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Abstract	<p>The contribution of Enrico Serventi Longhi aims to highlight the influence of the movement of Solidarność on the largest Italian trade union, the General Confederation of Labor during the peak of the Polish crisis (1980–1982). The author traces the ambivalences and contradictions of the debate that take place in the trade union, through an extensive study of the interviews, articles, internal reports and public speeches of intellectuals and main leaders. A clear picture emerges of both capacities and limits of Italian trade unionism (as of the whole Italian left) in understanding the real nature and depth of political and economic crisis in the socialist world.</p>	

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# Solidarity and Italian Labor Movement Culture: CGIL Intellectuals and Revision of the CGIL's International Relations (1980–1982)

*Enrico Serventi Longhi*

## 12.1 TRADE UNION CGIL AND ITS INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the debate over international policy generated by events in Poland in 1980 with regard to the Italian trade union movement's most important member, the Italian General Confederation of Labor (CGIL). On the basis of writings and some internal documents, significant interpretations emerge regarding Solidarity's fight by those within the CGIL responsible for cultural policy. This reconsideration took place as part of an extended process involving not only a redefinition by the union of its relations with the political left but also a rethinking of its association with "the socialist camp" and traditional categories of Marxist analysis.

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19 This study has to take into account the particular role of intellectuals in  
 20 an organization such as a trade union that based its identity on being a  
 21 direct or representative expression of a collectivity of workers. For this  
 22 reason, it would be incorrect to isolate particular individuals, while it  
 23 would be far more profitable to look to the collegiality of a debate taking  
 24 place in the CGIL's two cultural offices (Office of Studies and Office of  
 25 International Relations) and the editorial board of its house organ,  
 26 *Rassegna Sindacale* ("Trade Union Review").

27 The CGIL was founded in 1906, starting from a socialist and reformist  
 28 matrix; after the Fascist interruption, it was re-founded in 1944 as a uni-  
 29 tary union, bringing together Social-communist, Catholic and democratic  
 30 currents in a single entity. The dominance of the Social-communist cur-  
 31 rent became evident after the decision to call a general strike in 1948,  
 32 following the attempted assassination of Italian Communist Party head  
 33 Palmiro Togliatti. This involved a choice not shared by the other currents  
 34 that, in line with divisions taking place in general in Italian society, took  
 35 advantage of the situation to set up their own confederations: thus, the  
 36 Italian Confederation of Trade Unions (CISL) for Catholics and the  
 37 Italian Labor Union (UIL) for secular democrats were born. Polarization  
 38 in Italian society between government forces and Social-communist oppo-  
 39 sition induced the CGIL to align without delay with the "socialist camp,"  
 40 both at a national and international level: it consolidated an exclusive rela-  
 41 tionship with the Italian Communist and Socialist parties (PCI and PSI  
 42 respectively) and adhered to the World Federation of Trade Unions  
 43 (WFTU) from its founding in Paris in 1945. The WFTU was an interna-  
 44 tional organization that, after an initial period, represented exclusively  
 45 unions from the "socialist camp" from 1949 onward, reflecting the for-  
 46 eign policy interests of the Soviet bloc.

47 An ideological tension prevailed in Italy throughout the 1950s—a labor  
 48 movement little "Cold War"—that sublimated trade union demands to  
 49 the needs of a party system that left little autonomy to social forces, weak-  
 50 ened the labor movement and, in fact, favored the (European) liberal poli-  
 51 cies of the first Christian Democratic governments.<sup>1</sup>

52 This generated profound discomfort within the CGIL with regard to  
 53 conceiving trade unions as mere "transmission belts" of the Social-  
 54 communist parties and the Soviet bloc. Such a concept did not take into  
 55 account the CGIL's national and reformist culture, which continued to

<sup>1</sup>Pepe et al., "La CGIL e la costruzione della democrazia," 169 ff.

prevail although often sacrificed in the name of mounting opposition to government policies. 56  
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The contradictions exploded in 1956 on the occasion of Soviet intervention in Hungary, when CGIL Secretary Giuseppe Di Vittorio condemned the military choice, attracting the anger and disapproval of the PCI's leadership. The clash ended with a significant, but nonetheless limited, affirmation of the right of the union to criticize the Italian Communist Party.<sup>2</sup> 58  
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The economic boom of the 1960s, the reformist policies of center-left governments and the growth of stronger social movements favored a new concept of trade unionism, more attentive to its intermediary role between society and institutions and more determined to carve out a defined space for trade union autonomy. A trade unionism of this new type, according to Trentin and Foa, should make autonomous representation of workers as a whole the reason for breaking dependence on the party system and again drawing close to (notwithstanding various distinguished and diverse internal critics) the other political cultures, particularly the democratic and Catholic. The Italian labor movement's "golden season" culminated with the passage in 1970 of the Workers Statute and, two years later, the reunification of the CGIL, CISL and UIL in a Unitary Federation.<sup>3</sup> 63  
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Until then, the few positions taken by trade union officials regarding problems of international order did not arise out of the logic of the Cold War. Far from showing elements of the liberty and autonomy it demanded on a national level, the CGIL's stance on international matters was subordinated to positions taken by the Italian Communist Party. The PCI's post-World War II strategy was characterized in particular by its dependence on and conflict with Soviet leadership and by ideas proposed by Togliatti—following the Soviet Union's destalinization process and the establishment of the European Economic Community—in terms of autonomy and polycentrism. If the concept of autonomy from Soviet power had an exclusively national character, that of polycentrism implied the creation of a specific regional space, that of Western Europe, where the national Communist parties composing it—the Spanish, French and Italian—should connect and integrate, contributing more efficiently to strengthening the international "socialist camp." This was a minimalist vision of polycentrism which, however, also included potential "strategic" 75  
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<sup>2</sup> Guerra and Trentin, *Di Vittorio e l'ombra di Stalin*.

<sup>3</sup> Bordogna, *Le relazioni industriali in Italia, 191–195*. Torre Santos, *I sindacati italiani nel secondo dopoguerra*, 80. Loreto, *L'«anima bella» del sindacato*, 270 ff.

91 consequences, such as the development of an international political  
92 analysis bringing into question the USSR's primacy in the socialist camp.<sup>4</sup>

93 Coordination of the activities of the Western Communist parties pro-  
94 ceeded well in the first half of the 1960s, but the Czechoslovak crisis of  
95 1968 brought a sudden halt, with differences emerging among the several  
96 parties (especially as between the Italian and French) and the limits of a  
97 revisionist process still anchored in the "socialist camp."<sup>5</sup> All the same,  
98 between 1968 and 1969 acute problems and profound divergences  
99 emerged with regard to the Soviet regime, although not to the point of  
100 desiring a complete rupture. Affirmation of the principle of diversity and  
101 freedom to criticize regarding Soviet policy became acceptable, without  
102 formulating a genuinely alternative model to actual socialism and a genu-  
103 inely incisive criticism of the logic of the blocs.<sup>6</sup>

104 Together with the French Communist Party, new PCI Secretary Enrico  
105 Berlinguer developed the strategy of Eurocommunism between 1969 and  
106 1973, a product of the generalized wish of Western Communist leaders to  
107 harmonize their own policies and renegotiate their tie to a Soviet "mother."<sup>7</sup>  
108 The new orientation was formalized in 1973, as a response to the crisis in  
109 Chile, and had as a consequence for domestic politics recognition of the  
110 North Atlantic Treaty Organization and opening of the way for the  
111 "Historic Compromise" between the PCI and the Christian Democrats.<sup>8</sup>  
112 Given the substantive change this represented in terms of redefining inter-  
113 national relations, the Soviets considered Eurocommunism a genuine men-  
114 ace and, in the context of the ending of détente, it was abandoned between  
115 1978 and 1979.<sup>9</sup>

116 Throughout the 1970s the social and trade union forces orbiting  
117 around the Party were affected by the tensions between the PCI and the  
118 USSR and, given a larger space in which to act, took advantage of the situ-  
119 ation to make more courageous choices in their international positioning,  
120 which brought about a break with trade unionism of the Soviet bloc. The  
121 CGIL's season of repositioning began in 1973 with its joining of the  
122 European Trade Union Confederation and proceeded apace with official

<sup>4</sup> Bracke, *Proletarian Internationalism*, 7–44.

<sup>5</sup> Bracke, *Quale socialismo, quale distensione*.

<sup>6</sup> Pons, *L'Italia e il PCI*, 63–87.

<sup>7</sup> Pons, *La rivoluzione globale*, 345.

<sup>8</sup> Sassoon, *The strategy of the Italian Communist Party*. Pons, "La formazione della politica internazionale di Berlinguer," 569–609.

<sup>9</sup> Bracke, *Quale socialismo, quale distensione*, 277 ff.

exit from the WFTU in 1978.<sup>10</sup> Bruno Trentin, one of the Italian union's most sensitive theoreticians, justified this international repositioning strategy by the need to break with the logic of the Cold War and strengthen the European trade union movement, with the objective of fostering the processes of disarmament and détente.<sup>11</sup>

Trentin's reflections on CGIL international policy were part of a process of rethinking an array of fundamental trade union principles. These implicated overcoming the centrality of the working class, an organic relationship with a political party, the myth of salary equality and, at an international level, abandoning the Soviet model based on economic planning and the primacy of the socialist state.<sup>12</sup> This was, however, mainly a national exercise, one that seemed satisfied with incorporating and encouraging the realignment taking place in Italy's leftist parties (PCI and PSI) after the Czech crisis. For Trentin this involved positioning and rendering the Secretariat's choices and decisions more homogeneous—a Secretariat composed of Secretary General Luciano Lama (a Communist tied to Enrico Berlinguer) and deputies Agostino Marianetti and Giacinto Militello, both tied to other associated parties. Marianetti was a Socialist tied to Bettino Craxi (at the time a rising star in the PSI) and therefore all the more inclined to support a profound renewal of the working class left in a Social-Democratic and anti-Soviet sense. Militello, a member of the Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity—a formation of the radical left—exemplified the radical spirit in the union and intended to connect *repositioning* with a clear-cut pacifist program, one that would enhance the role of European institutions and national unions in a not only conciliatory but anti-capitalist mode.<sup>13</sup>

In the face of a leadership that, all things considered, was reluctant to deepen contradictions in the great international issues stood a group of “organic” intellectuals in the Studies and International offices, who elaborated a vision that was more original and closely tied to the policy of détente. In labor movement terms, the realignment was designed to assimilate Scandinavian and German experiences, of a Social-Democratic nature, and promote its renewal in terms of class collaboration and worker management. In international terms, this pointed toward strengthening

<sup>10</sup> Ciampani and Gabaglio, *L'Europa sociale e la Confederazione europea dei sindacati*.

<sup>11</sup> Wittenberg, “Che pensano gli americani.”

<sup>12</sup> Trentin, *Lavoro e Libertà*. Foa, *Il cavallo e la torre*.

<sup>13</sup> Militello, “Posizione e iniziative della Cgil.”

157 the international trade union movement by means of participation in the  
 158 process of European integration and encouraging departure from the  
 159 static system of international bipolar competition.

160 The myth of a “Europe of the workers,” based on the autonomy of the  
 161 labor movements of the same national/political parties, provided the  
 162 framework best adapted to break the logic of the blocs still dividing the  
 163 continent. Aldo Bonaccini, the CGIL official responsible for international  
 164 policy, repeatedly placed the question of an overall restructuring of the  
 165 union’s international relationship at the center of debate, connecting it  
 166 directly to the formation of continental political institutions. Bonaccini  
 167 was one of the most faithful members of the current inside the CGIL that  
 168 had been proposing the union adopt a Europeanist stance without, how-  
 169 ever, giving way to Social-Democratic impulses. The concept of enlarging  
 170 the European Community, according to the Europeanists, would be use-  
 171 ful in creating a topic of international policy tending toward incompatibil-  
 172 ity with the existence of the Atlantic Pact. CGIL’s reformists linked that  
 173 perspective to the concept of trade union autonomy and emphasized the  
 174 significance of an integrated Europe as being an alternative to the Soviet  
 175 state as well.

176 Moved by the debate among his cultural office colleagues, Marianetti  
 177 began in 1978 to speak about “Eurosindicalism,” a term that, with respect  
 178 to the formula “Eurocommunism,” was somewhat late in arriving. But it  
 179 had a completely original connotation, based on a concept of autonomy of  
 180 the trade union movement, a force potentially more dynamic in demo-  
 181 cratic societies and better equipped to renew socialist ones, that was com-  
 182 pletely absent from the political strategy of the Communist leadership.<sup>14</sup>  
 183 But the proposal of “Eurosindicalism,” which perhaps represented the  
 184 most advanced form of a new model of trade unionism, one ready to con-  
 185 front new international challenges, attracted little support—indifference  
 186 at the union’s grassroots and suspicion at the confederation’s top.

## 187 12.2 SOLIDARITY’S VICTORY

188 Reformists and socialists hoped the trade union movement could succeed,  
 189 by supporting the continent’s political forces, in relaunching the process  
 190 of international détente. That hope was dashed by the first European elec-  
 191 tions in June 1979, which saw the return of blocs and an outcome that

<sup>14</sup>Wittenberg, “Intervista con Agostino Marianetti.”

rewarded moderate forces.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, it was the failure of the political initiative that convinced CGIL leaders, rather than to aim at supporting political undertakings, to develop cooperation among Eastern and Western Europe's trade union forces.<sup>16</sup>

It was in this light that the autonomous initiative of the CGIL and Unitary Federation to protest against political repression in the USSR under way between 1978 and 1979 should be seen. The persecution by Soviet authorities of the Russian nuclear physicist, who for years had been involved in a campaign for civil rights in his country, led to a rupture in bilateral relations with Soviet unions. This involved a highly polemical choice, perhaps the first such ever undertaken by a substantially communist trade union confederation, with a follow-through choice to highlight various reformist processes taking place in other countries in the Eastern bloc.

The Office of Studies' October 1979 visit to East German unions served to accentuate the two entities' common "reformist" bent, revealing the possibility that the trade union movement of all Europe—both that of the European Economic Community and the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance—might take part to a greater degree than that of traditional political parties in a process of institutional renewal.<sup>17</sup> An interview with Hungarian trade union leader Sandor Gaspar that appeared in the June 1980 issue of *Rassegna Sindacale* underlined the originality of the new economic policy, based on salary reform and its linkage to productivity, approved in that country. Themes of the greater autonomy of economic forces and the role of unions as part of a more organic co-responsibility of management, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, emerged in the background.<sup>18</sup>

Francesco Cuozzo, a member of the Studies Office and editor of *Rassegna Sindacale*, launched a profound criticism of the first 30 years of economic planning and denounced the impasse experienced by socialist regimes, given their inability to adjust industrial policy to their economies' changing needs.<sup>19</sup> Cuozzo's analysis underlined the disquiet of both the management and workforce in Eastern European factories, with particular focus on the developing situation in Poland—soon destined to monopolize the attention of all trade union observers.

<sup>15</sup> Magnani, "Elezioni europee."

<sup>16</sup> Wittenberg, "Due sistemi diversi."

<sup>17</sup> Wittenberg, "La Cgil in Rdt."

<sup>18</sup> Wittenberg, "Il salario non è un premio di presenza."

<sup>19</sup> Cuozzo, "Trent'anni dopo."



225 The Polish worker committees' propaganda activities and clandestine  
 226 fight had been receiving little attention in Italy. The Helsinki accords of  
 227 1975, viewed as the peak of the détente process and considered a great  
 228 success for Soviet foreign policy, had for a long time promoted social and  
 229 political change in Eastern Europe, demonstrating the limits of the "pop-  
 230 ular democracies" with respect to human rights and, in fact, legitimizing  
 231 the dissident movements.<sup>20</sup>

232 Of all countries in the Eastern bloc, it was Poland perhaps that had  
 233 accumulated the most experience in matters of conflict with Soviet power.  
 234 Worker protests in 1956 had taken on political implications such as to  
 235 force Soviet authorities to change the Polish government. At first the new  
 236 President, Wladyslaw Gomulka, had shown himself open to a series of  
 237 economic-social reforms, only progressively to close every door to popular  
 238 requests for political openings. A supporter of Soviet repression in  
 239 Czechoslovakia, Gomulka had fallen into disgrace after violent incidents  
 240 that broke out in 1970 at the shipyards in Gdansk, Stettin and other Baltic  
 241 localities following widespread worker protests against pricing policies.<sup>21</sup>

242 With the consent of and support from Moscow, Edward Gierek was  
 243 appointed as new head of government, able to guarantee overcoming of  
 244 the most acute phase of social tensions. During the period of détente, the  
 245 Communist authorities' less rigid attitude made possible the resurgence of  
 246 an impressive trade union movement that, taking advantage of the post-  
 247 Helsinki accord climate, established links with dissident groups. A series of  
 248 political and cultural circles took shape alongside the labor movement,  
 249 closely tied to political émigrés and support groups in Western Europe.  
 250 The most important of these was the Committee for Worker Defense  
 251 (KOR), which worked hard to promote a process of overall political renewal  
 252 based on working-class initiative. As part of a profound process reconsider-  
 253 ing the nature of trade unionism, KOR intellectuals wound up clandestinely  
 254 denouncing communism's totalitarian character and questioned the  
 255 socialist state's professed pro-worker nature. KOR called for a national and  
 256 anti-communist alliance between the secular community and the Polish  
 257 episcopate—something that would be necessary to bring about the pro-  
 258 gressive outlook that was of interest especially for workers. The episcopate,

<sup>20</sup> Bracke, *Quale socialismo, quale distensione*, p. 256; Hitchcock, *The Struggle for Europe*, 301–310.

<sup>21</sup> Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises," 163–214. Korbonski, "Soviet Policy Toward Poland," 61–92.

in fact, while after years of going along with socialist governments to the extent of its ability, had become the sole institution in Polish society that could be an alternative to Communist power.<sup>22</sup>

The USSR's December 1979 invasion of Afghanistan provoked international tension that, in combination with the Polish government's evident inability to adjust the economy's productive system, caused economic difficulty and led, in July 1980, to a rise in the price of meat. This brought about new demonstrations, capable of arousing widespread international attention. Strike coordinators, who once again were active in the Gdansk and Stettin shipyards, got together with the Solidarity movement, which became the most important embodiment of dissent in the entire Eastern bloc. Notwithstanding the change in government, the Communist authorities were constrained under pressure from the protests to sign the Gdansk accords, by which government institutions for the first time recognized the trade union movement's independence and accepted, although in measured doses, the principle of separation of state and society that seemed little compatible with communist ideology.

As for the CGIL, as noted, events in Poland arrived at a particularly sensitive time in regard to reformist processes taking place in the "popular democracies" and the European trade union movement's role in supporting and quickening them. Cuozzo singled out the genuine novelty in the Polish case of the marked association of traditional economic demands for better working conditions with more advanced ones for political liberty, civil rights and trade union autonomy. He went beyond that, considering the existence of a free labor movement hardly compatible with "present socialist structures," characterized by central planning and its related bureaucratic apparatus. A sole resource remained by which genuine socialism might reform itself—that is to say, by enlarging the progressive role of the trade union movement. As the Polish case showed, the trade unions were the only institution with an ability to transform the socialist system, cutting loose the state's authoritarian and bureaucratic mechanisms from within while, at the same time, preventing its final collapse.<sup>23</sup>

If Cuozzo's analysis involved above all the internal situation in Poland, valuing a concept of the trade unions as the sole force capable of driving social issues in particular national contexts, other observers linked the process under way more directly to the crisis in the world situation. According

<sup>22</sup> Soutou, *La guerre de Cinquante ans*, 622–623.

<sup>23</sup> Cuozzo, "La scelta c'è stata... e domani?"

295 to Giancarlo Meroni, who headed the CGIL's International Office after  
 296 Bonaccini left the union, Solidarity's successful trade union initiative was  
 297 capable of permanently ending with the Cold War's pervasiveness and  
 298 "making a first order contribution to overcoming the political and ideo-  
 299 logical bipolar competition that had been the Second World War's paralyz-  
 300 ing legacy."<sup>24</sup> Aware of the limits of the PCI's strategy, Meroni believed it  
 301 necessary that the Party overcome its strategy and reticence, to be open to  
 302 the trade unionism of the West and pay increasing attention to Solidarity's  
 303 accomplishments—the better to grasp and value its most significant revisi-  
 304 onist dynamics.<sup>25</sup>

305 Solidarity's national and Catholic nature did not go unnoticed, but was  
 306 even pointed to as the element fundamental to understanding its richness  
 307 and originality. Solidarity showed, even for Western trade unionism, how  
 308 the elements of trade unionism, religious faith and different political cul-  
 309 tures could coexist in a workers' movement. The movement's pluralism  
 310 gave value to the expression, "autonomy of the social," which confirmed  
 311 the oddness of practices among traditional ideologies. According to  
 312 Militello, the "autonomy of the social" that Solidarity's struggle affirmed  
 313 could serve as a model for a new culture of Italian trade unionism—more  
 314 open to the pluralism necessary to promote a genuinely democratic society.<sup>26</sup>

315 The terms of this rethinking about trade unionism seemed still  
 316 anchored, however, to traditional divisions in the labor movement. Apart  
 317 from themes of economic cooperation, the role of civil society and protec-  
 318 tion of human rights little echoed of the Helsinki accords that at the time  
 319 had affirmed, even in international debate, democratic values in the  
 320 Western sense of the term. Other Western unions had already developed a  
 321 clear perception of genuine socialism's failings and, without hesitation,  
 322 enthusiastically backed Solidarity.<sup>27</sup> But within the CGIL an unresolved  
 323 tension persisted between, on the one hand, a concept more disposed to  
 324 acknowledge the failings of regimes with a planned economy and, on the  
 325 other, one (yet prevalent) that exalted the worth of unions as a means for  
 326 promoting political democratization but did not involve leaving "the  
 327 socialist camp." This "camp" was still seen as the better adapted and, per-  
 328 haps, the only one able to combine the widespread call for greater political

<sup>24</sup> Meroni, "Fiducia condizionata," 28 and 37.

<sup>25</sup> Ciampani, "La CGIL e il suo ingresso," 15–30.

<sup>26</sup> Militello, "L'autonomia del sociale."

<sup>27</sup> Goddeeris, *Solidarity with Solidarity*.

democracy with a system that would succeed nonetheless in promoting economic equality and social justice.<sup>28</sup>

This musing on the Polish question revealed a naïve faith in the effectiveness of a progressive fight undertaken directly by workers and union representatives in a context of genuine socialism. Meroni explained the difficulty in relations between party and labor movement in Poland by linking them to external factors, such as the resurgence of political ideology in the blocs and a slowing down of the process of détente, without considering the impassible limits imposed by the authoritarian and unreformable nature of the socialist regimes.<sup>29</sup> Even in October 1980, the International Office considered socialist and reformist sensitivities prevalent in Solidarity and expressed assurance in “Polish society’s determination to manage itself” and “Polish society’s recovery of its cultural distinctiveness, history and even its contradictions.” These positions were considered not to be incompatible with a communist government capable of opening itself to the demands of society.<sup>30</sup>

There was no shortage of shades of opinion within the CGIL, a consequence of the differing ideological positions of the union’s executives.<sup>31</sup> Socialist Marianetti and Studies Office staff underscored the absolute primacy of social autonomy and strongly suggested trade unionism and a planned economy were incompatible.<sup>32</sup> Communist Militello and International Office staff, more cautious in regard to relations with the Soviet bloc, were happy to emphasize renewed rapport in Poland between party, government and union and asserted compatibility between trade union autonomy and economic programming was not only possible but constituted the basis for a strategy to pursue even in Italy.<sup>33</sup>

However, there was a fundamental point of agreement between these two positions: The concept of *sindacalità* (a stronger form of “trade unionism”)—understood as the inherent power of trade unions and the possibility they could embody the most dynamic element in any political regime. That concept was pointed to as the dominant note in the January 1981 trip to Rome of Lech Walesa, representative of the Solidarity

<sup>28</sup> See the statement of the International Office, Rome, September 4, 1980, in Cgil Archives, “Cartella Delegazioni per l’estero,” 1980.

<sup>29</sup> Magnani, “La CGIL e Solidarność,” 115–118.

<sup>30</sup> Magnani, “In nome della solidarietà.”

<sup>31</sup> Wittenberg, “Qualche domanda sulla Polonia.”

<sup>32</sup> Lauzi, “Al centro della democrazia polacca.”

<sup>33</sup> Fusi, “Perché vogliamo incontrare gli operai di Danzica.”

361 delegation that was visiting Italian unions. A celebration was staged at the  
 362 Savoy theater in Rome, praising the Polish group for its ability to guide  
 363 the worker movement's progressive thrusts and protect against eventual  
 364 antisocialist tendencies.<sup>34</sup>

365 A worsening of tensions in Poland in March 1981 aroused concern in  
 366 Italian unions because it seemed clear Solidarity's rank and file wanted to  
 367 go beyond its own leadership and bring into question the very nature of  
 368 the socialist system. For their part, communist authorities once again  
 369 responded by taking orders from Moscow, naming General Wojciech  
 370 Jaruzelski (a former Defense Minister long known as "Moscow's man")  
 371 the head of government.<sup>35</sup> The Solidarity crisis accordingly required new  
 372 choices and new solutions that would rise above the rhetoric of *sindacalità*  
 373 and consider the ups and downs of the Polish political-ideological scene.  
 374 Given the union leadership's inability to take a clear position, it fell once  
 375 again to the intellectuals to put a review process into operation. Meroni's  
 376 International Office this time did not limit itself to symbolic criticism of  
 377 the Warsaw government's threatened repression or rationalize it on the  
 378 basis of international tensions. Instead it condemned the vices that now  
 379 seemed second nature to the Polish government: "We do not deny that, in  
 380 fact, an authoritarian and totalitarian vision of socialism exists." This  
 381 authoritarian drift could be dealt with by recuperating the working class's  
 382 decision-making political role and speeding up the reform process:  
 383 "Revitalization of the State and improvement in the economy and [the  
 384 government's] institutions requires either profound democratization of  
 385 the party or political pluralism."<sup>36</sup>

### 386 12.3 THE COUP D'ÉTAT

387 On December 13, 1981, the illusion of a democratic renewal of Poland's  
 388 socialist system, based on trade union action, vanished with Wojciech  
 389 Jaruzelski's declaration of a state of siege and arrest orders against multiple  
 390 Solidarity leaders. Italian trade union leaders immediately condemned this  
 391 resort to force. The Polish government's repressive act shattered the  
 392 dream that a pluralist system could be achieved in actual socialism, with

<sup>34</sup> Scabello, "Walesa a Roma."

<sup>35</sup> Soutou, *La guerre de Cinquante ans*, 624.ges.

<sup>36</sup> Meroni, "Un pesante avvertimento."

guarantees of autonomy for society, without abolishing collective ownership of the means of production.<sup>37</sup>

The Studies and International Relations Offices acknowledged not only comments that came from the Socialist Party but also ideas advanced by PCI officials who, on the occasion of the Polish government's repression, spoke of the exhaustion of the renovating and liberating spirit of the Soviet model and the organic limits of a regime of state socialism.<sup>38</sup> CGIL Secretary General Luciano Lama mused that all Soviet systems seemed to be stricken by "sclerosis in the economy and increased costs that reduce the economic system's productivity and lead to crises that are not only economic but political." The most serious contradiction, at any rate, remained that of a regime that reiterated it was speaking in the name of the working class "without losing sleep over whether the working class recognized this representativeness; indeed, it pretends to continue to act on the workers' behalf even as the working class resoundingly denies such claim to representativeness."<sup>39</sup>

The debate subsequently involved others, even at a local level, such as CGIL officials linked to (PSI) Piedmont Regional Secretary Fausto Bertinotti and Emilia-Romagna Regional Secretary Giuliano Cazzola. Harsh positions were taken against the "totalitarian" culture that engulfed not only the Soviet but also the Italian Left. For Bertinotti it was vital to side without hesitation with Solidarity, holding the fight of workers inherently democratic and, together with all forces—"even those otherwise interested" (i.e., those liberal and Catholic)—starting a profound reconsideration over the nature of countries of the East.<sup>40</sup> For Cazzola this review had to be penetrating, and the Italian Left had to get to "thinking of itself as an integral part of the great progressive alignments of the West, not being the other face of capitalism but the bearers of culture, values, political models, and social alternatives to those of conservative and reactionary forces." For this, according to Cazzola, judgment regarding Polish events could not be anything commonplace: "this is in fact a different concept of politics, of society, of civil and human relations, of all those values about which people in the course of history were prepared even to give their lives."<sup>41</sup>

Ready to share the comments submitted by numerous mid-level officials, the Studies Office in January 1982 proposed to formalize the

<sup>37</sup> Wittenberg, "Precipita la crisi."

<sup>38</sup> Napolitano, "Polonia, una vicenda cruciale."

<sup>39</sup> D'Agostini, "In nome della classe operaia."

<sup>40</sup> Federazione dei Lavoratori Metalmeccanici – Piemonte, *Polonia '81*.

<sup>41</sup> Cazzola, "Emilia-Romagna: revisione per tutta la sinistra."

427 anti-Soviet breakthrough at a round table led by Michele Magno. All those  
 428 who participated took note that Eastern systems could not be changed and  
 429 had exhausted any margin for democratic advance.<sup>42</sup> It had become neces-  
 430 sary to point out for the masses new models of relations between state,  
 431 trade union and society, beginning with recognition of the value of Social-  
 432 Democratic models—the only ones able to describe in completely new  
 433 terms the relationship between free market and programming and, conse-  
 434 quently, between democracy and socialism.<sup>43</sup>

435 The joint pro-Solidarity rally called for February 13, 1982, was sup-  
 436 posed to ratify rejection of socialism as experienced in the East; overcom-  
 437 ing it was to signify acceptance that more advanced forms of democratic  
 438 society were needed.<sup>44</sup> However, notwithstanding the commitment of  
 439 CGIL cultural office staff and the presence of a large number of union  
 440 officials, this initiative proved a substantial failure, unable to engage the  
 441 rank and file and harbinger for a series of protests against this revisionist  
 442 turn.<sup>45</sup> The pro-Solidarity campaign remained weak and, for all practical  
 443 purposes, the preserve of lay or Catholic political and trade union leaders  
 444 or of social forces (such as Communion and Liberation) outside the labor  
 445 movement.<sup>46</sup> On September 13, 1982, the editorial staff at socialist jour-  
 446 nal *Mondoperaio* held a further discussion. Alongside calls to step up sup-  
 447 port efforts for the Polish movement, Studies Office head Michele Magno  
 448 responded by listing the many past and future actions promoted in sup-  
 449 port of Solidarity and revived his plea to engage the European trade union  
 450 movement. He had to admit, however, that most workers remained sub-  
 451 stantially indifferent.<sup>47</sup>

452 In line with pressures coming from other trade union confederations  
 453 and the cultural milieu of Italy's Democratic Left, and faced with the  
 454 difficulties of energizing workers in the labor movement, CGIL trade  
 455 union officials emphasized the open and united character of the pro-Soli-  
 456 darity mobilization. To stress the overlap between the more open expo-  
 457 nents of social Catholicism and the labor movement's new cultural  
 458 horizons, *Rassegna Sindacale* hosted several gatherings of Catholic

<sup>42</sup> See the statement of Agostino Marianetti, *Situazione polacca: iniziative e riflessioni*, January 8, 1982, Circular n. 3570, in Cgil Archives, "Cartella Raccolta Circolari," 1982.

<sup>43</sup> Wittenberg, "Democrazia e socialismo."

<sup>44</sup> Magno, "Dopo la Polonia quale distensione?."

<sup>45</sup> Filios, "Solidarietà con la Polonia."

<sup>46</sup> Tortorelli, *Il lavoro della talpa*, 25.

<sup>47</sup> "Lettera di Magno, Gabaglio e Levati."



intellectuals. The figure of new Pope Karol Wojtyla was analyzed and reworked in Europeanist terms by the priest Gianni Baget Bozzo—theologian, historian and Catholic intellectual who, in that very period, finished the “parable” of (a Catholic Church) drawing closer to the Italian Socialist Party. He considered the idea of a potential social transformation based on “the Polish model,” that is, commitment to rebuild a bridge between East and West within a “primacy of a culture of the nation and family over the State.” The fight against materialism and imperialism on which Wojtyla’s message hinged, according to Baget Bozzo’s reading, was filled with anti-totalitarian and democratic significance that integrated well with the cultural transformation taking place in the CGIL. The same Baget Bozzo perceived a convergence between the Church—which although conservative on a theological plane could become progressive on the political one—and the trade union movement that, in turn, was providing a basis for profound cultural renewal in terms of civil society’s autonomy and political liberty.<sup>48</sup>

At the height of Jaruzelski’s repression, a delegation of some 20 European trade unionists (among them Agostino Marianetti and Solidarity Counselor Bohdan Cywinski) met in audience with John Paul II. The Pope recognized in Solidarity “a character of authentic representation of the workers, acknowledged and confirmed by the organs of power,” and called it an “autonomous and independent trade union...concerned about being a constructive force for the nation.” Wojtyla repeated that, in general (and not only in Poland), “unions assume a specific function, which is not political in the sense of seeking political power, but which acquire general social importance.”<sup>49</sup>

Wojtyla’s October 1982 trip to Poland and the end of the state of siege did not appear to stop the process of ideological revision in the union, even as the worker initiative underlying the rise of Solidarity appeared now to have given way to a nationalist and even confessional one.<sup>50</sup> Still, the mass of unionized workers began to reject this shift in the CGIL’s international policy and progressively distance themselves from the pro-Solidarity campaign. According to various observers, the ghost of “partisans for peace” (pacifists of a pro-Soviet persuasion who betrayed the revivalist wind out of Poland) reappeared at the great rally—of evidently and

<sup>48</sup> Baget Bozzo, “Papa Wojtyla e Santa polacca chiesa.”

<sup>49</sup> Santini, “Il Papa chiede.”

<sup>50</sup> Olivero, “L’attività dell’Ufficio Internazionale,” 55–56.



494 exclusively an anti-American cast—called on October 22 for peace and  
 495 against Euro-missiles. The CGIL’s leadership, confirming its commitment  
 496 in support of Solidarity, refused to join the rally. This deepened the crisis  
 497 of confidence that increasingly distanced the CGIL’s leadership from its  
 498 base, which saw this as confirmation of the union bureaucracy’s opportu-  
 499 nistic drift and as much a proof of the absence of a credible alternative to  
 500 Soviet communism as to aggressive neo-liberalist capitalism.<sup>51</sup>

501 On the other hand, CGIL cultural office staff, even in the absence of the  
 502 hoped-for mass mobilization, continued to stand by Solidarity—collecting  
 503 funds and sending assistance. The CGIL was, in fact, among the organiza-  
 504 tions that in January 1982 founded the Italian Trade Union Support  
 505 Committee, which remained active until 1989. That solidarity did not  
 506 imply, on the other hand, any further attempt at autonomous thinking in  
 507 regard to international relations. On the contrary, it was accompanied by a  
 508 return to the concept of a working-class struggle based on economic dis-  
 509 putes taking place in an exclusively national framework.

510 The pro-Solidarity campaign’s limited effectiveness testified to the fact  
 511 that, notwithstanding the efforts of Cuozzo, Meroni and Magno to articu-  
 512 late and develop a more intense and mature ideological worldview, obsta-  
 513 cles remained.<sup>52</sup> The debate seemed unable to appreciate the profound  
 514 nature of crises involving the legitimacy of Soviet communism and the  
 515 challenge of the “liberal revolution” Ronald Reagan was about to launch.  
 516 Consideration remained suspended, self-criticism was absent, and there  
 517 seemed no willingness to take into account an evolution in the relation-  
 518 ships between national politics and the global economic dynamics brought  
 519 about in the context of a “new Cold War.” Once again it became necessary  
 520 to choose between the worlds of capitalism and socialism. The group of  
 521 CGIL intellectuals did not understand, as has been pointed out, that the  
 522 Polish movement represented “a new nail in communism’s coffin.”<sup>53</sup>  
 523 Solidarity required a choice: either for one of the two worlds or for a radi-  
 524 cal shift that, getting right down to it, the CGIL did not want to do.

525 Something of the Polish experience remained in its culture. Still, it was  
 526 very little compared with the dramatic consequences of the crisis faced by  
 527 the peoples’ democracies of the “socialist camp.” Vittorio Foa pointed out  
 528 how the relationship with Solidarity helped overcome a “monastic con-

<sup>51</sup> Wittenberg, “Manifestazione per la pace.”

<sup>52</sup> Maffei, *La CGIL di fronte alle lotte di liberazione nell’Est europeo*, 221.

<sup>53</sup> Soutou, *La guerre de Cinquante ans*, 625.

ception of the working class” that did not perceive the coexistence, in the mind-set of workers (indeed in every single worker), of different concepts of solidarity and even a range of selfish interests.<sup>54</sup> In certain contexts, a sense of national consciousness, religious conscience and democratic conscience could support, complement and enrich class-consciousness.

The effort of interpretation undertaken by the CGIL in these months of the Polish crisis strengthened pluralism and trade union autonomy and served to enhance the “natural” differences within the labor movement. What it did not do was develop an alternative worldview, one capable of re-equipping the labor movement to face the crisis international communism was undergoing and new challenges in the global economy. Union intellectuals failed to grasp the problems Solidarity posed, even in terms of relations between state and society and the concept of class struggle. In the face of an irreversible crisis in the Soviet bloc and the traditional trade union movement, they lacked the will to overcome the movement’s bureaucratic and unidirectional nature.

On the one hand, in the face of hesitation and reticence on the part of union leadership, intellectuals and staff demonstrated centrifugal impulses that led them to search out new areas for involvement outside the organization’s “cage,” and, on the other, intensification on the part of ordinary workers to show little willingness to digest hard-to-understand, uncertain and contradictory cultural and ideological changes. This was the profound confusion that contributed to the CGIL’s crisis of identity and confusion in subsequent years.<sup>55</sup>

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