

## CHAPTER 6 PARTY, POLITICS AND CULTURE IN THE SIENESE COUNTRYSIDE: THE ROOTS OF ITALIAN COMMUNISM

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### Premise

As it is well known, the life of the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano, P.C.I.) has come to an end, after a decision of the majority of its members, in February 1991, at the congress of Rimini. It had been founded in 1921 by the left wing of the Socialist Party at Livorno, in a period of time where many Communist parties were instituted all over the world, following the successful 1917 Bolshevik revolution, and the hopes this event had roused among large strata of population in the factories and in the farms of Europe and elsewhere.

The end of the Communist Party and its transformation into two separate political formations, as the Democratic Party of the Left (P.D.S.), and the Party for the Communist Refoundation (Rifondazione Comunista), have begun a new history in the Italian left; certainly it is worth mentioning that, for the first time in their history (excluding a period in which the Communists have been part of a national unity government, after the end of the war and until 1947), both the heirs of the P.C.I. occupy now a dominant position within the Italian political panorama: the first is the most important partner of the government coalition which rules over Italian affairs, the second is part of the majority which supports the centre-left coalition led by Prime Minister Romano Prodi. They represent about 30% of the Italian electorate, and the P.D.S. is the largest Italian party with its 21% of the votes in the last political elections (1996).

The history and the present situation of this section of the Italian left, notwithstanding its failures and internal divisions (Ginsborg, 1989), and notwithstanding the end of the Soviet Union, has proved the persistence of its deep roots within the Italian society, and its actual predominance in the political arena shows at least that a patrimony, in political and cultural terms, which had been built over a period of seventy years, has not been wasted or perished with the sinking of the dictatorial regimes of Eastern Europe and with the fall of the Berlin wall. Its future has still to be written, and will depend on many factors, both national and international; primarily, I would say, on the capability of the Italian government, so much influenced by the heirs of the C.P., to cope with the problems of economic crisis and unemployment. This is not the place,

however, to speculate about these issues, interesting as they may be; I am more concerned, in this paper, to investigate some of the factors which, in the past, have led the Communist Party to occupy such a central position within the Italian political arena, as seen from an anthropological perspective, namely a local one. I will not be mainly or directly concerned, therefore, with the policies elaborated by the party at the national level, in congresses, meetings and official documents; I will rather take into account the rooting and development of the party in a specific context, that of Siena (Tuscany) and its countryside, just around and after the end of the Second World War. Other authors (Spriano 1975; Martinelli 1996) as well as other anthropologists (e.g. Shore 1990), have dealt with the history of the P.C.I. at the national level. What it is often missing in these studies is the *raison d'être* of anthropology itself, that is its holistic awareness, which makes its practitioners go beyond a rigidly founded field of inquiry to look for connections and explanations external to it, its internal vision which moves toward the outside, its attention for the world of concrete social relations and sets of values as they are to be found among real people--beyond official documents and records.

#### Party and Conditions of Life

I carried out research among the Communists of a local branch of the Siena C.P. in the late eighties and early nineties, right in the period when its last secretary, A. Occhetto, had proposed to the party the change of its name and the construction of a new political formation. Hence, I was able to directly witness the discussions, divisions, struggles and crises, both collective and individual, which took place within the militant body of the "A. Borri" branch of the party; however, what I was mostly interested in, and what really convinced me to carry out research, was the attempt to understand the reasons which, beginning from the days of the antifascist and the antinazi resistance, had brought people in their thousands to join the political militia and the Sienese C.P. This would be the key to understanding the extraordinary support for the party which, in electoral terms, could count on the absolute majority of votes in the whole province of Siena (35 municipalities or "comuni"). Indeed, the P.C.I. received 46.5% of votes in the first free elections after the Fascist regime, in 1946, and 50.88% in the last elections where the Communist symbol was still printed on the ballot papers, in 1990. The first elections after the Rimini Congress, in April 1992 confirmed again the main heir of the C.P., the P.D.S., as the first party of the province, with roughly 40% of the votes (39.6%), and gave Rifondazione Comunista 10.5% of votes. Thus Siena continued to be the "reddest" province in Italy, within the Central Italian 'red belt', with Emilia-Romagna, Umbria and part of Marche as well as Tuscany itself.

As a matter of fact, the subjects of my research, those members of the C.P. who entered the party during the three years from 1944 to 1946 and who constituted the main bulk of the "Borri" members together with a second political age-class which were introduced to the party in the late sixties and mid-seventies, compelled me to modify substantially my original working hypotheses. While I was looking for a political culture, ideologically loaded, widespread among the sharecroppers and the peasants of the countryside, as well as among the artisans and workers of the town of Siena, I was rather confronted with expressions of values and feelings pertaining deeply to the daily conditions of life and experiences of the people concerned. While my interviews and questionnaire had been originally designed to discover the reasons which prompted the choices of those people during the mid-1940s in the realm of politics, collecting, as it were, political biographies, they, on the contrary, were recording thoughts and events relating mainly (even if not uniquely) to working conditions, health, education, and life expectations. Instead of political biographies I ended up collecting biographies *tout-court*, as people interviewed continuously escaped the purely political net I was trying to impose on them.

I was in fact originally inclined to interpret their membership in the party as a choice dictated by political culture and ideology as an expression of their adhesion to a messianic dream of revolution, to a love for that Soviet Union and its leadership which had defeated nazism, to the idea that, by doing in Italy as they had done in Russia, they could radically transform the structure of inequality.

In fact, strictly political events and considerations were not absent in the reconstruction of the past offered by the people interviewed; but these were on the whole secondary, while their thoughts primarily focused on the daily life of the 'mezzadri' families, the sharecroppers who cultivated the plots belonging to the landed gentry of the Tuscan countryside.

What emerged was a perception, which many people seem to have held in those years, of a movement from a situation of social marginality and alienation, defined by the lack of fundamental rights in the economic, political, social and cultural fields, established prior to Fascism but strengthened during the dictatorship, to a progressive but rapid acquisition of those rights, conquered through the struggles of the C.P. and the Communist led peasants' organizations such as the "Federmezzadri". In the minds of the people interviewed, the link between the amelioration of life conditions, the acquisition of rights and party action appeared to be a given datum, a fundamental and founding part of their culture.

In more abstract terms, it can be reasonably argued that the party's strategy and action were devoted to the moulding of *citizens* for the newly born Italian Republic, conscious of rights and duties which had to be won through social

and political conflict with antagonistic forces, rather than to the creation of an ideologically strong army to be prepared for the revolutionary moment.

In a way, the Sienese case runs parallel to the national strategy of the party as it was elaborated by its leadership after the return to Italy of the general secretary Palmiro Togliatti in the spring of 1944, and is an instance of its concrete realization. The idea that a small bolshevik structure, as it necessarily was during the Fascist regime, should give way to a mass organization, the "new party", the modern Gramscian Prince able to establish hegemony on society and create a web of alliances with progressive socialist and catholic forces in order to govern the country, came in fact to a realization in the province of Siena.

### The "Red Sub-Culture"

The penetration of the national society by the party started at the end of the War (Spriano 1975, p. xii). By the end of 1944, 12,000 persons had entered the P.C.I. One year later, their number was 41,548, i.e. something like 15% of the total population of the Province itself (268,000 inhabitants). A document sent by the Sienese organization to the P.C.I. headquarters in Rome in August 1945 analyzed the social composition of the party: out of 35,378 members, 16,903 were sharecroppers (47.8%), 6,229 housewives (17.6%), 6,799 workers (19.2%), 2,221 daily labourers in the farms (6.3%); artisans, shopkeepers, teachers and intellectuals constituted the last 6% (Guastalli 1979, p.128). It was a mass organization, as the national leadership intended, and it was mostly a peasant party, with an overwhelming presence of sharecroppers and their families (recruitment used to run in fact along family and kinship ties). A few thousand townspeople were also in the party organization.

Many of the analyses which attempt to explain the impressive strength acquired by the Communist Party in Tuscany and in the whole of Central Italy by the end of the War, try to explain the phenomenon in terms of political culture, by referring to the presence of a "red sub-culture" (Anderlini 1983, 1983b, 1986; Detti 1981, 1990; Fusi 1985). In broad terms, the "red sub-culture" refers to forms of social and political organization, to ideologies and cultural values born in the countryside in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the appearance and diffusion among the sharecroppers (and among factory workers and artisans in the towns) of Socialist and Anarchist ideas. Both these movements stressed the ideals of solidarity and work, and of solidarity among workers, and contributed to create a sort of apocalyptic expectation for a future of equality among people. These organizations and values were also tested against the owners of the land and their unions, against whom strikes and struggles had been organized by the peasants' leagues both at the end of last century and after the First World War. Fascism put an end to sharecroppers' struggles in the countryside, and dismantled their

organizations but, as these analyses claim, the river of Socialism, with its burden of messianic expectations, had not dried up; it went underground, to surface again with the Resistance movement and the new-born Italian Republic.

It should not be forgotten, however, that a *new* political subject took control of the situation, replacing the ancient Socialist movement, and that that subject was the Communist Party. Furthermore, twenty years of Fascist dictatorship must not be underestimated, in that it was successful both in terms of its repression against left wing organizations and their leaders and members, and in terms of the consensus around the regime it had been able to create thanks to persuasion, control and propaganda. If a "red sub-culture" survived, and it certainly did, this is still not sufficient to explain the tremendous appeal of the Communist Party to the peasants, and, to a smaller extent, to the towns' people).

The concept of "red sub-culture" furthermore seems to me to be too static, and emphasizing as it does a situation of separatedness from the rest of Italian society and culture, should perhaps be considered as nothing more than a starting point from which to begin in order to understand the reasons of the strength of the P.C.I. in the Siena province. Rather than a static exclusion, a dynamic movement toward inclusion into the overall social structure should be considered as the main feature which characterizes the socio-cultural situation beginning with the days of the Resistance and ending with the end of "mezzadria" in the sixties--when the former sharecroppers migrated to town becoming workers, shopkeepers, artisans, employees in the public and private sectors.

### Resistance and After: The Making of Citizens

A first point, which was particularly significant in the shaping of a new socio-cultural setting, concerns the relationship of the partisan forces with the peasant world. It is in fact interesting to note that the partisan brigade which was active in guerrilla warfare in the Sienese countryside against the fascist and the German armies, the "S. Lavagnini" (see Gasparri 1976), became self-sufficient in the spring of 1944 by receiving its provisions from the shares of produce which, according to the "mezzadria" contract, were due to the owners of the land. The partisans did not usually take any food or supplies from the sharecroppers' families' shares, while of course they accepted shelter and gifts. The partisans could therefore move as "fish in the water" in the countryside, planning and realizing their actions against their enemies; at the same time many sharecroppers began to understand that the overwhelming power of the landed gentry, of their "padroni", could be eroded, and its balance moved toward the sharecroppers themselves.

The real shift in the balance of power in the countryside took place after the war, when the action of the Communist Party and their allies, along with the peasants' organizations, could be fully displayed. Even before the liberation of Siena (July 1944) and already in May 1944 (see Cirri, 1990, pp.165-166) the Sienese Communists elaborated a new policy for the countryside, demanding new rights and asking for a re-negotiation of power relations in favour of the sharecroppers.

The main lines of this new policy were the following: the drawing up of new contracts between sharecroppers and landowners, the official recognition as a contractual partner of the peasant committees elected at the level of farm, the participation of the peasants, through their elected committees, in the management of the farms themselves, the complete abolition of gifts and gratuities which traditionally were due to the landowners, and finally a redefinition of the shares, allocating more than 50% of the produce to those who worked the land.

From 1944 onwards peasant organizations' and the Communist Party's activities were devoted to the implementation of these points, obtaining some success. The above list contains contractual rights to be fought for and won, and it is an attempt to shift a portion of power from the landowners to the sharecroppers and their representatives. But it should also be stressed that, firstly, the sharecroppers were asking for the right to be recognized as legitimate partners of a relationship with their adversaries. A significant portion of landowners of noble and ancient tradition, could not even imagine the idea of conceding a social status as equal partners to people they were accustomed to see as pure labour force and as passive object of their command. It should not be forgotten—and many remember it well—that traditionally the landowners could even decide whom a "mezzadro" could or could not marry.

I am here maintaining that the reasons which can explain the furious resistance and reaction of the landowners to the peasants' demands and claims, with hundreds of cases of trials of peasants brought to court for breach of contract, innumerable notices to quit, with the police called to enforce them, tens of episodes of clashes between peasants and police forces called by the landowners to stop union or political disputes, cannot be searched for in the realms of economics and politics alone, but have also to be understood at the level of attitudes and cultural values.

Within this context, it is for example quite significant to mention that women were not counted as working units, and had therefore no rights whatsoever. A double power was therefore exercised on them: The first one was that of the landowners and their mediators (men) in the farms, the "fattori", who did not recognize them as social persons; the second one within their families, where they had to obey the will of their husbands and of the "capoccia", the senior elder of the polynuclear family (see Solinas and Clemente 1983; Clemente 1987) who was in charge of the overall organization of work. When, as many

then young women maintain in their interviews, the C.P. began to organize meetings where the topic under discussion was the 'emancipation of women' and to create specific bodies within the party's structure charged to deal with women's problems, suddenly new, though confused, perspectives of social and cultural change were for the first time made available to many young peasant girls.

### The Party as Educator

Society and culture, economy and politics tended to intertwine continuously in the ten years after the end of the war. The struggles of the sharecroppers to implement their contractual economic rights were at the same time deeply political, when peasants were demanding to have a voice in the managing of the farm, or when they were proposing farm development plans, to eliminate what they considered to be inefficiencies in the owners' management. There were also struggles for a real amelioration of conditions of life, in order to live no longer "as beasts" (as one of them said to me) inside houses in very poor conditions, with no electricity, no running water, and no lavatories. The Communist Party, through its local branches, present everywhere in the Sienese countryside, listened to these urgent appeals which were coming from the peasant world, and attempted to represent them. Step by step substantial changes occurred in the formal structure of the contracts linking the sharecroppers to the landowners, with a progressive increase in the shares which the peasants could keep for themselves, codified also at the level of Parliament and national law (as with the so-called "Iodo De Gasperi", ratified in 1947). At the same time the Comuni of the province, with their Communist and Socialist mayors and majorities, began to provide services, offering real and visible changes and improvements in the road system, schools, houses, electricity, water supplies etc.

As I mentioned above, a significant point in the encounter between the Communist Party and peasant world has to be found, at least partially, outside the world of politics and political culture strictu sensu, and inside the realm of culture, of the attitudes and values expressed by the people in a context of changed and changing circumstances. In these years after the war, the peasants, and especially the young men and women, were increasingly finding unbearable, not only their physical conditions, for which they sought a general improvement, but the simple and to their eyes dramatic fact of being excluded from education, schooling, and culture. These were the dues the dominant groups, of the wealthy and of the urban people; in the countryside, the children were needed as labour force, as guardians for the pigs and for the cattle, and their precious energies could not be wasted on the school benches. A few years of elementary school, for the luckiest ones, was therefore considered

sufficient to learn some writing and counting, soon to be forgotten in the years to come.

The party addressed this question by creating the so-called party schools, at the provincial and the local levels. They were meant to provide the militants and the cadres with the intellectual and political means to implement meaningful political action in society. The idea was to shift the attention of the party, especially its militant section, from quantity (the impressive number of party members) to quality, by selecting and forging cadres equipped to act in society. To the many people who attended the courses in Italian and world history, in political economy and in other subjects, this was the first moment in their lives in which they could *learn* something, begin to understand historical, economic and political processes. From this point of view the party was a sort of collective educator, supplying a service which was not furnished by the institutions of the Italian state. It has been calculated for example that, in the area under examination, 17.000 people followed party courses in the years from 1951 to 1954--an impressive number indicating a mass phenomenon which involved a considerable section of population in the whole province of Siena.

Party activities had a value therefore beyond strictly political terms: they had a social function which should not be underestimated. People coming from different experiences and with different expectations met together inside the rooms which hosted the local party branch, in the countryside or in the villages and small towns; they were compelled to make things together, to discuss and exchange points of view, to comment on local or national or international events; they were also invited to participate in social situations where people came together to dance, or to attend a theatrical presentation, promoting therefore a sense of common belonging and of shared identity. While in situations, as elsewhere in Italy, where the influence of the Communist Party was weak, an emphasis on common identity could generate an image of the Communists as somewhat 'different' from the rest of the population, here in the Sienese area, where the strength of the party was so overwhelming, its concerns, activities, and the diffusion of a superimposed Communist identity upon so many people, tended to constitute the social 'norm', while 'difference' was characteristic of those who were not Communist, as for example the supporters of the Christian Democratic Party (Li Causi, forthcoming).

### Conclusions: Peasants and Citizens, Peasants as Citizens

We have seen how, in broad terms, the C.P. and other organizations linked to it, acted in the years following the Second World War at different levels: an economic one, implementing struggles to change the status of the peasants vis-à-vis the landowners, with the configuration of new rights and duties; a political one, by creating everywhere party branches and structures, meeting

points for collective discussion and action and ramified presence within society (see Kertzer, 1980); an administrative one, by gaining control through elections of the Comuni, and beginning therefore to offer new facilities to the people and to create a new class of administrators; finally a cultural one, by providing through the party's schools basic information and analyses on fundamental historical and socio-political processes.

As a result, the C.P. did not create revolutionary militants, bearers of a particular "red sub-culture" (though some of them did keep inside their hearts and minds the mythical *x* hour to come), but citizens of the Republican state, with changed statuses and roles within the overall Italian social structure.

A final point has to be stressed. During the years under consideration, the differences between the countryside and the town were very sharp and concerned the economic situation of the peasants as compared to that of the townsmen, these latter being much better off than the former. There was however a gap in cultural terms which could hardly be bridged by a change in economic conditions. The inhabitants of Siena considered themselves to be different and superior to their fellow countrymen in the countryside; these latter considered their peasant condition as an unbridgeable difference.

As already mentioned, the party used to organize situations where people coming from different backgrounds could be together, discuss together and share the same condition of being Communist. Party schools are an example, but there also were the party's festivals (like the "Festa de l'Unità"), provincial and local meetings and gatherings. Apart from these 'institutional' moments, a prolonged action of the party on three specific issues contributed in the late 'forties and early fifties' to make the gap between countryside and town to shrink in a significant way.

After the 14th of July 1948, when a right-wing Sicilian student made an attempt on the C.P. general secretary's life, a very strong protest movement was aroused in most of Italy, accompanied by a general strike organized by the workers' unions and by many clashes between armed police forces and demonstrators. In the province of Siena, and in the town itself, a few people died on both sides. When the situation calmed down, Italian courts began to put on trial thousands of Communist and Socialist militants and administrators accused to be the organizers of riots and plots against the State. 139 cases were tried in the courts of Siena and Montepulciano, plus many more in other courts in Tuscany. 1600 persons were tried; many of them sentenced to many years in prison (Bardini, 1977, p.108). The solidarity campaign launched by the C.P. in the whole province was impressive. It served to cover the trials' expenses and to support the families of those who had been sent to jail. Funds were collected everywhere, creating a chain of solidarity uniting Communists and non-Communists, peasants and town-dwellers for many years following the 1948 facts.

A second unifying theme, which brought together peasants and townsmen, and which constituted a central issue during the years under consideration, was that of peace. The fear for a new world conflict was very much felt during the 'cold war', and people were widely mobilized against the dangers of a new war. Demonstrations, meetings, fund raising were the tools utilized by the C.P. and other left-wing organizations to create on one side popular support for the international peace conferences held in Stockholm and Berlin and, on the other, opposition to the admission of Italy to the C.E.D. (European Defense Organization).

Again, as in the previous case, a common theme, and common goals, unified people coming from different situations and social backgrounds. The peasants who attached to the top of their sheaves the peace flag, with the rainbow colours, and the shopkeepers who stuck posters with the sign "We are against C.E.D." on their windows, were feeling to be fighting for the same objectives, to be sharing the same values, to be much closer than their social condition would usually permit.

A third unifying moment took place in 1952, when peasants were confronted with hundreds of notices to quit sent by the landowners. It was a reaction against new laws which had finally brought restrictions to the landowners' power to expel the sharecroppers from their fields without any justification. Again, people from the countryside and from the towns were mobilized when the police were called in to force the sharecroppers out of their houses, and human barriers were erected to prevent the expulsion of the peasants. In fact, only 17 families were evicted, out of 460 cases of notices to quit. It was a success for the peasants and for those townsmen who helped to reinforce, under the same banner, the right to work. Peasants and town-dwellers had been called by the C.P. to fight for the same rights and for common values (freedom to organize political action, peace, work etc.) bridging historical gaps between town and countryside, creating webs of alliances, and moulding the new citizens of the Republic.

The status of the sharecroppers had changed considerably, as well as their worldviews. When the crisis of this particular system of production in agriculture became acute, by the end of the 1950s and 1960s, many peasants moved to Siena and to other towns, becoming artisans, shopkeepers, nurses etc. Their allegiance to the C.P. did not continue.

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## CHAPTER 7 SOME REFLECTIONS ON SOCIOLOGY AND THE CONDITION OF BEING A SOCIOLOGIST IN PRESENT- DAY TURKEY

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These are some comments of the peculiar blend of cosmopolitanism and parochialism, or insularity, which has been, and continues to be, the hallmark of sociology in Turkey. To elaborate, I will begin with some reflections on the condition and practice of being a sociologist in Turkey. I will end by offering some remarks on a very significant ceremonial event, the Second National Congress of Turkish Sociological Association, which took place in 1996. In between, I hope to convey some of the ambiguities and dilemmas associated with the location(s) of the sociologist as a public figure in present day Turkey.

We sociologists in Turkey tend to be driven by the urge to diagnose "lived" events and propose solutions. (1) The push to bring a particular social reality into daylight, rendering it "understandable" in public, to the public and for the public, and proposing brave solutions often takes precedence over "understanding", analytical refinement, theoretical sophistication. Of the two sensibilities out of which sociology has been historically molded, one intellectual, the other "lived" and made of social commitment, it is the latter which dominates the field in Turkey.

The cultural imaginary and self-understanding of a sociologist in Turkey is neither that of a free floating, "disinterested intellectual" who searches for universals in the name of truth, nor quite that of "social engineer" who comes up with practical solutions to pressing problems of the moment. Rather, it is that of a "social diagnostician". We battle with recurring bouts of symptoms which Turkey seems to contract in its twisted historical trajectory. We tend to torment ourselves with continuing aspirations to an unachieved modernity. But we remain unrepentant in our attempts to affiliate to the modern via great national or Western narratives.

The major signposts in the career trajectories of sociologists working and living in Turkey are not influential books - which they have written or read - but the mesmerizing play of political events, wars, economic crises, military coups, liberalization's which usher moments of intense anxiety and of reappraisal, imparting sense of new departures and breaks with orthodoxy. And of course it is precisely such a momentous event, the birth of the Turkish nation out of