

More than Canteen Control: Polish and Italian Socialists Confronting Their Workers, 1944–1947*

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the chasm between party leaders and rank-and-file workers within the postwar Italian Socialist Party and Polish Socialist Party between 1944 and 1947. So far only studied in the context of communist parties, existing historiography on this theme has observed a deep rift between the radicalization amongst grassroots activists defending the self-management workers had won during the final days of World War II and the moderation practised by party leaders desperate to demonstrate their trustworthiness as government partners. Based on an analysis of the sentiments amongst socialist workers in Łódź and Sesto San Giovanni, and of the visions espoused by provincial and national socialist leaders, this article argues that the dynamics within socialist parties were exactly the other way around. Whereas socialist leaders ascribed a crucial role to grassroots participatory structures in their efforts to teach the working classes democracy, socialist workers were more concerned with day-to-day survival than with participation, self-management, or any other question.

The social history of 1945 Europe remains mesmerized by what could have been. With workers left to their own devices as collaborating industrialists fled the advancing Allied armies, their collectivism in defending factories from looting by retreating Germans whilst at the same time keeping production going has captured the imagination of many social historians. In their view, the discipline and autonomy shown by the working classes carried the germs of true economic democracy: a participatory system of worker self-management fundamentally different from both Western market capitalism and Soviet state capitalism.¹ That these worker efforts to

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1. The standard work on the transformative potential of grassroots working-class activism in the postwar period is still Lutz Niethammer, Ulrich Borsdorf, and Peter Brandt (eds),

radically to reshape society failed to come to fruition is often attributed to the formidable coalition they were facing. Between communist leaderships obsessed with showcasing their moderate and patriotic credentials in the various “battles”² to raise industrial output, and occupying powers fearful of seeing any rival authority emerge under their watch,³ there was little room for experiments bent on overhauling industrial relations.

One group is, however, by and large neglected in scholarship on the rise and demise of postwar worker initiatives. Notwithstanding that socialist workers were represented in the factory committees taking control of production upon liberation and that socialist leaders were right at the heart of coalition governments struggling to recentralize the reconstruction effort, there are no accounts of grassroots-leadership dynamics within the postwar European socialist parties. The underlying assumption seems to be that, whereas the sudden restraint practised by communist leaders caused real disillusionment amongst their rank and file,⁴ socialist reformism was so self-evident that it should have come as a surprise to no-one.⁵ This is a misconception for at least two reasons. In the first place, the socialist parties emerged much radicalized from World War II.

Arbeiterinitiative 1945: Antifaschistische Ausschüsse und Reorganisation der Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland (Wuppertal, 1976). While Germany remains the foremost study object of historians in this school, scholarship is now also available on a range of countries in East and West. See Peter Heumos, “Betriebsräte, Einheitsgewerkschaft und staatliche Unternehmensverwaltung: Anmerkungen zu einer Petition mährischer Arbeiter an die tschechoslowakische Regierung vom 8. Juni 1947”, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 29 (1981), pp. 215–245; Tom Behan, *The Long Awaited Moment: The Working Class and the Italian Communist Party in Milan, 1943–1948* (New York, 1997); Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski, “Give Us Back Our Factories! Between Resisting Exploitation and the Struggle for Workers’ Power in Poland, 1944–1981”, in Immanuel Niess and Dario Azzellini (eds), *Ours to Master and to Own: Workers’ Control from the Commune to the Present* (Chicago, IL, 2011), pp. 191–209; Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Moment of Liberation: Western Europe (1943–1948)* (Oxford, forthcoming).

2. On the Hungarian communists and the “battle for coal”, see Mark Pittaway, *The Workers’ State: Industrial Labor and the Making of Socialist Hungary, 1944–1958* (Pittsburgh, PA, 2012), pp. 60–65; on the French communists and the “battle for production”: Adam Steinhouse, *Workers’ Participation in Post-Liberation France* (Lanham, MD, 2001), pp. 105–110.

3. Dick Geary, “Social Protest in the Ruhr, 1945–49”, in Eleonore Breuning, Jill Lewis, and Gareth Pritchard (eds), *Power and the People: A Social History of Central European Politics, 1945–56* (Manchester, 2005), pp. 17–28, 22; Jeanette Michelmann, *Aktivistinnen der ersten Stunde: Der Antifa in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone* (Cologne, 2002).

4. Patrick Major, *Death of the KPD: Communism and Anti-Communism in West Germany, 1945–1956* (Oxford, 1997); Donald Sassoon, “The Rise and Fall of West European Communism, 1939–1948”, *Contemporary European History*, 1 (1992), pp. 139–169, 154.

5. Dietrich Orlow, *Common Destiny: A Comparative History of the Dutch, French and German Social Democrats, 1945–1969* (New York, 2000); Peter Heumos, “Die Sozialdemokratie in Ostmitteleuropa 1945–1948: Zum gesellschaftlichen Potential des demokratischen Sozialismus in Polen, der Tschechoslowakei und Ungarn”, in Hans Lemberg (ed), *Sowjetisches Modell und nationale Prägung. Kontinuität und Wandel in Ostmitteleuropa nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Marburg an der Lahn, 1991), pp. 51–70.

Their first postwar party programmes often went further than those put forward by the communists, especially on such socio-economic issues as nationalizations and worker control in industry.⁶ Secondly, postwar socialism was far from a unitary ideology. There was no socialist Moscow and reformism was certainly not the only denomination amongst the postwar European socialists.

To address this void in existing literature, this article explores the relations between rank-and-file workers and party leaders within two of the most outspoken socialist critics of reformism: the Italian Socialist Party (Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria – PSIUP) and the Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna – PPS). Historians of postwar reconstruction are nowadays increasingly realizing that the Cold War conceptual constructs of East and West might have “actually obscured the variety of national experiences in Europe immediately after the war”.⁷ This is very much the case for the postwar Italian and Polish socialists. Often dismissed as mere fellow-travellers when weighed against the reformist and anti-communist socialist parties from their “own” bloc,⁸ a more balanced picture transpires if we compare the PSIUP with the PPS. After all, both parties emerged from a generation of right-wing dictatorship convinced not only that a communist-socialist united front provided the only way forward, but also that their politically underdeveloped populations had been corrupted still further by two decades of fascist propaganda. It was the resultant perception that a thorough “moral re-education” of the people was prerequisite if democracy was to survive that shaped the parties’ attitudes towards the working classes.

The purpose of this article is two-fold. The first is to demonstrate that the PSIUP and the PPS ascribed grassroots participatory structures with a

6. Gareth Pritchard, “Social Democracy in Post-War Eastern Germany”, in John Callaghan and Illaria Favretto (eds), *Transitions in Social Democracy: Cultural and Ideological Problems of the Golden Age* (Manchester, 2006), pp. 93–106, 96; Norman Naimark, “Revolution and Counterrevolution in Eastern Europe”, in Christiane Lemke and Gary Marks (eds), *The Crisis of Socialism in Europe* (Durham, 1992), pp. 61–83, 71; Karel Kaplan, “Tschechoslowakische Sozialdemokratie und tschechoslowakische Kommunisten 1944–1948”, in Dieter Staritz and Hermann Weber (eds), *Einheitsfront Einheitspartei: Kommunisten und Sozialdemokraten in Ost- und Westeuropa 1944–1948* (Cologne, 1989), pp. 280–304, 283.

7. Mark Mazower, “Reconstruction: The Historiographical Issues”, *Past and Present*, Supplement 6 (2011), pp. 17–28, 20.

8. There is an extensive body of literature portraying the PSIUP as an “anomaly” in the otherwise successful story of reformist, anti-communist, and governmental postwar western European social democracy. See Giovanni Sabbatucci, *Il riformismo impossibile: Storia del socialismo italiano* (Rome, 1991); Luciano Cafagna, *Una strana disfatta: La parabola dell'autonomismo socialista* (Venice, 1996); Paolo Mattera, *Storia del PSI: 1892–1994* (Rome, 2010). Much less comparative work has been conducted on postwar eastern European socialism, but the PPS certainly receives a bad press relative to its Czechoslovakian sister party; Andrzej Paczkowski, “The Polish Contribution to the Victory of the ‘Prague Coup’ in February 1948”, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, 11 (1998), pp. 141–143.

crucial role in their efforts to teach workers democracy. If workers were empowered to discuss, organize and co-decide matters of everyday concern at the local or factory level, they would gradually learn to appreciate what was in the collective good and that the populist solutions offered by reactionaries carried no substance. Worker participation in such bodies as factory councils and cooperatives was, then, to be the backbone of the “new democracy” PSIUP and PPS leaders envisioned.⁹

The second aim is to show that (socialist) workers actually displayed little interest in participation, self-management, or any question of high politics for that matter. This was reflected in the concerns voiced by workers in the two working-class bulwarks under review in this article: Łódź for Poland and Sesto San Giovanni (the industrial commune on the outskirts of Milan) for Italy. Both had been major socialist strongholds during the interwar period and remained so in the face of much more potent communist competition after liberation.¹⁰ They were home to an entrenched working-class community, where tradition, hierarchy, and skill were valued commodities.¹¹ But, only liberated in January and April 1945 respectively, Łódź and Sesto San Giovanni also bore the brunt of the atrocious final months of World War II and their workers entered freedom in a dismal material position.¹² It was this material misery that often trumped all other considerations amongst urban workers. An analysis of the matters raised by rank-and-file (socialist) workers within PPS factory circles in Łódź, cross-party factory internal commissions in the Milan area, and the PSIUP weekly in Sesto San Giovanni shows that their primary concern was not some longer-term political objective, but day-to-day survival. Despite all the best efforts of provincial and national party leaders

9. Jan de Graaf, “Old and New Democracy: Placing the Italian Anomaly in a European Context”, in Jens Späth and Steffen Prauser (eds), *History and Generation: Political Culture in Post-War Europe* (forthcoming).

10. Whereas the Italian communists made significant inroads into the socialist vote during the June 1946 elections to the Constituent Assembly, socialist support in Milan, with the PSIUP polling 34.1 per cent of the ballots cast against a mere 23.5 per cent for the communists, held up remarkably well. As the January 1947 elections to the Sejm (returning the communist-socialist bloc with a large majority) were rigged, no reliable numbers are available for postwar Łódź, but, there too, the PPS is considered to have had a strong grassroots organization dominating much of local trade unionism; Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945–1951* (Ithaca, NY, 1997), pp. 43, 49.

11. See *idem*, pp. 75–77; Luigi Ganapini, *Una città, la guerra: Lotte di classe ideologie e forze politiche a Milano, 1939–1951* (Milan, 1988), pp. 231–232.

12. Though Łódź had come off relatively well by Polish standards, the real income of its postwar workers was only at 25 per cent of its prewar level and often did not suffice to buy basic necessities. Milanese workers, meanwhile, already hit by inflation, social dislocation, and food shortages, saw their position weakened further by the fact that they were no longer needed in the war industry; Władysław Stefaniuk, *Łódzka organizacja PPS: 1945–1948* (Łódź, 1980), p. 79; Behan, *The Long Awaited Moment*, p. 168.

to steer discussions in more politico-ideological directions, meetings, correspondence, and the local party press were dominated by the issue of the provision of such basic necessities as food, coal, and clothing.

That is not to say that the socio-economic demands formulated at the party grassroots were somehow not political. Yet, historians have exhibited a marked tendency to subordinate these bread-and-butter issues to worker protests more “relevant” to the political tug-of-war on the national level. “The first demonstration in postwar Poland”, Andrzej Paczkowski writes in his work on how strikes, riots, and manifestations shaped the Polish road to socialism, “is noteworthy mainly because it was the first, not because of its scope or cause”. Apparently, then, the people of Radom taking to the streets protesting against the lack of electricity supply in April 1946 was a less significant event than those student demonstrations commemorating the Polish warriors fallen to the Red Army one month later.¹³ Similarly, Luigi Ganapini records two (out of many more, he argues) instances of postwar Milanese workers petitioning the reinstatement of purged (for collaboration) factory owners, who had promised the workforce they would bring in vital orders via their connections in the old boys’ network of industrialists or their good relations with the Allies.¹⁴

Despite this clear indication that subsistence concerns outweighed moral and political considerations amongst postwar industrial workers, the remainder of Ganapini’s account sticks to the familiar history of a strongly politicized working class seeking to wrest control of the workplace from the capitalist.¹⁵ Rather than presenting the largely socio-economic agenda of the postwar working classes as secondary to the “real” political struggles of the day, this article places the two on an equal footing. It focuses on the tensions that permeated the PPS and PSIUP during the first postwar years: between rank-and-file workers demanding an immediate amelioration of their living standards, party leaders dreaming of a future workers’ democracy, and, caught in between, those middle-level functionaries who, while formally representing the party leadership at the grassroots, frequently sympathized with the plight of the average socialist worker.¹⁶

13. Andrzej Paczkowski, *Strajki, bunty, manifestacje jako “Polska droga” przez socjalizm* (Poznan, 2003), pp. 28–30.

14. Ganapini, *Una città, la guerra*, pp. 203–204.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 233–234.

16. Especially for the lower echelons of the parties, it is sometimes difficult to pinpoint whether a quoted speaker is simply a socialist voter or sympathiser, a rank-and-file member or activist, or a local or provincial leader. In such cases, the broader context of his/her intervention is drawn on to determine in which of the three categories (party leader, middle-level functionary, or rank-and-file) he/she should be placed.

Just what constituted the average worker, however, had changed considerably during the war. Conscription, forced labour in the Reich, and population transfers combined to transform the social composition of the working class by paving the way for such newcomers as women, peasants, or youngsters.¹⁷ With these new arrivals came a new set of socio-economic concerns¹⁸ and new forms of social protest,¹⁹ which were often incompatible with the established practices of the organized Left. Socialist strivings to engage workers in grassroots participatory bodies were, then, in no small part directed at these fresh recruits of the industrial proletariat. It was this educational function of factory councils and cooperatives, especially towards those backward groups that had not been politicized by the experience of wartime resistance, that gave special meaning to worker self-management for the socialists. Unlike their communist counterparts, for whom worker self-management was just another economic policy to sacrifice at the altar of their grand coalition strategy, socialist leaders always viewed grassroots participation as a political question.²⁰ It was the future of democracy that was at stake.

In stressing a sharp dichotomy between grassroots and elite discourses, the article touches on a larger debate that goes to the very nature of postwar Europe. There is a still potent historical school, whose main tenets have often trickled down to textbook accounts, perceiving widespread popular radicalism in the immediate aftermath of World War II.²¹ According to these historians, the moment of liberation saw a real window of opportunity for a root-and-branch transformation of society

17. On the changed composition of the working class in various industrial strongholds across postwar Europe, see for example: Pittaway, *The Workers' State*; Mark Roseman, *Recasting the Rubr, 1945–1958: Manpower, Economic Recovery, and Labour Relations* (New York, 1992).

18. Catia Sonetti has documented how strongly the universe of commuting sharecroppers differed from that of the established workforce in the postwar Tuscan industry, with workers complaining that commuters “do not speak of politics! Their only problems are the second job, the farm”; Catia Sonetti, “The Family in Tuscany between Fascism and Cold War”, in Jonathan Dunnage (ed), *After the War: Violence, Justice, Continuity and Renewal in Italian Society* (Market Harborough, 1999), pp. 75–88, 85.

19. Padraic Kenney points out how the communist authorities in postwar Poland struggled to get to grips with woman strikers, whose agitations were often “spontaneous, directionless, and without demands”; Padraic Kenney, “The Gender of Resistance in Communist Poland”, *The American Historical Review*, 104 (1999), pp. 399–425, 417.

20. On the differences between communist and socialist attitudes to worker self-management in Italy and Poland, see Claire Andrieu, “La France à gauche de l’Europe”, *Le Mouvement Social*, 134 (1986), pp. 131–153, 136, 139; Christoph Kleßmann, “Betriebsräte, Gewerkschaften und Arbeiterselbstverwaltung in Polen (1944–1958)”, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 29 (1981), pp. 185–214, 191.

21. Geoff Eley, “When Europe was New: Liberation and the Making of the Post-War Era”, in Monika Riera and Gavin Schaffer (eds), *The Lasting War: Society and Identity in Britain, France and Germany after 1945* (Basingstoke, 2008), pp. 17–43.

opening up, which might have been seized if it had not been for the hesitant and contradictory conduct by the political leaders of the working-class movement.²² The strike wave that swept Europe's industrial centres between 1945 and 1947 is for them testimony of worker ardour to engage in direct action to achieve political objectives.²³ In recent years, however, this interpretation has come under sustained attack from scholars stressing that depoliticization and exhaustion took possession of the working classes after Depression, dictatorship, and war.²⁴ In their view, there was a marked tendency to recoil into private life as the traditional organizational structures of the working class had been severely weakened by years of persecution.²⁵ The key question is, then, whether an alternative to the restorationist Europe, bourgeois in the West and communist in the East, that emerged from the stormy postwar years was ever on the cards.

BREAD, BUTTER, AND EGALITARIANISM

In order to answer this question, we first need to establish the aspirations and demands of the working classes at the end of the war. The moment of liberation did not mark a radical rupture in the everyday life of the average worker. The extremely dire material situation of the last months of the war continued into liberation, with workers scrambling for such scarce commodities as food, fuel, or even jobs. The slogans shouted during a hunger march of Milanese and Sestese workers in July 1945 are most telling in this respect: reduction of the cost of living, bread and work, our children are hungry, price control, we want an immediate devaluation, protect our interests against those starving the people, struggle with the black market. Patience with those in power (including socialists) was already wearing thin, the local socialist weekly reported, as "all things human had a limit".²⁶ But it soon emerged that the new rulers were unable to deliver upon even the most basic demands of the working classes. As one worker commented to the Milanese trade-union authorities in August, the hopes of the first months after liberation – including the levelling of the most evident income inequalities and providing state workers with a wage sufficient to avoid starvation – had not been realized.

22. Horn, *The Moment of Liberation*.

23. Robert Mencherini, *Guerre froide, grèves rouges: parti communiste, stalinisme et luttes sociales en France: les grèves "insurrectionnelles" de 1947–1948* (Paris, 1998).

24. Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*; Steven Fielding, Peter Thompson, and Nick Tiratsoo, *England Arise! The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain* (Manchester, 1995).

25. Martin Conway, *The Sorrows of Belgium: Liberation and Political Reconstruction, 1944–1947* (Oxford, 2012).

26. "Manifestazione di protesta di popolo e di lavoratori per la rivendicazione dei diritti dell'ora", *Sesto Proletaria*, 7 July 1945; Fondazione Istituto per la Storia dell'Età Contemporanea, Sesto San Giovanni [hereafter, Fondazione ISEC].

Seeing prices multiply relative to pay every day, it was an affront to the working classes to witness countless people still living in luxury. He called upon the government to tackle quickly the problems of speculation and unemployment, as winter was approaching fast.²⁷

The already harsh winter of 1945–1946 and the especially brutal winter of 1946–1947 drove the working classes to the edge both mentally and physically. In a situation where nearly everything was lacking, it should come as little surprise that workers were completely immersed in issues of central importance to their daily existence. First and foremost, this concerned the provision of basic necessities. Worker grievances during these first postwar years were dominated by the factory's or the state's failure to supply them with the essentials to keep themselves and their families afloat. Demanding compensatory payments to fill up the holes in his household budget, a socialist working in the Łódź public transport system illustrated the problem graphically. Where his newborn should be a source of parental joy, he argued, it was quickly developing into "a tragedy". As his entire income was swallowed up by buying baby food on the free market, "what should he and the rest of his family live on?"²⁸

Similar worries were voiced by workers of tractor-producing Motomeccanica in Milan. There was intense unease about the dropping confectionary level of bread, whereas the shortage of indispensable food-stuffs and especially of sugars for children "forced workers to sacrifice their already miserable purchasing power to satisfy their minimum needs".²⁹ With most of the elementary requirements being rationed, the shortcomings of this system were another prime target for worker complaints. These ranged from general demands that rations should be larger (for example those of coal),³⁰ or extended (for example to include soap),³¹ to more particular claims that coupons were taking over as currency – a meeting of socialist cells in central Łódź calling it a travesty that tram tickets could only be bought at prohibitively high prices or be paid for with food coupons.³²

27. "L'operaio Valboretti nell'Esecutivo della Camera del Lavoro Milano. Cosa ha fatto e cosa farà l'organizzazione sindacale" [15 August 1945], Archivio del Lavoro, Milano [hereafter, AdL], Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.1.3., Fasc. 4.

28. "Protokół zwyczajnego Koła P.P.S. przy Zarządzie Miejskim, Wydziale Technicznym, Oddziale Pómiarow", [16 August 1945], Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Łódź [hereafter, APŁ], DK PPS Śródmieście Prawa, 10, fos 5–6.

29. Comitati direttivi di organismi dei massa della Motomeccanica to Prefetto della Provincia di Milano, 19 July 1946, AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.2.2.4., Fasc. 1.

30. "Protokół" [22 August 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Śródmieście Lewa, 14, fos 52–53. See also: CI Magneti Marelli to FIOM Milano, 24 March 1947, AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.2.2.4., Fasc. 2.

31. "Protokół z zebranie komórki P.P.S. odbytego w dniu 25 października 1945 r. w Łodzi" [25 October 1945], APŁ, DK PPS Śródmieście Prawa, 10, fos 9–10.

32. *Ibid.*

Prices and the related problem of wages were the second main concern of workers in the immediate aftermath of the war. The common charge was that working-class wages were nowhere near a sustainable level.³³ There was much dissatisfaction that wages remained equal or even went down as prices were spiralling out of control.³⁴ According to the internal commission at Milan's tram manufacturing and repairing Teodosio, the continuous hikes in the cost of living had made the food situation so precarious that workers were no longer able to work productively. In these circumstances, even a 10 per cent pay rise would have been wiped out by price increases within a matter of days – a 40 per cent rise was what should be aimed for.³⁵ At the same time, however, the state was demanding ever more of its workers. The steady advance of piece-rates added further uncertainty to the material position of the working classes. When it was announced that bonuses would henceforth only be awarded if spinners managed to attain 115 per cent of the production target over all hours worked at one of Łódź's many textile factories, many socialist workers responded that this was unfair. If production was interrupted through a lack of electricity or machine breakdown, those hours should not be counted.³⁶

In both countries, the trade-union movement had been assigned the task of defending working-class interests in industrial disputes over pay and norms. But as socialist activists were soon to find out, postwar trade unions were weak players in negotiations with the state or with employers. By mid-1946, socialists in Łódź's textile industry were wondering where the trade unions were, asking who was fighting their corner, and petitioning trade unionists to show some interest in their lives.³⁷ Less than a year later, their counterparts in the city centre concluded that trade unions were powerless in the face of pay reduction.³⁸ When reflecting upon the subordinate role of trade unions, local Sestese socialists pointed to the political leaders of the Left. Where they might have the best of intentions towards the trade union movement, "the road to hell was paved with good intentions". Concrete support was needed, as trade unions had

33. "Protokół z zebrania Polskiej Partji Socjalistycznej na terenie przedzalni Ksziezey Młyn" [3 March 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Fabryczna, 8, fo. 53.

34. "Protokół z zebrania Koła P.P.S. w Panstw. Zakł. Wyrob. Bawelnianych oddz. 'Biała'" [22 May 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Ruda Pabianicka, 8, fos 25–26.

35. CI Teodosio to Camera del Lavoro, 10 July 1946, AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.2.2.4., Fasc. 1.

36. "Protokół z zebrania Koła P.P.S. w Panstw. Zakł. Wyrob. Bawelnianych oddz. 'Biała'" [22 May 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Ruda Pabianicka, 8, fos 25–26.

37. "Protokół z zebrania członków P.P.S. koła fabrycznego przy Panstw. Zakł. Włókiem. daw. K. Scheibler i I. Grohmann" [25 May 1946], APŁ, DK PPS Fabryczna, 8, fos 9–10.

38. "Protokół z zebrania Koła PPS przy PPT-EP Oddz. Łódź" [4 March 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Śródmieście Prawa, 10, fo. 43.



Figure 1. In its drive to increase industrial production, the PPS leadership publicized the exploits of such labour heroes as turner Karol Ciba, who managed to out-produce the norm by 163 per cent.

Photograph: Anonymous, PPS archives, *Archiwum Akt Nowych*, Warsaw (microfilm 2029/3).

grown into the “Cinderella” of present-day Italy. Never publishing any articles dealing with “the trade unions, their function, and above all their indispensability”, the national PSIUP daily, *Avanti!* (run by the party leadership), was severely criticized. After all, workers would happily forsake all treatises on political processes to read something that finally related to their vital problems. Was “it impossible to clear out half a column” for that?³⁹

Far from empowering the trade unions, however, socialist and communist leaders increasingly employed them as transmission belts for government policy.⁴⁰ Workers were quick to identify their unions with

39. Gandi, “Quattro Parole sui Sindacati”, *Sesto Proletaria*, 12 July 1945, Fondazione ISEC. A similar exasperation with “political talk” was discernible amongst Łódź factory workers. One report of factory meetings intended to rally workers around political slogans (struggle with the reaction etc.) noted that: “A strong turmoil erupts when a worker takes to the stage and begins to shout that his children are hungry. Then a more general cry develops [...] we are fed up with political talk, we want to eat”; Wojciech Górecki, “Strajki robotnicze w Łodzi w latach 1945–1947”, in *Kronika Miasta Łodzi*, 2 (1995), pp. 143–152, 145.

40. On how trade unions were used to serve the productionist goals of both governments: Simone Neri Serneri, *Resistenza e democrazia dei partiti: I socialisti nell’Italia dell’1943–1945* (Manduria, 1995), p. 420; Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, pp. 61–69.

the authorities and worse. Claiming that everyone who spoke out against the fact that the collective agreements had only been to the benefit of the industrialists was censured, one Sestese socialist argued that it had been exactly this types of injustice that had created worker discontent with, and distrust towards, the fascist unions.⁴¹ The negotiating positions taken by trade-union bodies were also a major source of dissatisfaction amongst Łódź socialists. Complaints focused on such diverse issues as the unfairness of collective agreements for simple workers,⁴² on union inability to reach collective agreements in the first place,⁴³ and on union support for a prolongation of the working day.⁴⁴ That tensions between rank-and-file workers and trade-union officials could run high was attested to by the Milanese conflict over the *imposta di famiglia* (a local tax levied on families) in early 1947. After several failed attempts to convince the Milanese trade-union authorities that working-class families were hit unduly hard by the tax, the internal commission at the Montecatini mines published an open letter criticizing trade unionists for bowing to the (socialist-communist-run) city council. Trade unionists were reminded that they were representatives of the working classes and could not simply ignore a request from a considerable number of those whose interests they should be serving.⁴⁵

Feeling abandoned by their traditional organizations, the working class increasingly took matters into their own hands. Agitations, (wild-cat) strikes, but also theft were the order of the day in industry, as workers were desperate to improve their standard of living. According to workers, there was an intimate link between these activities and labour leaders' (both political and trade-union) inability to provide for their basic needs. As one socialist employed in the Łódź public transport system remarked, the theft of coal by railway workers was a sign of their bitterness. The working class demanded not to be "treated like a beggar" by "its own comrades in leading positions".⁴⁶ Similarly, a worker at Motomeccanica called upon the government to place orders no longer with firms laying off workers, as in the current situation of mass unemployment even "honest people become black marketers, thieves etc. to feed themselves and their families".⁴⁷

41. R.R., "Risposta a Gandi", *Sesto Proletaria*, 19 July 1945, Fondazione ISEC.

42. "Protokół z zebrania Koła PPS przy Łódzkich Zakładach Przemysłu Czesankowego" [7 August 1945], APŁ, DK PPS Górna, 6, fo. 3.

43. "Protokół zebranie członków P.P.S. Dzielnicza Tramwaje Miejskiej" [25 July 1946], APŁ, DK PPS Tramwaje, 13, fos 28–29.

44. "Protokół" [28 August 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Śródmieście Lewa, 14, fo. 12.

45. CI Montecatini to Esecutivo Camera del Lavoro, 29 March 1947, AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.2.2.4., Fasc. 2.

46. "Protokół zwyczajnego Koła P.P.S. przy Zarządzie Miejskim, Wydziale Technicznym, Oddziale Pómiarów", [16 August 1945], APŁ, DK PPS Śródmieście Prawa, 10, fos 5–6.

47. B. Filippo to Camera del Lavoro, 15 October 1946, AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.2.2.4., Fasc. 1.

Despair was also listed as the foremost reason for the strikes that hit both cities with increasing frequency. When the 250 workers at the Mazzarella weaving shop struck in protest at its directors' refusal to increase pay, a solidarity strike broke out among the 15,000 workers at the neighboring Breda aeroplane works. Petitioning the Milan prefecture to intervene at Mazzarella, the internal commission at Breda indicated that it was not possible to live on a salary of between 20 and 22 lire per hour in a place like Sesto San Giovanni.⁴⁸ But whereas the working classes might occasionally show such internal solidarity, local support was often the best workers could expect. Striking against the introduction of multi-machine work, the workers at a Łódź textile factory were backed by the district committee of the PPS. Notwithstanding their claims that overhauling the worker-machine ratio made little sense if the poor electricity supply already had 70 per cent of spinners sitting idly by, the visiting trade-union officials threw their full weight behind the factory management.⁴⁹

If workers were already frustrated by their isolation in industrial disputes, there was still greater exasperation at the authorities' continuing inability to tackle those "parasites and smoke sellers" operating on the black market.⁵⁰ Workers complained bitterly that speculators could live "a good life" not by working,⁵¹ but by acting as "vampires sucking the last blood out of society".⁵² Just how widespread these practices were was experienced firsthand by those Breda employees living in Monza, who found local shops closed from 11am because bakers had sold all their bread on the black market.⁵³ Thus directly threatening their daily existence, the many abuses of the black market evoked fierce emotions amongst workers. In a resolution adopted by the socialist trade-union activists at Milanese train manufacturer TIBB, it was called for "a firm BASTA [enough] to the wild and greedy speculation that is running rampant and could drive us to wholly unintended actions".⁵⁴

48. CI Breda to Prefetto di Milano, 4 March 1947, AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.2.2.4., Fasc. 2.

49. Dzielnicowy Komitet P.P.S. Ruda Pabianice to Wojewodzki Komitet P.P.S. Łódź, 15 September 1947, APŁ, DK PPS Ruda Pabianicka, 5, fo. 48.

50. Mirko Zaghi, "Communismo e Socialismo", *Sesto Proletaria*, 1 November 1945, Fondazione ISEC.

51. "Protokół spisany z zebrania członków P.P.S. przy Państwowych Zakładach Przemysłu Welnianego Nr. 40 w Łodzi" [28 October 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Fabryczna, 8, fos 82–83.

52. "L'operaio Valboretta nell'Esecutivo della Camera del Lavoro Milano. Cosa ha fatto e cosa farà l'organizzazione sindacale" [15 August 1945], AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.1.3., Fasc. 4.

53. CI Breda to Prefetto di Milano, 11 December 1946, AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.2.2.4., Fasc. 1.

54. Gruppo sindacale socialista T.I.B.B. to Camera del Lavoro Milano, 18 April 1947, AdL, Class. 5.2.2.4., Fasc. 3. Emphasis in original.

Grassroots socialists often lamented that government initiatives to deal with the black market were not only ineffective, but also fraught with hypocrisy. One socialist in Łódź expressed his surprise that, at a time when the government was claiming to be directing a “battle with high prices”, the prices of train tickets had been increased.⁵⁵ A local Sestese socialist was more comprehensive in his critique of government handling of the price issue. Referring to two workers who had courageously handed in a woman who had been knocking on doors to sell tobacco illegally, he wondered what their action counted for in the light of the new hikes in the price of state-provided cigarettes announced that very day. Between this woman and the state, “perhaps the woman was conducting social work” as the practices of the state “are more black than those of the black market”.⁵⁶

It is indicative of the profound sense of disillusionment the working classes felt towards the governments ruling in their name. Rank-and-file socialists considered themselves to be neglected by their national party leaders, whom they reproached for breaking promises and for showing no interest in their problems. This brought back bad memories of times gone by. Addressing the social ills of liberated Poland, one Łódź socialist compared current times to the period when the country was ruled by the *Sanacja* (the authoritarian dictatorship that had governed Poland between 1926 and 1939).⁵⁷ Similar sentiments were expressed in an open letter by the Sesto San Giovanni PSIUP to the national PSIUP leadership in August 1946. After providing an exposé of the many woes tormenting the working classes – the incessantly rising costs of living, raging speculation, and industrialists manipulating the markets by stockpiling their goods – it concluded: “The worker is patient and has been waiting for a year-and-a-half for someone or something to change this state of affairs. Nothing! Like before, worse than before. We cannot continue like this.”⁵⁸ In devoting all their energies to the peace negotiations, which were going to be decided by the imperialist powers anyway, political leaders had ignored “the harsh realities of our internal situation, the truth about the conditions of the working masses”. They should take an interest in the concerns of the working classes and remember that there was “a certain limit where people stop reasoning, close their eyes, and vent the anger that has been brewing in their hearts”.⁵⁹

55. “Protokół zebrania Fabrycznego Koła P.P.S. przy P.Z.P.B. nr II” [27 June 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Górna, 7, fo. 27.

56. Zeta, “Borsa nera e simile...”, *Sesto Proletaria*, 19 July 1945, Fondazione ISEC.

57. “Protokół sporządzony na zebraniu Koła Prac. Umysł. przy Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej” [13 November 1946], APŁ, DK PPS Tramwaje, 13, fos 39–40.

58. Esecutivo PSIUP Sesto San Giovanni to Direzione PSIUP, Vice Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri Nenni, and Gruppo Parlamentare PSIUP, *Sesto Proletaria*, 28 August 1946, Fondazione ISEC.

59. *Ibid.*

Perhaps the most damning indictment of the new state was that it failed to deliver even basic fairness. When Prime Minister Feruccio Parri had indicated during a radio speech that many sacrifices still lay ahead for Italy, a worker writing to the local socialist press was quick to agree. But things should be proportional – someone who had amassed 10 million lire should at least give half of that to the state.⁶⁰ Over the years to follow, however, workers would often find just that proportionality lacking. In the above-mentioned conflict over the *imposta di famiglia*, the protesting internal commissions branded it “immoral and anti-social” that the burden of postwar reconstruction fell almost exclusively on the shoulders of the working classes, and instead called for a tax on “every form of luxury and extravagance”.⁶¹ Manifestations of abundance also bred much bad blood amongst workers in Łódź. At a meeting of socialists in a textile factory, multiple speakers highlighted the continuing divide between poor and rich in Polish society – asking such questions as why there was a lack of milk, butter, and eggs for children while some people had everything, or why expensive goods such as lemons or oranges were imported while there was a shortage of bread.⁶² In postwar Poland, such claims were particularly poignant, as they flew directly in the face of government rhetoric. In view of the official propaganda that there was no longer a bourgeoisie in People’s Poland, one socialist worker wondered who it was “driving around in limousines at Piotrkowska [Łódź’s main shopping street] and buying all the luxurious products a worker can only dream about”.⁶³

If the postwar (socialist) working classes ever had a political programme, it was definitely their egalitarianism. The inevitable pain of war and reconstruction was going to have to be divided evenly and, for the working classes, first and foremost that meant the rich contributing more. Amid widespread calls for a requisition of war profits, a Milanese worker exhorted that it could not be the case that the worker was paying for a war

60. Un Operaio, “L’ancora c’è”, *Sesto Proletaria*, 12 July 1945, Fondazione ISEC.

61. CI Sindacato Bancari, Banca Commerciale Italiana, Banca d’America e d’Italia, Banca Popolare, Banco di Napoli, Banca Commerciale Serico, Piccolo Credito Bergamasci, Cassa di Risparmio della P.P.L.L. Rhodiaca, Elettroteco, Edison, Innocenti, Falck, Bemberg, Telegrafo Centrale, Alfa Romeo, Officine Bossi, Motomeccanica, Brill, Credito di Francia, Feltrinelli, and Siemens to Camera del Lavoro, 28 March 1947, AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.2.2.4., Fasc. 2.

62. “Protokół z ogólnego zebrania Koła PPS w Państwowej Fabryce Nr. 2, Ł.Z.P.W” [7 May 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Śródmieście Lewa, 14, fo. 40.

63. “Protokół spisany z zebrania członków P.P.S. przy Państwowych Zakładach Przemysłu Welnianego Nr. 40 w Łodzi” [28 October 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Fabryczna, 8, fos 82–83. This was part of what Kenney deems the “moral community” of the postwar Łódź working class – workers were concerned not only by “how well the community was supplied”, but also by “whether it was paid fairly and equally”. “If Poland is poor”, one worker argued, “it should be poor for everyone”; Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, pp. 97–100.

created by capital whilst capitalists were making billions each month.⁶⁴ Yet it was not only industrial fat cats that were the targets of working-class demands for a more equitable division of income. There was all sorts of indignation over disparities across craft and regional boundaries,⁶⁵ but perhaps the most grievous resentments were those within factories. Milanese workers repeatedly demanded a levelling of white-collar and blue-collar pay,⁶⁶ whereas a Łódź socialist asked how it was possible that a manager earned 120 per cent of what his subordinates made.⁶⁷

This was part of a more general backlash against those who had climbed the ranks of the workers' movement in postwar Poland. There were bitter remarks about the "arrogance" of workers-turned-managers, who felt superior and did not even meet their erstwhile co-workers.⁶⁸ Similar feelings of resentment were harboured against middle-level party functionaries. Referring to working-class indignation that speakers of the Łódź PPS provincial committee (who regularly addressed factory circle meetings) did not travel with them on the public transport system, a district committee leader recommended that speakers would henceforth use the urban means of transport – only if these were unavailable they should come by car or horse carriage.⁶⁹

DEMOCRACY FROM BELOW

This particular suggestion incurred an irritated response on the part of Łódź PPS leader and PPS Central Committee member Henryk Wachowicz. Apparently, he argued, his comrade was "interested in horses rather than in the speech". Calling for a distinction between personal and business matters, he claimed that taking equality to such extremes would amount to anarchism.⁷⁰ A similar repudiation of blanket egalitarianism is

64. B. Filippo to Camera del Lavoro, 15 October 1946, AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.2.2.4., Fasc. 1.

65. Workers in the Łódź metal, energy, transport, printing, and chemical industries complained that they were lacking the access to consumer goods that was enjoyed by workers in the textile industries (via payment in kind or theft), whereas the Milanese working class protested against the higher wages being paid to workers in Turin; Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, pp. 100–101; Ganapini, *Una città, la guerra*, pp. 237–238.

66. CI OM to Camera del Lavoro, 21 June 1946, AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.2.2.4., Fasc. 1; CI Montecatini to Commissione Interne delle Aziende Milanesi, 28 April 1947, AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.2.2.4., Fasc. 2.

67. "Protokół sporządzony na zebraniu Koła Prac. Umysł. przy Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej" [13 November 1946], APŁ, DK PPS Tramwaje, 13, fos 39–40.

68. "Protokół z zebrania Koła P.P.S. przy Wiedza" [13 December 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Śródmieście Lewa, 14, fo. 71.

69. "Protokół z plenarnego posiedzenia Rady Wojewódzkiej Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej w Łodzi" [27 September 1947], APŁ, Wojewódzkiej Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej w Łodzi, 2, fos 28–39.

70. *Ibid.*

discernible in the observations that PSIUP trade union leader Fernando Santi put on paper upon his return from a visit to the Soviet Union. Noting how the basic wage of the Soviet worker could be supplemented with a whole range of bonuses if production targets were met, he concluded that the levelling of incomes in the Soviet Union had definitely not taken the proportions that “many fear and some naively hope”.⁷¹ That is not to say that socialist leaders were perfectly fine with remaining income inequalities, but they were always more concerned with the political fallout for their parties and governments. Speaking in the PPS Central Committee, party chairman Kasimierz Rusinek listed the reasons for worker opposition to the government. In his view, little had changed since the war – the administrative apparatus in industry was distrusted and whereas industrial managers had made no concessions regarding their living standards, workers got nothing. Yet, his focus was firmly on winning the elections, not on any schemes to come to a more equitable division of income.⁷² That worker demands for greater fairness also played second fiddle within the PSIUP is attested to by a letter the socialist vice-president of the Italian Trade Union Confederation (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro – CGIL) wrote to his party leadership. Lamenting that the government had thus far treated salary agitations solely as “a public order problem”, he called upon socialist leaders to “actually do something for workers”.⁷³

Often, however, party leaders claimed there was very little they could do to improve the lot of the working classes. Sweeping pay rises were out of the question, as these would only further fuel already rampant inflation. As late as 1947, PSIUP Finance Minister Rodolfo Morandi painted a grim picture for his fellow party leaders of the socio-economic outlook of the working classes. The sheer destruction wrought by the war had rendered profitable production almost impossible, whilst workers would end up paying the price of wage increases in the form of inflation.⁷⁴ In the same vein, socialist workers in Łódź were told that pay rises offered no solution to their problems, as “inflation is the real enemy of the working classes”.⁷⁵ In these circumstances, all socialist leaders could

71. “Prime impressioni sull’Unione Sovietica”, AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.1.3., Fasc. 4.

72. “Protokół posiedzenia C.K.W. P.P.S.” [30 November 1945], Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw [hereafter, AAN], Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, Centralny Komitet Wykonawczy, 2037, 235/III/2, fos 9–18.

73. “Riunione della Direzione” [7 July 1946], Istituto Storico della Resistenza in Toscana, Florence [hereafter, ISRT], Fondo Foscolo Lombardi, Partito Socialista Italiano, Direzione Nazionale, Busta 4, Fasc. 20.

74. “Riunione della Direzione” [4 April 1947], ISRT, Fondo Foscolo Lombardi, Partito Socialista Italiano, Direzione Nazionale, Busta 4, Fasc. 21.

75. “Protokół z zebrania Koła P.P.S. przy Wiedza” [13 December 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Śródmieście Lewa, 14, fo. 71.

ask for was for workers to show some patience. Faced with a question regarding working-class living standards, one Łódź factory circle leader compared postwar Poland to “a young marriage – first some money has to be made, after that prosperity will follow”.⁷⁶ Not all his colleagues were as polite in their responses to the bread-and-butter demands of workers. After being confronted with a series of complaints about deficiencies in the food and coal supply, a factory circle chairman ordered workers not to “exaggerate about small matters”. Hardships, he argued, were “a victory for the country”, and in the current ruins only patience would see the situation improving.⁷⁷ This linkage between the devastations left by war and the absence of material improvements in workers’ lives was also made by Italian trade unionists. It was absurd, they claimed, for those who had for years cheered on fascism’s criminal war politics to think now that trade-union bodies could perform “the miracle of multiplying bread”.⁷⁸

Discipline and sacrifice were, then, the key concepts socialist leaders threw at workers. Visiting a factory circle in one of Łódź’s larger textile plants, PPS Central Committee member Stanisław Rybicka discussed the socialist role in the economic reconstruction effort. The government, he insisted, was on its way to “a better tomorrow”, but for that the party needed “honest and disciplined members, who would answer its calls and are prepared to make sacrifices”.⁷⁹ Likewise, the lead socialist trade unionist in the Milan area, Franco Mariani, claimed that CGIL was doing all in its power to instil “a spirit of sacrifice for the salvation of Italy” amongst its working-class constituents.⁸⁰ Strikes stood in the way of this national salvation and were almost universally denounced by socialist leaders.⁸¹ Socialist workers in Łódź were told that their role had changed now that they were no longer working for the capitalist but for the state.⁸² That meant strikes made no sense, as they were directed against the

76. “Protokół z zebrania Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej na terenie przedzalni Ksziezey Młyn” [3 March 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Fabryczna, 8, fo. 53.

77. “Protokół z zebrania Koła PPS przy Łódzkich Zakładach Przemysłu Czesankowego” [7 August 1945], APŁ, DK PPS Górna, 6, fo. 3

78. “Disciplina Sindacale” [1 August 1945], AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.2.2.9., Fasc. 1.

79. “Protokół z zebrania koła P.P.S. przy P.Z.P.B. Nr. 2” [25 October 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Śródmieście Lewa, 14, fo. 59.

80. Interview Robert Hadfield with Franco Mariani [1945], AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.1.3., Fasc. 4.

81. Despite a “widespread belief” to the contrary, Łukasz Kamiński, in his extensive research on industrial action in postwar Poland, found no evidence that the PPS’s attitude towards strikes differed significantly from that of the communists; Łukasz Kamiński, *Polacy wobec nowej rzeczywistości 1944–1948* (Torun, 2000), pp. 129–130.

82. “Protokół z zebrania majstrów i robotników I zmiany Tkalni człoków P.P.S.” [9 May 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Widzew, 15, fos 60–62.

very government that was struggling to create socialism. Time and again, socialist leaders reminded workers that they were not allowed to participate in strikes, that strikes affected national well-being, and that strikes always had a political character.⁸³ Whereas the PSIUP never employed arguments like these towards its discontented workers, the party made it quite clear that the mandate to proclaim industrial action rested with the higher echelons of the labour movement. Writing in the local socialist press, one Sestese socialist called upon workers not to engage in uncoordinated agitations as these did no good to the standing of CGIL and could only tempt the bourgeoisie to “counter-manoeuvres”.⁸⁴

This fear of political opponents capitalizing upon disunity in the labour movement was symptomatic of the PPS and PSIUP leaders’ obsession with a perceived reactionary threat. According to various socialist leaders, those reactionaries who had for decades supported right-wing dictatorships were now trying to destabilize the young democratic regimes by playing upon worker grievances. The aim of these “political speculators”, according to Mariani, was to profit from the misery and joblessness amongst the working classes to “create tumults and insurrections”, which would be crushed by those same Allies on which reactionaries had pinned their hopes to “destroy the nascent democratic structure of our country”.⁸⁵ Even though there was obviously no prospect of the Allies siding with reactionaries in postwar Poland, its socialists too harboured intense fears of a reaction exploiting the socio-economic woes of ordinary workers to achieve its political goals. In every manifestation of worker discontent, they tended to identify the disingenuous machinations of the “exceptionally strong” reactionary movement in Poland.⁸⁶ In order to prevent the working classes from falling prey to the hollow promises of this group yet again, it was imperative that socialists acted quickly in both countries. That involved improving the material situation of the working classes, as their current plight hardly “encouraged them to a struggle with the reaction”.⁸⁷ But, above all, it meant that socialists in government

83. “Protokół z zebrania Koła P.P.S. przy P.Z.P.B. Nr. 3” [16 November 1946], APŁ, DK PPS Górna, 6, fo. 22; “Protokół z zebrania członków P.P.S. koła fabrycznego przy Panstw. Zakł. Włókiem. daw. K. Scheibler i I. Grohmann” [25 May 1946], APŁ, DK PPS Fabryczna, 8, fos 9–10.

84. Eugenio Sighinolfi, “Disciplina Sindacale”, *Sesto Proletaria*, 24 July 1946, Fondazione ISEC.

85. Interview Robert Hadfield with Franco Mariani [1945], AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.1.3., Fasc. 4.

86. Speaking in the PPS Central Committee, Stanisław Skowronski claimed that the reaction could potentially draw on “the petit-bourgeoisie, the ignorant, the clergy, and the teachers”; “Protokół posiedzenia Centralnego Komitetu Wykonawczego P.P.S.” [14 May 1946], AAN, Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, Centralny Komitet Wykonawczy, 2037, 235/III/2, fos 45–56.

87. *Ibid.*

should stop offering only “technical expedients” and finally let workers know “for what and for whom” they were suffering.⁸⁸

The key for socialist leaders was, thus, to raise working-class awareness not only of the difficult situation in which their governments found themselves, but also of what would be ahead if they persevered. To achieve this, both parties placed considerable emphasis on direct worker participation in local and industrial decision-making. These notions had deep roots within both parties, which can be traced back to the defeat of the workers’ movement in the 1920s. The failure to capitalize upon the factory occupations of the *biennio rosso* (1919–1920) by entering into fruitless negotiations with employers in Italy,⁸⁹ as well as the progressive removal of socialists from the economic apparatus by the *Sanacja* in Poland⁹⁰ caused profound disillusionment with the reformist politics the PPS and the PSI had pursued thus far. Socialism was to be arrived at by means of a revolution, but not the bureaucratic revolution from above as witnessed in the Soviet Union. A young Morandi defined the dictatorship of the proletariat as class self-management and severely criticized both reformism and the use of the state as a revolutionary instrument under Stalinism.⁹¹ Similarly, the prewar Polish socialists associated Bolshevik-type nationalizations with bureaucratization, capitalist methods, and the by-passing of society, and championed forms of worker self-management, like cooperatives, as the bedrock of a future socialist civilization.⁹²

These theoretical disagreements with the communists often turned into real political conflicts after liberation. When the Italian communists endeavoured to merge the *comitati d’agitazione* [clandestine factory bodies that had sought to mobilize workers during the German occupation] with the more party-controlled *comitati di liberazione nazionale*, this was opposed by the PSIUP on the grounds that the *comitati d’agitazione*, as the organizations closest to factory life, were best placed to arouse spontaneous participation amongst workers and diffuse ideas of socio-economic renewal in factories.⁹³ In Poland, too, the socialists came to the defence of the cooperatives during the communist-led nationalization drive of 1947–1948,

88. Lelio Basso, “Espedienti o soluzioni”, *Avanti!*, 19 September 1945; <http://www.leliobasso.it/documento.aspx?id=6c9c65ef2df3c28d35883209f0732a80>.

89. Mattera, *Storia del Psi*, pp. 85–87.

90. Roman Bäcker, *Problematyka państwa w polskiej myśli socjalistycznej lat 1918–1948* (Torun, 1994), p. 92.

91. Cristiana Boscarelli, “Libertà democrazia e socialismo: un tentativo teorico- pratico di declinazione positiva tra Rodolfo Morandi e Raniero Panzieri”, in *Actas das Jordanas de jovens investigadores de filosofia: Segundas Jordanas Internacionais*, pp. 45–70, 51; http://www.krisis.uevora.pt/edicao/actas_vol2.pdf.

92. Bäcker, *Problematyka państwa*, p. 93.

93. Emanuele Rossi, *Democrazia come partecipazione: Lelio Basso e il PSI alle origine della Repubblica, 1943–1947* (Rome, 2011), pp. 102–103.

arguing that cooperatives, by virtue of their direct links with producers and consumers, were in the best position to respond to the needs of both groups and that the bureaucratization entailed in further nationalizations could only come at the expense of workers.⁹⁴

According to PPS and PSIUP leaders, drawing workers into such grassroots participatory structures as factory committees and cooperatives strengthened socialism's position vis-à-vis the reaction in at least two ways. In the first place, by giving workers a clear stake in day-to-day administration, it served to dispel any illusions they might hold about what their governments were able to provide. Speaking at the first congress of Milanese (both factory and non-factory) liberation committees, Morandi argued that the masses would never learn to appreciate "the tragic situation of the moment" through "speeches and sermons" alone – only "direct experience with authority" would help them understand.⁹⁵ When confronted with difficult questions, (local) socialist leaders would often point out that workers could take responsibility to improve their own lives. Faced with complaints about the food supply of the local cooperative, two Łódź district circle leaders claimed that "workers were to blame themselves, as they should improve distribution by their own behaviour".⁹⁶

Secondly, and more importantly, the PPS and the PSIUP saw grassroots organizations as indispensable vehicles in their relentless efforts to teach the working classes about democracy. Socialist leaders in both Italy and Poland were acutely aware that their countries were lacking a longer democratic tradition and that the reintroduction of democratic freedoms at liberation had not suddenly changed that fact. If the interwar period had taught them anything, it was that, by itself, universal suffrage was insufficient to guarantee a democratic outcome. According to PPS Minister of Labour and Social Security Jan Stanczyk, formal democracy still presented many risks – after all, Hitler had also "come to power by democratic means".⁹⁷ Or, in the words of PSIUP Secretary General Lelio Basso, it would be "a dangerous delusion" to think that electoral rallies alone "could give a democratic conscience to a people that never had one".⁹⁸

94. Robert Spałek, "Między pragmatyzmem a zdradą. Zawłaszczenie PPS w kraju (1944–1948)", in *idem* (ed), *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna: Dlaczego się nie udało?* (Warsaw, 2010), pp. 145–242, 211.

95. "1 Congresso dei C.L.N. Provincia di Milano" [1945], Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia, Milano [hereafter, INSMIL], Fondo Cln Regionale Lombardia, Busta 17, Fasc. 94.

96. "Protokół zebranie członków P.P.S. dzielnica Tramwaje Miejskiej", [15 July 1946], APŁ, DK PPS Tramwaje, 13, fos 28–29.

97. "Protokół z wspólnego posiedzenia CKW PPS i KC PPR" [28 September 1945], AAN, Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, Centralny Komitet Wykonawczy, 2037, 235/III/6, fo. 25.

98. Lelio Basso, "Per una coscienza democratica", *Avanti!*, 29 August 1945; <http://www.leliobasso.it/documento.aspx?id=1fb14f1db3eb10586206df1cbf448089>.

In order to promote such a democratic conscience amongst the working classes, the two parties attributed a crucial role to grassroots participatory bodies. Emphasizing their “educational significance”, chief PPS economist Stanisław Szwalbe appealed on his government to rely more on factory committees and cooperatives.⁹⁹ Basso was more elaborate on what this would look like in practice. To counter the “political illiteracy” that had beset large parts of the working classes, he argued, it “is from concrete problems that we have to start the work of re-education”. If socialists could manage to get workers, clerks, and peasants to discuss their everyday concerns over pay, food, housing, and heating, the popular masses would gradually learn to “link up their immediate demands with more complex situations and transcend the particular to arrive at a more general understanding of class relations”.¹⁰⁰

Thus precipitating in the emancipation of the worker not only as “homo economicus” but also as “homo politicus”, socialist leaders vowed to ingrain the value of self-management amongst the working classes even where “they did not yet understand that themselves”.¹⁰¹ That meant the largely technical competencies that had so far been awarded to shopfloor participatory bodies needed to be broadened. Speaking at a joint socialist-communist plenum, PPS Secretary General Edward Osóbka-Morawski bemoaned tendencies to curtail the capacities of factory councils. The government, he insisted, should implement “thorough reforms” as their role could not be reduced to mere “canteen control”.¹⁰² A similar extension of the powers of factory councils was advocated by PSIUP economic theorist Angelo Saraceno. In his view, giving workers the power of co-decision only in technical matters did not alter the basic fact that the provider of capital still carried responsibility for the production process. Instead, he argued, the “technical maturation” and the “political maturation” of the working classes should go hand in hand, as factory councils were empowered to counter the bureaucratization that would inevitably accompany the introduction of a regulated economy.¹⁰³

In this process of political maturation, socialist leaders expected their rank-and-file activists in factories to take a pioneering role. According to Basso, socialist factory cells were the “militant avant-garde” of the

99. “Protokół z wspólnego posiedzenia CKW PPS i KC PPR” [28 September 1945], AAN, Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, Centralny Komitet Wykonawczy, 2037, 235/III/6, fo. 16.

100. Basso, “Per una coscienza democratica”.

101. Pietro Nenni, “La democrazia dei consigli”, *Avanti!*, 13 July 1944, in Domenico Zucàro (ed), *Vento del Nord* (Turin, 1978), pp. 23–25.

102. “Protokół z wspólnego posiedzenia CKW PPS i KC PPR” [28 September 1945], AAN, Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, Centralny Komitet Wykonawczy, 2037, 235/III/6, fo. 3.

103. Angelo Saraceno, “Relazione sulla riforma industriale: I Consigli di Gestione”, AdL, Camera del Lavoro, Class. 5.2.2.10, Fasc. 9.



Figure 2. A meeting of the like-minded Italian and Polish socialist leaders visiting Warsaw's Wilanow Park during a joint meeting in October 1947. From left to right: Lelio Basso, Pietro Nenni, Jozef Cyrankiewicz, Adam Rapacki, Kaszimir Rusinek.

Photograph: Anonymous, PPS archives, Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw (microfilm 2029/3).

working classes, which, having their “finger on the pulse of the masses”, could unite “various categories of workers on the political level”.¹⁰⁴ This was reflected in the significance both parties attached to the quality of their cadres.¹⁰⁵ Whereas PSIUP leader Pietro Nenni repeatedly emphasized that party membership was of “moral value” and should not be seen as a necessity to find a job,¹⁰⁶ PPS activists were told to recruit “new, but democratic members”.¹⁰⁷ Arguing that there was no place for

104. Lelio Basso, “L’aspetto politico dei nuclei aziendali”, *Quarto Stato*, 30 January 1946; <http://www.leliobasso.it/documento.aspx?id=e23c39b2efef8f1eae37279209501c11>.

105. The PPS’s preference for “persuasive arguments”, hoping “to win workers to the cause of socialism rather than just to the PPS”, stood in stark contrast to the communist preoccupation “with numbers and the control of key positions” in factory management, whereas the PSIUP initially adopted the “draconian” policy of excluding all former members of Mussolini’s fascist party from joining its ranks; Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, p. 33; Mattera, *Storia del Psi*, pp. 133–134.

106. Pietro Nenni, “Che cos’è e cosa vuole il Partito Socialista”, *Avanti!*, 23 July 1944, in Zucàro, *Vento del Nord*, pp. 42–45.

107. “Protokół z zebrania Koła P.P.S. przy Państwowych Zakładach Przemysłu Wełnianego Nr. 2” [8 March 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Śródmieście Lewa, 14, fo. 26.



Figure 3. Sestese workers listening to the address given by Pietro Nenni on 23 May 1945. Photograph: Anonymous, Sesto Proletaria, 27 May 1945, Fondazione ISEC.

those who had served Hitlerism in the ranks of the PPS, one speaker of the Łódź provincial committee concluded that the party could be proud to “have stood at the foundation of the healthy bulwark of the labour movement”.¹⁰⁸

Despite these high demands on new party members, however, the attitudes socialist leaders took towards both their own rank and file and the working classes more generally always hovered between paternalism and condescension. On the one hand, there was an intense desire to take the workers by the hand and teach them the fundamentals of democracy and socialism. After the popular apathy created by fascism, Nenni postulated, it was necessary to unleash “a wave of civicism” on ordinary people to combat “the quietism and pietism” that were the classical nemeses of “the moral resurrection of the nation”.¹⁰⁹ From a similar logic, one leader of the Łódź provincial PPS criticized a Central Committee member’s declaration that “garbage” should be removed from the party. Rather, he contended, socialist awareness should be raised amongst the

108. “Zebrania Koła P.P.S. przy f-mie Scheibler i Grochman” [27 April 1947], APL, DK PPS Śródmieście Lewa, 13, fo. 35.

109. Pietro Nenni, “Lezione di un processo”, *Avanti!*, 18 December 1944, in Zucàro, *Vento del Nord*, pp. 248–251.

rank and file – “just as we do not throw semi-finished products in the garbage [...], we should educate and inform new members”.¹¹⁰ On the other hand, socialist leaders often displayed a barely disguised disdain for the superstitions they perceived as still marring the working classes. Certainly, Basso wrote, the experience of wartime resistance had ushered in the political coming of age of many workers. But, as far as he was concerned, there was no denying that there were “vast sectors of the working classes, specifically women and youngsters, that had not taken part in the political struggle [and] do not show an interest in political problems”.¹¹¹ Łódź PPS leaders too complained bitterly about the indifference and poor knowledge of their rank and file. Calling for a far more widespread subscription to the local socialist daily, one factory circle chairman deplored that “if so many had confidence in the party, they should also read its newspaper and not some tabloid”.¹¹²

CONCLUSION

In its near-exclusive focus on communist parties, scholarship on the socio-political history of the first postwar years has noted an insurmountable gulf between a radicalized rank and file and a leadership completely swallowed up by the day-to-day business of reconstruction. Within the two socialist parties under review in this article, there seems to have been a grassroots-leadership chasm as well, but rather the other way around: the revolutionary transformation of industrial relations championed by socialist leaders finding little resonance amongst ordinary workers just concerned with getting by. To what extent are these two cases representative for postwar Europe as a whole? The PPS and the PSIUP were definitely peculiarities within the international socialist movement and the preliminary results of similar research on the French and Czechoslovakian socialist parties show their leaders to be distinctively less enthusiastic about worker self-management. As in other countries where democracy had survived during the interwar period, the democratic re-education enshrined in factory councils and cooperatives did not carry similar urgency for them.

Yet, the same results suggest that the priorities of their working classes were remarkably similar to those described by Rusinek in May 1946. Commenting on the countless strikes that had inflamed Poland’s industrial strongholds during the spring, he concluded that the cause had been the

110. “Protokół z plenarnego posiedzenia Rady Wojewódzkiej Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej w Łodzi” [27 September 1947], APŁ, Wojewódzki Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej w Łodzi, 2, fo. 32.

111. Basso, “Per una coscienza democratica”.

112. “Protokół z zebrania Koła P.P.S. przy Państwowym Browarze Mieszczańskim” [18 July 1947], APŁ, DK PPS Śródmieście Lewa, 13, fo. 65.

inadequate supply of basic necessities “almost everywhere”, in some cases the “vagueness” of pay models, and only finally the “inadequate demarcation between management and factory council competencies”.¹¹³ Despite its subordinate position on the agenda of the postwar working classes, however, the theme of worker self-management still exerts a powerful attraction for the social history of postwar Europe – with even those historians sceptical about the overall revolutionary potential of the moment of liberation featuring it prominently in their accounts.¹¹⁴

From the perspective of the PPS and the PSIUP, a more fruitful way of looking at issues surrounding grassroots participatory structures would address how these affected socialist self-understanding vis-à-vis the communists. After all, for all the philo-communism usually attributed to the Italian and Polish socialists, there was within their leading circles a remarkable deal of criticism of communist conceptions of economic democracy. Compared to the full, if gradual, worker empowerment envisioned by socialist parties, communist attitudes towards the working classes were often derided as being one-dimensional and heavy-handed. Whereas the communists tended to see CGIL principally as “a defensive organ” preoccupied with “the direction of salary agitations and the maintenance of a sufficient standard of living”, as one socialist trade unionist remarked, its functions “went far beyond that” for the socialists: “[i]t is a formidable instrument of social politics and should lead workers towards equal pay, but also towards the factory council, agrarian reform, and industrial reform”.¹¹⁵ However, socialist calls for “full powers” for factory councils were largely in vain as communists were not about to give the working class a real say in postwar reconstruction.¹¹⁶ According to Morandi, this came down to a fundamental difference between socialist and communist conceptions of the purpose of a working-class party. Whereas “the masses expressed their interests within and governed through the party” according to the socialist conception, the communist view saw the party as an “instrument to manoeuvre the masses in accordance with the directives assigned to cadres”.¹¹⁷

113. “Protokół posiedzenia Centralnego Komitetu Wykonawczego P.P.S.” [14 May 1946], AAN, Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, Centralny Komitet Wykonawczy, 2037, 235/III/2, fo. 46.

114. Kenney, for example, begins his section on the “Subordination of Organized Labour” with a description of how workers refused to “hand [factories] over to the Soviets, the government, or a private employer”; Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland*, pp. 57–61.

115. “Politica sindacale” [1947], INSMLI, Fondo Lia Bellora, Fasc. 6.

116. “Protokół posiedzenia Centralnego Komitetu Wykonawczego P.P.S.” [14 May 1946], AAN, Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, Centralny Komitet Wykonawczy, 2037, 235/III/2, fo. 52.

117. Rodolfo Morandi, “Lettera aperta ai compagni comunisti” [September 1944], in Neri Serneri (ed), *Il Partito Socialista nella Resistenza: I documenti e la stampa clandestina (1943–1945)* (Pisa, 1988), pp. 206–208. Though not mentioning the communists by name, Basso also warned that non-party workers should not be treated as “unconscious instruments for

These debates, however, remained largely academic to the average worker family simply struggling to stay afloat. Probably earlier than their national leaders in government,¹¹⁸ the working classes understood how much recent history had seen the political pendulum swing to their disadvantage. After a war fought predominantly in cities and an occupational regime targeting worker organizations specifically, the working classes were bound to lose out relative to other social groups.¹¹⁹ Amongst Łódź and Sestese (socialist) workers, there were at least as many resentments against peasants “withholding food”¹²⁰ or “leading an easy life”¹²¹ as against the bourgeois and capitalist exploiters pointed the finger at by their national leaders. With such animosity persisting amongst the two historically oppressed groups in both Italy and Poland, a revolution, let alone a successful one, was never a likely prospect. This was reflected in the remarks a Sestese socialist made only months after liberation. The country, he argued, found itself in “a critical situation” – just as workers were reclaiming their rights, there was no hope of an improvement in their living conditions until the imbalance between expenditure and revenue in industry had been addressed. In these circumstances, he urged upon workers to stay calm, as “every recrimination is pointless”.¹²²

TRANSLATED ABSTRACTS FRENCH – GERMAN – SPANISH

Jan de Graaf. *Plus qu'un contrôle de cantine, les socialistes polonais et italiens confrontant leurs travailleurs, 1944–1947.*

Cet article examine le fossé qui sépara les leaders de parti et les travailleurs de la base dans les partis socialistes italien et polonais de l'après-guerre entre 1944 et 1947. Jusqu'à présent étudié seulement dans le contexte des partis communistes, ce

action that is directed from above” without taking “their real needs and aspirations” into account; Rossi, *Democrazia come partecipazione*, p. 113.

118. Aldo Agosti has noted that Morandi was amongst the few PSIUP leaders not hiding that the relative position of the working classes had deteriorated in the first years after liberation; Aldo Agosti, *Rodolfo Morandi: Il pensiero e l'azione politica* (Bari, 1971), p. 424.

119. On how the working classes emerged weaker rather than stronger from World War II more generally, see Conway, *The Sorrows of Belgium*, pp. 287–288.

120. X, “La rivoluzione continua”, *Sesto Proletaria*, 19 July 1945, Fondazione ISEC. On how peasants were “seen by public opinion as cynical exploiters of the difficult postwar situation” in Italy as a whole, see Gustavo Corni, “Italy after 1945: War and Peace, Defeat and Liberation”, in Lothar Kettenacker and Torsten Riotte (eds), *The Legacies of Two World Wars: European Societies in the Twentieth Century* (New York [etc.], 2011), pp. 263–264. On the Milan region specifically, see Ganapini, *Una città, la guerra*, pp. 220–221.

121. “Protokół zebrania informacyjnego koła P.P.S. przy Łódzkich Zakładach Przemysłu Czesankowego” [24 July 1945], APŁ, DK PPS Górna, 6, fo. 2.

122. Sennen Tabanelli, “Considerazioni”, *Sesto Proletaria*, 12 July 1945, Fondazione ISEC.

thème de l'historiographie existante fit apparaître profond désaccord entre la radicalisation des activistes de la base, défendant l'autogestion que les travailleurs avaient conquise pendant les derniers jours de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, et la modération pratiquée par des leaders, voulant désespérément démontrer leur fiabilité en tant que partenaires de gouvernement. Se fondant sur une analyse des opinions des travailleurs socialistes à Łódź et Sesto San Giovanni et des visions embrassées par des leaders provinciaux et nationaux socialistes, l'article soutient que la dynamique au sein des partis socialistes était exactement inverse. En effet, si les leaders socialistes attribuaient un rôle essentiel aux structures participatives de la base dans leurs efforts pour enseigner la démocratie aux classes ouvrières, les travailleurs socialistes se préoccupaient plus de la survie au jour le jour que de la participation, l'autogestion ou toute autre question de haute politique qui soit.

Traduction: *Christine Krätke-Plard*

Jan de Graaf. *Mehr als Kantinenkontrolle. Polnische und italienische Sozialisten in der Auseinandersetzung mit ihren Arbeitern, 1944–1947.*

Der Beitrag erkundet die Kluft zwischen Parteiführung und gewöhnlichen Arbeitern in den italienischen und polnischen Sozialistischen Parteien der Nachkriegsjahre 1944 bis 1947. Die bisherige historiographische Literatur zu diesem Thema, das bislang nur in Zusammenhang mit kommunistischen Parteien untersucht worden ist, hat auf eine tiefe Kluft zwischen der Radikalisierung von Basis-Aktivisten und der Parteiführung aufmerksam gemacht: Während die Basis-Aktivisten versuchten, die von den Arbeitern in den letzten Tagen des Zweiten Weltkrieges errungene Selbstverwaltung zu verteidigen, übten sich die Parteiführer in Zurückhaltung, da sie verzweifelt ihre Zuverlässigkeit als Regierungspartner unter Beweis zu stellen suchten. Ausgehend von einer Analyse der Befindlichkeiten sozialistischer Arbeiter in Łódź und Sesto San Giovanni sowie der Visionen der lokalen und nationalen sozialistischen Führungen wird in dem Artikel die These vertreten, dass die Dynamik innerhalb der Sozialistischen Parteien genau umgekehrt war. Sozialistische Parteiführer sprachen basisnahen Partizipationsstrukturen bei ihren Bemühungen, die arbeitenden Klassen an die Demokratie heranzuführen, eine wesentliche Bedeutung zu, während die sozialistischen Arbeiter eher mit ihrem täglichen Überleben beschäftigt waren als mit Fragen der Partizipation, der Selbstverwaltung oder der großen Politik überhaupt.

Übersetzung: *Max Henninger*

Jan de Graaf. *Más que control de la cantina. Los socialistas polacos e italianos ante sus trabajadores, 1944–1947.*

Ester artículo explora el abismo que existe entre los líderes y los trabajadores de a pie durante la época de postguerra en el seno del Partido Socialista Italiano y en el Partido Socialista Polaco entre 1944 y 1947. Esta cuestión ha sido tan sólo analizada hasta cierto punto en el contexto de los partidos comunistas y la historiografía que podemos encontrar referida a este tema ha planteado la existencia de una profunda

fractura que se llegó a plantear entre la radicalización que se dio entre los activistas de base que defendían la autogestión obrera ganada en la etapa final de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, y la moderación practicada por los líderes de los partidos desesperados por demostrar que eran de confianza a sus socios de gobierno. A partir del análisis de los sentimientos extendidos entre los trabajadores socialistas en las localidades de Łódź y de Sesto San Giovanni y de las visiones expuestas por los líderes socialistas nacionales y provinciales, el artículo plantea que las dinámicas internas de los partidos socialistas eran exactamente las contrarias a esta visión. Allí donde los líderes socialistas otorgaron un papel destacado a las bases en las estructuras participativas en su esfuerzo por enseñar la democracia de la clase obrera, los trabajadores socialistas estaban más preocupados en la supervivencia cotidiana que en la participación, autogestión u cualquier otra cuestión de alta política de este tipo.

Traducción: *Vicent Sanz Rozalén*