

October 31, 1962

Minutes, Meeting of Italian Communist Party (PCI) Politburo

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Summary:

The Italian Communist Party (PCI) Politburo discuss recent events in Cuba: the revolution, US invasion of Cuba and the international political situation.

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Minutes, Meeting of Italian Communist Party (PCI) Politburo, 31 October 1962

Directorate [Politburo] of the Italian Communist Party

Meeting of 31 October 1962

Present: Togliatti, Longo, Terracini, Roasio, Berlinguer, Novella, Colombi, Scheda, Alinovi, Cossutta, Pajetta, Amendola, Macaluso, Romagnoli, Alicata, Bufalini

Absent: Ingrao, Sereni, Scoccimaro

Invited: Occhetto, Barontini, Barca

Secretary: Amadesi

Objectives of the Day:

[...]

1. - The fight for peace (speaker Alicata);
2. - On the Congress of the Italian Communist Youth Federation [Federazione Giovanile Comunista Italiana] (speaker Barca);
3. - The situation of the dailies and other periodicals (speaker Pajetta);
4. - On the organization of the center of the party (speaker Longo).

- The fight for peace.

Alicata: It is difficult today to try and reconstruct the full course of events related to the American aggression in Cuba. [These were] surprising actions that only "L'Unita" had forecast. At the bottom of everything, is the US attempt to invade Cuba, even if the problem of the missiles should not have been a pretext. [There was a] large resistance in defense of Cuban independence, on the part of many countries and in the world public opinion. The crucial point of the crisis was the night between Friday and Saturday. The second message of Khrushchev and Kennedy can be explained by the need to exert pressures. What is unexplainable is the affirmation of [Soviet UN Ambassador Valerian] Zorin [to the UN Security Council on October 25] that in Cuba, missile bases do not exist.

The conclusion of the incident is positive only if the guarantees for Cuba are real. This objective is something of which we were fundamental proponents. If one makes other hypotheticals and considerations one can arrive at other critical conclusions, but that does not seem to be the case. The reaction in Cuba is not good; the reaction is negative for the fact that everything developed about and outside of them. The Cubans legitimately demand to obtain effective guarantees and justice on their request for Guantanamo.

A great possibility has opened for the development of actions in favor of coexistence, for the abolition of the bases, and disarmament. Even in [Italian Foreign Minister Attilio] Piccioni's arguments in the Camera [Italian Chamber of Deputies] this can be heard.

[There was a] positive judgement of the way that the party reacted. [There is] wide support for our actions: [amongst] intellectuals, socialists, youth. The élan of the students and the intellectuals seems to have surpassed that of the workers; at many demonstrations they are the vanguard. That must be because of the fact that many people don't believe that the danger of war is real. That is not only happening in Italy, in all of Western Europe, the reaction of the masses has been very limited. In Latin America, there has not been a political counter-movement like the one that accompanied the previous act of invasion of Cuba.

When there is a dramatic episode, like that in Milan, popular support becomes so vast.¹ [There are] diverse reactions in the party to the events. Not to say that they might have been disappointed at the absence of a show of force, but it is difficult to understand that to you all there were signs of weakness on the part of the U.S.S.R. in the sense that they abandoned the Cuban Revolution to fend for itself. To our allies, the reaction is positive. To give continuance to our peace initiatives, we insist on the opportunity to defend the independence of Cuba, and to develop actions against American bases in Italy and the world. [We should] enlarge and consolidate the alliances that are installed. The nuts and bolts of these problems are put up now for discussion.

Togliatti: On the diplomatic front there is something that can give you pause for reflection. There is an impression that we don't know everything. The fact that Zorin denied the existence of the bases doesn't worry me much. The truly important point is the eventual unrest of the Cuban leaders. Let's move the discussions in the party about this and that episode and concentrate them on fundamental problems, of principle.

Compared to other countries, in Italy we have done more, but the limits, the growth of the movement are evident. In many cities, they aren't doing anything or hardly anything - at the most some small demonstration. We need to analyze concretely the zones of passivity that are in the party. Among the comrades [there are] two contrasting and paralyzing positions: nothing will be done, the USSR won't risk war. The other: The USSR will show the Americans what they are not expecting. They do not understand that it's possible to arrive at peaceful coexistence with battles, even bitter ones, for singular concrete aims. For example, the agreement on the objective of obtaining real guarantees for Cuba today is now possible, meanwhile 15 days ago it was not. Let's continue the struggle on this basis. Among other things it helps us connect with the socialist masses and other dispositions. The actions of the Chinese in this moment are not comprehensible.

Pajetta: [I'll] underline the positive and negative elements. [There was] activity in Spain a few weeks ago that demonstrated the vast potential for solidarity and for struggle. On the other hand [there is] deafness and passivity in certain zones of the party. There are potential units that for a long time did not hold demonstrations in Rome at Brancaccio. Certain unclear aspects of the events do not justify the incorrect orientation of some comrades. Let's not put on the same level those that renounce the struggle and those that are ready to fight. [A] positive judgment for the way that L'Unità illustrated the various phases of the crisis.

Our position on the Chinese-Indian conflict. We are not, and, I do not believe we have to be, supportive of China for condemning certain positions of Nehru.

Throughout this crisis, we attacked the government and we must continue to witness their ambiguous positions. [There is a] major possibility to conduct effective actions that profit from the weakness of the adversaries: the position of [Italian reform socialist Giuseppe] Saragat is different than that of [Prime Minister Amintore] Fanfani and [Italian Socialist party leader Pietro] Nenni. The United States has "legalized" its right to control Cuba militarily and that can make more likely the renouncement of the invasion.

Cossutta: I do not doubt that the position: "ben venga" the war², exists in certain circles. However more widespread is the idea: what could we possibly do? This is to be decided by only two men. [i.e., Kennedy and Khrushchev]

[...]

Berlinguer: The majority of the public opinion has risen regarding the views of the U.S.S.R. but in the class of Western managers, extremist elements are unleashed and even some that critically orient themselves toward Kennedy's politics remain perplexed and convinced that he was right.

[I have a] positive judgment of the mobilization of the party. There's a need to review the growth of the movement, the participation of the workers that, in some centers, was considerable. In places where we are strong the movement has been weak and vice versa. This is due to the orientation of our group of directors. There's not just incredulity about the risk of the war but also some fatalism.

Amendola: Let's discuss the orientation of the party, I worry about the vast areas where incredulity, fatalism and bureaucracy dominate. In certain active parts of the party in the last few days you see there is a certain crisis ... [...]

Bufalini: [...] The peace march set for 1 November will not take place because the Kennedy-Khrushchev agreement produced a certain demobilization. The demonstrations instead will probably take place in a theatre against the missile bases in Italy for the input of the Brancaccio presidency [...]

Alinovi: In Naples [...] The masses recognize that Khrushchev eliminated the residual malcontent of last year with the resumption of Soviet nuclear experiments [in September 1961]. We must be clear. There are comrades that undervalue the strength of the USA and therefore do not understand the need to find a way towards a modus vivendi. The potential existed for a bigger battle than that which manifested itself. The impression that the danger was real was widespread. There is an important function that non-involved countries not involved had. The position of the party on neutrality of Italy is to [be] agreed upon. The proposal to collect signatures against the planned bases seems to me opportune. [...]

Roasio: There were different positions in the party that were caused by the dramatic, confused and also contradictory manner with which the news of the events unfolded from one hour to the next. Let's explain, therefore, the events and let's not seek deviations.³ Moving to the Chinese-Indian conflict. We must intervene somehow and present our positions.

Terracini: We protested in defense of Cuba, exerting pressure on our government because it modified its foreign policy. There are also those favorable to the independence of Cuba who did not criticize the government. Let's move forward in the developments of actions for solidarity with Cuba. The war is avoidable because the socialist world cedes: this can be the conclusion to which some comrades come under the influence of the opposing camp. Let's take this into account in our propaganda.

In the theses, a different avenue was adopted for China and Albania which to me seemed incorrect.

Togliatti: [Armando] Cossuta points out that in Milan they always acted in accordance with the C.d.L. [perhaps the Consulenti del Lavoro-trans.] and that it was better to take charge of the demonstrations rather than leaving them without any direction. This would have happened anyway. The whole party apparatus present in Rome is responsible stimulating and organizing the party for Cuba. We certainly did not intend to open up a conflict with Chinese comrades on their current disagreement with the Indians. On this border question they are not wrong. The mistake is instead of not accepting preliminary discussions and to have pushed forward with military operations at the present time.

Alicata: Let's properly orient the party on the fight for coexistence, coordinating moments of attack and when they ebb. The foreign policy of the USSR - also in form and in method - distinguishes itself, and must distinguish itself with that of the bourgeois because it must be inclusive and accepted by the masses. If this does not happen, the consequences can generate a lot of confusion. Let's not have illusions about what the USA will do against Cuba to make sure it is not attacked.

It is critical to the government that their position was not extremist. For the India-China conflict, I underline that the solution would be easier if China was in the United Nations. The misjudgment by China that India is an imperialist country.

Decision: A communique from the party will be released.

[1] Ed. note: According to Italian scholar Leopoldo Nuti, the allusion to a "dramatic episode" in Milan refers to an incident on Saturday, 27 October 1962, in which a young student in a demonstration, Giuseppe Ardizzone, was killed when he was accidentally run over by a police jeep when police charged to disperse the crowd.

[2] "So much the better the war." This in Italian is an expression of welcoming indifference but not of want or need. Best: "But if there is war, so be it."-trans.]

[3] That is, let's set the record straight and speak in a unified manner. trans.]