party response to the Congress on his return from Moscow on 6th March.

¹⁵ Another reason given for his initial diffidence was that he was a proponent of national political integrity and implicit in that position was the belief that the internal politics of a country was that country's business. Therefore in this instance, comment on the critique of the former leader of the CPSU and the related changes underway in or proposed for that party, and government, was essentially the domain of the Soviets themselves.

¹⁶ It should be retained that levels of literacy in Italy at this time were amongst the lowest in Europe and that therefore the images of Stalin had a powerful pull in a post-war context of widespread discrimination against communists.

¹⁷ Communism as an ideology has also been described as a secular religion, and this does seem in many ways to be a fitting analogy.

As it turned-out, the only winners of the Italian administrative elections in May that year were the centrist parties, a development that no doubt can be attributed to the impact on the electorate of Khrushchev's revelations.¹⁸

Nuovi Argomenti

The *New York Times* published the full version of the report on 4th June after weeks of conjecture and partial analyses in the mainstream media. By that time, the leader of the world's largest non-ruling Communist Party, who was also the longest serving General Secretary of such a party, knew that his strategy of avoidance had become untenable. It was at this juncture that Togliatti decided to address the problem publicly, and this he did with astonishing assertiveness. He chose to break his silence by accepting an invitation to take part in an interview in the left-leaning cultural review *Nuovi Argomenti* along with several other prominent intellectuals and politicians and conducted by Italian author, high profile intellectual and joint editor of the publication, Alberto Moravia.¹⁹

The interview was organised around 'Nine Questions on Stalinism' and was published in the review as an article on 17th June. The fact that he had chosen this way to deal with the situation rather than, as might have been expected, by speaking directly and exclusively to the party faithful via the internal information flow of the PCI or via its propaganda machine may seem inappropriate, and a gamble. It may have appeared to his core constituents as though he were ignoring them by going straight to a bourgeois publication with explanations, comment and analysis. It was published simultaneously in *l'Unità* – but that was hardly the same thing. Surely they should have been the first to know such things, to have been party to such discussion? – and indeed months earlier? In the event, his adept handling of the interview was

¹⁸ There were no elections at this time in Gorizia and Monfalcone as they had been scheduled for October (when support for the PCI fell undoubtedly to the Soviet interventions in Budapest). However, the PCI in the Venezia-Giulia region had been no less affected in the spring of that year than the rest of the country by the Italian party leader's reticent approach to the problem of the Secret Speech, in that his avoidance of the issue set the agenda and the parameters for the way in which it was handled by the party at the regional and local levels too, contributing in different ways to its remaining a non-issue for our community until June.

¹⁹ The article appeared in *Nuovi Argomenti*, founded by Moravia in 1953, edited by Moravia and Alberto Carocci, and *l'Unità* on 17th June, 1956.

enough to deflect potential criticisms or grievances that may have been harboured in this regard. (And still, he had avoided that ‘interface’ with the rank and file he had known would be so problematic.)

In the interview Togliatti criticised the manner in which Khrushchev had denounced the former leader; he raised the question of why and how Stalin had been able to impose his influence and will to such an extent that it had led to the violations of and degeneration in the Soviet system; he recalled the warnings of Lenin regarding the dangers of bureaucratisation in the economic and in politics and above all in the party; he spoke of the ‘co-responsibility’ of the present Soviet leadership - many of whom having also served under the former leader - in having allowed all this to occur, and indeed for having fostered the adulation of Stalin across the international communist movement; he stressed the need for guarantees that this type of situation would not recur; and he took the opportunity to expound his idea of the political (and ideological) decentralisation (or devolution) of the communist movement away from the Soviet Union itself,²⁰ to different points across Europe and the world in a policy of ‘Polycentrism’, to make it clear that the PCI would be following a ‘national road to socialism’ and that there was no room in the Italian party at that point for those inclined to look to Moscow for direction (although things did not quite transpire in this way).²¹

It is clear that the leader of the PCI had been in an extremely awkward position that spring, and as it happened, things were about to get worse. Nevertheless, his handling of the interview in *Nuovi Argomenti* shows that his reputation as an astute

²⁰ In these last statements which were in answer to Question 9 of the interview on whether post-XX Congress there would be changes in the working relations between the Soviet Union and the International Communist Movement, Togliatti was making allusion to what he saw as sectarian elements within his own Party. He was alluding to the phenomenon or characteristic of *doppiezza*; a fundamentally paradoxical understanding or approach to the politics of non-ruling Communist Parties that was often associated with the party leader himself. This ‘double-dealing’ effectively constituted and epitomised the dual existence at the core of these parties of a national-democratic *and* revolutionary agenda. (see Blackmer, 1968, p. 45).

²¹ Over the next eight years, Togliatti was obliged to maintain a semblance of unity with an international communist movement itself in the process of transformations due to the growing number of conflicting interests on the part of its constituent members, and further his own agenda of pursuing a more autonomous, more democratic, more contemporary transition to socialism in the national context.

politician had not been unfounded. With this exercise Togliatti, the undisputed protagonist of the elite group of interviewees, had managed to turn a near political crisis in the national context into a media coup, and via his preferred medium of ‘mass’ communication. He was aware of the PCI leadership body’s relief that the question was finally being addressed and therefore confident of its support, and he had come across in the interview as authoritative, ironically ‘decisive’ but, as ever, measured and reasonable. His incisive analyses of the cult of personality and of the origins and implications of the current problems concerning the Soviet system were as unexpected as they were convincing.²² As were his visionary proposals on what he saw as the future path for Communism in the West.

On the macro level, Togliatti had read the situation correctly: he and the current Soviet leader were essentially headed in the same direction politically and therefore he could be fairly confident that a) there would be an understanding in Moscow of his strategy on this matter thus far, and b) there would also be the understanding that he would now have to articulate a position. Furthermore, he could save his own situation in the national context by appearing to save Italian (and Western) Communism with his bold lines of argument without fear of a come-back from Khrushchev, who was, after all, implementing a process of ‘de-Stalinisation’. Italy was not, after all, behind the iron curtain.²³

²² He had been in a position to know about such things after all, having been exiled in the Soviet Union from 1928-46. During the latter years of that exile he had been senior members of the Politburo and was, along with Georgi Dimitrov, close to Stalin himself (and this is sometimes given as one of the reasons for his reticence at the revelations concerning Stalin, in that his personal experience of the Stalinist regime begged the question: ‘Surely he must have known of these things?’)

²³ Testament to Togliatti’s skillful politicking is that it would be he who came out of that eventful year better than Khrushchev, and better than the Secretary of the Federation of Gorizia, Silvino Poletto (see Chapter 7). Both Khrushchev and Poletto ‘paid’ for their heresy in the long term, whereas for the Italian leader, the aggregate events of that year and in particular the Soviet interventions in Budapest, became the point of reference for the ‘Italian road to socialism’ that evolved over the next decade and which was associated in the eyes of communists and non-communists alike with the Italian leader himself.

6.1 *'La guerre d'Algérie'*

As may be imagined, the Algerian issue had been more important for the informants in La Seyne and in Toulon in 1956 than it had for those in Monfalcone and Gorizia. In fact one of the marked discontinuities in the findings of this research is the centrality of the issue in the personal and collective memories of the French informants, compared to the decidedly peripheral position it occupied in those of their Italian counterparts. For France, resolving the situation in a way that would allow political continuity as well as address the need for reform was key to the country's retaining its position as a modern, independent world power. This obviously kept the conflict at the forefront of national media attention all year long. Algeria was no less key to the PCF as on the one hand the party's anti-imperial stance as part of the international communist movement was automatically at odds with the colonialist project in and of itself, and this was very much the perspective of the rank and file, and on the other, its political model being that of the CPSU, within the Soviet Union within the USSR, *it was minded at that point to see the French Union in a potentially similar light i.e. as a 'confederation' of constitutionally similar sovereign states* (although sovereignty for Algeria was not envisaged), and the official party line was based at least in part on this convenient 'truth'. Added to which, and as we have seen, the PCF's strategies were by this time circumscribed by the need to effect and maintain a productive working alliance with the Republican Front government in line with Moscow's macro strategy. This entailed supporting, or at least not opposing directly, some of the government's key policies of the day. In this regard, national and international trends and imperatives were reflected, replicated or reconciled with communist strategy at the local and regional levels in the context of this study, as opposition to the war in La Seyne and Toulon was incorporated into the campaign for the new Popular Front, and all that that entailed.²⁴

²⁴ The PCF's stance on Algeria, on its initial support for 'pacification' e.g. in its vote for Special Powers, on the very question of Algerian independence itself, on which of the nationalist movements to engage in negotiations with, was far from coherent. Although it had always been consistent in its campaign to end the conflict, this in many ways contradictory position caused consternation and confusion within the party membership and skepticism vis-à-vis the non-communist world.

Algeria was, naturally, also a running feature at this time in the Italian press, both the mainstream and the communist, although very few of the informants in Monfalcone and Gorizia were able to remember the war easily, and in some cases any recollection at all was tentative. This is perhaps not surprising given the on-going political and economic problems this community faced on a daily basis that monopolised their attention. Those who did remember the Algerian issue had usually held local or regional cadre positions in 1956, as individuals fulfilling either function at the time had had to be *au fait* with international events and the direction of the party line in relation to them. Notwithstanding, neither category was able to recall historical detail concerning the conflict. Discussion of the situation in Algeria as part of this research in the Italian context therefore, revolved around abstract themes such as communist ideology and strategy *per se*. On seeing newspaper headlines about the war, the Italian informants would invariably comment on the PCI's assured opposition to it. Unlike their French counterparts however, who knew the complexities of the situation, they would often link this automatically to the validity and justification of 'the' Algerian independence movement although by their own admission, this was more in the way of extemporised evaluation than clear recall of the issues or indeed in response to evidence presented to them in interviews. *l'Unità* had been no more in a position and had no more inclination to make such judgements at the time than *l'Humanité*.

In Monfalcone and Gorizia, informants explain that 'Algeria' had seemed very far-off, despite its relative geographical nearness, despite France's being a close neighbour, despite the PCF's being the sister organisation of the PCI, despite the anti-colonial stance's being one of the core principles of the international communist movement, despite Italy's relatively recent history in North Africa and despite an empirical aversion to occupation and a particular understanding of internationalism that existed in the region as a result of historical experience. For hard-working, beleaguered communists in Venezia-Giulia and especially in Monfalcone in 1956, the Algerian issue was at best secondary, if not an abstraction.

What concerned this community at this time were issues of heightened levels or rather new methods of discrimination in the workplace (see below) and those related to the de-Stalinisation process that were being playing out on their very doorstep, rather than those relating to another country's problems of decolonisation. They did not, it appears, engage with the question of Algeria to any great extent at the time, nor remember it readily fifty years on, for similar reasons that neither the French nor many of the Italian informants, to all intents and purposes, remembered Poznan (see below). One informant and former Resistance fighter **Dino Zanuttin** (aka 'Nanò'), had spent his childhood years in France as a result of his family's having to emigrate from Venezia-Giulia to find work after the war. Here he describes the priorities for working people at the time in Monfalcone:

What do you remember about the Algerian war?

'Here, locally I don't remember there having been much interest in these issues – at least not in my circle – these things were happening far away – distant from our everyday lives – Algeria was different for me personally because I always knew it as part of France, but people round here just knew it as a colony, I went to school with kids from Algeria ...'

But colonialism was contrary to your core beliefs?

'Oh yes'

Did you discuss Algeria and / or Cyprus?

Well - only from an anti-colonial perspective ...'

No demonstrations or anything?

'No – at local level no – maybe nationally ...', (**Zanuttin**, personal communication, December 3, 2009).

Guido Russi gives a coincidental account:

What do you remember about the Algeria war in 1956?

'No – nothing – we didn't talk about that – we had problems of our own – 'Italian' communists vs. 'Titoist' communists - Tito vs. Togliatti – *l'Unità* used to write about it but it didn't give it much attention – we had difficult problems – a job so we could make a living – relations who

had gone abroad and we hadn't had news of – ‘Are they all right? Are they alive? Are they dead? My aunt - dad's sister went to America and he never saw her again ...’, (**Russi**, personal communication, December 4, 2009).

Renato Papais, as a mid-level cadre in both the PCF and the CGT apparatus in 1956 is able to explain the thinking of ordinary communists at this time. He says that neither those at the base of the party nor those in positions of responsibility within the party / union structure had the time nor the desire to engage in political debate or action regarding issues that did not affect them directly in one way or another.²⁵ Even day to day union business, he explained, had had to be conducted via short addresses to workers as they were entering or exiting the shipyards.



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It has to be remembered that this was the moment at which the assault on the unions in Italy by government / industry had reached its height, and a raft of measures had been introduced in the CRDA shipyards in Monfalcone designed to minimise union influence on workers and in particular that of the predominant CGIL. These

²⁵ This is not, it should be noted, because they felt themselves disassociated with macro issues, which, for communists would have been a contradiction in terms. Rather, it was because they entrusted the handling of many of these macro issues to their Party cadres or leadership depending on the focus or magnitude of the problem, whilst they got-on with everyday political engagement regarding concrete issues in immediate contexts.

²⁶ Illustration provided by **Renato Papais** (centre front), July 5, 2011.

measures included restrictions on union meetings on site during breaks.²⁷ **Signor Papais** describes the way in which he had had to perfect the art of straight talking. There was no time to address extraneous issues, and nor would the rank and file have thanked him for taking up party / union time on such matters.

Did you ever speak about Algeria, about the PCF?

‘At our level, as far as I’m concerned – no ...’.

‘In l’Unità there were frequent references’

‘Yes – but only in the newspaper ...’,

But seeing as you read l’Unità

‘If in our meetings something about France was mentioned it was because it was useful for *us* - if a member wanted to say something about something in France he would and we’d thank him and that would be the end of it ...’,

And so are you saying that as regards Algeria there was little interest around here? You were anti-colonialist?

‘That was in our statute – automatic - we will have spoken about it – bound to have – I remember speaking about Suez yes because that was dramatic – we must have supported the Algerian people - but my memory tells me that we didn’t do much about it – those weren’t local things for us, they got decided at international level, and then on the basis of what was said in Rome, we took that approach – when there were national initiatives that said “demonstrations in all piazzas”- then we’d do one in Monfalcone – but the word would have to be from Rome ...’,
(**Papais**, personal communication, December 11, 2009).

Signor Papais goes on to make the point that apart from other considerations, it would have been strategically ineffective to take action locally, and that that in itself would have damaged the credibility of the party:

‘If you organise a demonstration it has to be unanimous, and as large as possible, and for something like that (international interest) it has to be in big cities – if we had done one here it would have been a waste of time –

²⁷ These stipulations for workers were laid-down in ‘8 restrictive points’ document issued on the part of the CRDA management of the shipyards on 12th April 1955 (see Puppini, 2008, p.108).

but we did them against Tito of course in '48 ...', ²⁸ (**Papais**, personal communication, December 11, 2009).

A Communist Party cannot afford to appear politically ineffective - squandering time, energy and resources inappropriately and unsuccessfully. ²⁹ This was especially important in the local context in view of the party's having been 'distracted' by macro politics at a key moment in post-war history and, as many see it, having lost the region to the Christian Democrats as a result. **Signor Papais** adds that in his recollection, the marginalisation of these types of issues had not been limited to the local or even the regional contexts:

'I don't even think they thought about Algeria much in Rome – it always depends on what's going on in your own country ... I imagine that our support must have been with the Algerian people – we must have been against the French position ...'

It was very different for communists in France ...

'Well yes – they had specific interests, but Italians didn't – my granddad went to Lybia for example – *that* was different for *us* ...', (**Papais**, personal communication, December 11, 2009).

Here we can see the salience of concrete experience in the consciousness of ordinary party members who dealt directly, on a daily basis, with the consequences of

²⁸ Clearly, international issues that do not affect local contexts and interests directly are more effectively tackled in places where there is a concentration of political power, where large numbers of comrades can be mobilised and action taken will make the most impact. This is in contrast to political action concerning the two year campaign to make the Province of Gorizia part of Yugoslavia 1945-7, during which there were almost daily demonstrations in the Monfalcone, as the Province's second largest town and its industrial hub (the Communists were banned from holding any type of gathering in the capital Gorizia until 1953, due to the capital's border location that intensified the antagonism between communists and right-wing elements that stemmed in the post-war period from such issues as the summary killings of fascists during Tito's forty day rule of the Province, the two year fight to make the region part of Yugoslavia, the Tito-Stalin split etc.).

²⁹ This Machiavellian conception (in the true political sense) of political office and leadership as being less than useless if not successful was also Togliattian in that he had always avoided revolutionary rhetoric and action, not only as a post war general orientation in line with Moscow's macro strategy but also because he knew that if a revolution were attempted and failed, it would be the end of communism in Western Europe (McClelland, 1996, pp. 150-191). When in hospital after having been shot in 1947, which would in principle have presented a revolutionary moment for a revolutionary party, he is reputed to have said to his comrades in the party leadership '*Non fatti i cretini eh?*' or 'Don't do anything stupid'.

strategies and policies agreed in Central Committees and Federation Committees at national and regional levels. This perhaps goes counter to the received wisdom that all communists thought and acted as constituent parts of a well-oiled machine. Despite the intrinsically ‘macro’ nature of international communism, despite its concerns, orientation and agenda based on universal principles that were subscribed to with the deepest conviction by all of its members by definition (all of which was undeniably true in large part), evidence from this research suggests that there was space, not only in the Italian but in some respects also in the French Communist Parties,³⁰ for individual and community interpretation and application of that conceptual schema. For example, there seems little doubt that for informants in Monfalcone and Gorizia, Algeria was an abstraction in much the same way as the Tito-Stalin split was an abstraction for informants in La Seyne and Toulon. (And Poznan was an abstraction for both communities.)³¹

From testimonies such as that of **Signor Papais** it becomes clear that in the Italian context, if macro issues were part of political debate and the subject of militant action at local and regional levels, it was because they touched the lives and the politics of Communist Party members in those localities - and in Monfalcone and Gorizia in 1956, what touched the lives of ordinary communists more than anything were issues the of:

- the US backed crack-down on Communist Trade Union presence in Western European industry, and especially in Italy, that resulted in the local context in mass lay-offs in the CRDA shipyards
- the de-Stalinisation process that included the improved relations between Tito and the communist world (it must be remembered that at this time there were still comrades from Monfalcone imprisoned in Yugoslavia from the time of the Tito-Stalin split)
- and in one way or another, in the autumn of that year, the specific actions of the regional party cadres in relation to the Soviet interventions in Hungary.

³⁰ In other respects, local issues were automatically linked to and addressed as part of macro issues.

³¹ Dino Zanuttin, ‘It was obviously important for all communists because we thought that the Soviet Bloc was solid, but for us it was on our doorstep - we had a direct relationship political and geographical ...’, (**Zanuttin**, personal communication, July 10, 2009).

Over in La Seyne and Toulon meanwhile, rarely a day went by between May and August without Algeria's being front page news in one way or another - with headlines such as:

'RESERVISTS CALLED-UP FOR ALGERIA 20.000 IMMEDIATELY, 30.00 BY END OF MAY' ("Rappel du contingent," May 10, 1956, p.1).

'AFTER THE TRAGIC EVENTS IN PALESTRO, 3.000 MEN CONSCRIPTED IN A VAST OPERATION. ENOUGH BLOODSHED IN ALGERIA!' - NEGOTIATE TO STOP THE WAR, TO STOP THE HATE.' The search continues in the Palestro region to find the two missing soldiers - or their corpses ...', (Après la fin tragique de la patrouille de Palestro, May 22, 1956, p. 1)

'MENDES-FRANCE RESIGNS - BUT APPEALS FOR NEW CONSCRIPTS ...

'Jacques Duclos: the war in Algeria goes against the national interests...', (Luc, June 1, 1956, p.1).

As usual, party strategy was intrinsically linked to the campaign for a new Popular Front - indeed evidence such as the extract below from an Ministère de l'Intérieure document suggests that it took precedence over all else at this point, or rather, it was seen as the means to all ends:

'Coming ahead of "Peace in Algeria", "The Popular Front" becomes number one priority for the PCF in the Var ... the *raison d'être* of the party militants', (Ministère de l'Intérieur, July 13, 1956, p.1).

The regional Communist press continued to feature the Popular Front / Frenchness / opposition to the conflict in Algeria on a daily basis as can be seen in these two examples that follow (the first of which is also a reference to the vast demonstration that took place in Paris on Bastille Day 1935 when half a million people came out to support the Popular Front parties in calling for improved economic conditions, the defense of democratic rights and world peace):

'Spectacular 14th July in Toulon - Parties of the Left march together - for Peace and Liberty! 14th July is Ours!

‘Blood flows in Algeria ...’, (‘Éclatant 14 juillet à Toulon’, 1956, p.1).
‘La Seyne - 766 families - that’s 2. 678 people in all - sign a *Peace for Algeria Petition* launched last year by the *Peace Movement* – and destined for Monsieur Mollet ...’, (‘Soit un total de 2.678 de personnes ...’, August 23, 1956, p.1).

Demonstrations against the war in Algeria, against conscription, and against the torture being implemented there on Algerian nationals by the French military authorities, were being held all over the country throughout 1956;³² and not least in La Seyne and especially in Toulon which, as regional capital, key naval base in the Mediterranean and a major port along with Marseille, was at the forefront of transportation of troops, arms (and coffins) to North Africa.³³ These demonstrations were of course not solely the work of the PCF,³⁴ but it was extremely present and pro-active in this movement, conducting much of its action via its associated organisations and restricting its contestation, as always, to direct but peaceful protest.

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³² The first protests against the call-up of reservists for Algeria had been in September 1955 following the Phillipeville Massacre.

³³ At a mere eight kilometers from La Seyne, Toulon would be the chosen venue for demonstrations and other forms of political action regarding national and international issues, whereas those held in La Seyne itself would be predominantly of an industrial nature, often involving CGT initiatives but automatically *linked to* larger issues.

³⁴ The call-up of course affected all young Frenchmen regardless of political persuasion. Whilst some had been motivated to take-up arms for all the usual reasons young men are sometimes motivated (out of understandings of patriotism, understandings of gender, for adventure), and indeed in the first real ‘phase’ of the conflict (November 1954 – post Special Powers) many French people had supported the campaign to retain *Algérie française* from understandings of national pride linked to France’s civilizing mission, because Algeria was ‘different’, part of France as a department with a large settler population, to redeem national dignity after France’s pull-out from Indochina and to maintain France’s position as a major world power by holding on to its last and most important overseas interest. The first major protest had been in September the previous year in Lyon (following the Phillipeville massacre), which involved riot police and reservists, followed by a sit-down strike by soldiers refusing to leave their barracks and destroying property. (Evans, 2006, pp. 445).

³⁵ Engaging in violent protest, other than in taking defensive measures, had never been the strategy of the non-ruling Communist Parties. Apart from ideological and ethical considerations it would have play directly into the hands of political establishments. **Jeannine Bechet** had had years of experience of communist militancy in Paris as a child, accompanying her mother in demonstrations during the Popular Front era and in 1947-8 before coming to La Seyne in 1950. Here she expresses a commonly held opinion within our community: ‘It really offends me when people say bad things about us ... I’ve never seen a communist smash a window during a demonstration – you never saw scenes of violence in a demonstration organised by the communists that wasn’t provoked by the extreme right or the police themselves ... contrary to what people said ...’, (**Bechet**, personal communication, July 27, 2009).

In terms of the informants' recollections of the war, although it had indisputably constituted a major issue for them at the time, indeed in many ways it appears to have underscoring all else, their recall of specific events in relation to it was in fact selective. Clearly all memory is selective, for organisational and functional reasons. However, what had been given precedence in this process by the informants may seem a little surprising given the dramatic nature of many of the events that had obviously been relegated to a secondary status. For example their recall of the Palestro Massacre, the resignation of Mendès-France over the government's abandonment of liberal policies in Algeria, required prompting,³⁶ whereas Guy Mollet's reorientation of policy following his trip to Algiers on 6th February and the vote for Special Powers in March were invariably recalled with little difficulty.³⁷ Perhaps this lack of acuity as regards historical detail in relation to other events and developments was linked to the war's having taken-on a constant or rather a continuous quality by this time, providing an ever-present yet shifting backdrop to other memories that imposed themselves (as though unrelated) onto the period - such as the Soviet interventions in October and November of that year.³⁸ As **René Merle** states:

‘Algeria was always there, in the background the whole time – it could have turned into civil war in France ...’, (Merle, personal communication, May 4, 2010).

Apart from the key events and developments in national politics mentioned above, the two themes closer to home appear to have remained prominent in the informants' memories of that time are a) their own political interventions in the form of direct action against the war and b) the prevailing preoccupation of where the conflict was heading and what that would mean to themselves, their family members and their community.

³⁶ The key phases of the successive call-ups of reservists were also not remembered clearly, as may be expected given their repetitive nature.

³⁷ This suggests that in many ways communists understood and experienced the world by way of a parallel consciousness; that whilst events such as the Palestro Massacre will certainly have been no less important to Communist party members than to the rest of the French population, their attention would automatically be directed towards underlying causes, and strategies to be pursued, rather than being ‘event-oriented’.

³⁸ There is a sense in which this stage of the Cold War had been recorded onto different tracks in their memories, at different speeds and at different volumes.

It is apparent from empirical evidence that the Var Federation of the PCF was highly active and vocal at the local and regional level in its opposition to the conflict, organising protests in various forms on an almost daily basis. All of the informants had been directly or indirectly involved in some form of anti-war protest as described here by **Elise Bernard** as she shares her recollections of these experiences:

‘There would be – maybe ten of us – and we used to go on to the trains full of conscripts waiting to be transported to Algeria – at the station in La Seyne - to talk to them, to try to persuade them not to go ... I remember once I got found out for leaving my place of work without permission ... but you won’t find that type of thing in newspapers ...’, (**Bernard**, personal communication, July 30, 2009).

Robert Gourvenec explains that this type of direct action often involved women physically obstructing and delaying convoys of conscripts and recalled soldiers leaving for North Africa:

‘When they started calling-up young men for the intensification of ‘maintaining order’, because they didn’t call it war at the time - the trains left from Ventimiglia or Nice for Marseille – they took a whole day what with the alarms being pulled and the women on the tracks stopping the convoys from leaving – for months there were terrible battles – in Toulon and across the region – any convoy headed for Marseille embarkation – all over the department there were the same type of protests ... I missed the call-up by six months ... Toulon was a revolving door ... there were entire trains that came right into the Arsenal we’d load the ships and off they’d go to Algeria ... and don’t forget that there had been the affair de Henri Martin that marked Toulon enormously ...’, (**Gourvenec**, personal communication, July 29, 2009).

As already highlighted, a key tactic in the campaign that had taken-on increased importance following the vote for Special Powers and subsequent developments in government policy was one of placing women in the forefront of the ‘stop the war’ campaign and the UFF was itself key in this regard. The extract below is typical of the many local documents reporting on summarising or advertising anti-war action on the part of the PCF and CGT regionally and locally in 1956. It is a (Communist-led) Town Council Deliberation and Resolution scheduling a demonstration in nearby Toulon against the war in Algeria:

‘The Town Council applauds their (local women’s) militancy, their solidarity and their tireless lobbying of the political establishment, this fight led by wives and mothers of soldiers ... to bring about the speedy end to the war in Algeria ... In the name of population of La Seyne that has expressed such deep feeling on this issue and sure of an growing groundswell of support that has manifested itself in particular amongst communist and socialist worker, this Council’s demands:

- 1) Stop the war in Algeria and begin negotiation with the representatives of the Algerian people.
- 2) Bring our young men home.

This Council will participate in the County Assembly for Peace in Algeria that will take place in Toulon on the 6th May 1956. (La Seyne Town Council Deliberations, April 30, 1956, pp. 1-2).

The regional specificity of Toulon as a major transit point to Algeria is understandably central to the informants’ perceptions of and reactions to the war.

As mentioned above, one of the principal concerns that each and every informant (and all other French citizens) had over this period that they themselves, their family members and / or comrades would be obliged to take up arms for the cause – as indeed many were. **Josette Vincent** and **Madame Meunier** talk of their state of consciousness at this time.

Josette: ‘We militants in La Seyne / Toulon had been very involved with the protest against Indochina at the time of Henri Martin – we had men here who’d lost their lives over there ... that was a period of anti-war protest - no sooner had we come out of that when we were confronted with Algeria

Madame Meunier: It followed straight on didn’t it?

Josette: Yes - my son - Roland - went to Algeria ...

Madame Meunier: My son didn’t go in the end because he’d been too young – but we didn’t know at the time – we didn’t know how it would develop ...

Josette: We were worried – we knew lots of men from La Seyne who’d gone – and some who never came back ...’, (**Vincent / Meunier**, personal communication, October 6, 2008).



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Dr. Paul Raybaud:

‘I knew lads who went to out there – they don’t talk about it easily - I always had the impression that the French army made them commit crimes against the population – they daren’t speak about it – I mean lads who were called-up, not the professionals – only a minority of Arabs could vote over there - and they were the lackeys of the French - fancy not being able to vote in your own country?’ (**Raybaud**, personal communication, October 21st, 2008).

Jeannine Bechet remembers that time:

Do you know many young men who went to Algeria?

‘My nephew, my brother in law who committed suicide a short while after – two of my brothers in law were called-up and the other recalled – my brother in law who committed suicide tried to tell me of the horrible things he’d seen – I didn’t feel guilty because I’d fought hard to stop it - my nephew did all of his military service over there – he started to drink

³⁹ (*l’Humanité*, 20th May, 1956)

when he came back – we’ll never tell the human damage to that generation that Algeria caused ... ’, (**Bechet**, personal communication, August 18, 2009).

It is clear from these and other testimonies that as communists, the informants’ opposition to the war in Algeria had been particularly, intrinsically and intensely political and ideological, but at the same time it was of course acutely and ineluctably personal. In this they were, as ever, distinct in the national context, and as French as everyone else.

6.2 The bombshell

If there was one thing everyone agreed on in this research, it was the devastation experienced on being confronted with the full contents of the Secret Speech as disseminated to the world via the *New York Times* on June 4th.⁴⁰ All of the informants across the two samples are united in describing the sense of incredulity, disorientation and betrayal they felt at that moment. Furthermore, this had been the case whether or not they had been hard-line Stalinists, and irrespective of role fulfilled within the party structure. What informants seem to have remembered are personal and collective responses to this shocking turn of events. At the time, the extremely public, apparently substantiated and indeed ‘self-inflicted’ attacks on their glorious leader and embodiment of their cause were made all the more intolerable because they had been published in the United States, and in a highly regarded media source. A critique by extension of the communist movement as a whole was also, of course, being made on the part of the non-communist world a) in its very publishing of the report, albeit by default, which meant that it had at that point taken ownership of the issue and b) in the attendant negative commentary and speculation in the mainstream media and in national and international political debates. Nevertheless,

⁴⁰ In terms of political orientation, the New York Times started as the mouthpiece of the Republican Party in the 1850s, but by the 1950s it tended to the right of the political centre on a variety of issues. It was the chosen broadsheet of Wall Street, which reflected its espousal and championing of economic liberalism. However, it has traditionally declared itself to be the paper of national consensus.

what is communicated in interviews is that the informants' focus at this time was directed towards the internal dilemma that ensued within their Parties and communities following the revelations, rather than towards deflecting attacks from the exterior. Certainly there *were* attacks, and here **Armand Conan** describes succinctly the type of things people would say to him around this time:

‘They’d say – ‘So, you’re a communist eh? Pro-gulags eh?!’ (**Conan**, personal communication, August 20, 2009).

As would be expected, sections of the mainstream press also played the issue to the hilt, and especially at the local levels, as these newspaper headlines demonstrate:

‘THEY’VE BEEN WORSHIPPING A MAD MAN’ (‘‘Après avoir adoré un fou’’, March 22, 1956, p.1).

‘KRUSHCHEV MAY NOT BE STALIN BUT HE’S INHERITED EVERYTHING HE NEEDS TO PERPETUATE THE OLD SYSTEM – DON’T EXPECT ANYTHING NEW’ (Djilas, Khrushchev non è Stalin, ma ...’’, June 17, 1956, p.1)

To a large extent, these types of attacks simply meant business as usual for the PCF / PCI, and therefore they seem to have elicited conditioned responses from individual comrades and an automatic closing of ranks on the part of their communities against the outside world. Nevertheless, at the same time, the beliefs and loyalties of these communists were being tested to differing degrees, and the revelations of the Secret Speech constituted an intra-community problematic in each location. What to do? Who to blame? - The West? Khrushchev? The PCF / PCI for not dealing with the issue effectively back in February and March, thus leaving ordinary communists off-guard, exposed and unable to respond effectively?

Signora Ferfaglia:

‘Stalin had won the war no? - we were all for Stalin – that song *Tito nas! – Stalin nas!* – Tito ours! – Stalin ours! - even now people talk about him ... (**Ferfaglia**, personal communication, June 16, 2009).



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Dr. Paul Raybaud:

‘You must understand what it was like in France at the Liberation – in each house there was a map of Europe with a small flag on it that followed the advance of the Soviet troops – the French people were crazy for the Soviet Union – one in three - that’s enormous – so when the troubles started in the satellite countries it was hard for people to grasp – because the Soviets had freed the world in the eyes of the people ...’, (Raybaud, personal communication, October 21st, 2008).

Jean Lauga:

‘One day Stalin was a God – and next ...’, (Lauga, personal communication, May 25, 2010).

Aldo Volpato, a rank and file communist from Ronchi, on the outskirts of Monfalcone remembers this time:

Did you discuss the revelations?

‘For us, Stalin might have made mistakes but he changed the world too – at the time we were convinced because we were convinced our fight was valid no? Stalin eradicated the Nazis – we were convinced ...’

Could we say that Stalin was a myth for you?

‘There was a huge respect for all the greats – Lenin, Togliatti ...’, (Volpato, personal communication, June 28, 2010).

⁴¹ (Yahoo Image results for Stalin, n.d.).



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Gastone Andrian, a Battalion Commander in the Garibaldi Brigades and senior PCI cadre in the nearby Federation of Udine in 1956, recalls the incredulity widely felt within the communist community at the accusations being leveled at Stalin in view of the WW2 experience just eleven years before, and he goes on to provide a *post hoc* analysis on the issue of the Secret Speech that discredits its ideological content:

‘When I was a partisan men would say with their dying breaths ‘long live Stalin! Long live the Soviet Union!’ because it was this great emblem – Stalin - not only for the Russians but he personally represented socialism for all the weak of the world and all workers of the world ... so that was the thrust of our discussions at the time – that you couldn’t eliminate Stalin the way Khrushchev had tried to do – it wasn’t possible – and in fact what did Khrushchev change - in the end?’ Stalin might have made mistakes – like all leaders – but we can’t heap all the blame on them – he made mistakes in the framework of creating socialism ...

What do you think of Khrushchev’s revelations about him then?

They were not thought through – *he* made a mistake doing things as he did – the gulags weren’t like the fascist ones – these things should have been discussed, properly addressed, he shouldn’t have made a declaration like that – you have to understand the ins and outs of things ...

⁴² (Yahoo Image results for Stalin. n.d.).

Gorbachev said after that Khrushchev had made errors - the Secret Speech doesn't have an *historical* significance but a *political* one ...', (Andrian, personal communication, December 7, 2009).

Elise Bernard and **Maurice Oustrière** explain how they felt in the French context at the time, with a certain retrospection. **Monsieur Oustrière** describes the news as coming 'out of the blue', which serves as a reminder that full realisation on the part of ordinary communists in the West of the issues involved was suspended between the first appearances in early March of news of the Secret Speech and the publication of the full version in the *New York Times* in June:

Oustrière: 'In truth it was brutal information they were giving us - I think at the base of our thought at the time was that we didn't want to know - a reflex of someone who had been in a sense betrayed - it was difficult to take in - we learned that there had been atrocities - know I had difficulty believing it all - all at once - out of the blue like that - that there had been murders, massacres, the sort of things we accused our enemies of ...',

Bernard: We used to say that the PCF was a 'house with glass walls', that nothing was hidden, all was transparent ...',

Oustrière: Yes and we believed it eh?

Bernard: And when you find out that you've been betrayed by people you loved - it hurts eh?

Oustrière: I felt as though my deepest held beliefs as a militant had been attacked ...',

Bernard: There were lots of socialists and others who took advantage of the situation - they spoke of Siberia and gulags ...',

So how did you respond?

Bernard: We didn't know how to - we had a sort of malaise - for a while we didn't believe it ...',

Oustrière: We saw the news on cinema and the bit where Khrushchev criticises Stalin was in all cinemas in the interval and it shocked us because it was so different to all we had been told ... we didn't have many TVs then ...',

Bernard: We wouldn't have had to watch them anyway!' (**Oustrière / Bernard**, personal communication, October 23, 2008).

Sergio Cosolo, from Pieris, outside Monfalcone, is a life-long communist and brother of **Silvano Cosolo** who was a well known WW2 Resistance fighter, and a communist Councilor after the war:

'It was very difficult because for people here Stalin was a myth – then came Khrushchev no? It was a shock but they had to think what to say at the reunions to make the people understand because not everyone read *l'Unità* – what they knew came from TV⁴³ – but that was all lies ...

They exaggerated about the gulags because to compare Stalin to Hitler! ... the Russians had been a feudal people – they had nothing – Lenin and Stalin really achieved a revolution – like China – a bowl of rice for each person – that was a great revolution! Stalin was hope, the future ...', (**Cosolo**, personal communication, December 15, 2009).

Elda Soranzio in Ronchi (outside Monfalcone) expresses the uncertainty comrades felt but also the trust they invested in the party cadres at the time:

'We were waiting for an explanation – in order not to misinterpret things ...', (**Soranzio**, personal communication, June 12, 2010).

Armand Conan in Carqueiranne continues his earlier account:

'For everyone who had experienced WW2 Stalin was God! Including for a time Churchill and company – he symbolised victory over Germany – Stalingrad represented joy in the hearts of millions of occupied French – he was viewed as having saved humanity – that's clear – and at the revelations of the Secret Speech – Stupefaction! Stupefaction!' (**Conan**, personal communication, December 1, 2008).

Guido Russi, Pieris (outside Monfalcone):

⁴³ Signor Cosolo here is referring to the few TVs there were at the time, in bars for the most part, and implied here as well are the filmic news items shown at the cinema.

‘It was a crisis – it was really difficult for us because we saw Stalin as a perfect being ...’, (**Russi**, personal communication, December 15, 2009).

Renato Papais, Monfalcone:

‘It was like someone was hitting in the face with a bat – and the person hitting you was your friend – we were at sea without a compass ...’, (**Papais**, personal communication, December 2, 2009).

Jeannine Bechet in La Seyne shares her reactions to and experiences of the publication of the full revelations that summer with a measure of retrospection:

‘It was a great shock for us – at that point of course nothing negative had been said about him and then – the Khrushchev report – we were dumfounded – I mean at the base – I don’t know whether the party leaders knew about it – I don’t think they will have – at least not all of it - at first we were stupefied, then we said ‘Well, it was wartime ... did he have a choice? There was a huge conspiracy against the Soviet Union – and we were paranoid – the reaction in La Seyne was stupefaction – well also – the Soviet Union was a long way off for me – and so I thought well it’s their business – I couldn’t do anything about it – I certainly didn’t assimilate the PCF with their perversions ...’, (**Bechet**, personal communication, May 25, 2010).

In terms of the responses in relation to this issue from Communist Parties in the West, the most high profile and ground breaking made by a General Secretary had been without doubt the interview given to the progressive, highbrow periodical *Nuovi Argomenti* mentioned above, by the PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti. Given the national and international attention it received, it is surprising to say the least that the informants did not recall the article and its contents spontaneously, when aspects of their oral evidence regarding other events and developments has been immediate, contextual and relatively comprehensive. In fact during interviews not even the senior cadres of the party federation in Gorizia made reference themselves to the article, nor were able to recall it in any detail. There is a lack of fit between the front page coverage the article received in *l’Unità* at the time nationally / regionally and the impact it appears to have made on the informants. It seems likely therefore, when placing this observation in the context of the sum of their testimonies, that a) it was

the *underlying concerns* addressed in the article rather than event of its publication that was important to the informants ⁴⁴ and b) that because of its macro dimensions, they had been happy to let this one be dealt with by their own national party leader and, when the cards were down, highly capable international statesman.

Another interesting point that should be noted here, is that although reactions to the full revelations of the Secret Speech in June were consistent across the two samples, there does appear to have been a significant difference in the nature and extent of democratic centralism in operation within the two Parties that affected the internal information flow within the PCF. Here **Maurice Oustrière** goes on to explain that when the initial shock of the revelations had subsided, he had felt a sense of frustration with the way the party was handling the issue:

‘The PCF adopted a position that I felt was ridiculous and I let the party cadres know that too - they kept referring to the secret speech as being ‘attributed to Khrushchev’ – as if there could have been a mistaken identity! we were taking one step forward and one step back – many people were annoyed by it because they didn’t know where they were ...’

Did you talk about that between you at the base of the party?

‘I wrote to the Federation but never had a response ...’, (**Oustrière**, personal communication, August 18, 2009).

Monsieur Oustrière was a young journalist at the time working in the La Seyne office of LPVM, the communist newspaper. His media background may well have meant that he was more able to be objective about certain things and at certain moments, more ready to venture an opinion than other party members, despite his difficult position. It has to be said nonetheless, that the informants in La Seyne and Toulon on the whole, appear to have felt less able than their Italian counterparts to question the party line on this or other issues.

⁴⁴ The fact that there is similarly no reference to the article itself in any of the documentary evidence regarding the Federation’s opposition to the Soviet interventions, only to the political concerns addressed and position adopted in the article, which are essentially those, or based on those of the XX Congress, gives weight to this hypothesis (see Chapter 7). On a more general note, this suggests that ‘events’ such as these were not automatically received at all levels of the party structures with the same amount of attention, nor can it be assumed that they had a similar effect.

One of the reasons for the internal coherence of both the Parties in the post war period had been the enduring ties with WW2 Resistance values and perspectives - which were often (but not always, see Chapter 7 pp. 247-8) those of communist orthodoxy. In the French case study, this seems to have resulted in an automatic deference towards former Resistance fighters - at least on the part of their fellow resisters. An illustration of this sentiment is provided by **Charles Galfré**, another journalist in Toulon at the time:

Did you discuss the revelations in your cell?

‘Oh yes – well in the cell we listened to a report read out by the secretary of the cell – it was the Central Committee report - word for word – I mean we didn’t actually talk about it – oh yes – that’s the truth ...’,

But between comrades, informally, did you discuss it?

‘Oh yes – a lot – every day ...’,

Were there different points of view expressed?

(Pause.) ‘Well first of all there weren’t many who criticised, who went against the official position (refuting the purported contents of the speech) ... you know we had risked our skin during the war and in the ranks of a party where there were militants who we looked up to - you know? - it was very hard to detach yourself from that – that took time ...’, (**Galfré**, personal communication, July 22, 2009).

With regard to the question of informal debate **Louis Blanc**, a former shipyard worker in La Seyne, describes the way in which this and other issues were discussed between colleagues on the factory floor, and he makes the point that discussion of political matters came automatically to busy shipyard workers:

‘Yes, we spoke about *everything* – goodness me yes - La Seyne was like that - it was an oral culture – that’s how we made sense of things and in the shipyards well ... all political issues were discussed amongst colleagues ...’, (**Blanc**, personal communication, August 13, 2009).

However, it would be a mistake to draw from that the assumption that these militant environments were also places in which individual stances and personal judgments took precedence over the party line:

Jacques Brémond, La Seyne, and the naval shipyards in Toulon:

‘The Khrushchev report knocked us for six and the revelations were very hard to take for certain militants – we put our trust in what the cell or section leaders told us ...

Did you discuss it?

‘Oh yes – the discussion were very open – mind you in 1956 it wasn’t the same – we had democratic centralism back then — you can see now it’s different – everyone can have their say – we spoke about it but it wasn’t like today - in principle it was rare that anyone went against the party line – very rare ...’, (**Brémond**, personal communication, January 30, 2009).

Evidence of a more structured internal discipline in the PCF than in the PCI, and a consequent reluctance to question the official line of the party on critical issues and developments, is examined more closely in Chapter 7 in relation to reactions to the Soviet interventions in Hungary in the autumn of 1956.

6.3 Poznan 28th – 30th June

When compared to the devastating effects of Khrushchev’s accusations against Stalin made know to the world in June, Poznan, for the informants in this study, had been to all intents and purposes a non-event at the time. No documentary evidence has been recovered indicating that either the Var Federation or the Federation of Gorizia took any action in connection with this issue and informants in both case-locations indicate that this was certainly not a priority for them at the time. The episode was downplayed by the Parties in each case-location, presented in the communist press as not much more than ‘a flash in the pan’, with the protagonists portrayed, predictably, as counter-revolutionaries.

Indeed despite its effective significance, Poznan was in some ways the forgotten event of 1956. The two days of rioting had indeed been headline news in the mainstream press all over Europe and in the United States as it had been immediately obvious to the non-communist world that the uprising was a corollary of the de-Stalinisation process. However, whilst developments in Poland continued to be

reported over the subsequent weeks and months, this was more in terms of residual ‘point scoring’ by the political Left or Right, and apart from judiciously selected headlines that supported either of those positions, detailed reporting was relegated to inside pages. The sensational nature of so many of the events that year ensured that only those news items of the most immediacy each day received major coverage.

Examples of the type of headlines the riots and subsequent developments received in the mainstream press through the summer and into the autumn of that year include:

‘IN THE BLOODY STREETS OF POZNAN TWO SOVIET DIVISIONS ON STATE OF ALERT’ (‘Nelle vie insanguinate di Poznan ...’, June 30, 1956 p. 1).

‘THE PEOPLE WANT MORE

The uprising that erupted on Thursday in Poznan appears to be of a most serious nature ... The whole world is following events with intense interest ...’, (‘*Le people veut d’avantage*’, June 30, 1956, p.1).

HUGE IMPACT ON THE WORLD OF THE BLOODY EVENTS IN POLAND (‘Enorme impression nel mondo per i sanguinosi fatti di Polonia’, June 30, 1956, p.1)

And below is a typical article written by the Socialist cadres in La Seyne at the time:

‘AFTER EVENTS IN POLAND ... A DEFENDING SILENCE FROM TOUSSAINT MERLE ... and yet we’re all impatient to know what he’s thinking ...

‘Monsieur Merle was a fervent admirer of the lunatic Stalin. Didn’t he say that the uprisings in East Berlin in 1953 were a fascist plot? - which is bound to be the excuse he’ll trot-out for the bloody incidents in Poznan (Poland) – they’ll be the fault of capitalist reactionaries. It’s true that in the two cases, hundreds of workers were killed at the hands of the ‘people’s’ police force who – I think we all know - are adept in Gestapo methods of repression ...’, (Midon, July 4, 1956).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ N.b. no page number available for this source (located in the Pratalli private collection, Archives Municipales, La Seyne).

The fact that developments ensuing from the riots were being reported in the height of summer could also have contributed to its low priority vis-à-vis our communities. This may have been the case in La Seyne and Toulon, where the deeply ingrained Mediterranean tradition of relative inactivity during the summer months prevails, as implied in this Police Intelligence document:

‘The Communist Party in the Var is half asleep at the moment - in “holiday mode ...”, (Ministère de l’Intérieur, July 25, 1956, p1).

Late summer and autumn coverage in the mainstream media continued in a similarly critical vein and, as usual, the PCF’s perceived exoticism was brought into things for good measure:

‘They’re aligned with the politics and the imperatives of Russia ... they’re with the dictator Nasser like they were with Hitler in 1939 ... Not once, since the Congress of Tours have the communists ... pursued policies worthy of our great nation.

They’re Russian after all, their leaders have proclaimed it, inscribed it, during the time of Stalin, and this permanent betrayal continues.

No – the Communist Party is not like other parties, because it is not French,’ (Midon, 1956, August 5).

‘THE MASSACRE IN POLAND PROVES THAT COMMUNISM IS NO FRIEND OF THE WORKERS ...

Blood still flows in Poznan ...’, (Midon, 1956, August 16, p.1).

‘DRAMATIC TESTIMONIES ... TOO MUCH POVERTY AND TOO MUCH HATE LAY AT THE ORIGINS OF THE UPRISING ...

confessions extracted by violence ...’, (“Drammatiche testimonianze ...”, September 30, 1956, p. 9).

And prior to Gomulka’s appointment as First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) on 21st October and the subsequent commencement of key reforms that included the suspension of the trials - the following headlines typify the coverage:

‘Latent political crisis in Poland where hard-liners and moderates battle it out’ (Crise politique latente en Pologne October 3, 1956, p. 1).

‘MANY MORE TRIALS SCHEDULED IN POZNAN

The judiciary will be working around the clock from now on ...', (De nombreux procès vont encore avoir lieu, October 5, 1956, p.1).

What the informants encountered in both case-locations in the inverted mirror of bourgeois propaganda with regard to the Poznan riots 'reassured' them, ironically, that it was no different to any other issue that year - or any year. No special response was thus required. Their instinctive, deep and long-standing distrust of the mainstream media was derived from historical experience, and it was not unfounded. It has to be said that in that no-where in that sector - be it the print or broadcast media - had the Communist Parties ever been represented objectively. Therefore as far as communists in France and Italy were concerned, the bourgeois media was a reliable point of reference in itself, in that whatever it said must be wrong. ⁴⁶

To counter-balance the coverage given to Poznan in the mainstream media, the events in the communist press were, of course, presented very differently, which further explains the lack of importance attached to it at the time by the informants. The Polish protestors were portrayed as provocateurs, counter-revolutionaries and imperialist agents, as can be seen from the selection of headlines from this sector of the media in each case-location:

'Incited by enemies of the People's Republic of Poland
SERIOUS DEVELOPMENTS IN POZNAN ...', (Graves incidents à
Poznan, June 29, 1956, p. 1).

'Serious provocation in the centre of Poznan ...', (Gravi provocazioni
nel centro di Poznan, June 29, 1956, p.1).

**'FAILED ATTACK ON THE PEOPLE'S SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF
POLAND AND ON REFORM BY ITS ENEMIES**

Work has resumed in the Polish city of Poznan, instigators identified, 38
fatalities, 260 injured, situation back to normality restored ...', (Fallito
l'attacco dei nemici della distensione, e della Polonia socialista, June 29,
1956, p.8).

⁴⁶ It would be interesting although perhaps problematic due to logistical and demographic reasons to ascertain whether in mining regions of France such as the of Nord-Pas-de-Calais, where there were significant numbers Polish miners working during our period, communist reactions were different.

‘CALM IS RESTORED IN POZNAN

Work has resumed in the factories where the workers express their indignation at the trouble makers ...’, (Le calm est revenu à Poznan, 1956, p. 1).

The impression given in this sector of the press as illustrated above is that what had been a potentially serious threat to a socialist republic, and by extension, the whole Socialist bloc, had been put-down swiftly and effectively in a matter of days by a legitimate government according to the provisions of the Warsaw Pact. Any further mention of Poland over the autumn months were in connection with the democratic reforms being implemented there and of the trials of the ‘enemies within’.⁴⁷ It can be said therefore, that the information contexts - both those of our communities and the rest of the local populations - did more than reflect reality, they ‘constructed’ it, at least in part. Added to which, the Parties’ handling of the issue at the regional and local levels i.e. as far as its inclusion on agendas of meetings or as regards any other type of formal discussion, seems to have been minimal at most. Ultimately, it was sidelined in favour of, or took a back seat in both our of communities to other, more pressing matters. **Jacques Brémont** in La Seyne makes reference to history, and as do many of the French informants in particular, to the influence of the Catholic Church in Polish society and politics:

‘We at the base of the party thought it was a counter-coup – we couldn’t think anything else - the reactionaries had occupied the shipyards in Gdansk - and the Church had been involved eh? – all those bishops sticking their oars in - we thought: ‘Can you believe it? the Soviets freed the Poles from the Nazis and now look what’s happening ...’,

Can you remember anything else?

‘We said that the authorities there had made too many concessions leading up to the riots – you can’t really criticise then for that - but anyway we said: ‘they’ll be sorry – and that’s how it turned out ... but basically at the time other stuff was more important for us ...’, (**Brémont**, personal communication, October 15, 2008).

⁴⁷ See ‘The enemy within’ editorial by Togliatti July 3, in *l’Unità*.

Lucien Conac, also in La Seyne, is of the same opinion as regards the influence of the Church in Poland:

‘The Poles were a religious people – no-one could change that – the Church that led a campaign against the authorities – for me that was very much a part of the trouble in Poland – look how easily Pope Jean Paul was able to facilitate the fall of socialism – I don’t give myself any illusions about the Poles ...’, (**Conac**, personal communication, October 10, 2008).

Baptistin Colonna talks of the influence of religion in Poland, and he makes a consonant point about the rank and file in La Seyne being preoccupied with more immediate concerns:

‘They’ve never been able to wean the East European countries off religion - it’s never worked – you can’t be a Marxist and religious at the same time ...’,

Could rank and file bring-up the issues they wanted to at party meeting?

‘Yes – but the context of meetings depended on the things that were important – you must take into account that the problems that interested people at the time were everyday problems - Algeria was always on the agenda – like Indochina (had been) - we did demonstrations – the problem was colonialism – both of those cost us a lot in human lives ...’, (**Colonna**, personal communication, August 3, 2009).

Silvano Morsolin:

‘I can’t really remember Poznan – I don’t think it was very important to us – it was all new to us – and there was an underlying Catholicism in Poland that obstructed the political processes – they only had that before – they were a feudal people – and in that way they neglected their own politicisation ...’, (**Morsolin**, personal communication, December 1, 2009).

Alberto Clemente, a mid-level cadre in the communist stronghold of Turriaco, just outside Monfalcone, describes the thinking at the time as regards events in Poland:

‘Poznan wasn’t important for us – we followed it daily in *l’Unità* but we saw it as being far off, it didn’t have the same effects as other events ...’, (**Clemente**, personal communication, November 26, 2009).

When asked how the party handled the episode at the time and with the benefit of hindsight, **Francisque Luminet** pauses in momentary reflection, then says deliberately with a dismissive hand gesture:

‘Mute’, (**Luminet**, personal communication, September 30, 2008).

Dino Zanuttin was an ordinary party member in Monfalcone in 1956, and like many of the informants in this study is only truly able to give a retrospective evaluation of Poznan:

Did you discuss Poznan?

‘I can’t remember having discussed it - it’s not like these things touched us directly in some way – it was different with Suez though – that was different because it was about aggression by imperialist states ...’

But in many ways so was Algeria - and Cyprus?

‘From the point of view of a worker, Suez was more important also because it was the first real showdown of the two blocs ...’, (**Zanuttin**, personal communication, July 10, 2009).

The possibility of Hungary’s having become such as situation was not mentioned in **Signor Zanuttin**’s account. This perhaps reflects the acceptance at the time of the counter-revolutionary version of events, which therefore slotted unproblematically into his personal memory as such, and which now constitutes the instant recall of that episode. This is despite the contemporary mainstream media coverage that implied otherwise, because this was automatically disregarded, automatically validating the communist perspective in the process.