

THE ITALIAN «SECOND RISORGIMENTO»

From the Resistance to the Republican Constitution (1943-1948)

Premises

- Antifascism in Italy during the Regime (Intellectuals and power)
- Antifascism in Europe (Spanish Civil War)

I. RESISTANCE AND FREEDOM

In the summer of 1943 the Allies went on the offensive on all fronts against Germany, Japan and Italy. Italy yielded first, while Germany and Japan displayed a surprising ability to resistance that determined the continuation of the war for another two years. Eventually even the “Fortress Europe” in which Hitler’s Germany had entrenched itself was conquered by the advance of the Anglo-Americans from the west and the Russians from the east, while the Japanese resistance was crushed with a new weapon: the atomic bomb. On June 26, 1945, the charter of the United Nations was approved in San Francisco (UN), the new international body created for the purpose of promoting peace, freedom and democracy among peoples around the world.

September 8th

The Allied landing in Sicily in the summer of 1943 gave the coup de grace to the fascist regime. The evident crisis of fascism, in serious difficulty on the external front of the war and on that internal popular discontent, pushed the crown and the moderate components of the regime to plan to get rid of Mussolini. The distrust of Mussolini voted by the Grand Council allowed **Vittorio Emanuele III** to intervene, forcing the Duce to the resignation and appointing the new head of the Badoglio government. The news of the **fall of Mussolini was greeted in the country with large demonstrations of enthusiasm**: the Italians, convinced that the nightmare of war was finally over, went down in street celebrating, while the imposing apparatus of the fascist regime melted like snow in the sun without putting up the slightest hint of resistance. The announcement of the armistice with the Anglo-Americans was given to the country on the evening of the 8th September, but the hope that the war was over dissolved in the course of the night: Germans, in fact, reacted immediately with the military occupation, while the Italian army, left without operational instructions, was disintegrating. In the meantime, to more easily control occupied Italy, Hitler offered his help to Mussolini, in order to create a collaborationist government dominated by Germany. After being freed, Mussolini thus gave birth to a new fascist state, the Republic Italian Social Security (RSI), also known as the «Republic of Salò».

Political parties

The day after 8 September, the surviving anti-fascist parties that had been formed clandestinely after 1926 had in the meantime been reconstituted:

- 1) the Italian Communist Party, which had been present with its network in Italy during the whole twenty years of Fascism;
- 2) the Action Party, which arose before the collapse of fascism from the confluence of different groups of liberal-socialist and republican inspiration;
- 3) the Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity, the result of the reorganization of the old PSI and the its merger with new socialist forces;
- 4) the Italian Liberal Party, founded by exponents of pre-Fascist liberalism including Croce and Einaudi;
- 5) Christian Democracy, founded by members of the old People's Party with the cautious support of the Church;
- 6) Labor Democracy, founded by Ivanoe Bonomi, a former member of the old party reformist socialist .

National unity

Although of different ideological inspiration, the six parties united in a common commitment anti-fascist giving life to the *National Liberation Committee* (CLN) in Rome, the organization who promoted and coordinated the Resistance after 8 September. They also applied to representing and guiding the new Italy out of the Fascist period and were therefore hostile also to the monarchy, considered co-responsible for the 20 years of dictatorship and the war. In Congress of Bari held in January 1944, the CLN therefore asked for the resignation of Badoglio government and the immediate abdication of the monarchy, waiting for the war to end a Constituent Assembly decides the institutional fate of the country. The conflict between CLN and the monarchical government was resolved by the initiative of the communist leader Palmiro Togliatti, who had returned from the Soviet Union after 20 years of exile. As soon as arrived in *Salerno* - then the provisional capital of the "Southern Kingdom" - Togliatti proposed to postpone the institutional question until the war was over and to form a new one government chaired by Badoglio with the participation of the CLN, that is, a government of unity national anti-fascist. Togliatti's proposal ("Salerno turnaround") was also accepted by the other political groups, so that on April 21, 1944 Badoglio formed a new government with the parties of the CLN, while the king undertook to surrender his powers to his son Umberto once Rome had been released and agreed to submit the institutional question to a popular referendum when was war over. In June 1944, once Rome was liberated, a new government was formed by Bonomi, who remained in office until liberation and who worked in close contact with the Resistance.

The partisan war

Immediately after 8 September they had formed in the mountains of central-northern Italy the first partisan bands. The most numerous and aggressive formations were those related to left-wing parties: the *Garibaldi Communist Brigades*; those of Justice and Freedom, linked to Action party; the Matteotti Socialist Brigades. However, the ideological differentiation of the partisan movement was that the Resistance assumed a political meaning. If on the one hand, in fact, the forces that they made up were united by the common commitment in the struggle for national independence and against Nazi-Fascism, on the other hand they were divided about the new state to be built when the war is over.

The forces of the left were fighting for a totally renewed Italy compared to the old liberal state, which was marked by the social privilege of notables and owners, and some communist and socialist components even hoped for a real revolution Soviet type; the moderate forces (monarchists and liberals), on the other hand, thought of restoration of the pre-Fascist liberal state, while the Christian Democrats hoped for the constitution of a new liberal-democratic state based on the Catholicism values and of interclass solidarity in opposition with the values of Marxism. The Resistance was therefore not only the highest moment of the anti-fascist struggle for the liberation of the country, but also the laboratory in which the forces took shape and developed policies that would rule the country when the war was over.

The Liberty

The fighting masses tend to give themselves one organizational form that goes beyond the parties. Vittorio Foa, October 1944

In the summer of 1944, the Allied advance resumed and liberated central Italy. Meanwhile, the partisan movement, reorganized by the establishment of a political and military leadership, the CLN Alta Italia (CLNAI), intensified its activity. Several cities were liberated by the partisans before the arrival of the allied troops; whole areas were proclaimed 'republics partisans »(Val d'Ossola, Langhe, Oltrepo 'Pavese) and governed by direct participation of the local population.

In autumn, however, the offensive ran aground on the Gothic line (the German defensive line from La Spezia went as far as Rimini along the Apennines), since the Italian front had become secondary after the Anglo-Americans landed in Normandy. This setback allowed Germans and Fascists to regain control over the Northern regions: winter 1944-1945 was very hard, since the "partisan republics" were wiped out from the Nazi-fascisms and cruel reprisals hit the civil population. However the partisan movement managed to survive the distrust of the allies towards the Resistance (who looked with suspicion at the growing strength of the communists partisan). On 7 December 1944, the Allies recognized the CLNAI.

In the spring of 1945, when the Allied offensive in Central Europe put Germany permanently on the ropes, the Anglo-American troops broke through the Gothic line. The Italian Resistance, which could now count on 200,000 men, unleashed the 25th April the national uprising against the Germans who were leaving the country, preceding the allied troops in the main cities of the North. Mussolini tried to escape but it was captured and executed: on 28 April 1945 the lifeless body of the Duce was exposed for some hours, hanging by the feet, in piazzale Loreto in Milan. The war was finally over.

The legacy of the Resistance

«It therefore appears essential to underline the long-term historical legacy of the twenty months which separated July 25, 1943 from April 25, 1945: a re-foundation of consensus emerged democratic and forms of political legitimacy, destined to operate in depth in course of the republican experience. In this perspective, three main themes of reflection: the new sense of rights that spread among the Italian people in close coincidence with the experience and suffering of war; the "constitutional ideas" of the Resistance, that is the arrival, however not unanimous, of a new political system; building a

memory or a historical narrative aimed at legitimizing in the conscience of the ruling class and that of the popular masses the new historical course opened after 1945 » (L. Paggi).

II. REPUBLIC AND CONSTITUTION

When the war was over, Italy was a nation to be rebuilt: on the material level and economic level, on the moral level due to the destruction suffered; for the great disorientation caused in the consciences of the majority of Italians from the catastrophe which the fascist experience had imposed; on the political-institutional level, since, when fascism collapsed, it was necessary to give the country back those democratic systems that a true national revival required.

The parties of the masses

The parties had returned to be protagonists of the political life of the country already after the 8th September 1943:

- the **PSIUP** (Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity), led by Pietro Nenni, was a party based on workers and peasants, but there was a certain consensus among the small bourgeoisie;
- the PCI (Italian Communist Party) had seen its prestige grow greatly for having been the main protagonist of the clandestine struggle against fascism before and of Resistance, then. In 1946 its members were already 1,700,000, a figure that made it the first European Communist Party after the Soviet one;
- the DC (Christian Democracy) was the heir of Don Sturzo's Popular Party and, like that, he aspired to represent the Catholic masses. His address was based on social doctrine of Catholicism, which recognized private property as a legitimate right, but from the point of view of a solidarity and inter-class conception of society, aimed at reconciling market and social equity through moderate reformism. His secretary was Alcide DeGasperi.

The crisis of the anti-fascist unity

The De Gasperi government decided to resolve the institutional question. They were like that elections for the Constituent Assembly to be held on June 2, 1946, to be held simultaneously with a referendum in which Italian citizens were called to speak out in favor of the monarchy or the republic. Even the last attempt to save the monarchy by installing a new sovereign on the throne is not compromised with fascism revealed useless: the referendum, in fact, decreed the victory of the republic, albeit with one relatively small vote gap **(the success of the republic was due to the electorate of Center-North; that of the South in fact voted in majority for the monarchy)**. The elections for the Constituent Assembly - the first in the history of Italy in which women also voted - were won by DC (35%), followed by PSIUP (20%) and PCI (19%): thus began to take shape the main mass parties and, with this, the aggravation of conditions of collaboration that had reigned in the period of anti-fascist unity. While the Christian Democrats were committed to a policy of normalization tending to contain the workers 'and peasants' struggles, the socialists and communists took a stand in support of the workers' claims. The breakdown of anti-fascist unity, with the consequent exclusion of communists and socialists from the government - matured in May 1947. The initiative was taken by De Gasperi who, after

having resigned, set up a single-color (Christian Democrat) cabinet, of which they entered following to take part also other parties and that did not hesitate to adopt measures to favour liberal economic reconstruction (Einaudi).

The roots of the Constitution

The end of the experience of anti-fascist unity did not negatively affect the workings of the Constituent Assembly, which after the vote in June 1946 had begun its work to give Italy a new republican constitution **to replace the old statute albertino**. The particular importance of the task to which they had been called led the parties to overcome the reasons for conflict to make the spirit of collaboration prevail. December 22, 1947 the Assembly finished its work by approving the constitutional charter with a crushing majority **(453 votes in favor and 62 against)**. The Constitution entered into force on 1 January 1948: its text was the result of a compromise between the main political-ideological components represented in the Constituent Assembly: the principles of liberalism and democracy, the fruit of thought secular, combined in a balanced way with Catholic solidarity and with the demands of social justice proper to the socialist tradition.

Text taken from: L. Marelli, -R. Salvataggio' -R. Infante, *History of the Modern World 3*, Arnoldo Mondadori School, Milan 1999, pp. 405-411; 607-616

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