

The Socialist International and Italian social democracy (1948–50): cultural differences and the ‘internationalisation of domestic quarrels’

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Abstract

Between 1948 and 1950 Comisco, the provisional Socialist International, and the British foreign office intervened in Italian politics to help the social democrats form a united party. The British Labour party came into conflict with the foreign office and the Dutch Labour party, as they disagreed over which Italian faction to support. The episode revealed the difference between the two parties’ political cultures and strategic choices, particularly on the issue of coalition government with centrist parties. The narrative of the intervention is followed by an appraisal of its success, the obstacles which limited it, and its short- and long-term effects.

Traditionally, historians of socialism, such as E. H. Carr and Donald Sassoon,¹ have taken the failure of the Socialist International as a symbol of the larger phenomenon of the ‘nationalization of socialism’, that is, the death of internationalism and the integration of socialists into the nation state.² The few existing works on the history of the Socialist International (for example, those by Julius Braunthal and Rolf Steininger)³ have adopted this paradigm; the exception being Guillaume Devin’s book which investigated the actual function of the organization and how it influenced the national parties.⁴ The renewed interest in transnational and informal politics has led to further studies on the international contacts between socialist parties – here termed ‘international fraternal relations’. These studies have uncovered examples of interference and transnational transfer, where the actions of a party in one nation could influence

¹ E. H. Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern, 1930–5* (1982), pp. 94n., 424–7; D. Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: the West European Left in the 20th Century* (2010), p. 210.

² I. Silone, ‘Missione europea del Socialismo’, in *Per Ignazio Silone*, ed. P. Bagnoli (Florence, 2002), pp. 91–2, originally published in *Europa Federata*, ed. F. Parri (Milan, 1947).

³ R. Steininger, *Deutschland und die Sozialistische Internationale nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, Darstellung und Dokumentation* (Bonn, 1979); J. Braunthal, *History of the International*, iii: *World Socialism 1943–68* (1980); L. Rapone, *La socialdemocrazia europea tra le due guerre: dall’organizzazione della pace alla Resistenza al fascismo, 1923–36* (Rome, 1999).

⁴ G. Devin, *L’Internationale socialiste: histoire et sociologie du socialisme internationale: 1945–90* (Paris, 1993), p. 202.

another party in a different nation, and where ideas and practices crossed borders, being adapted or rejected depending on the context.⁵

This article examines such an episode: the intervention of Comisco, the provisional Socialist International, in 1948–50, to help the Italian social democrats form a united party and prevail over the pro-communist socialists led by Pietro Nenni, the veteran leader of Italian socialism. The article also attempts to refine the conceptual tools for understanding international fraternal relations, suggesting in particular that factional struggle played a key role. It borrows from the school of ‘high politics’ the approach of studying politics as a competitive system of individuals and groups, but also gives proper consideration to how political culture – unconscious prejudices and past experiences – dictated political action.⁶

In order to understand how international socialist intervention worked, it is necessary to introduce a concept here called the ‘internationalisation of domestic quarrels’ – borrowing a phrase of William Gillies, international secretary of the Labour party for twenty years.⁷ Political parties are not cohesive entities, but complex networks of individuals and factions with different agendas competing for control over the organization. According to this hypothesis factional division and competition make possible and even encourage external and foreign intervention. Each faction tries to develop international links to gain prestige, define its identity, and establish supremacy. For example, in western Europe the minority left-wing factions sought help from eastern European socialists after the war, as did the minority right-wing factions from the Labour party and other western socialist parties.⁸ The Labour party received demands for pamphlets and articles to use against the communists from South America, Germany, Italy, Austria and Czechoslovakia.⁹ Ideological debates referenced Britain and eastern Europe as positive models of society which had achieved socialist

⁵ E.g., M. Broad, *Harold Wilson, Denmark and the Making of Labour European Policy* (Liverpool, 2017); I. Favretto, ‘La nascita del centrosinistra e la Gran Bretagna, Partito socialista, laburisti, foreign office’, *Italia Contemporanea*, ccii (1996), 5–44 and ‘The Wilson government and the Italian centre-left coalition: between “Socialist diplomacy” and Realpolitik, 1964–70’, *European Hist. Quart.*, xxxvi (2006), 421–44; T. C. Inlay, ‘“The policy of social democracy is self-consciously internationalist”: the German Social Democratic party’s internationalism after 1945’, *Jour. Modern History*, lxxxvi (2014), 81–123; T. Insall, *Haakon Lie, Denis Healey and the Making of an Anglo-Norwegian Special Relationship 1945–51* (Oslo, 2010); L. Nuti, *Gli Stati Uniti e l’apertura a sinistra, Importanza e limiti della presenza americana in Italia* (Rome, 1999); K. Steinnes, *The British Labour Party: Transnational Influences and European Community Membership, 1960–73* (Stuttgart, 2014); A. Varsori, ‘Il Labour Party e la crisi del socialismo italiano (1947–8)’, in *Socialismo Storia. Annali della Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini e della Fondazione di Studi Storici Filippo Turati*, ii (1988), pp. 159–210. See also the group around Kaiser, Leucht and Gehler (*The History of the European Union: Origins of a Trans- and Supranational Polity 1950–72*, ed. W. Kaiser, B. Leucht and M. Rasmussen (2009); *Transnational Networks in Regional Integration: Governing Europe 1945–83*, ed. W. Kaiser, B. Leucht and M. Gehler (2010)).

⁶ J. Lawrence, ‘Political history’, in *Writing History: Theory and Practice*, ed. S. Berger, H. Feldner and K. Passmore (2003), pp. 182–202, at pp. 185–7, 195–9; D. Craig, ‘“High politics” and the “new political history”’, *Historical Jour.*, liii (2010), 453–75.

⁷ C. Collette, *The International Faith: Labour’s Attitudes to European Socialism, 1918–39* (Aldershot, 1998), p. 89.

⁸ *Europäischer Sozialismus im Kalten Krieg: Briefe und Berichte 1944–8*, ed. P. Heumos (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), p. 37.

⁹ The National Archives of the U.K., BW 83/2, C. W. E. Duley, ‘Visit to Argentina and Uruguay, 15th Aug. to 30th Sept. 1947’, 11 Oct. 1947; Manchester, People’s History Museum, Labour Party Archive (hereafter L.P.A.), international department (hereafter I.D.), minutes and documents, 1946, ‘National Council of Labour delegation to Germany (British zone)’; *Il socialismo al bivio: l’archivio di Giuseppe Faravelli, 1945–50*, ed. P. C. Masini and S. Merli (Milan, 1990), Faravelli to Saragat, Milan, 4 Dec. 1945 (p. 63); ‘L.P.A., I.D., minutes and documents, 1945’, *London Information of the Austrian Socialists in Great Britain*, 15 Aug. 1945; T.N.A., FO 371/47216–N16956, Blazej Vilim to Morgan Phillips, 22 Nov. 1945.

goals – what Soviet propaganda called ‘actually existing socialism’ – or as negative examples of imperialism and autocracy.¹⁰ The split in Italian social democracy over strategy led to a division among the European socialists who took sides in the disagreement.

According to Sassoon, international prestige played an important part in southern Europe thanks to its inferiority complex towards northern Europe.¹¹ Actually, Britain and the Soviet Union were widely referenced in political debates because they were easy signposts. During the First World War, celebration of the Soviet Union gained currency as a unifying symbol of all the fringe socialist trends contesting the pre-war reformist hegemony.¹² Thus, as Darren Lilleker has pointed out, ‘the Soviet Union was employed as a hook on which to hang these individuals’ opposition to Labour economic and foreign policies’.¹³ In the same way, British socialism became the symbol of an actually existing socialist system other than the Soviet model. It was particularly effective in Italy, where the mainstream working-class cultures – communist and socialist alike – had a strong anti-reformist, anti-western and anti-parliamentary undercurrent. Therefore, the factions of ‘modernizers’ on the left adopted the myth of the Socialist International and northern social democracy because their adversaries, communists and left-wing socialists, hated them. Carlo Rosselli made the Labour party the great model for a socialist alternative to Marxism in 1931,¹⁴ and in the same year Egon Wertheimer did the same in order to contest the tradition of the German Social Democrats (S.P.D.).¹⁵ This was similar to the way in which Anthony Crosland employed Scandinavian and American examples against Soviet physical planning,¹⁶ or how, according to Robert Crowcroft, Aneurin Bevan adopted an anti-American stance in opposition to his adversary, the pro-American Hugh Gaitskell.¹⁷

The Socialist International’s main instrument of intervention was the power to grant legitimation. Affiliation is itself a form of legitimation, as the affiliated party can draw from a pool of symbols, respectability and successful tradition. The achievements of the past – for example, the Welfare State – are taken as a proof for future success and affiliation to the organization as evidence of a commitment to realize socialist goals.¹⁸ The legitimacy granted by this recognition is especially important when different factions or parties have competing claims on the socialist banner, as it allows the ‘recognized’ socialists to present themselves as the only true representatives of democratic socialism in the country. Such recognition can be given even to breakaway groups, which either might not be powerful enough to claim to be the main socialist party or

¹⁰ The extreme left in Italy systematically associated the Labour party and the Socialist International with British imperialism to delegitimize the social democratic way in Italy (see E. Costa, ‘Il “campo sperimentale del socialismo”: la vittoria laburista del 1945 e i suoi riflessi sulla sinistra italiana’, *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica*, ii (2011), 11–41).

¹¹ Sassoon, p. 599.

¹² S. Pons, *The Global Revolution: a History of International Communism, 1917–91* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 29–30.

¹³ D. Lilleker, *Against the Cold War: the History and Political Traditions of Pro-Sovietism in the British Labour Party* (2004), p. 42.

¹⁴ ‘I am explicitly in favour of reorganizing the socialism movement on similar basis to the British Labour Party’ (C. Rosselli, *Socialismo liberale* (Torino, 2009), p. 141).

¹⁵ E. Wertheimer, *Portrait of the Labour Party* (1930).

¹⁶ R. Toye and N. Lawton, ‘“The challenge of co-existence”: the Labour party, affluence and the Cold War, 1951–64’, in *The British Labour Party and the Wider World*, ed. P. Corthorn and J. Davis (2008), pp. 145–66.

¹⁷ R. Crowcroft, ‘The “high politics” of Labour party factionalism, 1950–5’, *Hist. Research*, lxxxi (2008), 679–709, at p. 686.

¹⁸ Devin, pp. 347–8.

whose policies might not be considered properly socialist.¹⁹ Recognition was not a simple statement of fact, rather it was a ‘performative utterance’, an assertion producing a social act, like giving a name to a person or, in this case, declaring that a party is truly socialist.²⁰ Words, however, have an unstable nature, and the quality given by the performative utterance can be rejected if there is hostility towards the one making it. The events under discussion reveal how the power of language could be insufficient to overcome the limitations imposed by material conditions. Politicians need funds to do political work freely, so they acquire obligations towards the organizations or people supplying these funds, thus hindering their complete freedom.²¹

The case of Comisco’s intervention in Italian politics was part of the larger history of the Socialist International after the Second World War. Following the inglorious demise of the Labour and Socialist International at the outbreak of war,²² few parties showed any interest in reviving an institution that had been marred by impotence and division over such important issues as fascism, communism and collective security, and which could be an embarrassment to the parties in government, particularly those in the Soviet sphere of influence. At a conference convened by the British Labour party on 17–19 May 1946, the main socialist parties, including the pro-communist eastern European parties, agreed to meet regularly twice a year (becoming once a year after 1948) as the International Socialist Conference. The Antwerp Conference (28 November–1 December 1947) established a permanent committee (Comisco) to put its resolutions into practice.²³ The International Socialist Conference and Comisco were to act as the provisional International until the Frankfurt Conference (30 June–3 July 1951), when the Socialist International was officially reborn.

Deep divisions between the anti-communist parties of the west and the pro-communist parties of the east and Italy made it impossible to achieve meaningful socialist co-operation in the first year and a half. The Prague coup (21–5 February 1948) put an end to the paralysis and ambiguity. In the period between the Vienna Conference (4–7 June 1948) and the Copenhagen Conference (1–3 June 1950) the communist offensive reduced complexity to a binary opposition between friend and enemy, encouraging activism and militancy. In 1948 and 1949 the members of Comisco were optimistic about their organization being able to intervene effectively in the countries that they believed needed socialism.²⁴ The Vienna Conference approved an overhauling of the organization, doubling the fees of every party to finance it, and making its decisions swifter and more politically meaningful.²⁵

¹⁹ *Social Democracy in Post-War Europe*, ed. I. Campbell and W. E. Paterson (1974), p. viii.

²⁰ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: the William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (1976), pp. 6–7.

²¹ Lawrence, pp. 220–5.

²² Steininger, pp. 13–17.

²³ L.P.A., I.D., minutes and documents, 1947, ‘Draft resolution unanimously voted by the International Preparatory Commission, Brussels, 29th October 1947’; Amsterdam, International Institute of Social History (hereafter I.I.S.H.), Socialist International (hereafter S.I.), box 47, circular 80, ‘Summarised report of the first meeting of the Committee of the International Socialist Conference, 10 Jan. 1948’.

²⁴ I.I.S.H., S.I., box 47, M. C. Bolle, ‘Statement of the activities and finance of the Socialist Information and Liaison Office and the Sub-Committee of Comisco in charge of it’, 27 May 1948; S.I., box 48, circular 30/49, 21 June 1949.

²⁵ I.I.S.H., S.I., box 47, circular 103, ‘Report of the Third meeting of the committee of International Socialist Conference, Vienna, 3 June 1948’.

The Labour party, which had been acting as a brake on the rebuilding of the Socialist International until the Prague coup, played a big part in enlarging the powers of Comisco, while expanding its own international department at the same time.²⁶ The Labour leadership believed that, despite lacking the authority and the money that the Communist International (Comintern) had, Comisco could strengthen the national parties and make them more effective in the struggle against communism. It argued that ‘the Conference is at least a moral symbol through which the policy of its members can be influenced – its intervention in the Italian elections was effective’, and that ‘the Labour Party could use it as a platform from which to publicise the British approach to problems of democratic socialism’.²⁷

The intervention in the Italian elections of 18 April 1948 served as a precedent to justify the high hopes of the European socialists. In these elections the Italian Socialist party (P.S.I.), headed by Nenni, presented a joint list with the Communist party (P.C.I.), leading the social democrats to present their own list, called Socialist Unity. Reversing their alliance, the Labour party and the other socialist parties publicly backed the social democrats. At the elections the joint list suffered a big defeat – falling from 40 per cent to 31 per cent of the votes – which was interpreted as a sign of the socialists abandoning Nenni in favour of Socialist Unity, which won 7.1 per cent of the votes.

Italian socialism was the exception in free Europe, as the main socialist party was not under a reformist and anti-communist leadership. This brand of left-wing socialism – which had been common before the war – called for unity of action with the communists to preserve working-class unity and fight fascism and capitalism. Thus, what we refer to as the Italian social democrats were not a faction inside the mainstream socialist party but socialists who had abandoned the original party and formed an alternative. They were a minority, a breakaway faction, but they did not accept this limited definition, arguing that they were the true socialists and that false socialists had infiltrated the official party. Denis Healey – then international secretary of the Labour party – was confident that Comisco and the Labour party could reverse the decline of democratic socialism in Italy, and help the social democrats to form a strong, united party that would become the true socialist, and the strongest working-class, party.²⁸

After the Prague coup, anti-communism became a prerequisite to becoming a member of the Socialist International, but other factors came into play when the European socialist parties had to take sides and choose between two equally anti-communist groups, chiefly the two strategies available to all socialists around Europe: the coalition strategy and the alternative strategy. The coalition strategy involved the transformation of the socialist party into the left-wing of a centrist coalition with moderates, liberals and Christian democrats. The goal was to defend democracy from the extreme left and right and to achieve reform through negotiation and compromise. The party exalted its interclassist support, appealed to the middle classes, and stressed its anti-communism, ideological flexibility and democratic credentials in order to make relations with the bourgeois parties less problematic. The alternative strategy called for the socialist party to work for a government alternative to the bourgeois parties and a working-class party

²⁶ L.P.A., I.D., minutes and documents, 1948, ‘Note on the International Department’, July 1948.

²⁷ L.P.A., I.D., minutes and documents, 1948, ‘Memorandum on international socialist policy’.

²⁸ L.P.A., I.D., minutes and documents, 1948, ‘Memorandum on international socialist policy’.

alternative to the communists.²⁹ Since the goal was to win over the workers from the communists and gain a majority, the party exalted its working-class nature and its links with the trade union movement, while strongly emphasizing its difference from the bourgeois parties.

In describing how the Socialist International and the stronger socialist parties behaved in international interventions, this article tests the following hypotheses: first, that a higher degree of anti-communism is not the deciding factor in attracting support from a strong socialist party; and, second, that a strong socialist party favours the faction that follows a strategy more in line with its own identity. The British Labour party was a model for the alternative strategy in the Socialist International; it encouraged this strategy and received invitations to help from the factions following it. Other parties, in particular the Dutch Labour party (P.v.d.A.) backed the factions following the coalition strategy. The preferences of the British Labour party concerning Italy opened a dispute inside Comisco along ideological lines. A third hypothesis can, therefore, be formulated: that the choice between different strategies and factions in the weaker parties opens up a discord between the stronger parties or between the factions of a strong party. Intervention was a two-way street: it was made possible by divisions in the periphery but created divisions at the centre. The foreign intervention of the British Labour party and the P.v.d.A. is, therefore, very revealing of those parties' political culture, prejudices and sense of identity.

In one of his memoirs Healey offers a brief but correct summary of the events in Italy: 'As International Secretary of the Labour Party after the war, I became deeply involved in Italian politics, trying to unite the socialist parties with little success: I started with two parties and finished with five'.³⁰ During the war old and new socialists formed the Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (P.S.I.U.P.), which was an uneasy coalition of factions with opposite strategies. Although at the elections of 1946 it still emerged as the biggest party of the left, it spent most of that year engulfed in intense factional struggle. The social democrats left the main socialist party in three waves. In January 1947 Giuseppe Saragat – the former second-in-command to Nenni and the respectable face of Italian socialism – argued that it was impossible to resist pro-communist encroachment, and led the desertion of the most important anti-communist factions, forming the Italian Workers' Socialist party (P.S.L.I.). Nenni's socialist party took the old name Italian Socialist party (P.S.I.). The second group of social democrats left in January 1948, when the P.S.I. agreed to present a joint list with the communists at the elections of April 1948. The former P.S.I.U.P. secretary Ivan Matteo Lombardo and the socialist writer Ignazio Silone joined the rump of the Action party (previously, the resistance party, Partito d'Azione) to form the Union of Italian Socialists (U.S.I.). The third and last group, the Movement of Socialist Action (M.S.A.), left in May 1949 under the leadership of former interior minister Giuseppe Romita, after Nenni defeated the right-wing and centrist elements that had risen up after the electoral debacle.

²⁹ A. Thorpe, 'Locking out the communists: the Labour party and the Communist party, 1939–46', *Twentieth Century British Hist.*, xxv (2014), 221–50, at p. 235.

³⁰ D. Healey, *Healey's World: Travels with My Camera* (Lewes, 2002), p. 79. Though not all were parties, there were indeed five groups in Nov. 1949: Saragat's rump P.S.L.I., the splinter left faction of the P.S.L.I., Silone's U.S.I., Romita's M.S.A. and Nenni's P.S.I.

The Labour leadership did not approve of the split of January 1947,³¹ and until the Prague coup it tried to convince the P.S.I. and the P.S.L.I. to form a united party. Throughout 1947 the P.S.L.I. sought recognition from the International Socialist Conference, but, as the P.S.I. was a member, Saragat suffered two humiliating rejections and many attacks from Healey and former chairman of the Labour Party, Harold Laski, leaving him with a strong resentment towards the Labour party.³² British diplomats would have welcomed a special relationship between the Labour party and the P.S.L.I., as the latter had solid anti-communist credentials and its programme was close to that of the Labour party.³³ After a year spent in opposition, the P.S.L.I. joined the government headed by Alcide De Gasperi, leader of the Christian Democrats, as the left flank of the coalition.

As the 1948 elections drew closer, the British ambassador, Victor Mallet, wrote that recruiting the Labour party against Nenni was essential in ‘keeping Italy on the right side of the iron curtain’.³⁴ On 13 March Healey and Morgan Phillips – the Labour party’s general secretary – were in Rome to issue an ultimatum against the alliance with the communists and offer support to Socialist Unity (a joint list of P.S.L.I. and U.S.I.) in exchange for a promise to form a united party after the elections.³⁵ The International Socialist Conference condemned alliance with communists, leading the Polish and Italian socialists to desert the organization.³⁶ The Labour party intervened in the electoral campaign with an explicit endorsement of the social democrats and Healey made a direct appeal on the radio to the Italian voters.³⁷ The Italian social democrats were offered to the Italian working class as a ‘sanitized’ version of socialism, the moral alternative to Nenni, so Comisco and the British Labour party had to give this product a mark of quality. In response, Labour pro-Soviet politicians Konni Zilliacus and John Platts-Mills drew up a telegram wishing Nenni victory which they had signed by twenty-two M.P.s, including not just regular fellow travellers but also centrists confused by the leadership’s sudden turnaround in policy. It was the most serious breach of discipline during the Attlee government, for which Platts-Mills was expelled.³⁸

The Christian Democrats won the elections of 18 April 1948 by a landslide, gaining a majority of the seats in the chamber of deputies, but the results were also encouraging for Socialist Unity. This did not, however, resolve the debate over whether it was better for the social democrats to stay in opposition and win over the votes of the working class or to support the government, as now the Christian Democrats could form a government on their own. There was also the question of whether the social democrats’ support for the government would be conditional upon its abandoning the policy of financial stabilization and adopting full employment as a goal instead.³⁹ The social democrats were divided into two fronts: right-wing social democrats backing the coalition strategy, and left-wing social democrats backing the alternative strategy.

³¹ Varsori, pp. 159–63.

³² Varsori, pp. 175–90; T.N.A., FO 371/67767–Z9534, Rome to foreign office, 1 Nov. 1947; T.N.A., FO 371/67767–Z9763, ‘Conversation between Mr Braine and signor Saragat, 30 Oct. 1947’.

³³ T.N.A., FO 371/67767–Z9073, Rome to foreign office, 15 Oct. 1947.

³⁴ T.N.A., FO 371/73156–21359/G, ‘Italy: political situation’, 12 Feb. 1948; see also Varsori, pp. 194–200.

³⁵ T.N.A., FO 371/73160–Z3549, ‘Quarterly report’; T.N.A., FO 371/73193–Z2449, ‘Fortnightly report 1st – 15th March’.

³⁶ Varsori, pp. 200–8.

³⁷ T.N.A., FO 371/73193–Z3503, ‘Fortnightly review, 1st – 18th April’.

³⁸ K. O. Morgan, *Labour in Power, 1945–51* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 65–6.

³⁹ M. Donno, *Socialisti democratici: Giuseppe Saragat e il Psli (1945–52)* (Soveria Manelli, 2009), pp. 419–24.

Another problem was the creation of a unified party – something which all of the social democratic leaders had promised the Labour party would happen. But should this be built from scratch or should all social democrats join the P.S.L.I.? The issue of party was strictly linked to the issue of government, as the right-wing social democrats controlled the P.S.L.I. and wanted to support the government, while the left-wing of the P.S.L.I., U.S.I. and other small socialist groups wanted to stay in opposition. In a new party the sum of the minority of the P.S.L.I. and the other social democratic groups would have made them the majority, allowing them to set the policy.

Saragat's tactic was to invite the others to join his organization or to postpone the creation of a unified socialist party, as in the first case he would have kept control over the party machinery and in the second he could wait for the other social democrats to decline without a solid organization, funds and materials, until they were forced to accept his strategy and his dominance. Strategic choices depended on the resources available. Keeping the party independent and spending time in opposition – 'in the wilderness' in Labour's jargon – required funds to finance the party organization. The Italian social democrats did not have access to the mass organizations of the working class, which the communists dominated, and could not receive grants from the communists, as Nenni did. Joining the government offered access to patronage and corruption, which helped to finance the party, recruit members and win votes.

The Labour party undermined Saragat's tactics, as Healey demanded immediate unification and a socialist strategy. The recognition of the Labour party and Comisco legitimized the Italian social democrats; the threat of its revocation gave those organizations leverage allowing them to dictate decisions. With the memory of Ramsay MacDonald's experience in coalition government fresh in his mind, Healey was reluctant to support opportunists working for a reactionary and Jesuitical government. The decision of Comisco not to admit the P.S.L.I. but to reserve the Italian seat for a new united party increased the uncertainty of Saragat's position.⁴⁰

Behind the scenes there was disagreement between Healey and the foreign office over Italian policy. The line taken by the Manchester Guardian, the Labour party (particularly Healey) and Christopher Mayhew – the under-secretary of state under Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin – was that a united party with a socialist leadership could win over the workers by staying in opposition and 'other factors should be subordinated to this'.⁴¹ On the opposite side of the debate, the civil servants of the foreign office were uneasy about the Labour party's involvement, arguing that 'it is a ticklish business putting other people's houses in order',⁴² despite having encouraged this involvement in the first place with their support for the coalition strategy (that is, neutralizing the extremes and avoiding polarization), on the basis that 'it is always British policy to support a third force in the centre'.⁴³ Bevin tried to balance the two positions.

The American department of state was on the alert for any interference from the Labour party that would encourage the social democrats to leave the government.⁴⁴ For

⁴⁰ T.N.A., FO 371/73162-Z4979, Rome to foreign office, 17 June 1948.

⁴¹ T.N.A., FO 371/79299-Z3930, 'A. D. F. Pemberton-Pigott, Italian socialist parties, points of discussion with the Times representative'.

⁴² T.N.A., FO 371/73160-Z3468, Rome to foreign office, 24 Apr. 1948.

⁴³ T.N.A., FO 371/79299-Z3930, 'A. D. F. Pemberton-Pigott, Italian socialist parties, points of discussion with the Times representative'.

⁴⁴ A. De Felice, *La socialdemocrazia e la scelta occidentale dell'Italia, 1947-9: Saragat, il P.S.L.I. e la politica internazionale da Palazzo Barberini al Patto atlantico* (Catania, 1998), p. 271.

example, Healey believed – as did Marinus van der Goes van Naters, chairman of P.v.d.A. and a future ally of Saragat⁴⁵ – that the former secretary Lombardo could have united all the social democrats, including the right-wing faction of the P.S.I., as he was a less controversial figure than Saragat and was not under the influence of the American embassy. Silone tried to encourage Lombardo to become an alternative leader to Saragat, but the right-wing social democrats denounced these manoeuvres to the U.S. department of state, and suggested making Lombardo a minister in order to satiate his ambitions.⁴⁶ It clearly worked, as Lombardo closely aligned himself with Saragat thereafter.

The rift between right- and left-wing social democrats was widened by two issues which were particularly important for the Americans. The social democratic and republican trade unionists were resisting American pressure to set up an alternative trade union federation to the communist-dominated Italian General Confederation of Labour (hereafter C.G.I.L.),⁴⁷ since the Catholic trade unionists would have dominated the new organization.⁴⁸ They had the backing of the left-wing social democrats and were helped by the more cautious attitude of British diplomats and unionists. Furthermore, De Gasperi wanted Italy to join the Atlantic Treaty, but a military alliance among capitalist powers against the Soviet Union was hard to accept for many social democrats.

In March 1949 deep divisions emerged in the P.S.L.I. over the ratification of the Atlantic Treaty. The Italian minister for foreign affairs, who considered the social democratic dissenters to be communist-inspired, asked for the intervention of the Labour party to aid Saragat.⁴⁹ The British ambassador agreed to help reconcile differences ‘through the Embassy and possibly by direct action of the Labour Party’.⁵⁰ Mayhew met Lombardo and told him that Comisco would help him to ratify the treaty. The problem was solved when the parliamentary group of the P.S.L.I. voted in favour of the Atlantic Treaty, but allowed the minority to abstain.⁵¹

In May 1949 the third and last wave of social democrats left the P.S.I. They formed the M.A.S., led by Romita. The International Socialist Conference expelled the P.S.I. and sent the French Leon Boutbien to monitor developments.⁵² Boutbien – who was

⁴⁵ I.I.S.H., Archief Marinus van der Goes van Naters, box 11B, Van der Goes van Naters to J. de Bruyn, 2 Nov. 1948. Not being proficient in Dutch, the author could not research Dutch state and party archives, but could read, with assistance, Van der Goes van Naters’ autobiographical excerpts and his file of documents on Italy. As he was directly involved in all these events, it is a very informative source.

⁴⁶ De Felice, pp. 241–2.

⁴⁷ T.N.A., FO 371/79300–Z7641, Braine to foreign office, 20 Oct. 1949. The entire episode is described in F. Romero, *The United States and the European Trade Union Movement* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1992), pp. 153–72. For the Dutch point of view, see I.I.S.H., Archief Marinus van der Goes van Naters, box 11B, Marinus van der Goes van Naters to Jan Leliveld, 2 March 1949.

⁴⁸ Masini and Merli, pp. 350–1, Faravelli to Simonini, Canini, Saragat, 29 Sept. 1948.

⁴⁹ T.N.A., FO 371/79299–Z1994, Rome to foreign office, 5 March 1949.

⁵⁰ T.N.A., FO 371/79299–Z2218, Rome to foreign office, 12 March 1949.

⁵¹ T.N.A., FO 371/79293–Z3037, ‘Fortnightly review 16th–31st March’.

⁵² Boutbien had already supported the P.S.L.I. against the P.S.I. in 1947 (Rome, Archivio Centrale dello Stato (hereafter A.C.S.), Dipartimento Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza (hereafter D.G.P.S.), Divisione Servizi Informativi e Speciali, Affari Generali, 1944–7, box 45, folder P.S.L.I., Rapporti del P.S.L.I. con i partiti socialisti francesi, 27 Sept. 1947). On the role of the French Socialist party, see M. Nardini, ‘La SFIO et la réunification du socialisme italien. La naissance du PSDI, la mission Commin et la rencontre de Pralognan (1949–57)’, *L’Ours, hors série Recherche Socialiste*, lx–lxi (2012), pp. 147–62.

particularly vocal on the need for international socialism to intervene in national politics⁵³ – organized a meeting of the left-wing social democrats, who signed a document with a commitment to call ‘a constituent assembly for socialism’.⁵⁴ The International Socialist Conference in Baarn (14–16 May 1949) approved the measure and established a commission headed by Van der Goes van Naters from the P.v.d.A., with the task of monitoring the P.S.L.I. conference in June, holding talks between the social democrats, and directing the unification process.⁵⁵ This step was also an attempt to contain Boutbien’s influence, as he was considered too leftist.⁵⁶ Van der Goes van Naters successfully negotiated a compromise to hold a unification congress in August 1949 – first delayed to September, then to December.⁵⁷

Van der Goes van Naters’s compromise was a setback for the left-wing social democrats and the Labour party, who had tried to turn the P.S.L.I. June conference into a unification congress by admitting representatives from U.S.I. and Romita as delegates with voting rights.⁵⁸ The Italian government protested against what its ambassador in London called a ‘treacherous foreign intervention in our internal politics’ to weaken Italy.⁵⁹ The British government heard charges from the Italians that Healey was trying to force the social democratic ministers to leave the government.⁶⁰ The matter was debated inside the foreign office and Prime Minister Clement Attlee asked Mayhew to investigate.⁶¹ Healey denied any unsolicited intervention, although he still believed in the alternative strategy.⁶² The British ambassador in Rome and the diplomats did not wish to undermine government stability in Italy and irritate the Americans, so they wanted the Labour party to refrain from encouraging the alternative strategy; also a government without the social democrats would have been ‘less amenable to British influence’.⁶³ They argued that the policy of the foreign office was to favour social democratic governments when possible, and collaboration with the Christian democrats when necessary.⁶⁴ Mayhew, however, sided with Healey and defended the alternative strategy.⁶⁵ Bevin concluded that the best course was to allow the Labour party to

⁵³ Paris, L’Office Universitaire de Recherche Socialiste (hereafter O.U.R.S.), Fond Guy Mollet, A.G.M. 53 (Internationale Socialiste, 1949–57), folder Comisco 1950, L. Boutbien, *Aspect International de l’Idée du Mouvement Socialiste* [around Copenhagen Conference].

⁵⁴ T.N.A., FO 371/79300–Z4297, ‘Supplement to report on P.S.L.I. Conference, Milan 1949, 1 June 1949’; A.C.S., D.G.P.S., Divisione affari generali, 1949, box 19, folder Partito socialista dei lavoratori italiani, Telegramma prefettura di Firenze a D.G.P.S., 17 May 1949; Questura di Roma, 23 May 1949.

⁵⁵ L.P.A., I.D., Italy, box 9, Denis Healey, ‘Report on the International Socialist Conference, Baarn, Holland’.

⁵⁶ I.I.S.H., Archieff Marinus van der Goes van Naters, box 11, Denis Healey to Marinus van der Goes van Naters, 26 May 1949; Louis De Brouckère to Marinus van der Goes van Naters, 3 June 1949.

⁵⁷ T.N.A., FO 371/79300–Z4457, Rome to foreign office, 20 June 1949; L.P.A., I.D., Italy, box 9, ‘Report of the Italian commission of Comisco’.

⁵⁸ I.I.S.H., Archieff Marinus van der Goes van Naters, box 11, Denis Healey to Marinus van der Goes van Naters, 13 June 1949.

⁵⁹ *I documenti diplomatici italiani, Undicesima serie 1948–53, ii: 1 gennaio–30 giugno 1949* (Rome, 2006), p. 1107, Gallarati Scotti to Sforza, 10 June 1949.

⁶⁰ T.N.A., FO 371/79299–Z4200, Victor Mallet to Ivo Mallet, 26 May 1949; T.N.A., FO 371/79299–Z4001, Rome to foreign office, 29 May 1949; T.N.A., FO 371/79300–Z4298, Christopher Mayhew to prime minister, ‘Italian socialist parties’, 14 June 1949; *I documenti diplomatici italiani*, p. 1048, Sforza to Gallarati Scotti, 9 June 1949.

⁶¹ T.N.A., FO 371/79299–Z4025, R. D. C. McAlpine to Christopher Mayhew, 26 May 1949.

⁶² T.N.A., FO 371/79299–Z4025, foreign office to prime minister’s office, 28 May 1949.

⁶³ T.N.A., FO 371/79299–Z4133, Rome to foreign office, 6 June 1949.

⁶⁴ T.N.A., FO 371/79299–Z3908, Ivo Mallet, minute, 27 May 1949.

⁶⁵ T.N.A., FO 371/79299–Z3908, Christopher Mayhew, minute, 27 May 1949.

send its delegates – against the wishes of the civil servants – but to warn them not to take risks and to act as ‘responsible people’.⁶⁶

Healey instructed Michael Foot, the delegate at the P.S.L.I. conference, to openly declare the Labour party’s neutrality in the debate.⁶⁷ De Gasperi was satisfied with the compromise and approved the discretion of Comisco’s committee, but he warned that co-operation among western socialists should not lead to interference with foreign governments.⁶⁸

At the end of 1949, the tension between the British Labour party on one side and the foreign office and the Italians on the other, which until then had successfully been kept behind the scenes, became public. The unification conference of all social democrats was to take place in December and the delegates were to be elected by all the cardholders registered before November.⁶⁹ However, on 31 October Saragat announced the withdrawal of the P.S.L.I. arguing that the left-wing social democrats were recruiting crypto-communists and that they did not accept the Atlantic Treaty. Actually, it had become clear that the left-wing social democrats would have had the majority at the unification conference and had also taken advantage of clandestine funds.⁷⁰

Throughout October the P.S.L.I.’s newspaper had been conducting a press campaign against Britain, exploiting nationalistic resentment over the loss of the Italian colonies. Saragat accused the Labour party of practicing imperialism in socialist matters, breaching the independence of Italian socialism, and setting factions against each other.⁷¹ The journalist Sylvia Sprigge, who was close to De Gasperi, called Healey in front of the civil servants and charged him with interfering in Italian politics.⁷² Healey repeated his belief that the alternative strategy was the best course, but claimed that he had never suggested this to the Italians. Even so, it was somewhat hypocritical of Saragat to denounce interference from the Labour party when he himself had asked the party to interfere in the elections of 1948 and in the ratification of the Atlantic Treaty.

Hearing of Saragat’s withdrawal, Healey became furious. The social democrats had the chance to become the great socialist party Italy needed, but they had been betrayed by Saragat and his opportunist desire for government position ‘as a sort of Ramsay MacDonald’.⁷³ In private Healey added that Saragat had no ‘workers’ support’, was ‘mutable’ and ‘paid by USA’.⁷⁴ Comisco, as organizers of the December conference, had to condemn the oath-breakers and to support the social democrats who were attending. Saragat appealed to Leon Blum as an alternative source of international socialist authority and sent him an open letter with a long list of the crimes committed by Great Britain against Italy and by the Labour party against himself.⁷⁵ Healey, who at

⁶⁶ T.N.A., FO 371/79300–Z4297, Ivo Mallet, C. Mayhew, E. Bevin, minutes, 8 June 1949.

⁶⁷ T.N.A., FO 371/79300–Z4297, foreign office to Rome, 13 June 1949.

⁶⁸ T.N.A., FO 371/79300–Z4477, Rome to foreign office, 22 June 1949.

⁶⁹ L.P.A., I.D., Italy, box 9 ‘Agreement on Socialist Unity’, *Comisco Newsletter*, Sept.–Oct. 1949.

⁷⁰ Central Intelligence Agency, Freedom of Information Act, Electronic Reading Room, CIA-RDP82-00457R004100340014-8, ‘Information Report, Italy, Financing Giuseppe Romita’, 13 Jan. 1950 <<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp82-00457R004100340014-8>> [accessed 11 Oct. 2017] (hereafter C.I.A., ‘Information Report’).

⁷¹ G. Saragat, ‘Discordanze’, *l’Unità*, 16 Oct. 1949.

⁷² T.N.A., FO 371/79300–Z7159, R. B. H. Baker, minute, 29 Oct. 1949.

⁷³ T.N.A., FO 371/79300–Z7452, ‘The crisis in Italian socialism’.

⁷⁴ L.P.A., I.D., Italy, box 9, Healey’s notes, n.d [c. Nov. 1949].

⁷⁵ ‘Lettera aperta al compagno Leon Blum’, *l’Unità*, 22 Nov. 1949.

the time worked for the overseas service of the B.B.C., exploited a broadcast to Italy to deliver a speech in Italian to the Italian socialists – in an obvious parallel to his actions in April 1948 – to explain himself and reject all accusations.⁷⁶ Saragat's charges were reduced to a 'hysterical fantasy' and Healey denied that acceptance of the Atlantic Treaty was a precondition for being part of Comisco, since the Swedish party, one of the greatest socialist parties, remained neutral.

Other than exploiting nationalism, Saragat's decision to go forward with an open attack was meant to expose Healey to the public. The manoeuvre worked, as the latter's actions created discomfort among the British diplomats. Before his departure to Italy to attend the conference, the embassy in Rome, the foreign office and Mayhew pleaded with Healey to keep a low profile, monitor the communists and avoid local intrigues, and not to interfere with the plans of the Americans.⁷⁷ Healey replied that 'he would be very ready to listen to our advice but did not undertake to follow it', provoking the comment: 'The Foreign Office has no control at all, over what Mr Healey does'.⁷⁸

The Conference of Socialist Unification took place on 4–8 December 1949, leading to the creation of the Unified Socialist party (P.S.U.),⁷⁹ born out of the fusion of the left-wing of the P.S.L.I. (including ten provincial federations), the U.S.I. and the M.S.A. The conference approved a programme fully in line with the alternative strategy: support to a trade union federation independent of Catholics and communists, an economic policy of planning and full employment, and acceptance of the Atlantic Treaty as an 'instrument of defence, not offence'. The last point was probably a result of pressure from Healey, who reassured the foreign office that the programme was less leftist than expected. Healey's speech, however, was very controversial, rebutting all Saragat's charges and calling him disloyal.⁸⁰ Healey said that the Labour party was 'a living proof that Democratic Socialism is both morally right and practically efficient' and that the P.S.U. could follow its example, although it would require more than speeches.⁸¹ However, he confessed some reservations in private: he was critical of the party's leaders, who he saw as just intellectuals, and of its insufficient ties to the trade union movement.⁸²

The comment of the embassy in Rome was harsh: 'I fear we cannot for long continue to speak in this country with two voices'.⁸³ Some civil servants confided to the Americans that Healey was acting as 'the head of a little Foreign Office'.⁸⁴ The episode revealed the problematic nature of the alliance between the state and a private organization pursuing similar goals – a concept known as 'State-private network'. The Labour party could be an important ally in projecting British influence abroad, but the foreign office was not in control.⁸⁵ Christian democrats

⁷⁶ L.P.A., I.D., Italy, box 9, 'BBC Italian Broadcast', 23 Nov. 1949.

⁷⁷ T.N.A., FO 371/79301–Z7772, A. R. Moore, minute, 29 Nov. 1949; FO 371/79301–Z7942, C. Mayhew, minute, 1 Dec. 1949; FO 371/79301–Z7772, Rome to foreign office, 29 Nov. 1949.

⁷⁸ T.N.A., FO 371/79301–Z7772, G. Jebb, minute, 2 Dec. 1949.

⁷⁹ T.N.A., FO 371/89636–WT 1015/5, Denis Healey, 'Report on the Italian Socialist Unification Congress'; FO 371/89636–WT 1015/3, V. Mallet (Rome) to foreign office, 10 Jan. 1950.

⁸⁰ T.N.A., FO 371/79301–Z8223, 'Mr Denis Healey's speech at the Italian Unification Congress'.

⁸¹ T.N.A., FO 371/79301–Z8223, 'Mr Denis Healey's speech at the Italian Unification Congress'.

⁸² T.N.A., FO 371/89636–WT 1015/5, Denis Healey, 'Report on the Italian Socialist Unification Congress'.

⁸³ T.N.A., FO 371/79301–Z7998, Rome to foreign office, 8 Dec. 1949.

⁸⁴ G. Gabrielli, *Gli amici americani: i socialisti italiani dalla guerra fredda alle amministrative del 1952* (Manduria, 2004), p. 189.

⁸⁵ H. Wilford, *The C.I.A., the British Left, and the Cold War: Calling the Tune?* (2003), p. vii.

and the P.S.L.I.⁸⁶ complained about Healey's speech, arguing that Comisco was like the Cominform (the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties) but with the British in place of the Soviets. Ambassador Mallet was enraged, writing to Bevin that Healey was completely ruining his policy of supporting De Gasperi by not backing the right side in the Italian cold civil war. As for the foreign office, 'everyone at this end' – wrote the ambassador's cousin, Ivo Mallet – 'was very much annoyed by Healey's ill-timed and inept polemics'.⁸⁷ Mayhew criticized Healey for his provocative actions, but he upheld the principle that the Labour party was to remain independent and free to help other socialist parties.⁸⁸ Healey argued that he was simply answering the insults against Great Britain and that the entire 'rumpus' was the product of a press campaign stirred up by the Italian government to get back its former colonies. The attitude of Bevin is difficult to interpret; he had a private meeting with Healey but no contemporary record of it remains. According to his autobiography, Healey stood firm in his position and Bevin let him go, promising to tell Mallet 'to stop whining'.⁸⁹ While this was obviously a self-serving version, it is a fact that Healey's freedom was not hindered, though Bevin's future actions indicate that he must have given some warning to be prudent.

The situation was far from settled however, as Comisco had to decide to which party to give the Italian seat. The Comisco meeting of 11 December approved the result of the P.S.U. conference and recommended its admission as a full member, leaving the P.S.L.I. with enough time until the Copenhagen conference (to be held in the middle of 1950) to join the P.S.U., otherwise it would be left out of the international social democratic community.⁹⁰ Van der Goes van Naters has stated that it was only thanks to the P.v.d.A. that the P.S.L.I. was not immediately expelled.⁹¹ Even then, the P.S.L.I. still had a considerable advantage over the P.S.U.: it had kept the organization, the buildings and most of the deputies and senators. It also enjoyed the legal and illegal benefits of being in government: Saragat's bargaining power would grow with time and he would be able to impose unification on his terms. The major threat came from Comisco, which could have provoked the collapse of the P.S.L.I. by withdrawing the external legitimization; being recognized by the international movement was still the greatest asset Saragat had, bolstering his claim that he, and not Nenni, was the leader of Italian socialism. Saragat made many overtures to the P.S.U. and began to work for a reconciliation, while his friends kept the pressure on the Labour party.

At the time Saragat supported the united trade union federation the Americans had wanted, but Romita did not, as he had brought over many trade unionists who refused to mingle with the clerical unionists.⁹² Already before the December conference the American labour attaché in London, Samuel Berger, had complained about the fact that the Trades Union Congress was not helping the American Federation of Labor's work

⁸⁶ T.N.A., FO 371/79301–Z7998, Rome to foreign office, 8 Dec. 1949; C. A. [Carlo Andreoni], 'Due Discorsi', *L'Umanità*, 9 Dec. 1949.

⁸⁷ T.N.A., FO 371/89638–WT 10161/1, Ivo Mallet to Victor Mallet, 13 Jan. 1950.

⁸⁸ T.N.A., FO 371/79301–Z8071, C. P. Mayhew, minute, 15 Dec. 1949.

⁸⁹ D. Healey, *The Time of My Life* (1990), p. 105.

⁹⁰ L.P.A., I.D., Italy, box 11, International Socialist Conference (Paris), summary of speeches.

⁹¹ I.I.S.H., Archief Marinus van der Goes van Naters, box 11B, Van der Goes van Naters, 'De Positie van het Italiaanse Socialisme', 22 Jan. 1951.

⁹² Romero, pp. 168–72

in Italy.⁹³ In January 1950 he again visited the foreign office to deliver a notice that the Labour party and Comisco were sabotaging the policy of the department of state for Italy. While the Americans could not interfere with the Labour party, the foreign office could show it ‘the error of its way’, which even the civil servants found ‘a rather heavy-handed attempt to put pressure on us’.⁹⁴ It could also have been part of a co-ordinated action, since the very next day De Gasperi asked Bevin to intervene in favour of the P.S.L.I. and Saragat pleaded the same.⁹⁵

The British general election of February 1950 modified the balance of power, returning the Labour government with a slim majority. The P.S.U.’s members believed that a clear victory for the Labour party would have forced Saragat to leave the government and accept unification.⁹⁶ Indeed Saragat was very happy with the results, prompting this comment from the head of the western department: ‘It seems to be all wrong that so much should, as this dispatch maintains, turn on the outcome of our own elections’.⁹⁷ Mayhew, who had been Healey’s best ally in the foreign office, lost his seat and Ernest Davies became under-secretary of state for foreign affairs.

By taking the initiative in attacking Saragat and offering Comisco’s blessing to the P.S.U., Healey angered Van der Goes van Naters. The Dutch socialist blamed Healey for having acted on a whim to help the left-wing social democrats (Silone and Romita) and the P.S.U., which he called ‘the anti-Nato party’ and the ‘the Labour-minded PSU’.⁹⁸ Healey had robbed Van der Goes van Naters’s commission overseeing Italy of authority, due to the excessive British domination of Comisco.⁹⁹ While Van der Goes van Naters believed Saragat had made a tactical error in going against Comisco’s plans, he did not believe in the alternative strategy, arguing that ‘In a country under the Bolshevik threat like Italy, there is no room for three socialist parties, two of which support democracy’.¹⁰⁰ Thus he offered the services of the P.v.d.A. to Saragat and attended the P.S.L.I. conference in January 1950 as a representative of Comisco, where he gave a conciliatory speech saying that Healey spoke only on behalf of the Labour party, and not Comisco.¹⁰¹ The International Secretary of the P.S.U., Paolo Vittorelli, did not appreciate this speech and defended Healey forcefully.¹⁰²

The meeting of the Comisco sub-committee in Hastings (in March 1950) considered two proposals. Acting in co-ordination with Saragat,¹⁰³ Van der Goes van Naters proposed to admit a federation of the P.S.U. and the P.S.L.I. to the International Socialist Conference, so as not to expel anyone.¹⁰⁴ The French delegate proposed to

⁹³ T.N.A., FO 371/79300–Z7641, H. G. Gee, note, 31 Oct. 1949. Berger had a central role in American labour diplomacy (Wilford, pp. 164–7).

⁹⁴ T.N.A., FO 371/89636–WT 1015/8, C. B. Shuckburgh, minute, 31 Jan. 1949.

⁹⁵ L.P.A., I.D., Italy, box 11, Denis Healey, ‘Note on Italian Socialism’, 16 March 1950; T.N.A., FO 371/89636–WT 1015/10, Saragat to Bevin, 1 Feb. 1950.

⁹⁶ T.N.A., FO 371/89636–WT 1015/9, Rome to foreign office, 5 Feb. 1950.

⁹⁷ T.N.A., FO 371/89636–WT 1015/9, J. W. Russell, minute, 24 Feb. 1950.

⁹⁸ M. van der Goes van Naters, *Met en tegen de tijd* (Amsterdam, 1980), p. 259.

⁹⁹ Van der Goes van Naters, p. 259.

¹⁰⁰ I.I.S.H., Archief Marinus van der Goes van Naters, box 11B, Van der Goes van Naters to Saragat, 22 Dec. 1949.

¹⁰¹ I.I.S.H., Archief Marinus van der Goes van Naters, box 11C, Van der Goes van Naters to Comisco Sub-Committee, 15 Jan. 1950; T.N.A., FO 371/89636–WT 1015/4, J. W. Russell, minute, 9 Feb.; Rome to foreign office, 14 Jan. 1950; L.P.A., I.D., Italy, box 11, P.S.L.I. conference, circular 14/50.

¹⁰² L.P.A., I.D., Italy, box 11, Paolo Vittorelli to Comisco parties, 21 Feb. 1950.

¹⁰³ I.I.S.H., Archief Marinus van der Goes van Naters, box 11C, Saragat to Van der Goes van Naters, 25 Feb. 1949.

¹⁰⁴ L.P.A., I.D., Italy, box 11, Denis Healey, ‘Note on Italian Socialism’, 16 March 1950; I.I.S.H., S.I., box 51, circular 65/50. T.N.A., FO 371/89637–WT 1015/23, ‘Extract from report on Comisco meeting’.

implement the decision of December 1949 and to admit the P.S.U. as a full member. The French proposal was approved with seven votes in favour, five against and three abstentions. Healey told the foreign office that the Copenhagen Conference would accept the recommendation to admit the P.S.U. and exclude the P.S.L.I.¹⁰⁵ He had some doubts about the P.S.U., whose working-class following was still weak and its leaders still middle-class intellectuals, but he was sure that the fate of Italian socialism was ‘in the wilderness’. According to Davies, Healey was convinced the P.S.U. would ‘gain in strength and constitute a real and growing opposition, and an alternative to Communism without weakening De Gasperi’, while Saragat would ‘be finished for the time being at any rate and PSLI’s rump of no account in the government’.¹⁰⁶

In April 1950 the Dutch socialist Martin Bolle went to Rome to broker an agreement between the P.S.U. and P.S.L.I.¹⁰⁷ He reported that the P.S.L.I. still had many workers and that the intention of the P.S.U. was to use the affiliation to Comisco to humiliate Saragat. Van der Goes van Naters warned Bevin that hurting the P.S.L.I. would put Italian stability and reforms in jeopardy.¹⁰⁸ Davies argued that this was a party matter and not a concern for the foreign secretary, but Bevin wrote an approving note to Van der Goes van Naters and summoned Healey, demonstrating again how thin the separation between party and government was.¹⁰⁹ Bevin had become receptive to the pressure of his civil servants and the Americans, but in the end it took the words of another socialist leader to tip the scale to a change of decision. Before he was able to meet Bevin, Healey informed the foreign office that he had revised his position, embracing Van der Goes van Naters’s proposal not to exclude anyone from Comisco and to stop putting pressure on the Italian social democrats.¹¹⁰ Apparently this change of mind happened independently, but we should not exclude the possibility that Healey was informed through other channels about Bevin’s decision, to avoid humiliating him in front of the civil servants.

The Copenhagen Conference (1–3 June 1950) approved the British proposal to admit both the P.S.L.I. and the P.S.U. as full members and to refrain from any intervention until requests came from both parties.¹¹¹ According to the ambassador in Rome, Saragat was ‘purring with pleasure’ and was grateful to Bevin, who had put national interests before party interests.¹¹² Healey informed the foreign office that the two parties had agreed to hold a joint conference in the future to fuse into one, but until then there would be a division of labour: ‘PSLI as a tame instrument of De Gasperi in his continual war with the Right wing of the Demo-Christian Party and PSU as an opposition force which may be able to cut into the disillusioned or apathetic workers and in particular into the present adherents of PSI and PCI’.¹¹³

¹⁰⁵ T.N.A., FO 371/89637–WT 1015/23, A. R. Moore, minute, 20 March 1950.

¹⁰⁶ T.N.A., FO 371/89637–WT 1015/23, E. Davies, minute, 21 March 1950.

¹⁰⁷ L.P.A., I.D., Italy, box 11, M. C. Bolle, ‘Unification of Italian democratic socialism’, 3 May 1950.

¹⁰⁸ T.N.A., FO 371/89637–WT 1015/29, Van der Goes van Naters to Bevin, 20 Apr. 1950.

¹⁰⁹ T.N.A., FO 371/89637–WT 1015/29, E. Bevin, minute, 15 May 1950; FO 371/89637–WT 1015/27, E. Bevin, 25 March 1950. In March Bevin had asked to see Healey, but he was told that the matter would not be settled until June.

¹¹⁰ T.N.A., FO 371/89637–WT 1015/32, A. R. Moore, minute, 23 May 1950.

¹¹¹ L.P.A., I.D., Italy, box 11, Denis Healey, ‘Report on the International Socialist Conference, Copenhagen’.

¹¹² T.N.A., FO 371/89637–WT 1015/33, Rome to foreign office, 29 June 1950; A.C.S., Presidenza del consiglio, Gabinetto, 1948–1950, box 15–2, folder 42270 (Comisco), Telegramma della legazione di Copenhagen, 3 June 1950.

¹¹³ T.N.A., FO 371/89638–WT 1016/2, Healey to Davies, 8 June 1950.

After the ‘unfortunate experience’ of December 1949, the Labour party decided to remain neutral towards Italian socialism, but the issue was not settled.¹¹⁴ A year later, Saragat and Romita came to an agreement on unification, forming the Italian Democratic Socialist party (P.S.D.I.).¹¹⁵ Once again the Italian government asked Comisco to intervene and postpone unification, but Herbert Morrison, Bevin’s successor, refused to get involved.¹¹⁶

Reactions to Labour’s defeat at the elections of November 1951 made factional divisions emerge once again in the Italian left. In public Saragat wished for a future victory,¹¹⁷ but in private, the ambassador reported, he expressed other thoughts:

He also added that he himself was very pleased with the [election] results because a change in the Foreign Office could only be a good thing for Italy. Moreover, he recalled how the Italian ‘free’ socialists had been treated by some officials of the Labour Party in the past; Saragat felt that the Conservatives he had met were much more understanding and knowledgeable about the problems which Italian Socialists were facing.¹¹⁸

The paradoxical result was that the leader of the Italian social democrats – who had broken with the Socialist party to be more like the Labour party – was pleased with Labour’s defeat, while Nenni – who had been thrown out of the Socialist International – not only regretted Labour’s defeat,¹¹⁹ but still considered the party the only hope for socialism in Europe, as the Labourites were starting to appreciate the imperialistic implications of the Atlantic Treaty.¹²⁰ This foreshadowed Nenni’s break with the communists and the Soviet Union and his gradual conversion to western-style socialism, accelerated when he condemned the suppression of the Hungarian revolution in 1956. The Bevanites, particularly Crossman, actively encouraged this process.

In order to understand the events just described, it is necessary to remember that influence is a two-way street: the possibility of intervention at the periphery opened up debate at the centre. With a wealth of possibilities available, different choices revealed the different strategic decisions and political culture of the actors involved.¹²¹

It was a widespread belief that Comisco served the interests of British imperialism because it was like the Cominform with the British in charge. The Italians and the Dutch read the struggle between the P.S.L.I. and the P.S.U. as a proxy war between the Americans and the British, their puppet masters.¹²² Indeed the P.S.L.I. agreed with the communists’ argument that the P.S.U. was a creation of the British Intelligence

¹¹⁴ T.N.A., FO 371/96227–WT1016/17, Ernest Davies, minute, 2 March 1951.

¹¹⁵ T.N.A., FO 371/96227–WT1016/19, Mallet to Morrison, 5 Apr. 1951.

¹¹⁶ T.N.A., FO 371/96227–WT1016/17, Sforza to Morrison, 23 March 1951; Morrison to Sforza, 31 March 1951.

¹¹⁷ T.N.A., FO 371/96234–WT1021/5, Rome to western department, 31 Oct. 1951.

¹¹⁸ T.N.A., FO 371/96226–WT1015/13, Mallet to G. W. Harrison, 3 Nov. 1951.

¹¹⁹ A.C.S., D.G.P.S., Divisione affari Generali, 1951, box 31, folder Partito socialista (Siis), Questura di Roma, 19 Nov. 1951.

¹²⁰ P. Nenni, *Tempo di Guerra Fredda: diari 1943–56* (Milano, 1982), p. 544, 22 Sept. 1952.

¹²¹ E.g., when Gaitskell and Bevan quarrelled over how to help the fusion of P.S.I. and P.S.D.I. in 1957, Crossman commented: ‘The situation soon got extremely tense and I thought, ironically, that it would be very funny if we managed to split the Labour Party on the issue of how to unify the Italian!’ (R. Crossman, *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman*, ed. J. Morgan (1981), p. 597, 23 May 1957).

¹²² For the Italians, see ‘Dietro il sipario’, *L’Avanti!*, 28 March 1951. For the Dutch, see I.I.S.H., Archief Marinus van der Goes van Naters, box 11B, Van der Goes van Naters, ‘De Positie van het Italiaanse Socialisme’, 22 Jan. 1951.

Service,¹²³ while Healey said that Saragat was in the pocket of the Americans and the American labour leader David Dubinski.¹²⁴ Despite the rhetorical excess, these statements cannot be dismissed too easily: the Labour party helped the foreign office in the Italian elections of April 1948 and in securing the ratification of the Atlantic Treaty. However, the international department was not a tool; the civil servants were more than once frustrated with Healey's actions. In 1947 and 1949 the British embassy in Rome failed to convince Healey to develop a special relationship with Saragat. Healey would 'listen' to the advice of the diplomats but did not 'undertake to follow it'. It is evident that the Socialist International could take 'positive action on questions of socialist credentials', but anti-communism was not enough to get these credentials.¹²⁵

Indeed inside Comisco the British Labour party and the P.v.d.A. had different opinions about what constituted a true socialist party, which reflected their own sense of identity, and the Dutch had no qualms about resisting the hegemonic pretence of the British. Van der Goes van Naters, for example, argued that 'the ways of the Labour Party are sometimes very odd, Comisco does not have to become a copy of the Labour Party'.¹²⁶

The culture of the British Labour party required that a socialist party stay in opposition, 'in the wilderness', building a following among the working class and refusing a coalition with the bourgeois parties so as not to compromise its outsider credentials. At the 1948 Annual Conference Zilliacus charged the Labour leadership with seeking a relationship with 'Macdonaldite Socialists' in France and Italy, an expression Healey used more than once in private. Healey often expressed the opinion that association with politicians close to the Catholic Church made it impossible for the social democrats to win substantial working-class support.¹²⁷ A civil servant reported that 'Mr Healey still thinks that the best hope for Italian socialism lies in the wilderness as recommended by the PSU'.¹²⁸ When the Italian ambassador accused Healey of undermining the Italian government and European stability, the latter admitted he had a point, but the only concern of the Labour party was 'the unity of all the labour forces in Italy'.¹²⁹ Although the Labour party had even less association with Marxism than the Dutch socialists, its policy and language appealed to revolutionary Marxists like Angelica Balabanoff – a former secretary of the Comintern – who said:

But where, I ask, is the contradiction between Labour Britain and the Marxist method? At the Milan Conference of our Party, a British Comrade [Healey] said that in Britain a fundamental change had taken place and it could be explained in very simple terms: The poor eat more and the rich eat less. He understood the Marxist method.¹³⁰

¹²³ A.C.S., D.G.P.S., Divisione affari generali, 1949, box 19, Questura di Roma, 8 Oct. 1949; A.C.S., D.G.P.S., Divisione affari Generali, 1951, box 31, folder P.S.L.I., Questura di Roma, 3 Jan. 1950; A.C.S., D.G.P.S., Divisione affari Generali, 1951, box 31, folder Partito Socialista Unitario, Nota della questura di Roma del 21 gennaio 1950.

¹²⁴ Dubinski was the leader of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, and made interventions in many trade union movements throughout Europe (T.N.A., FO 371/79301–Z8223, Healey to Mayhew, 16 Dec. 1949).

¹²⁵ L.P.A., I.D., Italy, box 11, International Socialist Conference (Paris), summary of speeches.

¹²⁶ I.I.S.H., Archief Marinus van der Goes van Naters, box 11B, Van der Goes van Naters to M. C. van Bolle, 29 Nov. 1949.

¹²⁷ D. Healey, 'Mediterranean impressions-1', *Tribune*, 11 Feb. 1949.

¹²⁸ T.N.A., FO 371/89637–WT 1015/23, A. R. Moore, minute, 20 March 1950.

¹²⁹ *I documenti diplomatici italiani*, Gallarati Scotti to Sforza, 10 June 1949 (p. 1107).

¹³⁰ I.I.S.H., S.I., box 54, circular 155/50, 'Report of the International Socialist Conference at Copenhagen, 1–3 June 1950'.

Even without Marxism, the working class was central to the identity of the Labour party: only the working class could save democracy and only a democratic socialist party could keep the workers away from communism. An article in the *Economist*, most likely written by Healey,¹³¹ explained the limited effect of propaganda about the communist purges:

But this is generally speaking, only a reaction of intellectuals. The hard core of French and Italian labour will remain loyal to the party as long as prices are high, food is scarce and unemployment threatens. And it is on the indoctrinated party cadres and the industrial masses that Moscow relies to keep western Europe seething.¹³²

The Labour party was ‘the only effective bulwark against reaction and revolution’, according to Arthur Henderson.¹³³ Jim Griffiths first argued that misery and despair had produced fascism, then claimed that ‘totalitarian Communism is born of chaos and nurtured on despair’,¹³⁴ adopting this claim as his rationale for being a staunch supporter of the Beveridge Report during the war and one of the designers of the Welfare State as a minister.

Healey complained that centrist politicians in Italy wanted to take power immediately and lacked a long-term perspective: ‘they will not reconcile themselves to the long period of organization and propaganda to develop the strength on which effective action could be built’.¹³⁵ The national character made them too doctrinal and quarrelsome, which damaged party unity: ‘Only the Communist and Catholic parties’, he wrote, ‘possess both the faith to unite divergent tendencies and the long-term view which enables them to pass from tactic to strategy’.¹³⁶

‘Faith’ was the pre-rational, emotional element – like Sorel’s myth – that bound together all the members of the movement despite religious, industrial, and regional divisions. It called for the subordination of the individual to the group, the sacrifice of today for tomorrow, the acceptance of majority rule when in the minority and of dissenting opinions that did not threaten party unity when in majority. At the Labour party’s fiftieth jubilee celebration, Griffiths drew from non-conformist language to commend the loyalty and devotion of the pioneers, great leaders and anonymous workers, who built the party without any realistic hope but with faith keeping them alive through the dark times.¹³⁷ In the nineteen-thirties the control of the trade unions over the party became stronger and their ethos put great emphasis on unity and the submission of the individual to the organization, giving cohesion a moral character.¹³⁸ Unionists like Bevin saw MacDonald’s actions in 1931 as the betrayal of the intellectuals.

¹³¹ At the time Healey wrote unsigned articles for *The Economist*. Given the themes and the language, the attribution to him is reasonable (E. Pierce, *Denis Healey: a Life in Our Times* (2002), pp. 96–102).

¹³² [D. Healey?], ‘A year of Titoism’, *The Economist*, 2 July 1949. The Italian diplomats read the article and agreed with it (Rome, Archivio storico diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (hereafter M.A.E.), Rappresentanza diplomatica d’Italia a Budapest, box 8, folder 4, Comunismo, Cominform (1947–52), Sofia to Roma, 18 Oct. 1947).

¹³³ A. Thorpe, ‘“The only effective bulwark against reaction and revolution”: Labour and the frustration of the extreme left’, in *The Failure of Political Extremism in Inter-War Britain*, ed. A. Thorpe (Exeter, 1989), pp. 11–28, at pp. 11–19.

¹³⁴ *Labour Party Annual Conference Report* (1949), p. 110.

¹³⁵ T.N.A., FO 371/89636–WT 1015/5, Denis Healey, ‘Report on the Italian Socialist Unification Congress’; FO 371/89636–WT 1015/3, V. Mallet (Rome) to foreign office, 10 Jan. 1950.

¹³⁶ T.N.A., FO 371/89636–WT 1015/5, Denis Healey, ‘Report on the Italian Socialist Unification Congress’.

¹³⁷ *Labour Party Annual Conference Report 1949*, p. 107.

¹³⁸ E. Shaw, *Discipline and Discord in the Labour Party: the Politics of Managerial Control in the Labour Party, 1951–87* (Manchester, 1988), pp. 26–30.

This emphasis on unity and faith explains the utter contempt for Saragat shared by almost every member of the Labour party, as he had committed the cardinal sin of splitting the party.¹³⁹

The Dutch Labour party was different from its British counterpart and could better appreciate Saragat's strategy without seeing him as a traitor. The Dutch socialists thought Saragat's decision to split the party in January 1947 had been commendable and brave, as he had given Italian socialists and workers an alternative to Catholics and communists.¹⁴⁰ Saragat was following a road the P.v.d.A. had itself taken a decade before: good relations with the Christian parties, coalition government, less emphasis on Marxist ideology and the working-class, and overtures to the middle classes. Van der Goes van Naters greatly appreciated Saragat's symbolic breaks with the working-class past, such as removing the hammer and sickle from the party symbol.¹⁴¹ The kernel of this strategy was the assumption that the socialists would not be able to win a majority of seats – especially in a system with proportional representation – and, therefore, winning votes was less important than the ability to form a coalition. This required ideological flexibility and good will towards the Christian parties and less ambiguity in relations with the communists in order not to raise suspicions. Ideologically Saragat and the P.v.d.A. were close, as was revealed by the debates over the declaration of principles at the Frankfurt Congress.¹⁴² Furthermore, the Dutch and Italian socialists had a very positive attitude towards European unification and supra-national solutions. Dutch federalists in the P.v.d.A. like Jaap Burger and Van der Goes van Naters found working with the British in the council of Europe frustrating, and this coloured their perception of the Italian situation.¹⁴³ When at the 1951 Socialist International Congress Healey and Van der Goes van Naters offered two opposing arguments on European unification, Italian social democrats sided with the latter.¹⁴⁴

The anti-European attitude in the British Labour movement was strengthened by the widespread suspicion towards Continental Roman Catholics.¹⁴⁵ Healey blamed the 'Jesuit-controlled' Catholic Action organization for the split in the Italian trade union movement, arguing that socialist trade unionists considered joining a confessional trade union to be political suicide,¹⁴⁶ and he argued that the Italian Christian Democrats could not be a true labour party, as it was just an arm of the church.¹⁴⁷ His 'anti-clerical feeling' displeased the foreign office.¹⁴⁸ Traditional anti-clerical socialists appreciated Healey's attitude, but people like Saragat and the Dutch socialists wanted to remove anti-clericalism as a distinctive feature of socialism. The most important initiative the

¹³⁹ See also Varsori, pp. 162–4, 177–9.

¹⁴⁰ I.I.S.H., Archief Marinus van der Goes van Naters, box 11B, Van der Goes van Naters to Saragat, 22 Dec. 1949; box 11C, J. A. W. Burger to Marinus van der Goes van Naters, 3 Jan. 1950.

¹⁴¹ I.I.S.H., Archief Marinus van der Goes van Naters, box 11B, Van der Goes van Naters aan het Partijbeatuur van de Partij van de Arbeid, 30 Jan. 1949.

¹⁴² I.I.S.H., S.I., box 60, circular 87/51, 'Report of the meeting of the Committee of the International Socialist Conference at Frankfurt-on-Main, 28–29 June 1951'.

¹⁴³ I.I.S.H., Archief Marinus van der Goes van Naters, box 11C, J. A. W. Burger to Marinus van der Goes van Naters, 3 Jan. 1950; Van der Goes van Naters, p. 242.

¹⁴⁴ I.I.S.H., S.I., box 59, circular 55/51, report on Comisco meeting, 2–4 March 1951.

¹⁴⁵ R. Broad, *Labour's European Dilemmas: from Bevin to Blair* (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 24.

¹⁴⁶ T.N.A., FO 371/89636–WT 1015/5, Denis Healey, 'Report on the Italian Socialist Unification Congress'. See also Romero, p. 165.

¹⁴⁷ *I documenti diplomatici italiani*, p. 1107, Gallarati Scotti to Sforza, 10 June 1949.

¹⁴⁸ T.N.A., FO 371/89636–WT 1015/5, M. B. Jacob, minute, 26 Jan. 1950.

P.v.d.A. took for the Socialist International was to encourage an ideological revision and adopt a positive attitude towards religion, approved by a conference in 1953.¹⁴⁹

The foreign policy of their respective governments also played a part in dividing Healey and Van der Goes van Naters. The Dutch thought Italy was the front line of the west and that Labour backed the neutralist P.S.U. because Bevin had opposed Italy's admission to the Atlantic Alliance.¹⁵⁰ Though Liberal foreign minister Dirk Stikker backed Bevin on this issue, Van der Goes van Naters was more sympathetic to Saragat's fight with neutralism, as he had been responsible for persuading the reluctant members of the P.v.d.A. to accept the Atlantic Treaty.¹⁵¹ While Healey had said that accepting the Atlantic Treaty was not a precondition for being a member of Comisco, Van der Goes van Naters and Burger considered it the most important issue at stake.¹⁵² Moreover, the resentment the Dutch government had developed towards the British for their lack of support in Indonesia made them sympathetic to the Italians' demands for the return of their former colonies.¹⁵³

When we examine these events, it can be seen that the intervention of the Socialist International and the Labour party in Italy led to great expectations and great failures. In 1948 Healey, Silone and anti-fascist leader Gaetano Salvemini had high expectations about democratic socialism in Italy. 'Instead, we had another miscarriage', Salvemini said when the P.S.L.I. joined the government.¹⁵⁴

Giovanni Sabbatucci has demonstrated how many old socialist militants and skilled workers abandoned the P.S.I.-P.C.I. coalition and voted for Socialist Unity, particularly in the traditional strongholds of the Italian working class.¹⁵⁵ There are some indications that the appeal of the Labour party and Comisco might have convinced some workers to desert the communist-dominated C.G.I.L. and also to vote for Socialist Unity.¹⁵⁶ Vittorelli remembered how impressed the poor peasants in the Abruzzi were that an international organization with the magic name of Comisco was interested in their fate, remarking that 'International Socialist solidarity was the one trump card with which the Left among the democratic Socialists could win an audience'.¹⁵⁷

By 1951 it had become common for social democrats to have a very pessimist outlook: 'Italian socialism has been, is, and will remain for the foreseeable future a broken reed. The reasons are deep-rooted, ineradicable and familiar', wrote an official in

¹⁴⁹ Braunthal, pp. 207–9.

¹⁵⁰ I.I.S.H., Archief Marinus van der Goes van Naters, box 11B, M. van der Goes van Naters, 'Italië, Slagveld van een koude oorlog' (unidentified journal, summer of 1949); M. van der Goes van Naters, 'De Positie van het Italiaanse Socialisme', 22 Jan. 1951.

¹⁵¹ G. Scott-Smith, *Networks of Empire: the US State Department's Foreign Leader Program in the Netherlands, France and Britain: 1950–70* (Brussels, 2008), p. 109.

¹⁵² I.I.S.H., Archief Marinus van der Goes van Naters, box 11C, J. A. W. Burger to Marinus van der Goes van Naters, 3 Jan. 1950; box 11B, Van der Goes van Naters to M. C. van Bolle, 29 Nov. 1949.

¹⁵³ W. Mallinson, *From Neutrality to Commitment: Dutch Foreign Policy, NATO, and European Integration* (2010), pp. 56–9.

¹⁵⁴ T.N.A., FO 371/73161–Z4339, Healey to Lombardo, 25 May 1948; G. Vassalli, 'Il Piave', *l'Umanità*, 21 Apr. 1948; T. Borgogni, 'Il carteggio Codignola-Silone negli anni 1947–51', in *L'azionismo nella storia d'Italia, 1946–53*, ed. L. Mercuri (Ancona, 1998), pp. 384–93, at p. 389. Salvemini had high hopes for the P.S.U. ('Qualche sasso in capponaia', *Il Mondo*, 24 Dec. 1949).

¹⁵⁵ G. Sabbatucci, *Il riformismo impossibile: storie del socialismo italiano* (Rome, 1991), pp. 84–8.

¹⁵⁶ T.N.A., LAB 13/457, W. H. Braine to H. G. Gee, 19 Apr. 1948.

¹⁵⁷ P. Vittorelli, 'Lift the Hunger Curtain', *Tribune*, 2 May 1952.

the foreign office.¹⁵⁸ This prediction proved to be correct: for the following forty years the Italian Democratic Socialist party was an almost permanent member of coalition governments, with few voters (6 per cent at best), found only among the progressive middle class and the beneficiaries of government patronage, and no workers were won over from the communists. Silone agreed with Healey that staying in opposition was the key to success, believing that it would take ten years to build up socialism in Italy.¹⁵⁹ Salvemini made the same prediction: ‘I think that by joining the De Gasperi government [Saragat] wasted a position which was not electoral, but moral and political and which could have borne precious fruits in the next ten years. The man has cut down the tree to eat the fruit’.¹⁶⁰

If they knew the route, why did they not take it? Healey and the foreign office argued that Italian politicians lacked endurance: ‘the Italians are most impressed by results and would be unlikely to back in any force a party which never held office’.¹⁶¹ However national character is a poor explanation and what really mattered was finances, because staying in the wilderness cost money. A lack of funds was a millstone around the neck of the Italian socialists, particularly because it was not just the party which needed funding but the factions too.¹⁶² The people supplying such funds could hinder the freedom of the socialists to follow the most profitable course. For example, the American trade unionists promised \$25,000 if the socialists refused fusion with the communists in 1946.¹⁶³ From the start, the disparity of resources greatly encumbered the P.S.L.I. in its political battles: at the 1947 Sicilian election they spent only two million lire, compared to the six to seven million lire spent by P.S.I., and the thirty million spent by the P.C.I.¹⁶⁴ The American trade unionists used the promise of much needed funds to force the social democrats to join a coalition with the Christian Democrats in 1948,¹⁶⁵ and the social democratic unionists to abandon the communist trade union federation later that year.¹⁶⁶ Giuseppe Faravelli – a socialist leader and editor of the theoretical journal of Italian reformism, *Critica Sociale* – protested against these moves that damaged the ultimate goal of the party: winning the workers away from the communists and rebuilding a free socialist movement. This would be impossible if the socialists abandoned their nature to embrace ‘anti-Bolshevism of any kind, even clerical anti-Bolshevism’ and, hence, become undistinguishable from Franco.¹⁶⁷ The American trade unionists simply ceased to support Faravelli and chose to support the ex-communist Carlo Andreoni, who was closer to Saragat and employed an extremely violent rhetoric.¹⁶⁸

¹⁵⁸ T.N.A., FO 371/96226–WT1015/7, G. P. Young, minute, 8 Aug. 1951.

¹⁵⁹ T.N.A., LAB 13/457, W. H. Braine to Stewart and Pilcher, 3 Jan. 1950.

¹⁶⁰ I.I.S.H., Anželika Balabanova papers, box 130, Gaetano Salvemini to Angelica Balabanoff, 9 Feb. 1948.

¹⁶¹ T.N.A., FO 371/89636–WT 1015/5, A. R. Moore, minute, 26 Jan. 1950.

¹⁶² Rome, Fondazione Nenni, Fondo Pietro Nenni (hereafter F.N.R.), Serie corrispondenza, ‘44–’79, box 18, folder 1093 (Lelio Basso), Basso to Nenni, 25 Sept. 1945; Serie corrispondenza, ‘44–’79, box 18, folder 1098 (Augusto Bellanca) Bellanca to Nenni, 18 Dec. 1946.

¹⁶³ F.N.R., Serie corrispondenza, ‘44–’79, box 33, folder 1651 (Henry Molinari), Molinari to Nenni, 28 March 1946. See also Romero, pp. 66–7.

¹⁶⁴ Masini and Merli, p. 255, Faravelli to Antonini, 26 Apr. 1947.

¹⁶⁵ Masini and Merli, p. 256, Montana to Faravelli, 4 May 1947; A. Roveri, *Il socialismo tradito: la sinistra italiana negli anni della guerra fredda* (Scandicci, 1995), p. 26.

¹⁶⁶ Masini and Merli, p. 363, Faravelli to Antonini, 7 Oct. 1948.

¹⁶⁷ Masini and Merli, p. 365, Faravelli to Montana, 13 Oct. 1948.

¹⁶⁸ Masini and Merli, pp. 386–7, Montana to Faravelli, 18 Dec. 1948.

During the recruitment drive for the December 1949 conference, Romita had the advantage that Vittorio Valletta, C.E.O. of Fiat, had decided to finance him instead of the P.S.L.I., since he hoped that a unified socialist party would be able to destroy the P.S.I. by encouraging defections.¹⁶⁹ Romita also had contributions from an entrepreneur who had received lucrative procurements while the former was minister for public works. Once these funds were exhausted, the financial state of the P.S.U. became dire, only slightly better than the smaller Icelandic party, as Comisco's balance sheet reveals.¹⁷⁰ At the end of 1950 Silone confessed: 'The search for funds to pay for our extremely narrow expenses becomes every month more difficult, more precarious, more humiliating. I repeat ... I do not mean we have to liquidate the PSU and accept unification at any cost, but it is to say that we can no longer go on this way'.¹⁷¹ In this period of hardship, the P.S.U. received money from Yugoslavia, and by January 1951 regular party activities had to stop due to precarious finances.¹⁷²

Nenni had the same problem and was subject to similar influences. In September 1948, he visited the Soviet Union, where he suffered many personal humiliations and was denied financial help.¹⁷³ The Italian Communist party told him that as long as the P.S.I. abandoned any notion of breaking unity of action with the communists, it would from time to time supply sufficient funds to prevent the total collapse of the party, although it would not undertake to provide regular finance. Thus the secretary of the party was obliged to announce that the P.S.I. would remain faithful to the unity of action with the P.C.I. When Nenni took back leadership of the P.S.I., in May 1949, he found it in a desperate financial situation.¹⁷⁴

Another important factor limiting the effectiveness of international socialist action was nationalism. The loss of territories to Yugoslavia, the loss of the colonies, and the threat of losing Trieste were emotionally charged issues that tinged the political climate of post-war Italy with nationalism. Nenni tried to explain to Bevin that Trieste was to the Italians what Strasbourg was to the French,¹⁷⁵ and even *Critica Sociale*, the journal that actively took the British Labour party as a model, openly contested the Labour government on the Italian colonies.¹⁷⁶ When the P.S.L.I. broke with Comisco and openly attacked the Labour party, it exploited anti-British feeling created over the issue of the former Italian colonies. The United Nations had had to decide whether to divide the colonies between Italy and Britain or to make them independent, and finally chose the latter. The newspaper of the P.S.L.I. responded by publishing an editorial cartoon where Bevin was about to use the Atlantic Charter as toilet paper.¹⁷⁷

In 1952, it was decided to hold the Socialist International's second congress in Milan, the working-class capital of Italy, to demonstrate the interest of international socialism in

¹⁶⁹ C.I.A., 'Information Report'.

¹⁷⁰ L.P.A., general secretary papers 10/1, International Socialist Conference, circular 17/51, 12 Feb. 1951.

¹⁷¹ Borgogni, p. 392.

¹⁷² A.C.S., D.G.P.S., Divisione affari Generali, 1951, box 31, folder Partito socialista (Siis), 25 June 1951; D.G.P.S., Divisione affari Generali, 1951, box 31, folder Partito socialista unitario, Questura di Roma, 11 Jan. 1951.

¹⁷³ T.N.A., KV 2/2025, 'Extract from SIS report re Italy', 28 Sep. 1948; Rome to western department, 26 Oct. 1948.

¹⁷⁴ Nenni, p. 487, 18 May 1949.

¹⁷⁵ F.N.R., Serie corrispondenza, '44-'79, box 19, folder 1118 (Ernest Bevin), Nenni to Bevin, 5 Sept. 1945.

¹⁷⁶ U. G. Mondolfo, 'L'Italia e le potenze vincitrici', *Critica Sociale*, 30 Sept. 1945; U. G. Mondolfo, 'Dopo la conferenza di Londra', *Critica Sociale*, 1 March 1946.

¹⁷⁷ *L'Umanità*, 5 Oct. 1949.

the country as a Cold War battleground and to boost the prestige of the P.S.D.I. a few months before elections. However, the police report on the reaction of the ordinary workers of Milan showed that the Socialist International had failed to win them over, and that they considered the P.S.D.I. a group of petit bourgeois who wanted a red social democracy without the popular masses.¹⁷⁸ The citizens of Milan mocked Paolo Treves for addressing the congress in English, as he had when the R.A.F. had bombed the city, having worked for the B.B.C. broadcasting to Italy during the war. The citizens also resented the discrimination against Italian miners in Britain and the ‘theft’ of the colonies. They said that the Labourites controlled the International to compensate for their lost imperial power and that the Italian social democrats were useful idiots.

The slights that Britain was seen to be inflicting on Italy were read in the light of the inferiority traditionally attributed to the Mediterranean countries in British culture, which the Italians perceived as a denial of their being part of the white race. In the polemical attacks of the P.S.L.I. against the Labour party, Andreoni, the editor of the P.S.L.I. newspaper, accused Healey of treating the Italians ‘with words that Negro socialists ... might find bearable’.¹⁷⁹ Colonization was conceived as the right of the superior race over the inferior race, thus many Italians saw being denied the right to have colonies as the equivalent of being branded as an inferior race; it was a similar response to that of Alfred von Tirpitz when he accused the British of treating the Germans as blacks.¹⁸⁰ Resentment towards Britain was a sign of resistance to the dominant discourse, that is the inferiority of the Latin races, but the reaction mimicked what they considered a feature of a superior race, that is the right to colonize. Even those Italian diplomats who admired the programme of the Labour party and wanted the Italian government to adopt it,¹⁸¹ said they would have preferred the Conservatives in government because of this perceived attitude, as ‘At least they do not have the ideological prejudices the Labourites have against us: 1) Italy is unable to have a socialist government as the LP means it; 2) Italy is governed by reactionaries; 3) worst of all, they are under the influence of the Vatican’.¹⁸²

The many negative reactions of workers, politicians and diplomats to its interventions shows the limits of the Socialist International. First, unlike the Comintern, it did not have a rich patron and so could only supply recognition to weak parties, not the money they needed to become stronger and independent. Second, for recognition to be effective it had to be identified with a successful example of actually existing socialism – in this case the British Labour party – but thus it carried over all the negative connotations associated with its model.¹⁸³ Nonetheless, the intervention of the Socialist International between 1947 and 1950 had an important long-term effect. Healey always rejected the charge that the international department interfered in Italian affairs, took

¹⁷⁸ A.C.S., D.G.P.S., Divisione affari riservati, 1951–3, box 54, folder p–50, Fiduciaria da Milano, 23 Oct. 1952.

¹⁷⁹ C. A. [Carlo Andreoni], ‘Due Discorsi’, *L’Umanità*, 9 Dec. 1949.

¹⁸⁰ On the relationship between freedom and owning slaves in classical liberalism, see D. Losurdo, *Liberalism: a Counter-History* (2014); G. Radice, *Offshore, Britain and the European Idea* (1992), p. 76.

¹⁸¹ M.A.E., Serie affari politici 1946–50, Gran Bretagna, box 36, folder 7, Ambasciata di Londra to Roma, 13 Sept. 1949.

¹⁸² M.A.E., Serie affari politici 1946–50, Gran Bretagna, box 36, folder 7, Anzillotti a Zoppi, segretario generale M.A.E., 3 June 1949.

¹⁸³ Healey conceded this in an internal document (L.P.A., I.D., minutes and documents, 1948, ‘Memorandum on international socialist policy’).

part in intrigues and had a special relationship with one faction. Saragat believed that Healey had regular contact with Silone through his wife, Darina Silone, and Vittorelli, but he could not prove it.¹⁸⁴ The foreign office dismissed the accusation as fantastical, but the facts seem to vindicate Saragat. Van der Goes van Naters confirmed that the Labour party preferred Silone and Romita to Saragat, and that it had always considered Silone its favourite socialist leader, hoping he would unite the P.S.L.I. and P.S.I. in 1947; Ignazio Silone was also a friend of Crossman and Mary Saran, long-time editor of *Socialist Commentary*.

The clearest case of a special relationship was between Denis Healey and Paolo Vittorelli (real name Raffaele Battino). In the nineteen-thirties Vittorelli was a member of *Giustizia e Libertà* – the liberal socialist group created by Carlo Rosselli – and he did undercover work in Italy. In 1941 he contributed to the war effort publishing an Italian newspaper in Cairo under the direction of Umberto Calosso, who was well known to the Labour party's international department and who the Special Operations Executive made responsible for Italian propaganda in the Middle East.¹⁸⁵ In 1942 Vittorelli himself worked for the S.O.E., as many of the non-communist left did during the war.¹⁸⁶ Unlike others, Vittorelli had long-held contacts with the British, going back to before the war. The fascist consular authorities in Egypt reported that his family was hostile to fascism and was collaborating with the British authorities.¹⁸⁷ Correspondence between Vittorelli and Michael Foot shows contact between them starting with the latter's visit to Italy in June 1949.¹⁸⁸ When the Labour party sent a delegation to Italy to help negotiate the union of P.S.I. and P.S.D.I. in 1957, Saragat invited Vittorelli to join the talks, although at the time he did not belong to either party, but was a member of the small group *Unità Popolare*.¹⁸⁹

Until 1959 the entrepreneur Dino Gentili had acted as a liaison between Nenni and Crossman and Bevan,¹⁹⁰ but Gaitskell disliked him, so another intermediary had to be found. Despite having been a member of the party for less than a year, Vittorelli assumed the responsibilities of international secretary for the P.S.I. – he had held the same position for the P.S.U. in 1950 – thanks to his personal relations with the Labour party, especially Denis Healey. Gaitskell had always been cold towards Nenni, but Healey was still interested in seeing the alternative strategy develop in Italy.¹⁹¹ Alfred Robens called Vittorelli 'a great personal friend of Denis Healey'.¹⁹² Indeed, according to the American embassy, Vittorelli had been given an important position inside the P.S.I. because the Labour party trusted him and wanted someone to check the sincerity of Nenni's conversion to western-style socialism.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁴ T.N.A., FO 371/79301–Z7903, Rome to foreign office, 26 Nov. 1949.

¹⁸⁵ L.P.A., James Middleton papers, I.D., box 10, 'Umberto Calosso', curriculum vitae, n.d.; B. F. Heine to William Gillies, 11 June 1942.

¹⁸⁶ T.N.A., HS 6/821. In his autobiography Vittorelli denies any involvement (P. Vittorelli, *L'età della speranza: testimonianze e ricordi del Partito d'azione* (Scandicci, 1998), pp. 1–15).

¹⁸⁷ A.C.S., D.G.P.S., Divisione affari riservati, Polizia politica, Fascicoli personali, box 90, folder Raffaele Batino; A.C.S., D.G.P.S., Divisione Affari generali e riservati, A4, box 331, folder Ernesto Setton.

¹⁸⁸ L.P.A., Michael Foot papers, Tribune papers (2).

¹⁸⁹ Crossman, pp. 575–7, 14 Feb. 1957.

¹⁹⁰ Nuti, pp. 191, 207.

¹⁹¹ University College London (hereafter U.C.L.), Gaitskell Archive, C310(2), Denis Healey to Hugh Gaitskell, 'Earthquake in Italy', n.d. [probably June 1956].

¹⁹² U.C.L., Gaitskell Archive, C204, Alfred Robens to Hugh Gaitskell, 4 Apr. 1960.

¹⁹³ Nuti, pp. 275–7.

This would seem to indicate that the Labour party had indeed established a special relationship with a section of Italian socialism and briefly acted in co-ordination with them to further their common goal: the creation of a strong social democratic party in Italy. From 1957 to 1963, the Labour party helped the evolution of Nenni towards western-style socialism; this intervention was similar to that which took place between 1947 and 1950.¹⁹⁴ In 1952 Nenni accused Romita of having accepted the conditions of the centrist parties: refusal to co-operate with the communists; recognition of the principles of the Socialist International; and acceptance of the Atlantic Treaty as an instrument of defence.¹⁹⁵ They were exactly the same conditions the P.S.I. had to accept to join a coalition government with the Christian Democrats in 1963. During its conversion to social democracy from 1955 to 1963, the P.S.I. had to adopt the programme of the P.S.U., which was different from that of Saragat but which was acceptable to the Labour party, as the foreign policy had been suggested by Healey. Indeed in 1963 Vittorelli wrote the foreign policy section of the P.S.I. manifesto, which took the line of the Labour party on many issues.¹⁹⁶ This allowed Nenni to discuss problems of foreign policy with Harold Wilson and to plan a common response to the proposal of the U.S. to create a Multilateral Nuclear Force.¹⁹⁷ Vittorelli's respectability allowed him to become the first Italian socialist to be invited to the Bilderberg meetings, where, in co-ordination with Healey, he impressed on McGeorge Bundy how much the Multilateral Force was damaging the unity of the Atlantic Alliance by raising the issue of nuclear proliferation and German nuclear armament. After years of repeated objections, the Americans put the proposal to rest.¹⁹⁸

Comisco's power could be effective, under the right conditions, for day-to-day problems, but it could not help the long-term development of socialism in a country where it was weak. The greatest achievement of the Socialist International, however, was favouring the socialization of politicians and the creation of an international network of socialist leaders.

As Gramsci noted, cosmopolitanism is a feature of economic power and nationalism a feature of political power. Political power is the power of the nation state and the members of the elite compete for such political power almost exclusively at the national level.¹⁹⁹ A central feature of mid-twentieth-century Europe is how highly organized parties representing vast sections of society established a tight control over access to political power and acted as the breeding ground of the new political elite. Interactions and interventions across national borders played a part in the formation of these new elites, as they provided new, ambitious politicians with resources to prevail over their competitors, explaining why factional competition developed an international dimension. This intervention in Italian politics was part of the generational turnover taking place inside social democratic parties, which in turn influenced the generational turnover of the political elite.

¹⁹⁴ Nenni's move towards western-style socialism is described in Nuti and Favretto.

¹⁹⁵ *L'Avanti!*, 20 May 1952.

¹⁹⁶ L.P.A., I.D., Italy, box 17, D. Ennals, 'Notes for James Callaghan in readiness for attendance at the Congress of the P.S.I. October 25th–29th', 11 Oct. 1963.

¹⁹⁷ Nenni, pp. 294–5.

¹⁹⁸ T. W. Gijswijt, 'Beyond Nato: transnational elite networks and the Atlantic Alliance', in *Transforming NATO in the Cold War: Challenges beyond Deterrence in the 1960s*, ed. A. Wenger, C. Nuenlist and A. Locher (2007), pp. 50–64, at p. 59.

¹⁹⁹ See A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*: iii, *Il Risorgimento* (Torino, 1975), pp. 1775–6; G. Vacca, *Il riformismo italiano: dalla fine della guerra fredda alle sfide future* (Rome, 2006), p. 7.