

Togliatti: Loyal Servant of Stalin

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PALMIRO TOGLIATTI died in 1964 but is still the subject of heated controversy in a way that British figures of a comparable era, such as Hugh Gaitskell or Nye Bevan, are not. The reason for this ongoing debate is that Togliatti has been the object of a cult on the part of large sections of the Italian left – political activists as well as intellectuals – for decades after his death.

Here I am not just referring to Armando Cossutta and his followers in the Pdc, whose nostalgia for Togliatti is no longer curbed by Bertinotti in the way it was before their October 1998 split with Rifondazione Comunista, a split that was accompanied by atavistic and frenzied attacks on Trotskyists (allegedly the principal architects of Bertinotti's adoption of an antigovernmental line) that were very reminiscent of Togliatti at his worst. The cult extends far beyond the Cossuttiani and includes influential currents that are part of the political mainstream. Former Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema regarded Togliatti as his political hero and role model and it could be argued that D'Alema was indeed a third-rate ersatz Togliatti in some respects, such as his devotion to the holding of power as an end in itself, his love of intrigue and his willingness to compromise with any force or personality that he regarded as possessing more power than he did – most notably Berlusconi for whose political resurrection and election victory in May 2001 he is primarily responsible. Similarities might be detected in D'Alema's obsession with constitutional reform – his beloved Bicamerale which he saw as equivalent to the Constituent Assembly of 1946-8 – at the expense of the social and economic questions that preoccupy organised labour, the pensioners and the unemployed, or his willingness to prostrate himself before the demands of the Catholic Church, so eager to attack the secular state school system with renewed vigour. However, D'Alema failed to expand his party membership – despite fusions with other left groups and a second name change, from PDS to DS – and even more significantly failed to build a large and devoted personal following amongst the popular masses, so the resemblance had its limits, even supposing

the methods of the 1940s and 1950s could have been successfully applied in Italy at the end of the 20th century, which is clearly a very debatable proposition.

However, my purpose in mentioning D'Alema's admiration for Togliatti is not to discuss the all too evident shortcomings of an ephemeral administration that staggered on from October 1998 to April 2000 despite a crisis in December 1999, but to substantiate my claim that a Togliatti cult whose adherents are almost as impervious to rational argument as the proponents of Pius XII's sanctification, still exists in 21st century Italy. It is worth noting that the cult has a few British adherents, most notably Donald Sassoon, with whom I have engaged in a rather fruitless debate on the question of Togliatti and 1956 in an academic journal quite recently.¹ The problem with British writing on Togliatti is not the size of the group of fervent Togliattians – a handful of academics with a Eurocommunist past and close links with Italy – but that the absence of English translations of any of the more critical works about Togliatti has allowed the Hobsbawm/Sassoon interpretation to shape the majority perception of a figure who has never aroused the interest of Anglophone academic circles in the way Antonio Gramsci did twenty-five years ago, and to a much lesser extent still does.

The time has come to destroy the Togliatti cult once and for all. The anti-Stalinist left should not be deterred from this key objective by the claim often made by Togliatti's apologists that any attack on Togliatti is an attack on the Italian Republic that arose from the Resistance, a claim whose subtext is that to attack Togliatti is to ally oneself with neo-fascists or their revisionist fellow-travellers such as Renzo De Felice.² Firstly, the defence of the Resistance legacy does not entail the defence of a figure who, unlike Longo and Secchia, played no direct role in the Resistance, quite deliberately choosing to return to southern Italy and not northern Italy in 1944. Secondly, one can be well aware that some of the research on Togliatti carried out in the newly opened Russian archives may be motivated by old-fashioned Cold War perspectives

without rejecting or ignoring valuable new empirical evidence unearthed by historians such as Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky.³ Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky may have been pupils of De Felice but their approach to documentary evidence has a seriousness that their master had abandoned by the end of his prolific career. Whilst their tirades about totalitarianism or paeans of praise to the USA for allegedly safeguarding democracy in the world after 1945, as if Pinochet and the Greek colonels had never existed,⁴ may irritate Socialist historians – as was evident from what in my view was a slightly ill-judged response by Barbara Rossi in a recent issue of *Revolutionary History*⁵ – they do not invent or manipulate primary sources.

Lest this rather polemical introduction seem like an attack on straw men, it must be pointed out that the only recent full-scale biography of Togliatti, the one produced by Aldo Agosti in 1996,⁶ represented a regression from, not an advance on, Giorgio Bocca's pioneering work of 1973.⁷ Bocca's book, whilst it was written by a journalist less than a decade after the death of its subject and was to a substantial degree dependent on secondary works and a wide range of oral testimony by Togliatti's contemporaries in the absence of archival material accessible to a non-communist writer, represented a serious effort to unearth the truth. Agosti's recent life, despite its deployment of most of the apparatus of conventional historical scholarship – although on close scrutiny its footnoting is quite a bit vaguer than one would expect in a definitive biography – and its pretence of objectivity, represents a stubborn and determined effort to salvage as much as possible of the old Communist historiography.

It would be impossible in the space available to deal with the entire career of Palmiro Togliatti, let alone the entire history of Italian Communism during his political lifetime. The fact that I am going to adopt “a history from above” perspective in this essay does not mean that there is not scope for “history from below”, as the work of Tom Behan amongst others has so clearly demonstrated.⁸ Nor is it my intention to argue that the PCI, once it became a legal mass party with deep roots in Italian soil, remained uninfluenced by the society in which it worked. The PCI's gradual transformation from a fairly orthodox Stalinist party into the basically social democratic one it had become long before its dissolution in 1991 – a transformation which in my view only really gathered pace after Togliatti's death, even if the tensions between Togliatti and Krushchev, whose de-Stalinisation did not meet with Togliatti's approval,⁹ had unintended consequences – cannot be denied. Nonetheless, my starting point in this article is that Togliatti was a Stalinist politician, in all probability the greatest and most intelligent of all

the Western European Stalinist politicians.

When I say my aim is to destroy the myth of Togliatti, I do not mean to dispute his significance as an historical figure. My quarrel is with his supporters' interpretation of his significance as being allegedly the de facto founder of a specifically Italian Communism who was a reluctant and half-hearted Stalinist, did his best to protect his own comrades from international Stalinism and surreptitiously preserved Gramsci's legacy. Togliatti was undoubtedly the most important figure in 20th century Italian Communism, leading the Italian Communist Party from Gramsci's imprisonment in 1926 until his own death in 1964. In terms of practical politics, rather than Marxist theory, Togliatti was far more significant than Gramsci. Gramsci's own period as party leader was very brief, about two years in 1924-26; for, contrary to Stalinist mythology subsequently repeated to wider non-Italian audiences by the Eurocommunists, the first leader of the Italian Communist Party was not Antonio Gramsci but Amadeo Bordiga, and Gramsci was heavily reliant on the Comintern in toppling Bordiga in 1924 – the Como Conference of mid-May 1924 demonstrated Gramsci's abject failure to win over the party's leading cadres to the new line espoused by his recently formed Central Committee majority.

The fact that Togliatti enjoyed such a long and, in his own terms, successful political career does not mean that Togliatti was really “*Il Migliore*”, “the best” of his comrades, as the cult has always claimed. Far from it. As the dates given above should clearly indicate, his years as a leading figure in the international Communist movement coincided with Stalin's years of absolute power. To use an old cliché, it was no accident that this was the case. In labelling Togliatti a Stalinist politician, I deliberately mean to emphasise both the adjective and the noun. As Togliatti's Stalinism will be discussed throughout the remainder of this paper, I want to take this opportunity to justify my characterisation of Togliatti as a professional politician, rather than a professional revolutionary like Lenin or Trotsky. Togliatti was not, except perhaps for a few years at the beginning of his career under the influence of Gramsci and Bordiga, a genuine revolutionary. The depth of his commitment to revolutionary politics even in those early years is open to question in the light of his behaviour in 1923 in the aftermath of the December 1922 fascist massacre of the Torinese left, a period when Gramsci was in Moscow and Bordiga was in prison. As Bocca asks, rhetorically: “Was he ill from December 1922 to April 1923?”¹⁰ Togliatti's sister told Bocca that to the delight of their mother, a devout Catholic who had never had any sympathy with her son's involvement in left-wing politics, Togliatti returned to the family home after

the December 1922 massacre, that he was not ill, that he had more or less abandoned political life and that he asked her to go to the university and enquire on his behalf about re-enrolling for his uncompleted philosophy degree.¹¹ Terracini, left in effective charge of the party, after vainly making a series of private and indirect attempts to get Togliatti to return to an active role in the party, was forced to go to *Avanti*, the still legal daily of the hated Socialists and request the publication of a communiqué announcing that “Comrade Togliatti is invited to get back into direct relations with the Executive Committee of the Party immediately”.¹² Togliatti never really forgave Terracini for this public humiliation and was always eager to use sanctions against him when he opposed the Stalinist line on various questions in later years, most notably expelling him from the party in 1939 for opposing the Nazi-Soviet Pact and only re-admitting him to the party in 1945, rather than 1941. Camilla Ravera, another leading figure in the party in the 1920s, commenting on Togliatti’s behaviour in early 1923, said: “For Togliatti politics was the art of government, not revolutionary militancy.”¹³

In saying that Togliatti was not a genuine revolutionary, I do not mean merely that as a Stalinist he played an objectively counter-revolutionary role, although this was certainly the case in the two revolutionary or potentially revolutionary situations in which he intervened after 1919-20, namely Spain between 1936 and 1939 and Italy between 1944 and 1948, but also that he was never, at least after the *biennio rosso*, attracted by the notion of revolution in the way the more naively Stalinist Pietro Secchia clearly was in December 1947 and July 1948, to cite but two instances.¹⁴ In this context, given the importance of the First World War in dividing revolutionaries from reformists in the European labour movement, it is, to say the least, interesting that Togliatti was not a revolutionary defeatist, or even a pacifist, at any stage of the First World War. Whilst Gramsci’s own record during the Intervention Crisis of 1914-15 was to put it kindly ambiguous, Togliatti went far beyond this, becoming a consistent Interventionist who ended up volunteering for service during the war. In 1915 his short sight meant that he had to join the Red Cross rather than the armed forces but a change in the rules in 1916 allowed him to join the Army in which he remained until 1918. All the evidence suggests Togliatti left the Socialist Party for the duration of the war.¹⁵ It is perhaps equally significant that during the 1926-29 period when Togliatti ceased to be under Gramsci’s influence, refusing to forward the latter’s October 1926 letter to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, but had not definitively submitted to that of Stalin,

he was a Bukharinite, in short that he sided with what appeared to be the most gradualist and moderate variant of Bolshevism.

Having marshalled some evidence that suggests Togliatti was a professional politician rather than a communist revolutionary in his basic outlook, I want to rapidly turn to his Stalinism, precisely because some of the material that I have already presented, whilst undermining his revolutionary credentials, might have had the side effect of suggesting that he was a consistent proponent of a specifically Italian national and peaceful road to socialism; in other words, I might have unintentionally reinforced precisely the impression that the bulk of his latterday apologists wish to convey. Given the limitations of space, I will centre my case on two episodes in his career, his role in Spain between 1936 and 1939 and his alleged authorship of the *svolta di Salerno*, the Salerno turning point of March 1944.

Togliatti in the Spanish Civil War

An examination of Togliatti’s role in Spain is central to any judgement about the extent of his Stalinism and sheds a great deal of light on his conduct in Italy between 1944 and 1948. Any of Togliatti’s actions in Moscow in the 1930s might be seen by his apologists as actions undertaken under duress, with his willingness to accuse or even condemn others – such as the Polish Communists – in the course of Stalin’s terror in the USSR being excused as essential for his self-preservation or, in some versions, the preservation of the Italian party as a whole. The Spanish case is different in that Togliatti was a protagonist in his own right on Western European soil, in a context of political freedom rather than fascist or Stalinist dictatorship, taking the initiative and passing on instructions to others.

Many have portrayed him as the leading Communist in Spain during the Civil War. Alexander Orlov, the chief NKVD official in Spain from September 1936 until his defection in July 1938, included the following statement in his testimony to the US Senate Sub-committee on Internal Security in February 1957: “Palmiro Togliatti was also in Spain ... with me, and he had been a good friend of mine at the time. He directed the Spanish Communist Party and the Spanish Communist military forces on behalf of Moscow.”¹⁶ The Spanish Communist militia leader Valentin González, better known as El Campesino, who escaped from the Soviet Union after the Second World War, wrote in 1952: “During the Spanish Civil War, the man who in effect directed the Communist Party was ‘Alfonso’, the famous Palmiro Togliatti, one of the top-ranking figures in the Comintern.... José Díaz and the entire politburo did nothing more than carry out his

directives.”¹⁷

Lest it be assumed that Orlov was too much under American influence or that El Campesino, “to all intents and purposes an illiterate”,¹⁸ was too readily swayed in his judgements by Julian Gorkin, the POUM leader who helped him write his memoirs, it needs to be underlined that similar opinions about Togliatti’s centrality were expressed by others who did not break with Moscow. For example, Enrique Lister, the prominent Spanish Communist militia leader, who remained an unrepentant supporter of the Soviet Union, claimed in 1977 that “He was the delegate in Spain of the Communist International whom the entire Politburo obeyed without a murmur”.¹⁹ The American Communist John Gates, head commissar in 1938 of the Fifteenth Brigade, asserted in an unpublished manuscript about the International Brigades that “Togliatti was the most powerful Communist figure in Spain. His responsibility was the whole policy of the Spanish Communists.... The enormous growth of the Spanish Communist Party after the fascist revolt must be attributed in large part to his advice and leadership.... Togliatti was a brilliant tactician, probably the most able in the Communist world”.²⁰ Santiago Carrillo, who had been the leading figure in the Communist youth movement during the Spanish Civil War, wrote in 1971, when he was Secretary of the PCE in exile, that Togliatti “was an invaluable counsellor and, for many of us, who were very young and inexperienced, a veritable maestro”.²¹ Fernando Claudín, a contemporary of Carrillo, who played a leading role in the PCE for three decades before his expulsion in 1965, wrote in 1970: “Togliatti played a role of prime importance in the political guidance and even the political leadership of the PCE during the Civil War. Along with him were the Bulgarian Stepanov, the Hungarian Gerö, the Argentinian Codovilla and, of course, the eminent Soviet ‘advisers’ both military and political”²² – a statement which implicitly gives Togliatti primacy over all the other foreign Communists in Spain.

Alongside these testimonies from Communists and ex-Communists we have the recollections of Justo Martínez Amutio, the Socialist governor of Albacete, the headquarters of the International Brigades, who had personal dealings with Togliatti. In his memoirs published in 1974, Amutio claimed: ‘He was the most skilful of all the agents sent by Stalin and the real director of Communist Party policy until the end of the war. I considered him ... superior in intelligence and ability to Stepanov.... The entire political orientation of the Comintern within the International Brigades was directed by this man, who together with Stepanov planned the domestic and military policies of the Communist Party.... He was in the habit of asking

questions courteously, insisting on details and learning through various channels about the personality of the most prominent political and military figures, wheedling out of his interlocutors their views. But, as far as he was concerned, no one could judge either from his gestures or facial expressions ... what he was thinking or feeling.”²³

Whilst one maverick British historian has recently attempted to minimise the influence of Togliatti and the Comintern over the PCE during the Civil War,²⁴ the issue that has given rise to lengthy and bitter disputes is not Togliatti’s influence in Spain but the date of his arrival there. The official version, first expounded in a hagiographical authorised biography during Togliatti’s lifetime, is that Togliatti arrived in July 1937 – in other words after the May events in Barcelona, the murder of the POUM leader Andrés Nin and the successful Communist manoeuvres to remove Largo Caballero, the left-wing Socialist, as Spanish Prime Minister. Togliatti’s first serious biographer, the distinguished Italian journalist Giorgio Bocca,²⁶ did not subscribe to this version.

The controversy over the date of Togliatti’s arrival in Spain had started during Togliatti’s lifetime as a result of the memoirs of Jesús Hernández, a leading figure in the Spanish Communist Party during the Civil War and one of the two Communist cabinet ministers in both the Caballero government and the first Negrín government,²⁷ being brought to the attention of the Italian public. As Julian Gorkin, a POUM leader who survived the Civil War, explained in a letter to Bollothen: “Palmiro Togliatti had his friends, the Ferrara couple, write that biography after I had denounced him at a meeting in Rome for his role in Spain and had the important daily newspaper *Il Messaggero* publish long extracts from the book by Jesús Hernández.”²⁸

Bocca’s opinion does not just rest on his belief in the credibility of Hernández’s controversial memoirs, a belief to which I will return in due course. Bocca also invokes the testimony of Scoccimarro, an important figure in the early leadership of the PCI. Bocca quotes Scoccimarro as saying of Togliatti that “he was in Spain during the war and also before”²⁹ and argues that the degree of detail in Togliatti’s articles and essays on Spain bears this out, citing various texts from 1934 onwards. More to the point, Bocca also cites a direct exchange with Scoccimarro in which he cross-examined him on the fundamental issue: “‘Was he already in Spain in ’36 or did he get there in ’37?’ And Scoccimarro says: ‘He was there in ’36. I am absolutely certain of it.’”³⁰ The weakness of Scoccimarro as a source is that he was not present in Spain himself between 1936 and 1939 but confined to an Italian fascist gaol, so his recollection would have been based on conversations with

other PCI leaders. Bocca names the three leading Italian Communists present in Spain who backed up Togliatti's denials as Vittorio Vidali, Luigi Longo and Longo's wife Teresa Noce.³¹ As late as 1988 Paolo Spriano, the official historian of the Italian Communist Party, stressed that "All the Italian Communist leaders who found themselves in Spain in 1936 have testified that Togliatti only arrived there in the summer of 1937",³² as if this constituted a definitive rebuttal of Hernández's claims, but was sufficiently shrewd not to name these leaders. Since the trio in question were Vidali, a sinister figure widely believed to have been directly implicated in Nin's murder,³³ Longo, Togliatti's successor as party leader, and Longo's wife, the common sense response, which Bocca did not feel the need to put on paper is bound to be "they would say that, wouldn't they?". Moreover Bocca, whose biography contains much evidence of Togliatti's dishonest accounts of many stages in his life, makes some specific points about Togliatti's unreliability with regard to his own record in Spain, showing that Togliatti's comments to his biographers, the Ferraras, criticising the infantile and sectarian position of the Spanish Communists in 1931 in the harshest of terms, make no sense given his own uncritical adherence to the Third Period line at the time, and that his May 1962 response to Hugh Thomas's book on the Spanish Civil War was dishonest.³⁴

In addition to raising queries about Togliatti's reliability, Bocca discusses the Communist attempt to discredit Hernández's testimony by personal vilification, quoting the claim by Francisco Antón, La Pasionaria's lover and a longtime Spanish Communist leader, that "Hernández invented Togliatti's presence in Madrid in the first months of the war on the advice of his CIA financiers to show that the Spanish Party was dependent on the Comintern".³⁵ Bocca convincingly responds that since Communist sources do not seek to deny the presence of the other four foreign Communists listed by Hernández – the Argentinian Codovilla, the Bulgarian Stepanov, the Hungarian Gerö and the Frenchman Duclos – at the relevant meeting, adding Togliatti to the list would be superfluous and pointless in terms of what Antón claimed to be the objective of Hernández and his alleged CIA controllers, namely showing the PCE to be taking orders from Moscow.

Destroying Hernández's credibility has always been an essential goal for pro-Togliatti writers, given that no intelligent investigator of Togliatti's life and times could sincerely believe that Togliatti always told the truth about his own past, however vigorously they might assert the contrary in public for political reasons. Hence Spriano, whose intelligence and industry nobody would dream of disputing but whose entire career rested on a

privileged relationship with the PCI, resorted to every conceivable way of discrediting Hernández as a source. Firstly, he cites Hugh Thomas's and Gabriel Jackson's negative views of Hernández's book³⁶ – the point here is not whether they have particularly convincing arguments to offer in favour of their positions but that one is English, the other is American and neither is, or has ever been, a Communist. Secondly, Spriano approvingly cites a negative description of Hernández in a book written by the POUM leader Julian Gorkin in 1941 when the former was still a Stalinist, a description whose vitriolic tone is hardly surprising given that Gorkin was living in Mexico where Trotsky himself had recently been murdered by a Stalinist agent. Thirdly, in the very next footnote Spriano attacks Gorkin for using Hernández's 1953 book as his source for the claim that Togliatti went to the Soviet Embassy in Madrid to find out what the GPU had done to Nin. Why Spriano should regard Gorkin, whom he would have seen as a Trotskyist, as a very reliable source in 1941 but completely unreliable subsequently, is never made clear and smacks of blatant opportunism on Spriano's part. Spriano also shows no hesitation in distorting the circumstances of Hernández's break with the PCE, saying he left the Communist Party "clamorously" when he reached Mexico after the Second World War, when the truth is that he was expelled in 1944.³⁷ Perhaps the most colourful example of the endless Communist campaign to discredit Hernández is provided by Bolloten's citation of the following passage from a work by Amaro del Rosal published in 1977: "During a journey by train from Prague to Warsaw, Vicente Uribe informed me in detail of certain antecedents of Jesús Hernández: an exploiter of women, a professional loafer and a filcher of alms boxes from churches."³⁸ Why Uribe and other leading Spanish Communists should have given Hernández a leading role in the party in the light of such a background is, needless to say, never explained.

Aldo Agosti's recent biography predictably backs Spriano against Bocca on the question of Togliatti's presence in Spain, leaving the uninformed reader with the impression that a definitive refutation of a journalist's libel has taken place. However, Agosti's anxiety to demonstrate a mastery of new sources unknown to other biographers leads him to undermine the ground beneath his feet. Agosti concedes that Italian diplomatic and police sources refer to a voyage by Togliatti to Spain between May and September 1936. One document originating from the Italian Consulate in Berlin gives a precise date for a meeting held by the Communist Party in Madrid – 29 August 1936. Agosti acknowledges that Togliatti did not attend meetings of the Comintern Secretariat in Moscow on either 20 August or 27

August but Agosti points out that he was certainly in Moscow for a meeting by 5 September.³⁹ What Agosti quite deliberately does not choose to inform us is that the date in the Italian diplomatic document fits the date of Hernández's alleged first meeting with Togliatti perfectly; Hernández did not give a date but Bocca had worked out from contextual information that it must have occurred some time between 27 and 31 August 1936.⁴⁰

Bolloten provides us with some further evidence of Togliatti's presence in Spain before Summer 1937 that is not dependent on Hernández's testimony. The first of these additional sources, whilst in other circumstances not the most substantial or significant one, is bound to offer considerable entertainment to any student of the Italian Communist campaign pursued by the apostolic succession of defenders of the PCI faith – Togliatti, Spriano and Agosti – for it is no less an authority than the Spanish Communist writer of the prologue to Palmiro Togliatti's *Escritos políticos*, published in Mexico City in 1971, before the non-Communist Bocca had written anything heretical that Spriano or Agosti needed to refute. Bolloten summarises the prologue writer Adolfo Sanchez Vazquez as asserting: "Togliatti was in Spain as a Comintern delegate during 'practically' the entire conflict 'from 1936 to 1939'."⁴¹ Bolloten's second source is Amutio, the Socialist governor of Albacete, the headquarters of the International Brigades, whose assessment of Togliatti was given earlier. He affirmed in 1974 that Togliatti was in Spain from September 1936 and recalled a conversation with him in December 1936 during which Togliatti tried to gain his co-operation in the "purging" of the brigades of "spies and undesirables", a conversation which, if true, shows the depth of Togliatti's day-to-day responsibility for Stalinist repression against the dissident left in Spain.⁴² Given this range of evidence for Togliatti's early arrival in Spain, the absolute certainty that Togliatti was not in Spain before July 1937 demonstrated by E.H. Carr and Tim Rees is a bit hard to take and should on no account be allowed to congeal into a new orthodoxy comparable to the Togliatti-Spriano-Agosti line in Italy. In Carr's defence, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*⁴³ was the last work of a dying man whose interest in the Comintern flowed from a deep knowledge of Russian, not Spanish, history and who made no claim to have read the earlier versions of Bolloten's book⁴⁴ – of whose existence he may well have been unaware – nor for that matter does Bocca's biography feature in the footnotes.⁴⁵ Rees's completely cavalier approach to evidence is far more deserving of censure – here we are dealing with an historian in his prime, a Hispanist and a man who has read Bolloten.⁴⁶

A recent collection of documents from the

Moscow archives⁴⁷ probably provides us with absolutely conclusive proof of Togliatti's arrival in Spain in Autumn 1936. Interestingly, the editors, Radosh, Habeck and Sevostianov, whose Introduction and linking passages are generally very polemical, invoking François Furet and *The Black Book of Communism*, whilst making no direct reference to any Spanish language secondary text on the Spanish Civil War, and on a few occasions draw conclusions which go beyond what a more judicious reading of their own documents would suggest is highly plausible, even to a die-hard anti-Stalinist like myself, do not really highlight the issue. The following passage – "The Comintern, which already had representatives such as Codovilla in place before the war broke out, also sent dozens of its own people to help the Republicans. These included men like André Marty (who organized the International Brigades) and Palmiro Togliatti, the Italian Communist leader. Within a few months all of the International Brigades would have Comintern or regular Red Army officers as their commanders"⁴⁸ – may imply that Togliatti was one of the first wave of Comintern apparatchiks to be sent to Spain in 1936 but fails to underline the claim, largely, one suspects, because the editors are unaware how controversial it is, which seems the most logical explanation for their failure to refer to it in their fairly extensive commentary⁴⁹ on their very lengthy "Document 60",⁵⁰ by far the most substantial of the 81 documents contained in the volume. Document 60 was written on 14 December 1937 by "M. Fred", usually known in Spain as "General Emilio Kléber", whose real name was Moshe Zalmanovich or "Manfred" Stern, a native of Bukovina who had fought for the Reds in the Russian Civil War and then become a staff officer in the Soviet Army. The document, a report to Soviet Military Intelligence "on work in Spain", written on Manuilsky's prompting, was labelled "Top Secret" and clearly not written for publication. Given the prevalence of conspiracy theory about documents originating from military intelligence, it has to be emphasised that, since the document failed to emerge before the collapse of the USSR, there seems absolutely no reason to assume that it could have been subsequently forged by anybody in Soviet Military Intelligence from some ulterior motive. The author, who "would disappear into the maelstrom of the purges in 1938",⁵¹ wrote this account in a desperate attempt to defend himself from numerous allegations against him, made by a variety of Russian and foreign Communists, including "Comrade Gallo" (Luigi Longo), which led to his recall from Spain in late 1937,⁵² and would have had no possible motive for inventing Togliatti's presence in Spain in 1936; given Togliatti's close links with Stern's

overt enemy Longo and his unfriendly parting remark to Stern, “you are also to blame for some things”,⁵³ any false allegation would have rebounded on Stern, and in any event Soviet Military Intelligence would have undoubtedly known which leading Comintern operatives had been in Spain at any particular time. Stern’s section on “September-October 1936” refers to Togliatti as “Comrade Alfred”, although a later section dealing with June-October 1937 uses Togliatti’s other, more usual alias “Ercoli”. These early passages concerning Togliatti are very matter-of-fact – “Comrade Alfred from the Comintern arrived, and after some time the German comrade whose cover name was Gómez. Comrade Alfred began to work at the CC on personnel matters”, and “together with Comrade Alfred and Checa, the member of the Politburo, we assigned the new comrades who had arrived from outside to various jobs ...”⁵⁴ – and do not seem to make any substantial point about Togliatti, which adds to their credibility.

One other document in the collection, “Document 43”⁵⁵, may conceivably have some direct relevance to the central themes of this essay. This document, dated 11 May 1937 and labelled “Top Secret”, was sent to Dimitrov and Manuilsky by a Comintern representative in Spain. The editors suggest its author is “possibly Codovilla”.⁵⁶ The title given to the document is “Informational letter of a member of the CC CPI with supplementary information on the political situation in Spain recently”.⁵⁷ “CC” is obviously Central Committee. The abbreviation “CPI” is not explained by the editors. Without seeing the Russian original, it is impossible to judge whether a typographical error has crept in at some stage in the translation, transcription or production processes. Assuming the initials are correct, one is bound to interpret them as standing for Communist Party and some country beginning with “I”, which obviously excludes Codovilla’s Argentina. I have never come across any suggestion that the Comintern had an Irish or Indian agent on Spain, so I am inclined to assume that the author is an Italian and, whilst it could conceivably have been Longo or Vidali, nobody would have been closer to Dimitrov than Togliatti. The document is an appallingly ferocious piece of Stalinism, full of bloodthirsty paranoid rhetoric directed against the POUM, the more principled anarchists and the Caballero wing of the socialists in the aftermath of the May Days in Barcelona. The single most bloodthirsty passage announces: “The people are nourishing unbelievable animosity towards the Trotskyists. The masses are demanding energetic and merciless repression. This is what is demanded by the masses of people of all of Spain, Catalonia and Barcelona. They demand complete disarmament, arrest of the leaders, *the creation of a*

special military tribunal for the Trotskyists!”⁵⁸ Unless and until somebody provides a clearer explanation of the document’s provenance, one is bound to wonder whether this might be Palmiro Togliatti’s death warrant for Andrés Nin.

Having shown that, contrary to the mantra endlessly repeated by Spriano, Agosti and their disciples, there is a *prima facie* case that Togliatti was in Spain before July 1937, the time had come to turn to the question of what Togliatti did there. Before citing Hernández, who gives the most detailed and substantial account of Togliatti’s actions, it is perhaps more appropriate to cite Claudín, who was expelled by the Spanish Communist Party in 1965, not 1944, and whom nobody has accused of working for the CIA. As ought to have been apparent from the quotation given earlier in this essay, Claudín assigns to Togliatti “a role of prime importance” in “the practical leadership of the PCE during the Civil War” but never gives an explicit date for his arrival. Claudín refers to the report by Díaz, the leader of the PCE, to the Plenum of the Central Committee of the PCE on 5-8 March 1937 as “a report *delivered* by Díaz, but drawn up in its main lines by the Comintern team which was overseeing the PCE”.⁵⁹ This amounted to a death warrant for the POUM written months before the May Days in Barcelona, and contained the following striking passage – “Fascism, Trotskyism and the ‘uncontrolled’ element are the three enemies of the people who must be removed from the political life not only of Spain but also of all civilised countries.”⁶⁰ Claudín had the honesty to acknowledge that “the repression of the POUM, and in particular the vile murder of Andrés Nin, constitute the blackest page in the history of the PCE, which acted as accomplice in a crime committed by Stalin’s secret service”.⁶¹ The implication of all this is that if Togliatti was in Spain by this stage he was involved in all this up to his neck, but Claudín chooses neither to confirm nor deny Togliatti’s presence in Spain before July 1937.

The evidence for Vidali’s involvement in Nin’s murder seems quite strong, one source directly links Togliatti to Vidali, and in any event if Togliatti was present in Spain at the time it is frankly beyond the bounds of credibility that he would not have known what an Italian Communist like Vidali was engaged in. It should now be apparent why Bocca placed no weight on Vidali’s claim that Togliatti was not in Spain before July 1937; Vidali had as much to hide as Togliatti. By no means all the evidence against them comes from POUM or ex-Communist sources, as Spriano and his ilk try to suggest. Bolloten quotes an account of a discussion in the Interior Ministry in which Gabriel Moron, the moderate Socialist general security director told his fellow Socialist Juan Simeon Vidarte,

Undersecretary of the Interior in the Negrín government: “Since the premier is so determined to learn the truth, you can tell him that the abduction of Andrés Nin was plotted by the Italian [Vittorio] Codovila, by Commandante Carlos [Vittorio Vidali], by Togliatti and by the leaders of the Communist Party including [Party Secretary] Pepe Díaz. The order to torture him was given by Orlov. Tell this to Negrín. If he wants to arrest them, I’ll put them all in jail first thing in the morning.”⁶² If the Socialists within the Interior Ministry understood the outline of the plot, it is hardly surprising that the most explicit accounts do come from POUM and ex-Communist sources.

Julian Gorkin was naturally curious to establish as much as possible about the fate of his fellow POUMist, and Bolloten points out that “Julian Gorkin states that Enrique Castro, one-time member of the Communist Party’s Central Committee, assured him, after he had left the party that ‘the personal executioner of Nin’ had been his former comrade in the Fifth Regiment, Carlos Contreras (Vittorio Vidali) and that Orlov had selected him as ‘his immediate collaborator in the case of Nin’”.⁶³ Bolloten also cites Hernández’s claim that “Vidali simulated a Nazi assault to ‘liberate’ Nin from his secret place of captivity in Alcalá de Henares, the sham assault being executed by the German members of the International Brigade, who carried him off, leaving behind incriminating documents purporting to show his connection with the Nazi secret police”.⁶⁴ In response to this allegation, Vidali told Giorgio Bocca: “So many things have been said about me but this is a stupidity. Why put on that stage show? In those days, if an anarchist or a Poumist had to be executed, it was done without so much fuss, can you imagine then, why I was necessary?”⁶⁵ The elderly Vidali talking to Bocca more than thirty years after the events, clearly chose to forget the element of show trial, as distinct from simple execution, that characterised the Stalinist campaign against the POUM and that what he later called “the stage show” was needed precisely because Nin preferred to die rather than act his role in the Stalinist script and make a false confession under torture of the kind familiar to us from the Moscow trials of Old Bolsheviks such as Bukharin.

Some reference to Berneri and Barbieri, two Italian anarchists murdered in cold blood in the immediate aftermath of the May Days of 1937 in Barcelona, seems essential in the interests of objectivity, since many anarchists have held Togliatti responsible. Here the case against Togliatti, whilst by no means implausible, seems much weaker, and the fact that both Bolloten and Bocca, who both believe the worst of Togliatti in other matters, concur in believing this, might (one would like to hope) make the unconvinced less

inclined to dismiss their carefully researched accounts as mere partisan polemics, as Togliatti’s defenders try to do. Bocca believed Berneri to have been killed by the NKVD but did not find the attempt to link Togliatti to the murder convincing.⁶⁶ Bolloten’s final edition goes further.⁶⁷ It emphasises that at the time of the killings most sources sympathetic to the anarchosyndicalists attributed the assassinations to the Communists because of Berneri’s criticism of the Communists’ policy in Spain in an Italian language anarchosyndicalist periodical published in Barcelona since October 1936. However, it points out that it now seems equally possible that the murders were carried out by agents of the Italian secret police, the OVRA, with Italian archival evidence demonstrating that the OVRA had Berneri under surveillance. Furthermore, it emphasises that there are clear similarities with the killing of the Rosselli brothers by OVRA agents in France shortly afterwards.⁶⁸

The other equally important, if less gruesome, episode in which Togliatti, according to Hernández, played a leading role was the removal in mid-May 1937 of Largo Caballero, the left-wing Socialist Prime Minister who fell out with the Communists over a variety of issues linked to their attempt to roll back all the initial revolutionary gains obtained by the Spanish workers and peasants in July 1936. The crunch issue was the Communists’ desire to persecute the POUM, a persecution which Caballero was not prepared to endorse, but the evidence suggests that the Communists had been looking for a means of removing him some time before the May Days in Barcelona. Claudín refers to pressures on Caballero from Stalin himself, citing Stalin’s letter of 21 December 1937⁶⁹ and further unwelcome advice sent by Stalin at the end of February 1937 to proceed immediately with the unification of the Communist and Socialist Parties.⁷⁰ Claudín sums up the course of events as follows: “Confronted with the stubborn refusal of Caballero to act like a good secretary of a national section of the Comintern, the only thing left for Stalin to do was to get rid of him, as was done with bad secretaries of national sections of the Comintern. The operation was accomplished by the end of May 1937.”⁷¹ Although Claudín does not mention Togliatti by name, given Togliatti’s role in the Comintern the implication is clear. Hernández claimed that Togliatti not only pushed the Spanish Communist leadership into getting rid of Caballero, despite the reservations of Party Secretary Díaz and Hernández himself but also chose Caballero’s successor: “‘As for Largo Caballero’s successor ... I believe we should proceed by a process of elimination. Prieto? Vayo? Negrín? Of the three, Negrín may be the most suitable. He

is not anti-Communist like Prieto, nor stupid like Vayo!”⁷² Referring to the summer of 1937 Bollo ten argues: “At that time Togliatti became the virtual head of the party, directing strategy and writing many of the speeches of José Díaz and La Pasionaria.”⁷³

Although Caballero’s removal was accomplished by peaceful means, the subsequent zeal with which he was deprived of any office within the Socialist Party, Parliament and the UGT trade union as well as the gradual seizure of every newspaper supporting his political line and the ultimate ban on his speaking in public after October 1937⁷⁴ suggest that his growing fears for his physical safety were by no means groundless. Togliatti played a central role in the silencing of Caballero and for this episode we can adduce Togliatti’s own writings rather than the disputed recollections of Hernández. It was early November 1937 before the last newspaper, *La Correspondencia de Valencia*, was taken from Caballero, but as early as 15 September 1937 Togliatti had complained in a letter to Moscow about the slowness of the PCE in throwing “Caballeristas out of the regional leadership of the unions and out of the editorial staff of the paper”.⁷⁵

The clearest account of the degree of control that Togliatti wielded over the second Negrín government that resulted from Prieto’s exclusion from the Defence Ministry in Spring 1938 is provided not by Bollo ten or Bocca but by Carr who is generally anxious to convey a more favourable picture of Togliatti’s role in Spain. Carr writes: “The central committee of the PCE set up a commission, significantly headed by Togliatti and Stepanov, to draft a programme for the new government. The draft was submitted to a representative meeting of party leaders, as well as the leaders of other popular front organisations. After “stormy debates” it was approved, and published in the party press on April 30 in the form of “thirteen points”. It was designed primarily to maintain the independence and integrity of Spain. It promised the defence of democratic and civil rights, including the rights of property and the “free exercise of religious beliefs”. A special clause, on which IKKI insisted and which caused some controversy, protected the property of foreigners, other than those who had helped the nationalists. Any element that could be labelled communist, or even socialist, was rigorously excluded. It was openly remarked that the thirteen points represented the transition from the “popular” to the “national” front.”⁷⁶

In a letter to his daughter dated 9 March 1939, Caballero’s loyal friend Araquistáin wrote: “[The Communists] have assassinated hundreds of Socialists and Anarchists. If they did not assassinate others such as Largo Caballero and me,

it is because we left at the right time.”⁷⁷ By this stage a PCE document of 2 February 1939 had already denounced Caballero in terms eerily reminiscent of their party’s attacks on the POUM: “The Politburo specifically denounces the shameful flight from national territory of Largo Caballero who – surrounded by a small group of enemies of unity, of enemies of the Spanish people and of its organisations – has done everything in his power to sabotage the work of the government and destroy the unity and resistance of our people and now crowns his criminal career by fleeing.”⁷⁸ There is every reason to suppose that Togliatti helped to draft what amounted to a death sentence for Caballero; the impossibility of carrying it out does not excuse the blatantly murderous intent.

Togliatti in Italy

Having outlined the case for regarding Togliatti as Stalin’s principal agent in Spain in 1936-39, the time has come to examine his record in Italy in 1944, in particular the *svolta di Salerno*. Togliatti’s instructions to the Italian Communists on his arrival in Italy in late March 1944 to abandon their intransigent position, which they shared with other anti-fascist parties involved in the Resistance, of refusing to participate in Badoglio’s government and calling for the King’s abdication, have been traditionally interpreted by Togliatti’s apologists as evidence of an original strategy for Italian Communism devised independently of Stalin and the Soviet Union, and have often been presented as the first step down the long and winding road to the PCI’s eventual Eurocommunism.

Given the chronological coincidence between the Soviet Union’s unexpected decision to recognise the Badoglio government on 14 March and Togliatti’s imposition on 30-31 March of a new more moderate line on the rather more militant Italian Communist leaders, many of whom had participated in the Northern Resistance and regarded the King and Badoglio with the same contempt as the non-Communist left did after their ignominious flight from Rome to Brindisi on 8 September 1943, many contemporary observers including the Anglo-American Allied Control Commission and the liberal philosopher Benedetto Croce had assumed that the change in the PCI line was dictated by Moscow.⁷⁹ However, Togliatti claimed when he arrived in Italy that he had left Moscow in mid-February and, therefore, knew absolutely nothing of the Soviet Union’s decision to recognise Badoglio’s government. Despite scepticism on the part of some historians, who were well aware of the almost identical policies being pursued by Communist parties in other countries at roughly the same time – in short, of the lack of any Italian exceptionalism in this case – Togliatti’s version had until recently been accepted

by the bulk of Italian historians, and there was no firm evidence to disprove it. Recent archival discoveries in Moscow brought to the attention of Italian readers by Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky have shed considerable light on the issue and prove beyond reasonable doubt that Togliatti, far from showing any autonomy or originality, took his orders directly from Stalin himself in the most humiliating fashion imaginable.

Before entering into the detailed chronology that is essential to refute the myths of Togliatti and his apologists, it is worth pointing out that Togliatti's position since June 1941 had, unsurprisingly given that he was in the Soviet Union, been broadly consistent in calling for the widest possible unity against Hitler and fascism. Bocca cites a radio broadcast made by Togliatti in July 1941, which I will quote in Ian Birchall's translation:⁸⁰ "From the fall of Hitler we Italians have everything to gain. And understand me clearly: Italians of all social conditions! At least, those industrialists who see their business ruined by the brutal competition think so. The businessmen to whom today all the European markets are closed by the domination of the German invaders think so. The Catholics, who see in German fascism the enemy of their traditions and their ideals of brotherhood, think so. Every Italian mother whose husband and sons are taken from her and sent to die under the flag of the swastika thinks so. The people, to whom the war means hardships, privation and hunger, thinks so. All Italians who aspire to be a free people think so." Therefore, in one sense the *svolta di Salerno* was not a bolt from the blue but fitted very neatly into a pattern of pronouncements in favour of broad cross-class national unity against the Germans that Togliatti had delivered from Moscow for some years. More specifically, Togliatti had been in favour of Communist participation in the government of Badoglio, set up after Mussolini's overthrow on 25 July 1943, until December 1943.

What is much more interesting is that at the beginning of 1944, Togliatti and Dimitrov, despite their general advocacy of cross-class coalitions of national unity at the European level, had taken up an anti-monarchist and anti-Badoglio position in the Italian case, possibly because they were aware that inside the Soviet Foreign Ministry itself, the opinion of the Russian experts on Italy was turning against Badoglio, for reasons that were not all that different from those that motivated the anti-Badoglio position of forces linked to the Resistance within Italy.⁸¹ A Soviet Foreign Ministry Memorandum of 19 November 1943 deplored the failure to introduce even "the most minimal democratic reform" and correctly remarked that "the middle and low levels of the state apparatus in Sicily and Southern Italy are full of fascists".⁸² So on 24

January 1944 Dimitrov, probably acting on Togliatti's advice, sent a memorandum to Molotov entitled "A Draft of a Reply to the Italian Comrades", arguing that the Italian Communists should not enter Badoglio's government but should instead support the creation of an alternative anti-fascist government of national unity and call for the immediate abdication of the king.⁸³ After Molotov failed to reply to Dimitrov's document, in February 1944 Togliatti drew up a memorandum, "On the Immediate Tasks of the Italian Communists", arguing that "the Communists should ask for the constitution of a democratic provisional government ... they should ask for the king's abdication ... they should refuse to participate in the present government".⁸⁴ Dimitrov sent Togliatti's memorandum to Molotov on 1 March, endorsing it with a supportive letter of his own.⁸⁵

Whilst they finally succeeded in their objective of bringing the Italian situation to the attention not just of Foreign Minister Molotov but also of Stalin himself, they did not get the official endorsement they had hoped for. On the night of 3-4 March Togliatti was received by Stalin in the presence of Molotov. Whilst the record of this fateful meeting has not yet emerged from the Soviet archives, its substance is known to us from Dimitrov's recently discovered Diary. Because of his close involvement in Togliatti's effort to change the Comintern's line on Italy, Dimitrov was telephoned by Molotov in the wake of the meeting to be informed of Stalin's views and he also met Togliatti for a further discussion about it the following day, so there is no reason to doubt the general accuracy of his record, even though, unlike Togliatti, he was not actually present at the meeting with Stalin. For those remotely inclined to doubt that Stalin issued such peremptory orders to longstanding Western Communist leaders in person shortly before their return to their native lands, it is certainly worth noting that the official minutes of an analogous meeting between Stalin and Thorez in the presence of Molotov and Beria on 19 November 1944, shortly before Thorez's return to France, do exist.⁸⁶ To return to the meeting with which we are primarily concerned, Stalin made it crystal clear to Togliatti that "the existence of two camps (Badoglio and the King against the anti-fascist parties) weakens the Italian people. It only favours the English who would like to have a weak Italy in the Mediterranean".⁸⁷ As usual, Stalin was far more concerned with the real or perceived foreign policy interests of the Soviet Union than with the fortunes of the Italian anti-fascists. Togliatti, accepting defeat, therefore immediately modified the February document "On the Immediate Tasks of the Italian Communists" by hand, deleting the demand for the King's abdication

and inserting one for Communist participation in Badoglio's government.⁸⁸

Whilst there could be no clearer documentary proof of Togliatti's total subservience to Stalin, even when Stalin's views contradicted his own assessment of the balance of forces within Italy itself, Togliatti's hagiographer Aldo Agosti has indulged in a perverse reading of this document in a desperate effort to sustain his myth about Togliatti's autonomy from Moscow. Ironically, it was Agosti who first brought the document to the attention of the Italian public, publishing an Italian translation in the PDS daily *Unità* on 28 October 1991, accompanied by a commentary proudly proclaiming that here was clear evidence that Togliatti had changed the document by hand, modifying Stalin's anti-monarchist line in the light of his own greater understanding of Italian circumstances.⁸⁹ In 1991 it is possible that Agosti was genuinely unaware of the Stalin-Togliatti meeting and acting in good faith, albeit with an excess of zeal and in order to produce the secondary effect that he had wanted all along, namely a number of ill-informed sensationalist articles in the mainstream bourgeois press by journalists to whom the notion of a rather patriotic but somewhat dissident Togliatti who had won an argument with Stalin had some emotional appeal – given that the 25th anniversary of Togliatti's death on 6 August 1989 had seen an attack on Togliatti as a Stalinist in *Unità* itself by a journalist close to Occhetto, such manoeuvres are far less far-fetched than a British reader might imagine.⁹⁰ In particular, it has to be pointed out that Agosti's views were not as idiosyncratic, even in the early 1990s, as they might appear. Leading PDS intellectual Giuseppe Vacca in his 1994 book *Togliatti Sconosciuto* tried to claim that Togliatti's initial reaction to the fall of Mussolini exemplified by a 14 October 1943 letter to Dimitrov – calling on the PCI to become part of a broader-based Badoglio government in order to intensify the war against Germany – was “an anticipation of the *svolta di Salerno*, conceived with extraordinary timeliness” and a policy which Togliatti had devised “autonomously”.⁹¹

By 1996, when his biography of Togliatti was published, Agosti had realised that his 1991 position was untenable, given the appearance of two learned articles based on the newly released Soviet documents, one of them in Italian. Agosti therefore argued that it had been Dimitrov, not Togliatti, who had taken up an anti-monarchist position in “The Draft of a Reply to the Italian Comrades” (24 January 1944) which Togliatti had for a brief period very reluctantly endorsed in the first draft of “On the Immediate Tasks of the Italian Communists” (February 1944).⁹² Agosti then muddied the waters still further by suggesting that

the anti-monarchist line had been propounded either by Dimitrov or by “somebody still higher than him”⁹³ – a convoluted innuendo worthy of the worst sort of Italian politician, say Andreotti or Cossiga, that managed to imply that it was Stalin himself who had been anti-monarchist without actually saying so in an unambiguous way that might have invited rapid rebuttal. Agosti's new account as elaborated in the biography is completely nonsensical. Firstly, Dimitrov did not have the authority within the Comintern to impose his own line on somebody as senior and experienced as Togliatti, especially on an Italian question; only Stalin could have authorised him to over-ride Togliatti. Secondly, Agosti gives no explanation as to why Stalin might have changed his position in February 1944, rejecting the line of supporting national unity in the struggle against Germany that he had maintained in a European, and not just Italian, context since the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, only to change his mind again and revert to his original position at the beginning of March 1944. Agosti's tortuous and unconvincing account of this episode clearly seems to have been constructed for one purpose alone, namely to support an assertion based on no documentary evidence whatsoever that in his meeting with Stalin Togliatti had an “active part, putting forward the arguments that he had advanced in the radio broadcasts in the first half of January”.⁹⁴

Togliatti did not escape from Stalin's authority merely by entering the Italian government.⁹⁵ Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky provide us with a great wealth of material indicating that Togliatti and other leading PCI figures made detailed reports to the Soviet Embassy on a virtually daily basis throughout the 1944-47 period to an extent that makes it impossible to argue with any conviction that Togliatti was exercising the degree of autonomy, on policy, as distinct from organisational matters where the Russians trusted his independent judgement, attributed to him by those apologists such as Sassoon or Agosti who see him as a precursor of Eurocommunism in 1944-47 before he was allegedly brought to heel by the Cominform but space constraints preclude a detailed discussion of other instances.

Conclusion

To conclude, the depth of Togliatti's Stalinism has been underestimated by the vast majority of writers sympathetic to the Italian left. The old claims that his involvement in Stalin's terror was confined to signing the death warrants of the Polish Communists under duress in Moscow or that his career after 1944 was entirely distinct from the path he took between 1926 and 1944 are no longer tenable. Firstly, Togliatti played a leading role in

implementing Stalinist policy in Spain, not only dictating the line and often the very words of the speeches of the PCE leaders but also crushing an authentic workers' and peasants' revolution, led by anarchists, POUMists and leftwing socialists, by a variety of means that included not just elaborate political intrigues that exploited the divisions in the ranks of other political forces but the importation of NKVD tactics of a hitherto unknown brutality on to the streets of cities such as Barcelona. Secondly, the *svolta di Salerno*, Togliatti's famous new strategy announced to the Italian Communists in March 1944, was the direct result of orders from Stalin, not the outcome of autonomous reflection. The Spanish and Italian experiences were closely linked for the very notion of a parliamentary road to socialism in Western Europe was first set out by Stalin in his December 1936 letter to Caballero. Togliatti's loyalty and servility to Stalin did not mean that he was not an extremely intelligent and astonishingly cunning politician who showed an extraordinary grasp of Italian reality in the years after 1944, turning the PCI into a mass party with deep social roots and a degree of electoral support unparalleled amongst Western European Communist Parties. Nor did it mean that he did not seize the opportunities offered by events to achieve some distance from Moscow between 1956 and 1964, although we need to acknowledge that his dislike of Krushchev played an important role here.

Togliatti was certainly not a mediocre Stalinist bureaucrat but he was never "*Il Migliore*". The Spanish Communists who worked with him in 1936-39 grasped the profound moral emptiness that lay behind his tactical genius and it could be argued that the image conjured up by their descriptions is that of an intelligent psychopath, not the heroic figure of the Spriano-Agosti-Sassoon hagiography. El Campesino portrayed him as "cold, cynical, without nerves and without scruples" and Enrique Castro was reminded of the words of his secretary in Spain: "He is the type of man that would make love to me just as coldly as he would have given orders to shoot me."⁹⁶

Notes

1. Donald Sassoon, "Togliatti, Stalin, Hungary and the tasks of historians", and Tobias Abse, "Togliatti and 1956: a response to Sassoon", in *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Vol.1, No.1, May 1999, pp.33-38 and pp.39-48.
2. This sub-text is made explicit in Luciano Canfora, *Togliatti e i dilemmi della politica*, Bari, 1989, especially pp.11-19.
3. Elena Aga-Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky, *Togliatti e Stalin: Il Pci e la politica estera staliniana negli archivi di Mosca*, Milan, 1997.

4. Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky, *Togliatti e Stalin*, *op. cit.*, pp.275-80, especially the claim on p.275 that "in the last half century the advance of democracy at the world level ... has been the result of the leadership of the United States, of its economic, technological and military force".

5. *Revolutionary History*, Vol.7, No.2, 1999, pp.285-298, especially her claim that "Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky's offering, however, belongs to an historiographical school that has long been discredited, and this greatly reduces its value for the historian" (p.298).

6. Aldo Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti*, Turin, 1996.

7. Giorgio Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti*, Bari, 1973 – all references in this article are to the 1977 two volume edition.

8. Tom Behan, *The Long Awaited Moment: The Working Class and the Italian Communist Party in Milan, 1943-1948*, New York, 1997.

9. See Abse, "Togliatti and 1956: a response to Sassoon", *op. cit.*, especially pp. 40-45.

10. Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti*, Vol.1, p.78.

11. Togliatti had completed his original, law, degree.

12. Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti*, Vol.1, p.80.

13. Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti*, Vol.1, p.81.

14. For Secchia's combination of Stalinism and revolutionary hopes see Miriam Mafai, *L'uomo che sognava la lotta armata*, Milan, 1984. Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky, *op. cit.*, pp.296-300 contains a fascinating transcript of a discussion between Stalin and Secchia on 14 December 1947 in which Stalin agrees with Togliatti's assessment of the Italian situation and advises Secchia against an insurrection.

15. Bocca, *op. cit.*, Vol.1, pp.17-18 and p.29. Some believe that he was not even a member in 1914, despite his repeated claims to have been one. The fascists burnt the records of the Turin Socialist section on 18 December 1922, so the question is not amenable to documentary proof.

16. Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counter-revolution*, London, 1991, p.133.

17. Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War*, *op. cit.*, p.788.

18. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War*, *op. cit.*, p.810.

19. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War*, *op. cit.*, p.133.

20. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War*, *op. cit.*, p.133.

21. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War*, *op. cit.*, p.134.

22. Fernando Claudín, *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform*, Harmondsworth, 1975 (English translation of 1970 Spanish text), pp.697-98.

23. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War*, *op. cit.*, p.134.

24. Tim Rees, "The Highpoint of Comintern Influence? The Communist Party and the Civil War in Spain" in Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe (eds), *International Communism and the Communist International 1919-43*, Manchester, 1998, pp.143-167. One assumes this author is motivated by the usual wearisome apolitical academic penchant for

revisionism for its own sake rather than any hidden pro-PCI agenda of the Sassoon-Hobsbawm-Agosti-Spriano variety but he appears singularly devoid of any inkling about how Stalinist parties functioned; a particularly priceless example of the surreal world Rees inhabits is the risible claim that: "In particular, decision-making in the Central Committee became more open and collective in nature encouraged by the sympathetic attitude that Togliatti took towards the Spanish leaders following the injunction of Dimitrov 'neither to limit nor suffocate in any way the initiative or personality of the Spanish leaders'" – Rees and Thorpe, *op. cit.*, p.157. Given the way in which Togliatti only very reluctantly accepted any collective decision-making in the PCI in the last couple of years of his life, the very notion of such an egalitarian approach to his Spanish comrades beggars belief. I will give specific examples of Spanish Communist speeches and documents drafted by Togliatti later in this article which should serve to refute Rees's bizarre theory.

25. Maurizio and Marcella Ferrara, *Conversando con Togliatti*, Rome, 1953.

26. Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti*, Bari, 1973.

27. Jesús Hernández, *Yo fui un ministro de Stalin*, Mexico City, 1953.

28. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.365.

29. Bocca, *op. cit.*, Vol.1, p.286.

30. Bocca, *op. cit.*, Vol.1, p.286.

31. Bocca, *op. cit.*, Vol.1, p.285.

32. Paolo Spriano, *Togliatti: Segretario dell'Internazionale*, Milan, 1988, p.216.

33. Bocca says that Vidali who lent him Hernández's books said "It is better to read them, even if he went over to the other side" – Bocca, *op. cit.*, Vol.2, p.706. This hardly adds weight to Vidali's denials. Vidali, like Scoccimarro, eventually regarded Togliatti as betraying Stalin's legacy, so he may have been deliberately sowing doubts in Bocca's mind.

34. Bocca, *op. cit.*, Vol.1, p.282 and p.287.

35. Bocca, *op. cit.*, Vol.1, p.286.

36. Thomas may indeed describe the book as "This unpleasant work of the leading Communist renegade from Spain" – Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, Harmondsworth, 1968, p.285 – but he makes frequent use of it as Spriano grudgingly acknowledges, without indicating that Thomas accepts Hernández's account of Togliatti's early arrival.

37. Paolo Spriano, *Togliatti: Segretario dell'Internazionale*, Milan, 1988, p.95; Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.785.

38. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.786.

39. Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti, op. cit.*, p.590 – this nugget is tucked away in the source notes; the academic historian Agosti, unlike the journalist Bocca, does not use proper footnotes.

40. Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti, op. cit.*, Vol.1, p.285.

41. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.364.

42. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.364.

43. London, 1984.

44. Burnett Bolloten, *The Grand Camouflage: The Spanish Civil War and Revolution 1936-39*, New York, 1961; Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Revolution: The Left and the Struggle for Power during the Civil War*, Chapel Hill, 1979.

45. Carr's certainty about the date of Togliatti's arrival in Spain is based on Togliatti and Spriano alone, for to quote Carr (p.39): "Hernández names Togliatti among those present. But Togliatti, on his own showing, did not come to Spain till July 1937, and other evidence conclusively supports him", the only reference given for other evidence is "P. Spriano, *Storia del Partito Comunista Italiano*, iii (1970), 215". Therefore, one can legitimately criticise both Carr and his research assistant Tamara Deutscher for a very inconsistent approach to these sources, given that when it came to a document issued in the name of the PCE Central Committee bearing the date 10 March 1939 and calling for an end to resistance, they accepted the testimony of Claudín's 6 March 1983 letter to Tamara Deutscher, to the effect that this document was indeed written by Togliatti, in preference to that of Togliatti and Spriano who were anxious to disclaim it. Carr's comment in the text that "*The tortuous argument* was characteristic of Togliatti's pen" or his barbed footnote in which he says "direct attribution of it to Togliatti comes from hostile and unreliable sources. Spriano coyly remarks that Togliatti and Checa issued an appeal on March 10 'to gain a few days' time" – p.78 (my italics) – does not tally with his earlier presentation of this duo as impeccable paragons of honesty when it was their word against Hernández's.

46. Rees adopts the circular argument that Hernández's testimony on one occasion is "clearly suspect" and on another occasion "suspect" because he lists Togliatti as a participant in meetings – Rees p.165 and p.166. Rees cites Carr's *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War* as convincing supplementary authority on the issue and loftily proclaims: "For an excellent recent overview of Togliatti's relationship with the PCE during the war, see A. Agosti, *Togliatti* (Turin, 1996), pp.225-43" (Rees, p.166). In short, Rees does not seem to have looked at Bocca's biography with its testimony from Scoccimarro or to have noticed that Bolloten's sources for his belief in Togliatti's early arrival in Spain include Martínez Amutio and Sánchez Vázquez, the validity of whose claims is in no way linked to the question of Hernández's veracity or lack of it.

47. Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck and Grigory Sevostianov (eds), *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War*, New Haven and London,

- 2001.
48. Radosh, Habeck and Sevostianov, *op.cit.*, p.22.
49. Radosh, Habeck and Sevostianov, *op.cit.*, pp.267-70.
50. Radosh, Habeck and Sevostianov, *op.cit.*, pp.295-368.
51. Radosh, Habeck and Sevostianov, *op.cit.*, p.269.
52. The document seems to suggest that he left in October but the editorial commentary on p.267 claims "December 1937".
53. Radosh, Habeck and Sevostianov, *op.cit.*, p.368.
54. Both quotations taken from Radosh, Habeck and Sevostianov, *op.cit.*, p.296.
55. Radosh, Habeck and Sevostianov, *op.cit.*, pp.195-204.
56. Radosh, Habeck and Sevostianov, *op.cit.*, p.175.
57. Radosh, Habeck and Sevostianov, *op.cit.*, p.195.
58. Radosh, Habeck and Sevostianov, *op.cit.*, p.197.
59. Fernando Claudín, *The Communist Movement, op. cit.*, p.712 – Claudín's italics.
60. Claudín, *The Communist Movement, op. cit.*, p.710. The more usual approach is to see José Díaz's speech at a public meeting on 9 May 1937 as the signal of the Spanish Communists' murderous intentions. This speech included the following bloodcurdling words: "Is it not perfectly clear that the Trotskyists are not a political or social organisation of a definite tendency like the Anarchists, Socialists or Republicans, but a gang of spies and provocateurs in the service of international fascism? The Trotskyist provocateurs must be swept away. This is why I stated in my speech at the recent plenary session of the central committee not only that this organisation should be dissolved in Spain and its press suspended, but that Trotskyism should be swept out of all civilised countries, that is, if we really want to get rid of the vermin... In Spain itself, who but the Trotskyists inspired the criminal putsch in Catalonia?" (Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.463.)
61. Claudín, *The Communist Movement, op. cit.*, p.711.
62. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.511 – translation of quotation from Juan-Simeon Vidarte, *Todos fuimos culpables*, Mexico City, 1973, pp.732-33. Moron's own account in his earlier *Politica de ayer y politica de mañana*, Mexico City, 1942, whilst not so explicit, tallied in general terms and included the statement: "Senor Irugo, the entire cabinet, the public prosecutor and I knew perfectly well where to find the only person responsible for the abduction of Nin" – translation in Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.511.
63. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.506.
64. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, pp.506-7.
65. Translation taken from Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.889; Bolloten took it from a Spanish text that quoted Bocca. The original text is in Bocca, *op. cit.*, Vol.1, p.301. This is Bolloten's only reference to Bocca's work, which he never read, despite the centrality of Togliatti to Bolloten's account of Communist actions in the Civil War.
66. Bocca, *op.cit*, Vol.1, p.301.
67. Bolloten, *The Spanish Revolution, op. cit.*, 1979, p.430, had already raised the possibility that Berneri might have been assassinated by "Franquist Fifth Columnists in the service of Mussolini's OVRA" rather than the Communists.
68. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, pp.875-77, which contains a very detailed statement on the subject written by Bolloten's research assistant George Esenwein.
69. For a full English text, see E.H. Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*, London, 1984, pp.86-87.
70. Here Claudín cites a Soviet work published in 1960 as confirming the account given by Caballero's Socialist friend Araquistáin – Claudín, *The Communist Movement, op. cit.*, pp.707-8.
71. Claudín, *The Communist Movement, op. cit.*, p.708.
72. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.363, quoting Togliatti's words as given by Hernández.
73. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.133. In a footnote he explains: "For this information I am grateful to a number of Spanish Communist refugees, whom I met in Mexico in the 1940s" – Bolloten, p.788.
74. After Caballero passionately denounced his opponents at a public meeting in Madrid on 17 October 1937, he was stopped at gunpoint on his way to Alicante for the first of a series of public meetings elsewhere in republican Spain. For details, see Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.562.
75. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.561.
76. Carr, *The Spanish Civil War and the Comintern, op. cit.*, p.68. Carr based this account on a Soviet work published in 1981. Whilst both Bolloten and Bocca suspected Communist influence, they gave garbled versions which underestimated the degree of direct Comintern and PCE involvement. Bolloten quoted the pro-Communist American journalist Louis Fischer as attributing the idea of the 13 war aims to the British Communist film producer Ivor Montagu, who allegedly had a conversation with the pro-Communist but nominally socialist Vayo who then put the idea to Negrín; Bolloten wrongly believed that the PCE "had not been directly involved in the elaboration of the thirteen war aims". Bocca believed the 13 war aims were the product of a correspondence between Togliatti and Negrín via the Prime Minister's secretary who was an old friend of Vidali – Bocca based this story on Vidali's testimony. More significantly, Bocca shrewdly remarked on the similarity of the 13 points to Togliatti's programme for the Italian Resistance in 1944-45. See Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, pp.645-6, and Bocca, *op. cit.*, Vol.2, p.303.
77. Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.924.
78. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.680.

79. Elena Aga-Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky, *Togliatti e Stalin: Il PCI e la politica estera staliniana negli archivi di Mosca*, Bologna, 1997, p.58 and p.64.
80. Giorgio Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti, op. cit.*, Vol.1, p.352; Ian Birchall, *Workers against the Monolith: The Communist Parties Since 1943*, London, 1974, p.23.
81. Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky, *op. cit.*, p.59.
82. Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky, *op. cit.*, p.60.
83. Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky, *op. cit.*, p.61.
84. Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky, *op. cit.*, p.61.
85. Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky, *op. cit.*, p.62.
86. A transcript in Italian translation is reproduced in Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky, *op. cit.*, pp.287-95.
86. Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky, *op. cit.*, pp.62-63.
88. Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky, *op. cit.*, p.63.
89. Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky, *op. cit.*, p.72.
90. Mark Gilbert, *The Italian Revolution: The End of Politics, Italian Style?*, Boulder, Colorado and Oxford, 1995, p.72.
91. Giuseppe Vacca, *Togliatti Sconosciuto*, Rome, 1994, pp.69-70, cited in Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky, *op. cit.*, pp.59, 70.
92. Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti, op. cit.*, pp.274-75.
93. Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti, op. cit.*, p.274.
94. Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti, op. cit.*, p.275.
95. The most blatant and polemical statement of this view, undiluted by much empirical evidence, can be found in Canfora, *Togliatti e i dilemmi della politica, op. cit.*, pp. 101-15 – a section entitled “La guerra è finita: Togliatti 1944-64”. Canfora’s Togliatti seems to leap free from Stalin’s influence in a single bound on his return to Italy; Agosti’s apologetics are much more nuanced.
96. Bolloten, *Spanish Civil War, op. cit.*, p.134.

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