

ITALIAN COMMUNISTS SPLIT BUT HARD CORE IS HARDER

By ARNALDO CORTESI

Special to The New York Times.

ROME, Dec. 15—Even the most superficial observer of the Communist party congress in Rome this week would have had no trouble in perceiving that here was a party racked by a crisis of some sort.

The delegates seemed to regard one another with distrust matched only by their distrust of their leaders. Even their cheers, when they found something they could cheer, had a defiant ring which revealed them as men hard pressed by events and circumstances. There was above all a complete absence of that mystic enthusiasm and fanaticism which distinguished the Communists in years gone by.

It would be a grave error to conclude, however, that communism has gone into a decline from which it will not recover. That would be underestimating it. Communist parties in all countries outside Russia have undoubtedly been dealt a number of severe blows from the twentieth congress of the Russian Communist party onward. But the Communist movement is merely wounded, not dead.

Party Hangers-on Lost

If the Italian Communist party may be taken as typical of communism in countries outside Russia, it is easy to see that the Communist movement has lost many hangers-on who lived at the margin of the Communist party. In other words, many fellow-travelers some of whom had already lost interest and confidence in the party seized this occasion to abandon it publicly. Some even slammed the door as they left.

It is doubtful whether the hard core of communism has been even faintly affected. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that the hard core has become harder, even if as a political party the Italian Communists have lost some of their voting strength—perhaps 1,000,000 votes or so.

Recent events have increased the isolation in which the Italian Communist party had begun to find itself for varied political



"And don't forget those Anglo-French forces are to blame for Hungary, too."



"That Togliatti is terrific in the hammer-throw. He has a Russian trainer."

Candido (Milan)

reasons since the end of last spring. This also has tended to drive it underground, withdrawing as many as possible of its activities from the sight of men. And this in turn has made it more difficult to deal with it. Some anti-Communist members of Parliament have demanded the outlawing of the Communist party. Others have argued that anything suggestive of persecution should be avoided. The Government has sided with the latter group and no overt move against the Communist party has been made.

First Hard Blow

The troubles of Communist parties everywhere began last winter when Nikita S. Khrushchev announced the de-Stalinization policy to an astounded congress of the Russian Communist party. Italian Communists had venerated Stalin as their beloved "Baffone," (Big Whiskers) who was coming sooner or later to settle all scores with the wicked capitalist exploiters. The sudden revelation that the idol

of all right-thinking Communists had been not only a bloodthirsty tyrant and homicidal maniac but also an incompetent bungler both in war and peace was hard to take.

Nevertheless, Italian Communists did take it. Their attachment to Stalin was chiefly of a sentimental or emotional nature and was largely unaffected by the posthumous revelation that he had not been quite what most Communists imagined him to be.

It was more difficult to dispose of the political consequences that flowed from the Russian party congress. Palmiro Togliatti, Italian Communist leader, re-

turned to Rome from Moscow and light-heartedly rushed into print with some criticisms of Soviet society which he said had "degenerated" and with the suggestion that international communism should organize on a system of "polycentrism." This apparently meant that Titoism was to reign triumphant and that all Communist parties were to be exactly on the same level.

These ideas did not please the

Kremlin in the slightest and Signor Togliatti was slapped down hard. He is adept at sensing changes in the political weather even before they occur and at this time he apparently sensed a swing back in Russia to Stalinist ideas. He has been busy since then receding with all possible speed from the position he had assumed and traveling toward the "hard" wing of his party. He finally came to rest about half way between the position of the French Communist party as exemplified by Maurice Thorez and the position of Yugoslavia's Marshal Tito.

Shocked by Revolts

The Italian Communist party was still in the process of recovering its balance when it was struck first by the Polish then by the Hungarian events. What shocked the Communists and Communist sympathizers most was that the Poles and Hungarians, after sampling the delights of Communist rule for more than a decade, were so ungrateful as to prefer something

else. This was a tremendous blow to many who had fallen in good faith for the Communist propaganda that life in Communist countries was an idyllic affair, compounded like some operettas in about equal measure of music, dancing and laughter.

The Communists made a brave attempt to represent what is happening as a deep plot hatched by Fascists in alliance with Western warmongers. This served to pull their party together but almost nobody but Communist diehards believed them.

The Last Straw

Then came the ruthless repression of the Hungarian revolt by the Russian Army. This was the last straw so far as most fellow-travelers were concerned.

All that this did to Communist leaders in Italy was to make them stand more firmly on their "hard" line. They stuck through thick and thin to their story that the Russian Army had served the interests of the workers everywhere in the world by stamping out a Fascist plot in Hungary. And this story satisfied a sufficient number of Italian Communists to enable the Italian Communist party to retain its standing as the greatest Communist party this side of the Iron Curtain.