

## CHAPTER 8

### **Conclusion**

#### **8.0 Memories, reactions**

Determining reactions to the Soviet interventions in the Hungarian Revolution amongst the regional party memberships of the Communist Party Federations of Var and Gorizia has entailed re-creating, re-visiting as far as is possible, the international, national, regional and local contexts of 1956, because the informants' memories of that time are inextricably linked to and shaped by them. For the French informants, the events of that year unfolded against the backdrop of the war in Algeria, which not surprisingly, was a constant in their thoughts. For the Italian informants, they presented in a context of worsening economic hardship and job insecurity that had been caused by the US-backed Italian government's assault on the Italian Unions and above all the CGIL, along with the perennial issue of relations between Venezia-Giulia and Yugoslavia. Therefore educative in itself is the way in which certain events and developments that year appear to have been more significant for the informants than others, depending on such factors as the roles each individual had fulfilled at the time within the party structures; the political cultures of the PCF / PCI at national and / or regional levels; national, regional and local histories; life experiences etc. This study has revealed that in the chronology of 1956 it was the XX Congress of the CPSU, the Communist vote for Special Powers, the full revelations of the Secret Speech, the Soviet interventions in Budapest and the Suez Crisis, that have remained the most prominent events in the informants' long-term memories. Unlike the reactions to the Secret Speech and to the Suez Crisis, which seem to have been consistent across the extended sample, the informants' recollections of the Special Powers are, understandably perhaps, much stronger for the informants in La Seyne and Monfalcone (although this in itself reveals the limitations of the assumption that there was one communist political consciousness). With regard to the informants' reactions to the Soviet interventions in Hungary that autumn, these show visible consistencies across the extended sample, however they also show marked and indeed some astonishing discontinuities between the single case-studies.

It is in these variations in reactions to the events of that year, not only in wider national contexts but across national boundaries, that the role of historical experience, of culture, and most importantly in this study *political* culture, is highlighted and defined.

### **8.1 Findings – consistencies & inconsistencies**

This research has brought to light a number of striking consistencies regarding reactions to the Soviet interventions in Hungary across the extended sample of Communist Party members, as described in personal interviews and supported either directly or indirectly by archival evidence. Perhaps the first of these is the *vivid memory of the interventions* for the totality of the informants, irrespective of the interpretations given to them, which is not surprising given the nature of the problematic. Nevertheless, another striking consistency to have emerged from the evidence is *the lack of essential political importance* informants attributed to the events at the time compared to that they attached to the Special Powers (in the French study) the Secret Speech, and to the Suez Crisis, which were all distinctly more meaningful to our communities on ideological levels. This phenomenon was apparently due to the informants' belief that the interventions were being inflated and exploited as anti-Soviet propaganda by the Western powers, and in many cases it was also due to the feeling, as with Poznan, that the events were happening far away and as a consequence, were not directly relevant to them. That said, a second, universal response described was *the real political significance* informants attached to these events at the time as constituting concrete proof of a) a reactionary presence in both the Eastern Bloc and in Western Europe and b) the West's intentions to use this turn of events to its own advantage. In relation to the information context in 1956, there is little doubt that there had been an *automatic disbelief amongst informants* of what was seen as Western propaganda in relation to our events, but at the same time *strong emotions had been elicited in the informants* by what they saw as the West's opportunist and recriminatory stance in relation to the Soviet actions. All this seems to have resulted in these communist communities' *instinctive closing of ranks* against the non-communist world. Another common response at the time described in

interviews is the feeling at the time that the problems occurring in the Warsaw Pact countries *should be left to the legitimate authorities in those countries* to address in their own way. Another striking consistency is the *enduring nature of the Stalinist / Soviet myth in 1956*, despite recent revelations, which meant that the majority of the informants still had an unshakable faith in the Soviet system / Red Army at that conjuncture. Therefore there had been an *absolute belief in the Soviet version of events*, which was that the uprising had been a counter-revolution that required immediate remedial action, and therefore there had been an *automatic and unquestioning support of the Soviet interventions* on the part of the majority of rank and file Communist Party members, mid-level cadres (and senior cadres in the French case-study), and indeed it appears that *the more 'militant' the party member* (as understood in practice as 'Stalinist' at that conjuncture), *the more vehemently s/he supported the Soviet intervention*.

The research has also however, highlighted a number of inconsistencies in reactions to events. With regard to support of the Soviet interventions, in the French case-study this is clearly indicated to have been consistent across the whole of the core sample (with one notable exception i.e. **Charles Galfré**) irrespective of the role individuals fulfilled at the time within the party structure, the levels of education they had attained, their occupations and whether they lived and / or worked in La Seyne (a working class town) or the regional capital Toulon (a mixed economy). In the Italian case-study the support for the interventions was less uniform, split between a) the majority of the rank and file, mid-level cadres and a proportion of the senior cadres in the Federation Committee who supported the interventions, and b) the majority of senior cadres in Gorizia, including the Secretary of the Federation, who either opposed the interventions or gave their support to this position. Although in the French study certain mid-level cadres seem to have had feelings of unease in dealing with the situation the Soviet interventions engendered, this did not, apparently make a difference to how they handled things in cells and sections; whereas in the Italian study such feelings and misgivings often it appears translated into insubordinate acts dictated by their own and / or majority convictions at the base. With regard to the

nature of the democratic centralism of the party at regional levels, evidence suggests that the democratic centralism in operation in the French party that determined the content and scope of formal discussion and the rigour and closed nature of the decision making process, effectively precluded any real debate there may or may not have been in the Var Federation regarding the interventions and / or indeed other issues that year. This appears to have been accompanied by a general disinclination at that time amongst the party membership, as indicated by the vast majority of the informants in La Seyne and in Toulon and alluded to in numerous written sources, to voice dissent within the party or to question its procedures. In the Italian example, it appears that formal discussion of the interventions was not censured, and that any constraints individuals may have had in voicing dissent in relation to the Soviet actions in Hungary, or other matters that year, were more likely to be due to a) personal convictions usually linked to an instinctive support for the Soviet Union and Stalinist policies, b) the immediacy of events that precluded a contemplated response, c) a lack of real interest in the interventions / relevant information, d) trust in their secretaries of cells and sections – some of whom had had to mediated the regional party line in relation to our events that autumn. With regard to attitudes to international issues, priorities for communists in La Seyne and Toulon at the time of the Soviet interventions in Budapest had been Algeria and Suez; whereas for those in Monfalcone and Gorizia priorities had been split between on the one hand a number of senior cadres in the Federation of Gorizia saw the Soviet interventions as the most important development because they risked de-railing the de-Stalinisation process, closely followed by the Suez Crisis, and on the other, the majority of the regional party membership that was more concerned with events in Suez, as to this group it represented a symbolic power struggle between old-style European imperialism and the emerging independent and ‘non-aligned’ states (the latter having particular relevance for communists in the region). With regards the implications of the Soviet interventions as regards electoral performance, in the Communist bastion of La Seyne, there was no loss of popular support for the PCF at the next elections, which were the Council (Municipal) elections of 1959 (Marius Autran, n.d.);<sup>1</sup> whereas in

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<sup>1</sup> The PCF continued to have a strong majority in local government for the next twenty

Monfalcone, the party lost votes in the Administrative Elections of December 1956, then made a steady gain until it won the Council in 1983 (Turrini, 1988).

*As can be seen in this schema, reactions in the French case-study were in many ways more straightforward and less differentiated than in the Italian study. In other words, the Italian results present more complex picture overall due, arguably, to the relative 'freedom' that party culture afforded its members.*

**Documentary / oral data correspondence:**

There was an apparent decrease in memberships of both the PCF / PCI Federations of approx. 11% and 11.5% respectively between 1956-7 as evidenced on the few relevant Communist Party documents available for each case (although there are questions regarding the reliability of this data, see below). Nevertheless, informants in both locations were agreed that there had been few if any defections from the Parties in protest to the interventions. In the French case-study they stated that any defections there had been had not been on the part of the rank and file, and written sources concur (see Chapter 7, p. 52). In the Italian case-study informants were adamant that no-one left in the Federation of Gorizia, largely because of the micro political context that existed in this region, and because both the 'progressive' and 'Stalinist' stance had been catered for in the Federation's actions in relation to the interventions and then in the open protest to that stance on the part of those at the base. No evidence was found to indicate that there was an increase in the Socialist Parties in either case-location, implying that a) those leaving the Parties chose not to migrate to the other political force on the left but rather to remain without political affiliation (which was very likely the case in the French study), or that b) there was not in fact a problem of people leaving the Parties (more likely the case in the Italian study).

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years. In 1983 it joined forces with the Socialist Party (PS) and won the council in a left-wing coalition in 1989, and in 1989 the coalition lost to the Union for the Defense of the Republic (UDF) – Rally for the Republic (RPR).

**Statistical data analysis:** available statistical data and oral accounts

- PCF Var Federation:                    1956: 4.564                    1957: 4053 = - 511  
(*Archives de la section d'organisation, effectifs fédéraux (1945-1998)*,  
n.d.)  
National membership:                    1956: 278.429                    1957:259.404  
(Martelli, 2010, p. 57)
  - La Seyne / Toulon: *oral and available written evidence suggests the reliability of the data*
  - Sample (core) 20 informants: 4% approx. of total Federation membership body in 1956 of 4.564
  - Sample (core): 4% approx. of 511 (apparent defections)
  - Informants who left the Federation over Budapest: 1 (plus testimonial evidence of 4-6 others having left for this reason)
  - findings are proportionate.
  
- PCI Federation of Gorizia:    1956: 4.966                    1957: 4375 = - 571  
(Amyot, 1981, p. 76)  
National membership:                    1956: 2.035.353                    1957: 1. 826.928  
(Amyot, 1981, p. 76)
  - Monfalcone / Gorizia: *oral evidence suggests the unreliability of the documentary data (further regional documentation unavailable)*<sup>2</sup>
  - Sample (core): 22 informants: 4% approx. of total Federation membership body in 1956 of 4.966
  - Sample (core): 4% approx. of 571 (apparent defections)
  - Informants who left the Federation over Budapest: 0 (testimonial evidence that no ordinary party members left for this reason)
  - findings (oral / available documentary data) contradict available data (which is questionable).

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<sup>2</sup> A typical response on hearing that evidence suggest that approximately 500 Party members of the Federation of Gorizia did not renew their cards between 1956-7 is the following from **Signora Visintin**: '500 people left? Where from? Those intellectuals are a bit unstable aren't they? (**Visintin**, personal communication, June 15, 2010). .

Oral and documentary evidence suggests that those who did leave the PCF / PCI at this time or who did not renew their membership cards in the spring of 1957 were much more likely to be less committed communists, largely non-proletarian members, outside the sites of industrial concentration or intense political activity; examples cited in Police and Trade Union documentation are those in agricultural communities, and white collar workers. The presence, or absence, of such individuals would not have been immediately visible to or register in the minds of those in our core communities at the time, or since, and these people would also be less likely to figure in the current samples, by definition.

Therefore, in view of the thrust of the title statement, and in view of the intrinsically empirical nature of the project, representative samples in each location, and therefore a functional equivalence across the multiple sample, was attained.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> As a result of this apparent anomaly in the available data regarding regional Party memberships, an announcement was placed in the regional newspapers in each location, stating that Communist Party members who left the Party in 1956-7 were being sought to help with this research. There were no relevant replies to these announcements. Further explanations for this anomaly between (certain) data, oral and other documentary evidence include:

- the low priority given to the documentation and retention of data in general in both regional federations due to a variety of problems e.g. a lack of time and resources to devote to this exercise, security factors that militated against this (e.g. as a lingering result of the Pigeon Affair in France / due to the hostile political establishment and anti-communist elements in Monfalcone and Gorizia), repeated translocation of premises since 1956 and a consequent loss of archival materials, and a more automatic focus - especially in regional and local contexts given to - practical matters
- the numbers refer to fully subscribed members in both locations, and therefore do not include those who at the moment of drafting, were in areas with their payments
- this data is limited to 1 or 2 examples and therefore the triangulation process is compromised
- the data displays a number of additional errors as regards other Federations
- Party fees were collected in person, in cells and section meetings, if in the workplace this would be by the same process at the time as the collection of union fees by unpaid Party / Union militants (union fees not deducted at source from wages), which was often problematic due to workload of that militant / economic hardships on the part of individual members / restrictions on union activity in the case of Monfalcone and Gorizia); this process was made more difficult in the Federation of Gorizia due to restrictions on union activity in the shipyard / factories
- statistical data indicates an overall decrease in membership of PCF / PCI nationally and regionally;

Fr. = steady decline over late 50s and 60s – to date

## 8.2 Conclusions

The unique synthesis of methodologies used for this research, that is to say oral history, micro history and the comparative, transnational approach, has permitted a number of firm conclusions to be drawn as regards reactions in our communities to the Soviet interventions in Budapest in 1956. This in turn has added to our knowledge and understandings of *attitudes towards the Soviet Union* amongst Western communists at that time, that is to say, of the levels of trust in its policies and macro strategies that existed and the extents of its ‘authority’ vis-à-vis these communities. These attitudes, by definition / extension, also provide a gage of the *commitment to and critical awareness regarding the state of international communist movement* within our communities, at this conjuncture.

What is clear from the substantial body of empirical evidence collected is the *consistency* of the findings in the French study in that reactions to our events were, for the vast majority of Communist Party members in the Var Federation at the time, to support the interventions for a number of common / combined reasons; as opposed to the clear *differentiation* in the findings of the Italian study, in that that whilst reactions for the majority of communists in the Federation of Gorizia were to support the interventions, this was for diverse reasons, and there was a high profile minority that made an unequivocal stand against them. What are the reasons for these differences?

### 1) Reactions determined by core ideological / political beliefs

Reactions to the interventions both within and across the samples were directly linked to the extents to which the *Stalinist perspective* prevailed in our communities at the time i.e. they were linked to the extent to which informants’

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It. = fluctuating – increase in early 1960s;  
therefore the regional decline indicated between 1956-7 in both cases, whether accurate in its immediate context or not, locates itself within that wider phenomenon, and will accommodate independent variables such occupation, level of education, role in Party etc. of those who left the Parties over that period.

understanding of and adherence to the communist movement was predicated on what was effectively the authoritarian and mechanistic application of Marxist-Leninist principles associated with the former Soviet leader.<sup>4</sup> Those of a Stalinist persuasion, in each case-location, supported the interventions, and those who were not, opposed them. The revelations of the XX Congress earlier that year had essentially made no difference to the former category, which was the majority in each case-location. As far as these comrades were concerned, it had been the abandonment of Stalinist policies and methods that had brought about such insubordinate, insurrectionary situations in the first place.

The natural tendency within the PCF as expounded by its leader Maurice Thorez was in any case towards ideological integrity and organisational rigour, and this was no less the case in the Var Federation, where it appears that the regional membership was, to all intents and purposes, assimilated into this party culture. The PCI however, manifested tensions between Togliatti's 'progressive', national-societal agenda, and the more 'conservative' elements within the Italian party leadership and its membership, which invariably comprised those who had suffered during the Fascist period and / or been most prominent in WW2 Resistance and who favoured a more Leninist programme based on the international class struggle.

This phenomenon that existed in the Italian party at the national level was replicated and indeed even more pronounced in the PCI Federation of Gorizia due to cultural, historical and geopolitical factors. It was represented in the Gorizian Province by, on the one hand, the 'progressives', who were in the minority in 1956 and on the other, by the Stalinists, who were in the majority. The former category comprised key members of the Federation Committee and their supporters, who saw the de-Stalinisation agenda as a way of breaking free

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<sup>4</sup> For the period he had been General Secretary of the CPSU, 1922-52, Soviet orthodoxy in communist ideology, politics, strategy etc. was synonymous with Stalinist policies and methods. Stalin *was* the Soviet Union. In the context of this study, and as we have seen, the informants' perception of Stalin in 1956 was still, in large part, as 'Uncle Jo', the glorious leader who had brought socialism to the countries of Eastern Europe, and as the WW2 hero that had saved the world.

from Cold War politics, which in this sensitive multi-ethnic region and especially in the border town of Gorizia, had dictated politics in the region in one respect or another since 1945. The latter comprised those Italian communists and the Slovenian minority (Communist Party members in the majority) whose experience of fascism had been singularly adverse; <sup>5</sup> the Fascist regime had left a particular legacy of anti-communism in the region - and by the same token a strong anti-fascism. It was natural for many communists in these parts to look to international socialism and therefore to Moscow, rather than to Rome, for inspiration and direction in the post-war period (and some comrades would retain this perspective longer than others).

These Stalinist / de-Stalinisation positions underpinned understandings and dictated the forms of communist militancy in our two case-communities to different extents (and in slightly different ways, see p. 28), in general and in relation to our events.

What did it mean to be a communist militant in the West at that time? (and in our communities?) What did communist militants in the West militate *for*, or *against*? (and in our communities?) It might well have been supposed that rank and file party members in what were communist bastions and decidedly radical environments, for example La Seyne and Monfalcone, would have reacted angrily to images of Soviet tanks 'defending' socialism by firing on what appeared to be their Hungarian counterparts, <sup>6</sup> and indeed would have taken action themselves in protest to the interventions - but as this study has revealed, this was not the case in either of our communities. Militant responses to the Soviet interventions for the vast / clear majorities in our constituencies in La

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<sup>5</sup> That is to say, Mussolini's political and ethnic / linguistic 'Italianisation' programme discriminated against and repressed communists and the Slovenian minority in the region. The Communists were the prime political targets of the Fascist regime, and it lost no time in banning the Communist Party in 1926, and imprisoning or exiling its leaders. The Nazi and Fascist regimes discriminated against Slav peoples *per se*, considering them ethnically inferior. Hitler had spoken of the threat of Pan / Neo-Slavism and the need to contain it.

<sup>6</sup> None of the informants had mentioned the East German uprising three years earlier, either in relation to the uprisings in Poland or in Hungary in 1956 or *per se*, indicating no doubt that they too had been seen automatically from a similar Stalinist perspective.

Seyne / Toulon and Monfalcone / Gorizia had meant an instinctive defense of those actions (whether there had been a solid engagement with the issue or not) in the face of bitter criticism from the non-communist world and the threat of physical attacks on party premises (and themselves) on the part of anti-communists. What protest there was against the interventions in the context of this study, was made by an elite of regional party cadres in the Italian study, albeit of undeniable political significance. It is perhaps ironic that this allegiance to Stalinist methods and policies was surely more deeply and genuinely felt on the part of Western communists at this conjuncture than on the part of their East European counterparts.

## **2) Concrete vs. abstract**

The Cold War determined not only the political climate and many of the events and developments of the epoch but also *the information contexts* at the time that informed the mindsets and perspectives of individuals and groups (and because, as we have seen, information contexts are social, cultural and political constructs that do not merely reflect realities but in many ways create them). During the autumn of 1956, in the space of days, the world's population had been bombarded with news of the airplane hijacking and kidnappings of key members of the FLN leadership by French military forces, the popular uprising and first Soviet intervention in Budapest, a rearmed West Germany, Israel's invasion of the Sinai Peninsula, the Franco-British attacks on Egypt, the second Soviet intervention in Budapest, intensification of the Suez Crisis and various ultimatums regarding Hungary and Suez by the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Nations, etc. At the moment of the second Soviet intervention in Hungary on November 4, there appears to have been little doubt in the minds of the majority of communists in our case-locations (with the exception of our Gorizian party elite) which issue had been the more morally justified and less potentially catastrophic? – the Soviet interventions in Budapest? or the Franco-British- Israeli assaults on Egypt?

Reactions to the interventions were also determined for some party members by *the extent to which they engaged with the issue on a personal level*. As already discussed, several of the informants in each case-location stated that they had felt that it was not their problem that it was happening far away. These informants also felt that it was being blown-up out of proportion on the part of the Western Powers to further their own ends, and that the Hungarian authorities should be left to deal with the situation in its own way. These feelings of disengagement from the problem were more prevalent on the part of (although as we have seen, not exclusive to) militants who were not also party cadres at the time, or who would not have been categorised as intellectuals in context. In this type of response there is both spatial and experiential discontinuity with the interventions, but also communicated in the testimonies is the general feeling that if the Soviet Union had taken this course of action and the party was, naturally, supporting it, then that must be what was right. Busy, beleaguered comrades with their own pressing and time consuming problems did not, on the whole, feel the need to sit around debating events in Eastern Europe, trying to tease-out the finer points of the problematic, trying to set it into the wider political context. That was what the party was for. It had the time, the knowledge, the experience, the information, the political expertise to do this – and especially for something as ‘macro’ as the Soviet interventions.

Furthermore, for our communities, there were other issues closer to home that demanded their time, attention and energy on a daily basis, and therefore to a large extent these over-rode ‘non-essential’ issues at this time. For communists in La Seyne and Toulon a major preoccupation at this time had been Algeria, as **Francisque Luminet** points out:

‘Anyone’s son could have been called-up at any moment ... that never left our thoughts ...’, (**Luminet**, personal communication, September 30, 2008).

For many ordinary communists, putting food on the table and keeping a roof over their families’ heads was more important - **Dino Zanuttin**:

‘There was enormous difficulty in finding jobs – you had to adapt to any situation - any offer ...’, (Zanuttin, personal communication, December 19, 2009).<sup>7</sup>

The threat of war, long working hours, economic hardships, or (in the Italian case) job insecurity occupied the minds of many of the informants and their comrades in La Seyne and Monfalcone at this time – and these issues were no abstractions, happening in a country far away, to people they did not know. These were problems that touched their lives and those of their families day-in, day-out. Informants needed no ‘information’ about them in order to engage with them - they understood them all too well. Therefore in the autumn of 1956, the thoughts of many in our communities were, to a significant degree, elsewhere. Informants not only trusted the party to do its job - but looked to it at moments like these for reference, for reassurance, and in some cases to make the judgments individual party members did not feel informed or concerned

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<sup>7</sup> That said, it was the CRDA shipyards in Monfalcone that were *the* target, *the* place everyone wished to secure employment, despite working conditions. Although state investment there had been minimal in the post-war period due in no small measure to the geopolitics of the region, it was still a relatively stable option in terms of job security in the region and a position in the shipyards, however skilled or unskilled, was coveted. Men would cycle in to Monfalcone from outlying areas to work there, but many would cycle long distances from across the region and sometimes this difficult commute would take hours a day, before and after a day’s physically demanding work in the shipyards had begun or ended, and in all weather. Communists also wanted work in the shipyards, and those who had had contracts there before the war (where they had functioned in clandestinity) were allowed to return to work after the war. Another important pull factor, especially / paradoxically for our community, was that at least as far as the communists were concerned they ‘owned’ the shipyards –this was their territory. The shipyards had always been and would remain a communist bastion, just as they had during the Fascist period as the centre of communist-led anti-Fascist Resistance in the region (the first in northern Italy), and as they effectively continued to after the war via the presence of the largest and communist-led trade union - the CGIL. Post 1945 Communists and Communist sympathisers were discriminated against in the region, in the community, and no less in the decidedly capitalist state owned CRDA shipyards, but at the same time, the shipyards offered them instant solidarity, belonging, self-esteem and the opportunity for political engagement on a daily basis. They may have been discriminated against when and where possible by management but they were respected for their work ethic (which had never been in question), their skills (they had to be *better than* other candidates to have acquired or retained the position in the first place), their tenacity and adaptability (as proven in their post-war political trajectory). The Communists were synonymous with the shipyards (and for those who had gone to live and / or work in Yugoslavia after the war, who were mostly skilled workers from the shipyards, this factor had not been ignored, but had factored in their final choices).

enough to make themselves. Their core ideological and political beliefs were invested in the party.<sup>8</sup>

### **3a) Reactions informed / circumscribed by party culture**

Whilst it was not the first objective of this study, its *findings essentially support the historical dichotomy theory that the PCF was the more sectarian, more Sovietophile organisation and that the PCI was the more 'progressive' and experimental.*<sup>9</sup> The national PCF's defense of the Soviet interventions had put it at odds with the wider national response.<sup>10</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that the party culture in the Var Federation in 1956 was any different to that of the national party culture, and that was conditioned in large part by its Marxist-Leninist-Bolshevik theoretical underpinnings.<sup>11</sup> Post-war pragmatics aside, the party understood itself to be the leading agent of the radical Left and 'revolutionary' vanguard (at the very least in spirit), natural home to the French proletariat with an agenda that was predicated on class struggle. As such, the national / regional party culture was normative and formulaic rather than responsive and experimental. Its members subscribed to a shared system of thought founded on stringent and inviolable (or sacrosanct) theoretical, ideological and political references (principles, values, concepts) that determined and guided political action. Policies and strategies were underwritten by the needs of the collective, not of the individual. The starting

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<sup>8</sup> It could be said that Party members who accepted the Soviet version of events were automatically accepting the Stalinist myth, in other words another abstraction. For the more 'Stalinist' Party members however, Uncle Jo was not a myth, but the (enduring) embodiment of all that they believed in and all they hoped for in a future. Their faith in 'Stalin' / Stalinist policies / the Soviet Union was real, and it infused their daily existence, their daily political engagement (and faith, whatever the metaphysical definition it may be given, is no abstraction). This faith, as far as they were concerned, was grounded in the dual realities of WW2 (just eleven years since and a concrete enough experience for anyone) and the creation of the Socialism in Eastern Europe (despite revelations and developments that appeared, at least to the rest of the world, to deny this achievement).

<sup>9</sup> Thorez's uninterrupted leadership of the party from 1930 until his death in 1964 played a part in the PCF's ideologically fixed position and militaristic organisation, whilst Togliatti's vision of a modern Italy dictated the ideologically adaptability, form and the functioning of his *Partito Nuovo* in 1945. It was a working model that, in essence, endured until the demise of the PCI in 1990.

<sup>10</sup> This situation was attenuated in La Seyne, and by extension across the region, because of the Communists' remarkable success in local government.

<sup>11</sup> See 'New Left' Chapter 1, p. 3, also Hirsh, 1982, pp. 84-105.

point was that in order to change the world, the human subject had to be de-centred from the political equation; only as social formations, as a *class*, could individual men and women intervene in the historical process. Therefore praxis had to facilitate this political model. As we have seen, the PCF Var Federation's organisation and *modus operandi* was centralised and disciplined, that is, its recruitment process selective, its internal dynamic airtight, its external operations co-ordinated and focused. Therefore, and as has been illustrated by the findings of this research, there was a tendency in our community to form common conclusions that sometimes entailed the muting (conscious or unconscious) of dissonant thoughts; towards to a mutual understanding of militancy in context; to a natural acceptance of the party line; and to think in 'collective' terms, rather than venture or indulge individual evaluations of this, or indeed other problems. The opinions of individual members were politically 'inappropriate' and those of groups were 'factional', that is, proscribed.

The PCI's (initial) defense of the Soviet interventions had put it at odds with the wider national response, whereas the Federation of Gorizia's opposition to the interventions (that lasted longer)<sup>12</sup> had put it at odds with the national party's position.<sup>13</sup> As evidenced in the Federation of Gorizia's actions that autumn, its regional party culture had clearly allowed more freedom of expression, and more room to maneuver than that of its sister organisation in Toulon. Therefore it seems reasonable to conclude that things were not as rectilinear (and as a result not as 'problem-free'), in the PCI as a national

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<sup>12</sup> Togliatti had backtracked in an article published simultaneously in *Rinascita* and *l'Unità* on October 30, in which he admitted that 'non-counter-revolutionary workers had also taken part in the uprising', affirming however that 'an armed insurrection can only be countered by the force of arms ...', (Togliatti, 1956) before giving his unequivocal support to the second Soviet interventions on November 4. The Federation of Gorizia remained firm on their original position until they were obliged to perform an 'auto-critique' at the time of Bonazzi's visit from the national Party Secretariat to the Federation Congress in 23-25 November 1956.

<sup>13</sup> This public deviation of the Federation of Gorizia from the national Party line does not appear to have caused the stir it might have amongst the wider regional population, that is amongst non-communists, even though this act of defiance on its part had been the first of its kind. This is most probably due to the intrinsically turbulent nature of politics *per se* in this region.

organisation as they were in the PCF. Certainly, whatever the particular conditions that may have led to the federation's act of indiscipline vis-à-vis its national party at that moment, the suggestion that an analogous situation could have occurred in the Var Federation, for whatever reasons, is unthinkable. Given the theoretical underpinnings of the PCI in the post-war period, the Federation of Gorizia's actions that autumn could be understood as having been not only the product of a distinct local culture but also as a natural extension of that national political model, and as such, not in effect antithetical to Italian communism in context.<sup>14</sup> Togliatti's *Partito Nuovo* was predicated (in principle) on new, less reductive interpretations and applications of Marxist theory that entailed bringing about a new collective awareness in all sectors of Italian society,<sup>15</sup> and thus a new reality based on ideological consensus and social (active, voluntary, informed) hegemony. Due regard and concessions to Soviet macro strategy apart, this Gramscian blueprint had dictated the party's form and function post 1945. Indeed this empirical, responsive orientation and operational model is perhaps best illustrated in the context of the current study in the functioning of the democratic centralism of the party federation in relation to resolving the various and contrasting reactions to the Soviet interventions and in the different understandings of militancy that existed amongst its membership.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Togliatti had known on his return from exile in 1945 that the transition to socialism in Italy would need to be predicated on a more sophisticated, 'post-industrial' political model than that of the Soviet Union. It would need to be consensual. It could be said that Party members at the time who supported the interventions had allowed *realities*, that is their own / Hungarian, to conform to *concepts*, that is universal principles articulated in their national Party lines. Their acceptance of the Soviet version of events that autumn however, had been a conscious political choice, a conscious political act, and choices and acts are not concepts (added to which, communists knew a thing or two about political choices and actions).

<sup>15</sup> Togliatti's strategy of making the Party a presence, a dynamic, in all areas of society, of its reaching out to the middle classes and in this way bringing a new collective consciousness was based on Gramsci's concepts of *società civile* and 'hegemony', which have to do with *informed consent*, and the 'modern prince' cadre that is, more 'empirical' than the traditionally formed cadre; individuals that emerge *organically* from the working masses and who are thus also truly 'grounded' in and responsive to that reality.

<sup>16</sup> **Silvino Poletto** had obviously had a very different idea of 'militant' communist action at that point to that of the majority of the Federation membership body, and certainly the comrades in and around Monfalcone.

The PCI understood itself to be a vanguard revolutionary party, but it was to be a ‘soft’<sup>17</sup> revolution i.e. constitutional, consensual. In the New Party, Italian communists were (in principle) a self-conscious and empowered collective of independent human actors. Whilst it would be simplistic to say that according to this understanding the individual resided at the centre of the historical process, the active role of the subject is nevertheless intrinsic to this model.<sup>18</sup> Here, **Sergio Cosolo** describes this constructivist / voluntarist – existentialist<sup>19</sup>

- understanding as political conviction being forged, rather than inherited:

‘You’re not born communist, you become one, via life experience you make a political choice ...’, (**Cosolo**, personal communication, December 15, 2009).

Going even further towards this type of empirical and pragmatic interpretation, in a way that is hard to imagine in the French context, **Guido Russi** states:

‘Politics has to be practical, not based on ideology or unity of thought - because that will never exist ...’, (**Russi**, personal communication, December 4, 2009).

And so there were in some ways quite significant differences in the cultures of the PCF / PCI at national and regional levels that apart from other considerations denied or permitted individual or group thinking or intervention in the life of the party. Nonetheless, *all* Communist Party members who chose to accept the party line regarding the Soviet interventions or other issues that year, were acting within the framework of these party cultures, *but they were acting nonetheless. They were acting in context, according to determined conditions of that party culture, and of the day. Choices and acts, whatever these may be, are hardly passive.*

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<sup>17</sup> The idea of soft revolution should not be confused with reform: the transition to socialism may have been conceived as consensual and constitutional but it was to be a revolutionary nonetheless in that its objective was to effect a complete and radical transformation of the economic, political, social and ideological structure of society as opposed to modifying the existing one (Bennett, Martin, Mercer, Woollacott, 1981, pp. 191-234).

<sup>18</sup> Also central to this understanding therefore, is the essentially independent role of the super-structure vis-à-vis the base-structure.

<sup>19</sup> See existential French Marxism see Poster (1975).

**3b) Reactions informed and / or affected, or not as the case may be, by:**

**(i) Geopolitics:**

*Geopolitics as such, does not appear to have been an issue to communists in the Var region of France in terms of their understandings of self as members of a larger political formation,*<sup>20</sup> nor does it appear to have affected the political orientation or functioning of their party federation or necessitated particular agendas.<sup>21</sup> *This is in stark contrast to the communists in Venezia-Giulia who were inevitably affected and influenced on diverse levels by the geopolitics of that region – as was their federation.*<sup>22</sup> Certainly, geography appears to have made little or no difference to communists in La Seyne and Toulon vis-à-vis reactions to our events. All of the available documentary evidence suggests that the PCF Var Federation followed the national party line to the letter in 1956, which in the autumn of that year meant consolidating and coordinating party members' and sympathisers' support for the Soviet actions and endeavouring to keep the wider focus of attention firmly on the government's mishandling of the economy at home and its political mishandling of events in North Africa. Whilst it is true that the Var region itself has historically been considered politically wayward in the national context i.e. of an 'independently Social

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<sup>20</sup> However, the relatively small numbers of prominent intellectuals in the Var Federation, which was due in part to its peripheral physical location in the national context (see Chapter 7, pp. 250-2), may have meant that there was an accompanying lack of 'contestation' to communist orthodoxy amongst its membership body, that is to say, that a tangible critical element was missing.

<sup>21</sup> The physical location and characteristics of La Seyne and Toulon did not have any particular or determinant bearings on the politics and economics of the region *in relation to the question at hand*, other than the former's being a communist bastion centering on the shipyards, and the latter's having a complex mix of traditional political support due to its military / naval associations and a hard core communist presence in the naval shipyards. Within the region also, even though the local political and economic situations were different in for example, La Seyne to those in Toulon, the Party (political) agenda for the region as a whole was identical. Whilst it is true that Toulon's naval associations had made it the centre of the Henri Martin affair (see Chapter 4, p. 41) 1950-3 that affected militants in Toulon and La Seyne directly, the campaign to free him was automatically and immediately incorporated into a national anti-war campaign, and whilst it is true that the same naval associations made Toulon a transit point to and from North Africa, demonstrations and revolts had of course been taking place all over France.

<sup>22</sup> Since 1945 the Federation had had to face and deal with a series of different and difficult situations that had direct consequences on the Party's regional structure, composition organisation, *modus operandi*, orientation and agendas (see Chapter 4 pp. 5-6.)

Democratic left tradition’,<sup>23</sup> this independence does not appear to have been represented *per se* in the PCF in the region. Any tensions there were at the different levels of the regional and local party apparatus, in different spheres of regional and local activity or between protagonists at these levels at this time, appear to have been *political* in character rather than *geopolitical*, potentially typical of all local / regional party cultures and structures (and still, it is not possible to talk of ‘currents’<sup>24</sup> in this regard – rather to ‘understandings’ of communist militancy). If geopolitics is germane to the discussion at hand it is in a negative sense i.e. that it was a quasi non-issue due, arguably to a) France’s long history as a centralist state<sup>25</sup> that shaped not only political and administrative realities but national and institutional identities and b) to the ‘Jacobin’ centralism of the PCF itself that imposed and maintained the coherence of ‘the party’ in the national context with little scope for regional deviations or interpretations. Above all at moments like this i.e. for such a macro event as the Soviet interventions in Hungary, any internecine friction (see Chapter 4, pp. 28-9) there may have been at this level, for whatever

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<sup>23</sup> As we have seen, *Le Var Rouge* or the Red Var. This alludes to the insurrection against the *coup d'état* by Napoleon Bonaparte 3<sup>rd</sup> in 1851 and consequent left-wing identity of the region and in particular as regard the important contribution to the insurrection of the working classes across the region rather than in the regional capital of Toulon itself which, had long been associated with state authority due to its military / naval connections. The term ‘red’ here denotes socialist tendencies linked to the revolutions of 1848, however as a more general political reference in the region it has come to have either socialist or communist connotations depending on interpretation and associations attributed to it. More general historical reference is also made to *Le Midi Rouge* or ‘the Red South’.

<sup>24</sup> The dictum that Communist Parties did not have political currents, is effectively borne out in this study in that Party members, despite any differences in interpretation of the nature and form communist militancy should take, were communists first and last.

<sup>25</sup> France had had a unifying, centripetal force in effect since the late sixteenth century in the form of absolutist governments. The *Académie Française* was established in 1635 as a learned body of men of letters in order to prescribe and preserve accepted norms of the French language. It was linguistic, cultural and *political*; a key part of a deliberate and systematic programme of creating a shared French identity. When it decapitated the State to start anew, it accommodated existing networks and institutions into the highly centralised administrative and judicial structure and apparatus established by Napoleon - which is essentially still in place.

reasons, was instantly over-ridden as the party and the community came together in common cause.<sup>26</sup>

There is little doubt that the geopolitics of Venezia-Giulia informed and affected communists' self-awareness as members of a larger political grouping, as it did the orientation, functioning and particular agendas of the PCI Federation of Gorizia (see Chapter 4, pp. 5-6). This phenomenon is inextricably linked to complex regional dynamics, which in turn were part of the complex political nature of Italy itself. The fragmentary nature of Italian rule prior to Unification<sup>27</sup> and the protracted and disjointed nature of that process once underway, had led to a heightened importance of regional identities and affiliations in that country and even Italian communists tended to conceive of political praxis in the framework of and as being intrinsically relevant to regional contexts.<sup>28</sup> The geopolitics of Venezia-Giulia had dictated its history for centuries, and since the October Revolution, this sensitive border region had represented in the eyes of established authority a potential conduit

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<sup>26</sup> From a wider perspective,, it could be said that if geopolitics were relevant to the PCF as a national political organisation, it was in the sense that it was intrinsically French, and yet it looked not to Paris but to Moscow for its spiritual, ideological and arguably programmatic leadership. This was not by design, but was a state of affairs that had been dictated by history. What is in many a torn identity of French communists is implied here by **Jeannine Bechet**: 'The French Republic missed an important opportunity in excluding us – they should have listened to our propositions – then and now – we're not making revolutionary propositions but reasonable ones – even though revolution is our ultimate reasoning – there's integrity in our party, and people should see past the caricature they make of us – nothing makes me more mad than when they throw the Soviet Union in our faces – because for me the S.U. is millions of people who died for liberty – and they don't talk about that! They only talk about madmen who betrayed the communist cause ...', (**Bechet**, personal communication, August 18, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> The peninsula had been a patchwork of Principalities, Duchies, Republics, City States, Kingdoms, Empires until Unification in 1870. These entities of autonomous rule led over centuries to quite different cultural, linguistic and economic developments in certain areas and Italy's relatively late and geographically specific industrialisation also meant that there was less of this unifying dynamic than in certain other countries.

<sup>28</sup> In a more general sense however, the fact that Venezia-Giulia had been a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual region for centuries, also meant, by definition, that there was less political, ideological, cultural and psychological homogeneity amongst the local population as a whole than for example, La Seyne and Toulon, where the ethnic composition of those societies during our period was almost exclusively French nationals and naturalised Italians, and where the assimilation process into the 'French' way of life was a non-problematic process (especially in this Mediterranean region). Any political differentiation in terms of left / right tendency in the Var occurred within the framework of regional *French politics*.

for the ‘long hand of Moscow’, and was therefore to be treated with suspicion, and firmly contained.<sup>29</sup> Whilst it is true that all regions in Italy have strong cultural and political identities, for communists, the Venezia-Giulia region was surely one of the most problematic.

Illustrative of this feeling of an almost separation of Venezia-Giulia and the rest of Italy is the commonly held view expressed here by **Danilo Verginella**, that the region had also been willfully neglected in terms of capital investment on the part of national government:

‘Here we were abandoned by Italy because of the Tito connection – the region was returned to Italy but there was the fear – we used to say – not even the party leadership in Rome went out of its way to help us up here – it should have done more than it did ...’,  
(**Verginella**, personal communication, December 10, 2009).

In these parts, as previously discussed, one of the most important and significant developments for communists had been the Tito-Stalin split or *la rottura* of 1948. In discussing the impact of this dramatic development on our community - as **Silvano Morsolin** points out:

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<sup>29</sup> The geopolitical influence of the region on communists coincides with the coming to power of the Fascist regime in 1922 and the banning of the PCI in 1926. These events and developments were of course crucial to our communities in Monfalcone and Gorizia, and within living family memory. As we have seen, the geopolitics of this region determined the singular levels and nature of Fascist discrimination against communists and Slovenians during the inter-war period – when they were considered ‘dangerous’ and ‘foreign’; it determined the strong implantation of right-wing elements in the region as a result as part of the ‘Italianisation’ programme in the form of public sector personnel brought-in from outside the region (predominantly from the South of Italy); it determined post-war events as the region became overnight the first theatre of the Cold War as Italy and the new Yugoslavia made their claims on the region; it determined a further demographic shift towards the right as an immediate result of thousands of Istrians leaving the new Yugoslavia and coming-in to the area post ’45; it determined an exodus of 3.000 approx. Italian communist to Yugoslavia post ’45, thereby reducing the numbers of communist in the region; it determined the influence exerted on the Italian government by United States to ‘contain’ the area, both economically / politically, both pre- and post September 1947 (and during our period); whilst it not determine the Tito-Stalin split in itself it did bring about an analogous split in the Federation of Gorizia between Italian and Slovenian *compagni*, mostly in Gorizia itself, and the imprisonment and torture in Yugoslavia and / or expulsion from Yugoslavia of communists returning, mostly to Monfalcone. All of the above consequences of the geopolitics of the region, of Gorizia as Provincial capital and Monfalcone as its industrial hub, had a direct influence on the realities of our period.

‘Yugoslavia was a stone’s throw away – and we still had people in prison over there in 1956 ...’, (**Morsolin**, personal communication, December 1, 2009).

**Silvino Poletto** describes the singularity of that experience for comrades in the region, how it gave them a different outlook to those in other parts of Italy, and how it reinforced the Stalinist standpoint in Venezia-Giulia and in certain environments within the region in particular:

‘A communist in Bologna for example didn’t understand what the Cominform resolution meant for us – the internal relations between communists – on this border we had everyday contact with Yugoslavia ... not only that but the period that came after ... the communists from Monfalcone – the vast majority – declared themselves pro-Stalin and they put them in prison over there, tortured some of them, concentration camps, others died ... but they didn’t change their minds – they were filo-Soviets, and for them Tito was a traitor ...’, (**Poletto**, personal communication, October 12, 2008).<sup>30</sup>

This type of graphic account illustrates the ways in which and the extents to which transnational events, forces and dynamics can impact on smaller areas and / or on interest groups. During interviews informants often link, juxtapose, or indeed momentarily superimpose this macro / micro event with or onto memories of later events and developments. This in itself is indicative of the ways in which and the extents to which this moment in their regional and local history shaped not only contemporary but subsequent understandings of realities, and not least of this last category are the Soviet interventions in Hungary in 1956, which in the final analysis, were informed by ‘revolutionary’ / ‘reformist’ perspectives.

## (ii) Understandings of / relation to history

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<sup>30</sup> Two of the informants, **Guido Russi** and **Dino Zanuttin**, had experienced life in Tito’s prisons before being expelled from the country as ‘dangerous elements’. Others such **Silvano Bacicchi** and the husband of **Etta Comar** had managed to avoid imprisonment by escaping by boat at night to Italy.

The French communists' (and their party's) understanding of contemporary issues was inevitably informed by their long, coherent view of history that was (is) inherently linked to the French Revolution, the French Republic, the Paris Commune – and as well of course, to the October Revolution.

**Robert Gourvenec:**

‘You have to go back our roots – what’s always stuck in my mind was the Paris Commune – it’s relevant today to what communists are trying to do – and it was a big influence on Lenin and company too ...’, (**Gourvenec**, personal communication, July 28, 2009).

**Dr. Paul Raybaud**

‘You can’t compare the Italian Republic with the French! – we have 200 years of Republican history – Italy only became a Republic in 1946 ...’, (**Raybaud**, personal communication,

On the other hand, **Dino Zanuttin**, who had come to Italy for the first time as a young adult with his parents when they returned to Monfalcone after years working in France:

‘Italians are lucky that they’ve had a problematic unification as a nation state – that they didn’t start out with this monolithic interpretation of the state - even today Italy has problems coming together as a nation state – there’s a greater mental flexibility – and you can see that clearly in the party’s dissolving itself in Bologna in 1991 - it didn’t wait to be asked to go - said to itself that it was time to change – that’s a clear indication of the difference between the PCI and the PCF ...’, (**Zanuttin**, personal communication,

French communists saw their commitment to the internationalist socialist project as being not only firmly located within the international communist movement but also as being closely associated with and indeed underpinned by their French (proletarian) Republican *principles* and *values*. This was a community that attached significant importance to, and recognised itself in, *symbolic* political struggles and events. It tended to look to key moments in its collective history for contemporary political references e.g. the French

Revolution *in relation to* WW2 Resistance, the Congress of Tours *in relation to* the situation in La Seyne between Socialists and Communists, the Popular Front of 1934-6 *in relation to* the post-war campaign to re-form this alliance as a way of returning to power. In other words, it sought to apply wider notions and interpretive frameworks to local issues and situations. Very little of the empirical evidence gathered for this study indicates that local or regional issues were treated *as* local or regional issues in 1956 i.e. without being explicitly linked to, for example, the campaign to re-form the Popular Front, or the campaign against the war in Algeria, or in the case of the economy, without its being linked to the party's ideological opposition to the European project, and all that signified and entailed. The national / international *was* the local. This can be seen in a series of Police Intelligence documents reporting on PCF and CGT meetings that autumn:

‘A public meeting organised by the PCF was held yesterday October 5, 1956 at 18.30 at the Bar Tabac, Place de le Setrinette, Toulon.

Meeting presided over by Mme. Baron from the UFF and Councilor M. Sauli Julien. Both started by detailing the accomplishments of the Town Council since the Socialist / Communist single-list alliance. They then gave a comprehensive evaluation of current political situation in France, terminating on the issues of Suez and Algeria, where cease-fires ‘would save millions of francs that could be used to raise the salaries of the working classes ...’, (Sûreté Nationale: Note d’Information, October 6, 1956, p.1).

1<sup>st</sup> November demonstrations organised by the PCF, La Seyne.

One day strike by refuse collectors in La Seyne ...

220 workers from the FCM leave work 15 minutes before time as directed by the CGT

Wreath placed on the War Monument, La Seyne

CGT meeting at the Labour Exchange, La Seyne 18.30

M. Puccini, CGT, stigmatised the Franco-British action in Egypt, affirms that the uprising in Hungary is a Fascist coup, criticise government policy that is impoverishing the working class ...', (Le Commissaire de Police de La Seyne, November 13, 1956, pp. 1-2).

'General Assembly of the CGT - Metal Workers in La Seyne

- 1 Assembly approved the autonomy of the CGT Metal Workers of La Seyne decided by the Confederal Committee
- 2 Preparation for the Congress of 2.2.57

Conclusion (essential ideas)

'On the November 7 Fascists attacked France ... sweeping changes are afoot ... the capitalist beast is looking death in the face but in its death throes takes its final shots ...', (Ministère de l'Intérieur, December 20, 1956, p.1)

The Soviet interventions in Hungary were seen by the vast majority of communists in La Seyne and Toulon in the light of universal precepts and understood according to the logic of the proletarian revolution, that is, it was seen as a counter-revolution that needed be put-down expediently and effectively in order to safeguard international socialism. Criticism of this stance was seen by these comrades as sympathy with the counter-revolution, or as a lack of politicization pure and simple.

The Italian communists' (and their party's) understandings of contemporary issues were inevitably informed by a view of history that was shorter, episodic rather than linear and thus less coherent than that of their French counterparts. This is directly related to the fact that Italy itself is a relatively young political construct in the European context, and its lack of an effective centralising state, until the Fascist regime in 1922-45,<sup>31</sup> had led not only to the forming of strong regional identities up and down the peninsula, but had undermined a

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<sup>31</sup> In the North of Italy, from 1943-5 a German Fascist regime was effectively in power in the form of the Italian Social Republic with Mussolini as its puppet leader.

shared sense of continuity over time.<sup>32</sup> These conditions resulted in Italian communists thinking in terms that were at once regional and internationalist, rather than national, and as **Alberto Clemente** reminds us:

‘We’d only known ‘Italy’ in the form of Fascism ...’, (**Clemente**, personal communication, November 25, 2009).<sup>33</sup>

Unlike their French siblings, Italian communists tended to look for contemporary political references closer to home in events, developments, periods and turning points of direct relevance to them, usually grounded in immediate realities - which were *also* distinct articulations of wider struggles. This North Eastern frontier region of Italy had been the site of key Twentieth Century international / national political developments, not least in the post-war period, and it was inevitably the communists who had suffered the most as a consequence of them. Italian communists attached importance of course to the party’s inception in Livorno in 1921 and to Amedeo Bordiga and Antonio Gramsci its founders, however the PCI was outlawed in 1926-43 (1945 in North Italy), which cut short its maturation as a mainstream political party at a national level and therefore its substantive influence. Italian communists had had to take matters into their own hands early on in their history in surviving as a clandestine organisation in local and regional contexts<sup>34</sup> and thus they

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<sup>32</sup> The cohesive element *par excellence* that was at once ‘capillary’ and a centrifuging force and to all intents and purposes a para-political entity, had for centuries been of course the Catholic Church.

<sup>33</sup> From 1918 to 1922, Italy as a whole had been mismanaged by the Italian government. National humiliation, severe economic hardships and widespread disillusionment had led to strikes, civil unrest and the rise of extremism. What has remained in living family history in Venezia-Giulia as regards the post WW1 experience is the rise and installation of the Fascist regime.

<sup>34</sup> Many Italian communists had gone abroad during the Fascist period with the express purpose of carrying out their anti-Fascist resistance activities in a more hospitable environment, often in France. Some of these would regularly carry out espionage between both countries and it would be interesting to see whether the political engagement became more internationalist, less associated with an Italian regional identity of the individual as a consequence. Other Italian communists (and communist sympathisers) had been exiled by the Fascist regime, including of course Togliatti. Many Italians had gone to France, including the La Seyne (including Pietro Nenni), to resist Fascism either passively or actively. Many Italian communists from the Venezia-Giulian region e.g. the Fontanot brothers, after whom a street in Paris has been named, had gone to France during the inter-war period. Based there, they were able to engaged in anti-Fascist activity in France itself and in Italy. Some also aided Spanish émigrés after 1936 or fought

conceived their commitment to international socialism as being represented in and measured according to the success of their direct political engagement on a day to day basis in the task of bringing about the transition to socialism in the here (or Yugoslavia) and now.<sup>35</sup> **Danilo Verginella** describes his experiences of such an engagement:

‘I was born in 1922 ...

*What was your experience during the war?*

‘... June 12 ’43 the Resistance movement was already up and running in the shipyards in Monfalcone – I used to say that the shipyards were a university proletarian militancy – intelligent people, people who had been in fascist prisons – you didn’t mess with them ...

*They were militant?*

‘You can say that again! ...’, (**Verginella**, personal communication, December 10, 2009).

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alongside other anti-Fascists in the Spanish Civil War as part of the International Brigades. The PCF had itself been forced underground in 1939. (see Puppini

<sup>35</sup> It was Gramsci’s understanding of this phenomenon that influenced aspects of his political thought and ultimately made the contribution it did to Italian communism. Here, Gramsci explains that in his more ‘empirical’ reading / application of Marxist theory, there is no discontinuity, and should not be dismissed as ‘unscientific’: ‘A fundamental theoretical question is raised: can modern theory [Marxism] be in opposition to the ‘spontaneous’ feelings of the masses? (‘Spontaneous’ in the sense that they...have been formed through everyday experience illuminated by ‘common sense’...) It cannot be in opposition to them. Between the two there is a ‘quantitative’ difference of degree, not one of quality. A reciprocal ‘reduction’ so to speak, a passage from one to the other and vice versa, must be possible. (Gramsci, n.d.) ‘The leadership given to the movement was both creative and correct. This leadership was not ‘abstract’... It applied itself to real men, formed in specific historical relations, with specific feelings, outlooks, fragmentary conceptions of the world, etc, which were the result of ‘spontaneous’ combinations of a given situation of material production with the ‘fortuitous’ agglomeration within it of disparate social elements. This element of ‘spontaneity’ was not neglected and even less despised. It was educated, directed, purged of extraneous contaminations; the aim was to bring it into line with modern theory—but in a living and historically effective manner...the movement gave the masses a ‘theoretical’ consciousness of being creators of historical and institutional values, of being founders of a state.’ (Gramsci, n.d.).

For our communities in Monfalcone and Gorizia, formative moments in their collective history that informed contemporary perspectives in 1956 include: the communist-led clandestine anti-Fascist resistance in the Monfalcone shipyards and early participation, along with their Slovenian comrades in the War of Liberation *in relation to* this community's immediate post-war internationalist orientation and agenda; the PCRG's defeat in its post-war campaign to annex the region to the new Yugoslavia and its subsequent transformation into a national political party of mass organisation *in relation to* notions of 'national roads to socialism' (interpreted in different ways by sectors of the regional party membership between 1947-56: by the rank and file as a political expedient and by the federation elite in its full 'progressive' i.e. anti-Stalinist sense) that was and affirmed in the XX Congress in 1956; the Tito-Stalin split in 1948 and its multiple and tangible consequences in the region *in relation to* perspectives on the Soviet interventions in the Hungarian Revolution. The split had engendered in the region a) an aversion to any dissent to Soviet orthodoxy as articulated in the stance of the *conformisi* (the vast majority of comrades) as a point of principle / as a result of the negative experiences of the comrades from Monfalcone in Yugoslavia at the time of the split and the attendant socio-economic-political problems in Monfalcone of the ensuing counter-exodus, b) the support of Tito's actions as articulated in that of the *titini* - who made-up the vast majority of the Slovenian comrades, particularly in and around the town of Gorizia, c) a cautionary skepticism vis-à-vis any such power politics e.g. Stalin vs. Tito, and since 1953, an automatic interest in the changes in dynamics that were occurring between Moscow and Belgrade.<sup>36</sup>

### **What this thesis has contributed**

This study has revealed *the widespread Stalinist perspectives of Communist Party members* in each of our case-locations (if to different extents) in 1956 as

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<sup>36</sup> As a result of Khrushchev's 'thaw' in relations with those leaders and regimes that had been disinherited by Stalin, notably Josep Tito, which was part of his strategy of cultivating the non-aligned

communicated most clearly in reactions to the Soviet interventions in Hungary in the autumn of that year. That meant that the majorities in each case-study supported the interventions unequivocally or automatically, either from a position of trust, or in spite of (or perhaps because of) mixed feelings. The study shows that this Stalinist perspective came, on the one hand, from strong political convictions that either originated in or were consolidated by their WW2 experiences, and on the other, as they saw it, from the on-going successes of the socialist realities of Eastern Europe (despite evidence to the contrary). The ‘conservatism’ (albeit ‘revolutionary’) inherent in the Stalinist stance was a fundamental reference to this constituency, the touchstone of communist solidarity, its rhetoric a daily source of strength, comfort, constancy, that reinforced an essential identity within and across national contexts in a Cold War predicament.

Despite this common denominator in reactions to the interventions, the study also shows that *there was no single communist experience*. With regards to reactions to the Soviet interventions, it might well be expected that reactions would have been identical in these two case-communities at the time. It was, after all, a mutually significant event for ostensibly consonant groups of people that in turn were part of an international movement based on universal precepts. Nonetheless, evidence points strongly to there having been a marked diversity in perspectives and responses (even where there is an unshaking loyalty to Stalin this does not appear to have been felt in identical ways; in the French study this comes across as having been strongly *historical / to do with principles and values*; whereas in the Italian there is more a sense of its being linked to *a regional historical trajectory* and that it was *experiential*). These differences in perspectives and responses as evidenced in oral and written sources were sometimes flagrant (see *Il Manifesto* in Chapter 8), sometimes understated (e.g. see *Distance and discontinuity* in Chapter 7), and some unstated at the time (e.g. see **Oustrière** in Chapters 5,7) and they reflect different:

- histories
  - French case-study: national, regional, local
  - Italian case-study: regional, local and national
- conditions
  - French case-study: local, regional, national
  - Italian case-study: regional, local, national
- party cultures
  - French case-study: nation, regional, local
  - Italian case-study: regional, local, national.

The reactions to the interventions as evidenced in oral and written documents in the Italian case were strikingly less coherent and reflect the more complex conditions and dynamics in existence and at play in that case-community, which explain the differentiation in responses according to: party culture, the role the individual fulfilled within in the party at the time, occupation, life experience, culture (in this multi-ethnic region) etc. *However in the French case too there were differences*; the everyday life of the party at the regional and local level was effectively fraught with discontinuities, tensions, rivalries and differences of ‘opinion’ – indeed in some ways even more so than in the Italian study. Whilst these differences were contained within the centralist organisational model of the national party structure on programmatic levels; and whilst they were instantly over-ridden where necessary when necessary, they were not without effects on the day to day functioning of the Var Federation and its regional and local apparatuses and membership bodies.<sup>37</sup>

### **How this research facilitates other studies**

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<sup>37</sup> In other words, things seem to have been more transparent, more explicit and less problematic in the PCI Federation of Gorizia than in the PCF Var Federation at this conjuncture. Perhaps this means that where human subjects are concerned, however consciously and willingly they subscribe to a belief system, institution or movement, coherence cannot effectively be introduced from without, or from above, or at least not in the long-term. Rather, it must come about from within that organisation via the active and informed participation of its members. In the context of this study, this would be more likely to be the case where democratic centralism functioned as it was designed to.

This study has revealed a number of issues and areas that request further attention, either from comparative perspectives or via specific studies. One of the most obvious issues emerging from this research, although one that in terms of data collection would be likely to prove problematic is: *Who were those individuals (11% of the regional party membership) who left the PCF Var Federation membership between 1956-7?* (All other evidence points to the raw statistical data indicating defections in the Federation of Gorizia as being unreliable.) The important questions in this regard that are also related to the current study would include: What were their occupations? Where were they working / living in the department i.e. in what type of sectors? What were their war experiences? This would help confirm or contest the view represented in oral testimonies and in Police Intelligence documents that people who left the PCF Var Federation at this time were predominantly professional people, those in white collar occupations and professional people, those in agricultural environments. It would also add weight to the hypothesis that those to have left at this time were more likely to have been those who had joined the party after the war, who had possibly been swept-along in the general mood of enthusiasm and gratitude towards the communists at that conjuncture, but whose commitment to the cause may not have been as deep-rooted, as ‘ideological’, as others. The findings of such a study would add to understandings of the link between a) occupational background and level of education b) the nature of political convictions – perhaps linked to generational issues, that is, at what point these respondents joined the party, and c) the levels of critical awareness in the PCF at the time. In order to embark on such a study, a different approach to data collection would have to be adopted, that is to say, that a different route would need to be taken in locating potential respondents in view of the likely ‘diffuse’ political nature of such a sample.

Another obvious and more accessible avenue of enquiry flagged-up by this research is: *Why was the PCI Federation of Mantova the only other in the country to make a stand over Budapest?* What was special about the politics of that federation / region / the protagonists involved that led to its making a

formal protest? Such a study would provide further insights into a) the nature and extent of national cohesion within the PCI at this time b) interpretations of militancy in the party and therefore interpretations of contemporary communist politics *per se* c) the importance and nature of regional diversity for Italian communism. The findings of the current study in relation to the Federations of Gorizia and Mantova's opposition to the interventions had been over-looked / neglected in the history of Italian communism, therefore a study that concentrates on the Federation of Mantova, or that makes a comparison between the Federations of Gorizia and Mantova in relation to the current topic promises to be *as productive*, adding significantly to understandings of Italian communism in the post-war era.

Another area of enquiry implied by this research are *the specificities of border regions in relation to: how Communist Party Federations in these areas understood their place, role and function within the national party structure and organization*. For example, those of Federations of Alpes-Maritimes and Piedmont on the French – Italian borders, in view of the differences identified here (in which case the study would be period specific) between the political cultures of the PCF / PCI i.e. Were these differences less accentuated in these locations given the physical proximity and potential cross-fertilisation of political cultures and practices – or not? For example, the differences between the Italian border towns of Gorizia and Trieste (69 kilometres distance) in relation to their respective positions vis-à-vis the Yugoslavian question, their relations with Rome, and / or their reactions to the Soviet interventions, all of which being very different. Such a study would add to the knowledge and understandings of the diverse influences, exigencies and realities of frontier regions and the extents to which and ways in which these were reconciled within the functioning and ethos of a cohesive organisation such as the Communist Party

With regard to ascertaining levels of and understandings of militancy within Western communism at this time, and in so doing, ascertaining whether the

findings of this study denote typicality; useful studies would be of the same problematic i.e. *reactions to the Soviet intervention as applied in other types of communist community* either as single case studies or valid comparisons, for example in mining towns; or in ports such as Le Havre where ship-building was secondary (and there was therefore a higher concentration of lesser skilled workers than was the case in the current study); in high profile communist bastions such as in the Red Belt around Paris or in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy? Such studies would test the propositions that a) the more ‘militant’ the communist (as understood as the defense of a commonly held communist perspective), the more s/he supported the interventions and b) that this stance was automatically linked to a ‘Stalinist’ perspective *per se* and c) that occupation, working environment and level of education had a bearing on these stances.

### **8.3 Retrospectives**

This final section of the thesis features a representative selection of informants’ retrospective analyses looking at the significance and legacy of the events in question, at micro / macro levels. These analyses were invariably solicited, or were provided automatically by the informants, at the end of an interview, when s/he/they were in a focused but naturally reflective state of mind. In this way they are spontaneous, nevertheless they automatically address a number of generic issues regarding memory, context, belief systems *per se* etc. They make clear for example *the role of temporal distance* in processing events in the minds of individual actors and of groups, and the way in which perceptions, understandings and interpretations of events alter over time, often informed by subsequent developments and contextual shifts. They also make clear *the importance of context* in forming consciousness and indeed to a significant degree, in shaping reality itself, and they are testament to the informants’ *ability to distinguish and travel between past and contemporary contexts* in providing prima facie knowledge of the issues in question and making informed and considered evaluations as to their long-term impact.

They shed light on the very nature and durability of belief systems, that is to say, what causes them to be challenged? when do they begin to fragment? *can* they remain constant and unchanging over, for example, the space of fifty years? *The informants' comments and observations in relation to their own changing attitudes are as candid as their accounts of their reactions to the events of 1956*, and in all instances demonstrate a complete if attenuated assumption of personal and collective responsibility for actions / reactions / failure to react (or rather, the choice not to react). These individuals were no 'robotons' meekly following party diktats in 1956 but instead highly committed political actors (by definition) who had made 'conscious' political choices in particular contexts (both immediate and wider contexts), and this is *as true* in La Seyne and Toulon as it was in Monfalcone and Gorizia. Given the micro / macro contexts at the time, the range of reactions from Communist party members in our case-communities to the events in question it must be said, are hardly surprising.

In one of his retrospective analyses of our events, **Renato Papais** - Resistance fighter at sixteen, life-long communist militant, party and union cadre – talks of the *Stalinist predicament* that prevailed amongst the rank and file in Monfalcone in 1956, and of how this altered over time:

'Togliatti was cleverer than we were – more astute – we were radical - but communists from around here – we've got our own problems – we were Leninist – they could be softer ...

... the vast majority of *compagni* around here reacted in opposition to Poletto's manifesto ...

... we lost 250 votes in my commune (in the administrative elections in December 1956) over Budapest! we could have won ...

... after Budapest we started having debates in the party – plan a new programme - there was a divergence between the progressives and 'the hard ones' who had suffered under Fascism who followed the Soviet Union blindly ... we had to bring them round ...

... we'd woken-up by the time of Czechoslovakia ...', (**Papais**, personal communication, June 14, 2010).

**René Merle** – son of Toussaint Merle, Communist Mayor of La Seyne 1947-69:

‘They were really all 100% Stalinist – for Poznan, Budapest – or anything - the time, people supported the interventions without hesitation – any reflection came afterwards ...’, (**Merle**, personal communication, July 29, 2010)

**Giovanni Sini** from La Garde just outside La Seyne, is a life-long communist and trade union activist, whose retrospective analysis of events is a monument to auto-critique:

‘Hungary? I think we gave it other meanings because we were fanatical Stalinists ...’, (**Sini**, personal communication, August 3, 2009).

**Jeannine Bechet** – is a life-long communist militant, who often accompanied her mother to demonstrations in Paris during the Popular Front era, active in her own right in those in the capital during the period 1947-8; a social worker in La Seyne communist controlled council from 1954 onwards; involved in the Peace Movement, was Secretary of the Section in La Seyne (Town) in the 1960s etc. In this particular example of retrospective analysis **Madame Bechet** looks back on a lifetime of political activism, and she talks about *the power of a given time or period, place and convergence of events, circumstances and influences to form and inform mindsets, opinions and actions*:

‘How can I explain to you? that generation was born with the party – I was born in 1924 – the party in 1920 – for me it was an epoch – I don’t exaggerate the sentiments we had at the time - unfortunately, we weren’t always led well politically ...

... we realise things after the event - it’s too easy to judge through the filter of now - communists back then were not the same as those of today ...

... back then we'd just come out of a war – you have to remember that the communists who had come out of the war were angry – I was too – we were angry at what we'd sacrificed – millions dead for an idiot ...

... if you really want to analyse the question - at the time of the revolution (October) all the world mobilised against the Soviet Union – the world was paranoid – and all this tension created paranoia in the Soviet Union too – a fear of others that was detrimental to *them ...*', (**Bechet**, personal communication, August 18, 2009).

**Dr. George Richard** – long-standing PCF member also describes *the information context in 1956, and how perspectives change over time*:

‘For the XX Congress we didn’t have a lot of information – now we see things differently to how we did at the time ...’, (**George**, personal communication, May 21, 2010).

**Elda Soranzio** – factory worker, long-standing Communist Party member and union cadre from the town of Ronchi, just outside Monfalcone, recalls specifically the *information context* that existed at the time and the less than objective view of things it provided, which for her community meant that the Soviets could do no wrong:

‘No-one really knew what going on in Budapest – we thought Russia was emancipated – that it was a more just society - that they had better working conditions ...’,

she describes the collective mindset of her community based-on historical interpretation:

‘... we believed the Soviets because they’d fought against the Nazis - lots of them died – we mustn’t forget that ...’,

and she reflects on *how perceptions change over time*:

‘... looking back Russia was wrong to invade Hungary that way – but who knew at the time? (**Soranzio**, personal communication, June 12, 2010).

**Senatore Silvano Bacicchi** – is a former shipyard worker, life-long communist militant, Resistance fighter, Secretary of the nearby Federation of Udine in 1956, and future national politician. In this particular interview he *looks back over time* to give a succinct contextualisation of the significance of 1956 for the Italian communist movement:

‘That was an iconic year – the events in Hungary posed problems – not immediately – for understandings of international communism and here in Italy the idea of a different communism started – it was already articulated in Togliatti’s ‘Salerno Turn’ in ’45<sup>38</sup> but then it grew and got re-affirmed after ’56, the idea became clearer and more discussed ...’, (**Bacicchi**, personal communication, December 8, 2009).

**Lucien Conac** – a life-long communist militant, shipyard worker and trade union activist, talks about the fast-moving and dramatic *the Cold War context* that informed the reactions of ordinary communists in La Seyne:

‘It (Budapest) wasn’t something that marked us ... you know events pass very quickly - Suez eclipsed Hungary - that and Algeria - that became the news – Budapest was a flash in the pan ...  
... what’s certain is that in the Cold War things were black and white and there was little room for doubt, it was a time of certitudes that the US was bad that socialism was good, it was the future, justice, equality, the will for peace – all this was indisputable for 90-95% of the militants ... obviously people like Aragon had a vision of the world larger than we did in the workplace ...’,

he also talks about party culture at grass-roots levels, political commitment and core beliefs:

11% of people leaving the federation? where did you get these figures? .... I’m certain there won’t have that many people leaving who made a clear political decision – I don’t believe that for a

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<sup>38</sup> Togliatti’s decision, on returning to Italy from his exile in Moscow, to reject the Soviet model of socialism for a more national-societal, constitutional model, and to take the Party into Badoglio’s government.

second – the number of members can go up and down in relation to the activity of the militants - not everyone was paid up all of the time and there was always a bit of juggling to do with finance – there are ups and downs for all sorts of reasons – but if there was a loss of members at this point it will have to be seen in a regular downward trend ...

.... if people *did* leave over Hungary it'll have been waverers, towards the right of the party - more influenced by the bourgeois press - mostly intellectuals – maybe some people left over the Special Powers – now that would be different ...', (**Conac**, personal communication, October 10, 2008).

**Professor Alberto Buvoli** – a life-long communist sympathiser, friend of many of the Italian informants in this study also draws our attention to *the Cold War context, geopolitics and the importance of 'time-travel' in historical interpretation:*

'Events in Hungary were portrayed here as (communist) propaganda – we only learned after of the deaths – we thought at the time – well the Soviets can't just look-on whilst all this is happening? We were misinformed and we focused on the Franco-British attacks on Suez ...

... it was difficult for us to break with the SU because communists around here were really attached to the SU – really attached - Soviet aggression didn't changed a thing for Russofiles – or with regard to party membership – a mere decade before people had died shouting 'Long Live Stalin! what do you expect?

... you have to think how people thought back then not how people think now ...', (**Buvoli**, personal communication, June 12, 2010).

**Suzanne Bertrand** – long-standing communist sympathiser and then party member, describes *the effect the Cold War context had on ordinary people*, and looks back from today's standpoint on levels of critical awareness in the communist community in that period:

‘We asked ourselves how it would all end – it was frightening in the Cold War – but it’s probably true that we didn’t think enough about Hungary ...’, (**Bertrand**, personal communication, May 24, 2010).

In his retrospective observations, **Batiste Colonna** – long-standing communist party member and trade union activist describes *the information context* at the time, which inevitably influenced reactions, but to an extent only visible after the event:

‘We were in a period when propaganda was important remember ...’, (**Colonna**, personal communication, August 3, 2009).

In one of his evaluations of the Soviet interventions, **Dr. Paul Raybaud** - Resistance fighter, long-standing communist militant and intellectual - discusses communism as a *Twentieth Century phenomenon*, depicting a quasi permanent state of Cold War for much of that time:

‘It was the Cold War – but actually ever since the October Revolution there’s been anti-Russian sentiment – and even now there’s mistrust ...’, (**Raybaud**, personal communication, August 31, 2009).

On another occasion he discusses a range of issues, assimilating a personal trajectory, post hoc evaluations and conclusions:

‘The XX Congress was a façade for the exterior – at the same time maybe *‘une pries de position’* (posturing) Khrushchev wanted to replace Stalin – it was *‘une querelle de chef’* (rivalry at the top) – I don’t think there was much difference between them personally ...

... if you like I followed the party blindly in those days because I really respected the communist leaders back then, from my experiences in the Resistance ...

... my role was a militant – a trusted foot soldier due to my Resistance record – I was *for* the Soviet interventions – as a militant communist at the time – what with the CIA stirring-up

trouble in Hungary – it (this episode) turned out to be one of the reasons I left the party but afterwards – not at the time ...

... you can see the attitude of the average comrade at that time by what was in the communist press ... an unquestioning adherence to the cause ... and our reactions were validated in our minds by the Cold War situation ...

... at the time we lived in a tight circle – at the time I didn't have a 'revelation' only afterwards I knew that the Party was too close to the Soviet Union ...

... around here they swallowed the whole business hook, line and sinker! – we were complicit! they didn't for a minute question the Stalinist perspective of the party - the comrades who had been through the war – instead of questioning – there was blind trust – we were thinking about principles when it was politics! (NB the use of a *mélange* of pronouns, possibly to denote a *mélange* of perspectives adopted), (**Raybaud**, personal communication, October 21, 2008).

**Francisque Luminet** – long-standing communist sympathiser and then party member also talks of party culture, in the sense of the French communists' inherent tendency to focus on 'big' issues. He looks back at 1956 and identifies the XX Congress of the Soviet Union in February that year as having the more *significant* development for communists in France:

'XX Congress (of the CPSU) that year resonated more than Budapest – Budapest was attenuated ...', (**Luminet**, personal communication, October 15, 2008).

The greater importance attached to the 'revolutionary' / reformist substance of the XX Congress, as opposed to that given to events in Budapest, reflects the communist state of mind at that conjuncture: if hard-working comrades were to give time and consideration to macro issues, it would be to those of relevance to them, and to their cause, certainly not to a Western inspired Horthyist counter-coup over in Hungary that was being whipped-up out of all proportion by the political mainstream. (It is also interesting to remember that in the

Italian example, it was the senior cadres in the Federation Committee in particular rather than the rank and file who were particularly interested in the ideological content of the XX Congress *per se* - but not for the same reasons.)

**Italo Chiarion** – life-long communist, intellectual and senior party cadre in the Federation of Gorizia talks of the part time itself plays in people’s perceptions and evaluations of events, and of counter-factual and speculative history:

‘I say that overtime our manifesto was proved right! people say that the SU was irredeemable but I say that if Khrushchev had remained faithful to the XX Congress history would be different - but he got scared – and things remained frozen for the next 20 years – when Gorbachev arrived it was too late ...

... and it might have been a case of when Hungary erupted Togliatti had thought “He (Khrushchev)’s in the process of *disgelo* – thaw – reform - now’s not the moment to make a fuss” – he (Togliatti) was very strategic ...’, (**Chiarion**, personal communication, December 14, 2009).

**Alberto Clemente** – life-long communist and mid-level party cadre from Turriaco, on the outskirts of Monfalcone, says that it became clear post 1956 that **Silvino Poletto** had been a politician ‘before his time’:

‘Poletto wasn’t on his own with that manifesto but he was in a minority - back then we just kept justifying things - you don’t always realise what’s going on at the time - people really started to change their ideas much later ...

... basically there’s always been two lines in the PCI – officially there was one – but underneath there were two because one was more Soviet than the Soviets, very sectarian, especially the ones who’d suffered under Fascism – these carried that baggage with them – and this was the cause of conflict sometimes ...

... but then in retrospect, it became a turning point – people started to get more critical really from that moment – and we had ‘the

Italian road to socialism' no?' (**Clemente**, personal communication, November 26, 2009).

**Armand Conan** – life-long communist militant and future Communist Mayor of Carqueranne, on the outskirts of La Seyne talks of *context* and how it shapes perceptions, and the way in *time* itself can destabilise belief systems:

‘There may have been momentary misgivings – “How can this be happenings?” that sort of thing – but also “They’re attacking communism after all they did in the war!” – so our reaction was to defend communism from those who were attacking it ...

... anyway we can’t be sure it wasn’t a CIA plot – it was the Cold War don’t forget – they’d infiltrated the unions in France – it was the role of the United States and the CIA to push for a confrontation – like afterwards in Chile – but now we wouldn’t be so uncritical ...

... for us the turning point was Czechoslovakia – in ’68 – it was harder to put down to capitalism – and there wasn’t all the rest like Algeria, Suez ...’, (**Conan**, personal communication, May 29, 2010).

**Jacques Brémond** – shipyard worker and life-long communist militant remembers his *ambivalent feelings at the time* of the interventions, and identifies the *differences in attitudes and understandings that come with the time*, as they are tested in different situations and against new problematics:

‘With time we realised that something had been seriously wrong – we’re not daft - but - not at the time ...’, (**Brémond**, personal communication, October 23, 2008).

**Signor Visintin** from Ronchi, on the outskirts of Monfalcone looks back on the post-war period:

**Alessandro Visintin**: ‘In 1956 I was a members of the Secretariat of the Section in Ronchi, and the Communist Youth Federation – our rank and file thought the interventions were just – when ‘Cominform’ happened (Tito-Stalin split) consensus was that Tito

had betrayed the Soviet Union – when Budapest happened it was basically the same thing ...’,

as **Jacques Brémont, Signor Visintin** talks of *shifting viewpoints over time* resulting from new information contexts (the circumstances in the French example however, were distinct):

‘... now everything’s changed – the parameters of judgement ...

**Poletto** saw things with a lot of lucidity – he already understood that the invasion was wrong ...

(**Visintin**, personal communication, June 15, 2010).

**Josette Vincent, Francisque Luminet, Louis Blanc** provide a collective retrospective addressing most of the key themes discussed in this chapter:

**Vincent:** ‘... but would say it made an impression on us – Hungary?’

**Luminet:** ‘no – exactly – it didn’t – we were just trying to come to terms with the reality of the XX Congress – there’d been a long silence about that ...

**Blanc:** ‘there were many things about that they didn’t tell us – but all these things from ’56 were addressed in retrospect – at the moment of Czechoslovakia for example ...

**Luminet:** ‘... it became clear afterwards that the Soviet Union had applied the ideas of communism wrongly ...

**Vincent:** ‘... at the time party leaders had access to information we didn’t and when we did it was with a time lapse – they had analyses prepared ...

**Luminet:** ‘... the defense of the ‘Soviet big brother’ by the party leaders like Jacques Duclos – just after Budapest he wrote in *Cahiers du communisme*: “To be anti-Stalinist is to be anti-communist ...”

**Vincent:** ‘... we made errors – we adopted some unwise positions - I don’t think we listened to certain people when we should have –

even though we thought they were wrong at the time we should at least have listened more than we did - but we excluded them ...

**Luminet:** ‘like Garaudy for example in ’79 – and now when we think back ... we have to excuse ourselves ...

**Vincent:** ‘but we couldn’t express ourselves like we do now could we – do you remember? we couldn’t say what we wanted to because we were afraid of being misinterpreted – that’s true that ...

**Luminet:** ‘yes that is true ...

**Blanc:** ‘yes - it is ...

**Vincent:** ‘... the party was sectarian back then ...’, (**Vincent, Luminet, Blanc**, personal communication, October 15, 2008).

In discussing our events, **Josette Vincent** – life-long communist militant and local politician and **Madame Meunier**, the wife of a prominent party cadre in La Seyne, describe a belief system, its impact on individual and group understandings of events, and how time can alter adherence:

**Meunier:** ‘As regards Hungary – we all followed the directives of the party – we ignored lots of things ... we asked ourselves what was happening - the tanks - some were for and some were against but it wasn’t really a cause of disunity, we always found common ground, a solution, but it was difficult period - when we spoke together he (husband) was a bit disappointed, he was skeptic, he didn’t know what to believe, he didn’t know what to make of it ... I know it affected my husbands’ core beliefs and loyalties until he died ...

**Vincent:** There were things that we found out afterwards, but it wasn’t the first thing on our minds to know how things in Hungary were at the time, we couldn’t have know in any case – we didn’t have all the facts - sometimes we were too trusting - we closed our eyes to things - it wasn’t our problem – it was the Soviets who liberated the world and we had to defend them – afterwards we found out it wasn’t like that – in retrospect it was very problematic for us - and it did a lot of damage to the PCF ...’, (**Vincent / Meunier**, personal communication, October 17, 2008).

**Jo Pentagrossa** – sent to Algeria as a conscript in 1956, journalist, life-long communist militant, talks about the changes time brings in the minds of people:

‘Afterwards I thought differently, but it took a long time ...’,  
(**Pentagrossa**, personal communication, August 17, 2009).

As does **Mario Mauchigna** – mid-level cadre and life-long party militant: from Turriaco, communist stronghold on the outskirts of Monfalcone

‘Our conclusion was that it had been external forces, those of capitalism, that had penetrated that society and whipped-up a counter revolution ... obviously it was a very narrow analysis ...’,  
(**Mauchigna**, personal communication, June 13, 2010).

**Maurice Oustrière & Elise Bernard** talk about the past with the benefit of hindsight, and with the utmost candour:

**Oustrière:** ‘The fascist attacks after Budapest, if you like, weren’t attacking what they should have been attacking i.e. the malfunctioning of our party, they attacked communism *per se* – our core beliefs, it would have been better if they’d honed in on what was really going wrong ...

... we fell for the party line at the time – though logically the Horthy lot took advantage – that’s what we were told anyway ...

**Bernard:** ‘... our naivety!

**Oustrière:** ‘our naivety yes – but I don’t plead innocence – I plead guilty – I don’t pardon myself ...

**Bernard:** ‘for those of us who thought there was something wrong it was a question of cowardice! – but what could we have done?’

**Oustrière:** ‘I don’t know what we could have done but ...

**Bernard:** ‘in this little *département du Var* – to climb all the way up the party structure to make them do something about Budapest?!

**Oustrière:** ‘we could have tried to do something at least ...

**Bernard:** ‘it’s not easy to make a stand you know - especially when you’re on the low rungs of the ladder ...

... if we’d had Internet ... the PCF started to destroy itself from then on – it should have made a stand in ’56 against all of it ‘the cult of personality’, Poland, Budapest – it never has to date I don’t think – so people like me detached themselves from it bit by bit – ‘*Stalin – le petit père du peuple!*’ – it went downhill from then on - a comrade of mine said in the 60s – ‘You know - we’re a generation of cuckolds ...’, (**Bernard / Oustrière**, personal communication, October 10, 2008).

The last word of this thesis goes to **Dino Zanuttin** – life-long communist militant, imprisoned in Italy and in Yugoslavia for his political activism:

*So people around here supported the Stalinist perspective?*

‘Yes, but not because they understood the ins and outs - but because they’d been conditioned – especially during the War of Liberation – that meant defending the Soviet Union pure and simple ... these things aren’t written in books - but they determined individual choices ...

The rank and file is scared of losing the hope that it can change the world and so it hangs on to things – but it’s wrong ...

Naturally there was a problem that lasted for years if you like at the base of the party because you can’t change from one day to another – they made justifications – addressing the issues but also trying to separate the failings of one man and the true communist cause ...

*The significance of Budapest?*

Well obviously it was important – it was a big international issue – but also for the individual – to evolve his thinking ...

*At the time?*

Reactions like that are never immediate – after reflection – after digesting it all ...

*Do you think the PCI handled it well?*

‘That’s a difficult question – maybe it could have responded in a different way – but remember what it was like then – reactions were contextual – we responded with what knowledge we had then – in that moment – in that reality – we didn’t know how it would end – we could all do better now!

... mid-level cadres didn’t know how to handle it either – they had to wait for directives – read *l’Unità* that morning – they had a lot of responsibility – people could have made more ‘courageous’ decisions - but if these damaged something bigger?

Di Vittorio and Poletto must be applauded for this – others just kept on justifying things - you *could* say that those who criticised the interventions at the time were the real revolutionaries...’, (Zanuttin, personal communication, December 19, 2009).