

Over one million people attended the funeral of Enrico Berlinguer. All sections of Italian opinion mourned the death of a great and respected figure. But Berlinguer was not just a remarkable Italian leader, he was one of the great political figures of postwar Europe.

Berlinguer: architect of Eurocommunism

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A POLITICAL LEADER dies, he is mourned by his friends and respected by his opponents. Well over one million people participate in the funeral. When his death was announced all workers stopped in silence for two minutes. Is it another case of a personality cult? This is unlikely, Enrico Berlinguer's style of leadership was unusual and even out of place in the vulgar age of show business politicians and media-made leadership. He looked and behaved as a man who never sought personal power and whose ego remained unaffected by the pressures of personal ambition. Leadership had been thrust upon him and he had accepted it with that sense of duty which had been one of the basic traits of his austere and slightly puritanical character.

An old party leader once said that his official biography should start thus: 'When very young, Enrico Berlinguer joined the leadership group of the Italian Communist Party'. This is not only a quip, it is also a fact. Berlinguer joins the PCI in 1943 when he is 21. In 1945 he is in the Central Committee. At first he works in Milan, then in Rome. In 1948 he is a member of the Executive Committee. A year later he is secretary general of the Youth Federation of the PCI. A year later, we are now in 1950 and he is 28, he becomes president of the World Federation of Democratic Youth, the 'Comintern' of the young communists. After this (important) international experience he returns to Rome where he will stay for good. He runs the party school (1957), enters the party secretariat (1958), he is

put in charge of the party organisation (1960) then of the party's regional organisation in the Latium (a demotion?). In 1968 he is elected to parliament. In 1969 the ailing leader of the PCI, Luigi Longo, asks him to become deputy secretary and his obvious successor. Longo will later explain that he had asked all the members of the secretariat and that Berlinguer had been their unanimous choice. In 1972 Enrico is at the top: secretary-general.

Togliatti

Berlinguer had played a very minor role in the Resistance and had no experience of the Comintern which had been disbanded the year he joined the party. He was the representative of a new generation of Italian communist leader. His Stalinism - when Stalin was alive - was *pro forma* and dictated by political necessity and not by

conviction. His Leninism was mediated by Palmiro Togliatti. Gramscism was his natural cultural habitat. The successor of Bordiga, Gramsci, Togliatti and Longo had no heroic past, had not been a leader of men and women, had no contribution to make to Marxist theory or the dialectics. He had never worked in a factory, nor led a strike, was a member of the petty aristocracy and came - like Gramsci - from Sardinia, a land inhabited - as many Italians used to say (and some still say) - by bandits and sheep. Longo later said that one of the reasons why they chose this unlikely man was that in 1969 the party needed someone who understood the young. Berlinguer had led the young communists and was still relatively young.

Inevitably he would be compared to Togliatti, the authentic shaper of the modern Italian Communist Party. Togliatti

was the product of a great international communist tradition. To lead the party meant to lead it in every way.

Togliatti would run the party organisation, decide on parliamentary tactics, keep in touch with foreign communist leaders, make the introductory speech for all meetings of the Central Committee, write the agenda, draw the conclusion, write at least one or two leading articles a week for the daily *L'Unità*, write the leading article for the weekly *Rinascita*, really edit *Rinascita* (sometimes rewriting other people's articles or telling them how and why they should write them). He would also jot down a couple of book reviews, polemicise with various intellectuals on theatre or music or the arts and write essays on Labriola or Gramsci or the Risorgimento.

A strategist

Berlinguer did none of these things. He wrote little and only for a particular purpose: a celebration, a Central Committee meeting, a public speech. He would write on politics and on nothing else. A product of the apparatus he seems an apparatchik. Yet he was unexceptional as a party manager. Others did it on his behalf. Togliatti had an intuition in detecting the whiff of a politician among his younger colleagues. He pushed forward people like Ingrao and Amendola, gave them jobs and responsibilities and used them for a long war of attrition against the older leaders who had grown in the shadows of the Comintern. Berlinguer did not have this ability or perhaps he thought that it was not his job to form new leaders.

As for parliamentary tactics, these were better left to those who knew parliament well. He did not. So what did he achieve? Why did over one million people leave their jobs and homes in the middle of a week and an electoral campaign to go to Rome and pay respect to the body of Enrico Berlinguer? What had he contributed?

Some will say that in a country full of corrupt politicians and of intrigues, Berlinguer stood out for his obvious honesty, undenied even by his worst opponents; that in a country whose memory still bears the scars of the the demagogic charisma of Benito Mussolini, the austere appearance of this small Sardinian produced respect. All this is probably true, but we are not dealing with an image: there is something more important than that and for which Berlinguer will be remembered even when the image will have left no traces. This 'something more' is *political strategy*.

Berlinguer's single great effort, the task

to which he dedicated his entire life at the helm of the largest communist party in the West, was to provide the Italian working class movement with a political strategy adequate to modern Italy and its place in the modern world. This strategy, which came to be known as the 'historic compromise' did not, of course, spring out as

Even your opponents will accept your right to win.

the goddess Minerva - fully grown and fully dressed - from the head of Jupiter. It was built upon the various stepping stones laid by a struggle of 30 years. What Berlinguer did was to make the strategy of 'grand alliances' pioneered by Togliatti into a concrete strategy and to explain why it was a necessary strategy. He did it with political courage and what is more important, with political precision.

The historic compromise

In 1973 in dealing with the *coup-d'etat* in Chile, he explained that the PCI and the Left, on their own, could not run Italy. Christian Democracy (DC) was not an ordinary political party: a party which runs a pluralist and democratic country uninterruptedly for 30 years is not an ordinary political party, it becomes a regime. A regime is not something one can remove with a simple majority in the country or in parliament: that would be - truly - parliamentary cretinism. The DC had occupied all seats of power, both formal and informal, and had built a powerful consensus, an authentic power bloc. The ideological basis of this consensus was anti-communism which in the Italian context meant the following: in this country there is something 'special', a very large communist party; its presence makes it impossible to have what there is in all other West European countries, namely, an alternance of parties in government. This is so because in other countries the alternative to conservative parties are socialist and social democratic parties that do not challenge the basic consensus, but work within it and have international acceptability. Thus in Italy there can be no alternance, no bipolar system. The DC must rule for ever, or at least as long as there is a communist party of such strength and stature. Against this Berlinguer launched his political strategy. The historic compromise meant that, once you have examined the situation in its stark concrete-

ness, with no illusions and no concessions to ideology, you begin to examine the relations of compromises which are necessary to unblock the situation. In this context it was the case of 'unblocking' Italian democracy from a one-party rule, of building up a complex web of alliances and relationships so strong that eventually you could name the terms of the compromise: we, communists, know well that we cannot rule Italy against you, Christian Democrats and the masses you lead; do you accept that you can no longer rule Italy without us? That the millions of people, from all social classes, who support us must share in political power?

The third way

The fundamental lessons of the historic compromise are that in order to 'win' it is never sufficient to obtain the support and the consent of your friends. It is also necessary to act in such a way that even your opponents will accept your right to win. That is hegemony: to devise a democratic framework within which it is possible to begin to conceive the question of the transition to socialism.

Of course, such a framework does not yet exist and it has never been established. So far we have had two roads. One was based on the annihilation of the opponent, the destruction of the existing framework with all its democratic potentials and the consequent establishment of a Soviet system which now, after Poland, 'has exhausted its driving force' (Berlinguer, December 1981). The other road, the so-called social democratic one, accepted the existing framework and achieved major gains: more freedom, more democracy and the welfare state, but it has not yet been able to go beyond a redistributive socialism. What Berlinguer was trying to achieve was the famous 'third way', to prove that socialism *and* freedom could co-exist.

For a long time the Italian Communists had called this 'third way' the 'Italian Road to Socialism'. What was now becoming clear was that the 'third way' could not be purely national. It had to find an international point of reference.

Eurocommunism

Other West European communist parties had come, for different reasons and in different ways, to similar conclusions: the first important step was to signal one's autonomy, the rejection of old models. It was the high season of Eurocommunism with the joint declaration between the Italian and French communist parties soon

to be followed by similar statements with the Spanish, the British and others. Then the French CP had a common programme with the socialists, the Spanish were emerging as a major force and the Italians scored massive gains in 1975 and in 1976. They were now in control of virtually all major Italian cities and one Italian in three was a communist voter.

Then the Eurocommunist wave receded. The Spanish were plagued by an internal strife which would reduce them to a minor force in Spanish politics. The French CP did not keep up the momentum, it quarrelled bitterly with the socialists, and suffered a massive electoral defeat while their socialist rivals surged to achieve political power. The Italian CP itself was enmeshed in the difficult attempt to support a 'government of national unity' without being in government. With the death of Aldo Moro, killed by the Red Brigades terrorist group, the Communists lost the man who could have united the Christian Democrats around the ideas of the historic compromise. Eurocommunism could no longer be viable if it did not develop into a wider conception, including a broader European Left.

The new internationalism

Berlinguer's contribution to the development of Eurocommunism demonstrates the exceptional attention he paid to the international context within which his party — *all parties* — must operate. Let us return to the famous article on Chile. In a passage in which Berlinguer underlines Togliatti's warning to 'all of us' to consider the international situation as coldly and lucidly as possible, he asks: what are the international conditions to which Italy is subject? The answer is simple, it is something everyone knows, a central fact that determines all others, namely that Italy belongs to an international military-political bloc and is constrained by it. It is a harsh reality, but it is the truth. It must not lead to inertia or to paralysis, but neither must it lead to empty rhetoric, to promises that cannot be maintained. Italy cannot abandon unilaterally the Western bloc not only because the USA will not allow it, but because there is not only one bloc. There are two, and they are intertwined in an international bipolar system.

This is the meaning of the decision not to raise the issue of NATO, of the PCI's participation in all the institutions of the EEC, of the constant emphasis on European co-operation. Efforts must be made to develop the multipolarity of the international system. For a European party,

Europe is the principal reference point, but it is not a Eurocentric position (although some in the PCI and elsewhere will interpret it so). There is no conception of Europe as a 'Third Force', no left-wing gaullism. The terrain is Europe because of geography, but the aim is to find a way out of the 'logic of the bloc' and this situates immediately the Italian Communists alongside all those who everywhere on the planet struggle towards the same aims. The 'new internationalism' is no longer based purely on general feelings of 'solidarity with oppressed people'. These feelings exist, *must exist*, but they do not amount to a political strategy.

The bipolar system

During the 70s the bipolar system had entered into a severe crisis: the USA had lost in Vietnam, oil producing nations had asserted their control over their own resources, the Portuguese revolution brought about by a lengthy colonial war had given rise to three new independent states in Africa. The two superpowers react in the same way: they seek to re-establish bipolarity. But before this reaction there is a period of pause. At the Central Committee meeting of January 1982 — called to discuss the military takeover in Poland — Berlinguer explained that one of the effects of the American defeat in Vietnam was that it had forced the Carter administration to try a more cautious way, to be less aggressive, more reluctant to intervene directly. To be sure it was a weak effort, not always consistently followed and soon to be defeated. But defeated by whom? Not only by forces within the USA.

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Berlinguer has no hesitation in indicating the Soviet Union as having at least a share of the responsibilities: 'The Soviet Union did not understand the new terrain for political initiative that the dynamic effects of the American defeat in Vietnam had opened'. The USSR does not understand 'the value of non-alignment and the new concrete possibilities offered by the North-South dialogue'. The question of detente — he adds — has now become purely a question of military equilibrium. The USSR comes now to conceive of

international relations in military and security terms: 'it has chosen the line of power politics in order to consolidate and extend its own politico-military bloc ... it now considers this to be its fundamental instrument for international initiatives'. The logic of this, he adds, points to Afghanistan.

Certainly a revolutionary

What is of great value is what emerges from Berlinguer's analysis and the terrain on which the Left as a whole must work: what is the cause of these (new) 'mistakes' of the USSR? The Italian leader offers some indications. The Soviet Union can only provide a military answer (by giving arms to its friends and, when possible, intervening directly to protect them), because it cannot give any other answer. The crisis of American imperialism has also become the crisis of the Soviet bloc for the USSR has little to offer the rest of the world except a model of society they cannot follow or are unwilling to follow. This and an arsenal of deadly weapons. For long the message of the October revolution had inspired the most diverse peoples in the struggle for their emancipation. Now Lenin's successors are faced with the fact that they cannot give the nations of the world what most they need: a new international system in which they can be protagonists.

From here follows the role the Italian CP has played in the peace movement. Some found it too cautious, but the stakes are high. From here follows too the incessant streams of initiatives with the socialist parties of the European Left: the Germans, the Greeks, the Swedes, even the French; with the liberation movements, with the rest of the Third World. It was in recognition of the international stature of this man and his party that representatives of the most distant countries paid their respects to his dead body. He had shown, after all, how much you can do even in opposition!

He was preparing to go to Moscow. There, I am sure, he would have told the Soviet leaders what the European peace movement needs desperately: the removal of at least some of the SS-20s pointed towards us so that it can be made easier for us to free ourselves from those cruise missiles on our soil, deadly symbols of our subordination to 'the other side'.

Now he will not go to Moscow, but others will. He does not leave a model to follow. He was not always right. He was not a 'hero of the Revolution', but he was certainly a revolutionary.