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### **Citation**

Capone, M. (2024). *International labour diplomacy: the case of the Italian CGIL*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4082620>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



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## International labour diplomacy: the case of Italian CGIL

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International Relations MA Thesis, Global Political Economy

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20<sup>th</sup> of June 2024

# Abstract

This thesis examines the ideological transformation of the Italian trade union CGIL from communism to reformism, focusing on the interplay between local and global dynamics in labour diplomacy. It investigates the internal ideological conflicts and the evolution of the union's affiliations, particularly the shift from the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) to the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). The analysis is set within the historical context of post-secession Italy, highlighting CGIL's initial strong ties to the Soviet Union and its eventual move towards a centrist position influenced by both internal factionalism and external geopolitical changes. The thesis will focus on the impact of national and international pressures on the union's ideological stance and the role of European integration. The thesis posits that the CGIL's shift was driven by the material conditions of operating within a capitalist society and the necessity to engage with European economic systems. This transition did not signify a full embrace of Western values but rather an adaptation to unavoidable economic realities, maintaining its identity as a class union. The conclusion emphasizes that this ideological shift was shaped by a combination of internal dynamics, external geopolitical factors, and the strategic need to represent the interests of the working class effectively in a changing global landscape.

# Contents

Chapter 1. Literature review and research question .....	4
Chapter 2. 1948-1956: between constriction and autonomy .....	12
2.1 The national dimension .....	12
2.2 Towards the formation of a regional consciousness .....	17
Chapter 3. 1956-1968. A departure without destination .....	21
Chapter 4. 1969-1974. Looking West for an arrival point .....	29
Concluding Remarks .....	33
References .....	35
Bibliography .....	35
Primary sources .....	37

# Chapter 1. Literature review and research question

In 1945, at the end of WWII, the founding of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) gave, for the first time in history, the brief hope of a united international labour, even though with great limitations from the start, given the absence of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Christian unions of the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU). Even with these constrictions, the federation represented, at its inception, 67 million workers from 55 different countries.<sup>1</sup> The presence of the British Trade Union Confederation (TUC), the American Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the Soviet All Union Central Council of Trade Unions (AUCCTU) of the USSR, the Chinese Federation of Labour and the Confederation of Workers in Latin America shows the political and ideological variety present in the organisation at the time of its establishment. With WWII ending, the organisation was not meant to last the cold war logics that were tacitly but rapidly leading to a decisive distancing of the various internal components. Already in 1949, the ecumenical afflatus of the WFTU was over. The western unions - that had most contributed to the souring of relations with the Soviet trade unions during the four years of common experience<sup>2</sup> - left the federation over quarrels about the Marshall plan, forming the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and leaving the federation in complete control of the Soviet Union. This created a rupture in the international trade union movement in accordance with the many divisions that echoed the polarisation around the Iron Curtain.

The case study of this thesis is the Italian labour movement in relation to this international history. We can draw a very clear parallel between the international and the Italian situations. During the Resistenza against fascism, all the parties opposing the regime, the so-called Committee for National Liberation (or CLN in Italian) supported the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (unitary CGIL). This trade union comprised factions linked to parties of different, and even opposing, ideologies. The main of which were: the Christian one, linked to the Christian Democratic party (DC); the communist faction, responding to the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI); the socialist one lead by the party Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI); the social democratic one of the Partito Socialista Democratico Italiano (PSDI) and the republican faction of the Partito Repubblicano Italiano (PRI).

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<sup>1</sup> The data was gathered from the WFTU website <https://www.wftucentral.org/history/> (acc. 18 apr. 2024)

<sup>2</sup> Weiler, 'The United States, International Labor, and the Cold War', 21.

The unified confederation was a very brief experience, and in 1948, along the lines of what was happening on the international level, the catholic faction and the secular one of the social democrats and the republicans, seceded and went on forming in 1950 two new unions, respectively the Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori (CISL) for the former and the Unione Italiana del Lavoro (UIL) for the latter. Many reasons stand behind this rupture, the main ones are to be found in the very different conception of trade unionism of these groups. Communist and socialist never believed in the possibility of a form of unionism that was apolitical, and ultimately saw it as the means for class struggle of the workers against the employers and the state, where trade unions had to serve the interest of the workers as a whole, and not only of their affiliates. On the other hand, CISL and the other unions sought to work as much as possible within the institutions and the new social order that was emerging in the West, consisting of the US model of development and ideology (of which the Marshall plan was, at the time, the symbol).<sup>3</sup>

The situation at the beginning of the decade following WWII therefore saw, on the international level, the presence of two main labour union institutions: the ICFTU, fully committed to the western block ideology and anticommunist sentiment; and the WFTU, which, with the exit of the western unions (with the notable exception of the Italian CGIL and French CGT) became fully controlled by the Soviet and non-aligned agenda. Thus, the labour movement too, both internationally and in the local Italian context, displayed the bloc divisions characteristic of the cold war. The CGIL, the biggest Italian trade union, entered the Italian post-war economic and industrial boom with only two of the original factions left.

If a consensus about labour union international relations can be gathered from the literature is that not enough has been written about it.<sup>4</sup> The lack of attention given by academia to international trade-union activity – and of labour history as a whole, is to be found, as Pasture argues,<sup>5</sup> in the idea that class struggle was considered a closed chapter at the end of the cold war in 1991. At the same time, Costa stresses that the underrepresentation of this field of study “[m]ay be explained [...] by the fact that the amount of attention devoted to such a policy (international relations policy in the context of trade unions) within the range of many national trade union organisation policies is far from what might be expected.”<sup>6</sup>

Geographical factors play a role too, since a large part of the debate has always been exquisitely European, therefore lacking serious attractiveness, especially in recent years.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, as Jouan<sup>8</sup> argues, the limits of the international relations of trade unions are to be found in their peculiar history, marked by the paradox of having to deal with a growing regional aspect, while deeply embedded in a national context. If solidarity has always been the main domain of international labour

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<sup>3</sup> Weitz, ‘XIV. The CGIL and the PCI’, 544; Iuso, ‘L’Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL’.

<sup>4</sup> Boito Júnior, *Política neoliberal e sindicalismo no Brasil*, 215.

<sup>5</sup> Pasture, ‘A Century of International Trade Unionism’, 278.

<sup>6</sup> Costa, ‘The Place of the International Relations Policy within National Trade Union Organisations’, 43.

<sup>7</sup> Hyman, ‘Shifting Dynamics in International Trade Unionism’, 140.

<sup>8</sup> Jouan, ‘European Integration and the Paradoxical Answers of National Trade Unions to the Crises of Capitalism’, 601.

intervention, the same cannot be said for the joint action of trade unions on a regional or global dimension, especially given that the driving role of the working class shifted from trade unions to parties at the turn of the 19th and 20th century<sup>9</sup>. In those crucial and defining years for labour, the international dimension was starting to fade as labour institutions and parties were getting recognized at the national level. At the same time, to tackle the rising appeal of socialist and communist parties, western governments implemented national reforms that provided better working conditions. This created a cycle in which unions recognized their effectiveness on the local level, therefore neglecting the international and focusing on domestic policies.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Munck supports the idea that even though “capital has always been mobile and the capital/wage-labour relation has never been hermetically contained within national boundaries,” the national dimension has prevailed in setting the industrial agenda until recently.<sup>11</sup> In their perspective, trade union internationalism is not an inevitable outcome of capital globalisation. On the contrary, it is a political project that has to be upheld and brought forward, as has been done unevenly and repeatedly since the 19th century.

The post-Fordist organisation of global capital brought a newfound reconciliation between the national and international dimensions where trade unions rediscovered the possibility of regional, if not global relations. It is interesting to note here the thesis brought upon by O’Brien.<sup>12</sup> According to O’Brien, the cold war was characterised by what Maier calls “politics of productivity.” Namely, the politics of productivity are the political practices that tamed labour and class conflict in western societies through the expansion of the welfare state, economic growth and productivity expansion. According to O’Brien, the intersection between national and international was to be found in the establishment of a series of institutions that backed the domestic consensus. Nevertheless, there was still room to pursue campaigns of political control and delegitimization also on a transnational level. In talking about the American situation, O’Brien goes so far in arguing that trade unions – specifically the American AFL-CIO – supported the US government “by actively undermining foreign labour activity premised upon more confrontational or redistributive principles.” This pairs with the export of the American model to other countries through monetary diplomacy, the Marshall plan and an absolute ban on left-wing parties coming to power.<sup>13</sup> This is particularly interesting for our thesis for a number of reasons. In the first place, this is a very US centred analysis, the scope of our thesis focuses on Europe where, during the cold war, behind the Iron Curtain wall, relations between East and West were far more complex and articulated. Even more so with trade unions, given their connection to the working class movements. Therefore, the explanation of labour being an instrument of the government does not quite convince in the Italian case, where the CGIL represented the biggest communist trade union in a western country. It is nonetheless relevant because of the central role the CISL, crafted and

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<sup>9</sup> Costa, ‘The Place of the International Relations Policy within National Trade Union Organisations’, 44.

<sup>10</sup> Stevis and Boswell, *Globalization and Labor Democratizing Global Governance*, 53.

<sup>11</sup> Munck, *Globalisation and Labour: The New ‘Great Transformation’*, 160.

<sup>12</sup> O’Brien, ‘Workers and World Order’, 535.

<sup>13</sup> Iuso, ‘L’Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL’; Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick, ‘Trade Unions, Politics and Parties’.

funded by the US played in the ideological shift of the CGIL.<sup>14</sup> This thesis also deals with the topic of European integration and the role of trade unions in this process. In particular with the formation of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), which had the ambition of uniting the region's social policies. The ETUC was established in 1973 by a number of different trade unions, all of them initially associated internationally with the ICFTU. It was then expanded in 1974 with the entrance of the Christian unions, who were adherents of the WCL, the Christian international confederation of labour, and the entrance of the CGIL. These entrances led to a greater ideological heterogeneity of the confederation.

The literature on this aspect is better supplied, especially in the last two decades where the integration process took a vertiginous acceleration. The rise of European social policy institutions can be understood from the standpoint of classical neo-functional integration theory as a sequence of discrete "spillovers",<sup>15</sup> where advancements in one policy area have sparked interdependent dynamics in adjacent ones. From this angle, one might consider the application of European social policy as an unintentional or unexpected consequence of market integration, aimed at rectifying distributional outcomes that are unjust and/or dysfunctional.<sup>16</sup> On a similar note, Jouan argues that a shift in the trade unions' perspective on internationalism happened around the 1970s: from an idealistic view on internationalism, in this case referring to European integration, to a more practical view on this topic.<sup>17</sup> The interconnectedness of the European countries' economies made clear that the problems arising were difficult to be dealt with at a national level. The perceived benefits of a unified regional market and institutions were the following: an easier means of cooperation to defend workers' rights between trade unions on the European level; unions would have more power to bring their instances upon a centralised institution; institutions that offered binding decisions and the opportunity to work in a fixed legal framework. Moreover, Jouan focuses on the national dimension as a driving force behind the endorsement of the European integration process by trade unions. In fact, this instrumental view of the European Economic Community (EEC) left behind trade union internationalism. The main goal was still to work within the framework of their own national labour market. At the same time, another part of the literature focuses on the limitations and weaknesses of the European integration movement from labour institutions. Firstly, as Di Donato points out, the socialist and social democratic forces started to make European integration as part of their political project with a substantial delay compared to centre-right and right-wing forces. From the 1950s through the end of the 1960s, the integration process was a purely right-wing affair, especially liberal and conservative, and those were the forces that contributed to shaping the institutions that were forming in those years. In the trade unions world, the situation was definitely different; the WFTU associates were strongly opposing the EEC and the

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<sup>14</sup> Gumbrell-McCormick, 'The International Trade Union Confederation', 248.

<sup>15</sup> Haas, *The Uniting of Europe*.

<sup>16</sup> Kiess and Seeliger, 'Editorial', 298.

<sup>17</sup> Jouan, 'European Integration and the Paradoxical Answers of National Trade Unions to the Crises of Capitalism', 603.



European single market.<sup>18</sup> Other limitations of trade union internationalism regarding European integration come from neo-institutional theory. According to Larsson cultural aspects play a major role in shaping transborder labour relations.<sup>19</sup> Elements such as language and cultural values contribute to shaping the way trade unions relate to each other on a regional and international level. For example, language itself is a powerful tool of framing and, therefore, hinder or assist transnational labour struggles. The cultural aspect is one of great interest in the topic of European social policy integration. If distinct value sets and industrial relations traditions exist across Europe and within national borders,<sup>20</sup> it is also true that there are shared European values,<sup>21</sup> and a pan-European trade union culture that sustained ideologically and historically the ETUC.<sup>22</sup> There are obviously limitations in giving an overly cultural analysis of the relations between trade unions; research shows that institutional differences like labour market regulations and power dynamics between unions and employers still have a greater impact.<sup>23</sup> It is important not to disregard a cultural dimension in our thesis. The shift of the CGIL highlights how there is only so much relevance that ideology has in shaping the international alignment, especially when we consider how much ideologised a communist trade union was during the cold war. It is extremely relevant here to give space to the aspects such as cultural affiliation, and the aforementioned pan-European trade union culture, as undoubtedly relevant pull factors in determining the fields and manoeuvres of union membership.

Lastly, we will focus on the historic and historiographical debates surrounding the CGIL's international and national dimension between the 1950s and the 1980s. The case of the Italian CGIL is one of great interest for academics of labour studies as it presents semi-unique conditions, especially when focusing on a period of time inscribable in the cold war era. This is because the trade union was strongly linked to the most important communist party in the western bloc, and had therefore also the biggest communist trade union associated with it.<sup>24</sup> The literature focuses on many aspects of the CGIL of those years. Maffei traces the origins of the soviet myth that spread rapidly across the peninsula after the fall of fascism.<sup>25</sup> He argues that the resilience and the extraordinary performance of the Soviet economy in withstanding the shock of confrontation with the Nazis had contributed to the idea of a concrete possibility of the existence of a communist and Marxist society. This idea spread rapidly among Italian socialists and communists. Again, according to the author, it took many decades

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<sup>18</sup> Bragatin, *Per l'unità sindacale mondiale*.

<sup>19</sup> Larsson, 'Cultural Obstacles in Transnational Trade Union Cooperation in Europe', 5.

<sup>20</sup> Andersson and Thörnqvist, 'Regional Clusters of Communication : Between National and European Identities'; Barbier, *The Road to Social Europe. A Contemporary Approach to Political Cultures and Diversity in Europe* Routledge; Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations*; Hyman, *Understanding European Trade Unionism: Between Market, Class and Society*; Klemm, Kraetsch, and Weyand, 'Solidarität in der europäischen betrieblichen Mitbestimmung als theoretische Herausforderung – ein kultursoziologischer Lösungsvorschlag\*'

<sup>21</sup> Inglehart and Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy*.

<sup>22</sup> Pernicka et al., 'When Does Solidarity End?'

<sup>23</sup> Larsson, 'Obstacles to Transnational Trade Union Cooperation in Europe—Results from a European Survey'.

<sup>24</sup> Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick, 'Trade Unions, Politics and Parties'.

<sup>25</sup> Maffei, 'All'origine del mito: 1944, la Cgil e l'URSS'.

to shatter this myth. Especially in the discovery of the Stalinist reality in the Soviet Union and the increasing frequency of popular uprisings and their repression. As argued by Carrieri, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the relation between the party and the trade union are marked by what the author calls “relational asymmetry,”<sup>26</sup> namely the structural subjugation of the trade union to the political party, due to factors peculiar to the Italian context’s development of socialist and communist actors and institutions. Iuso is not of the same opinion.<sup>27</sup> In their analysis, the author stresses a more autonomous reconstruction of the national and international dimension of the trade union. Iuso highlights the events by favouring a reading in which the party did not have much leeway to impose itself on the union, and by tracing the CGIL's autonomist path in a unified and unequivocal manner.<sup>28</sup> Other parts of the literature portray a different picture of the internal dynamics of those years. For example, Gabaglio, Ciampani, and Ciampani and Rosati all agree on the idea that internal struggles within the CGIL played a major role in those years.<sup>29</sup> Their historical reconstruction highlights the role of the socialist component.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, they also focus on the role that the other two main Italian trade unions, namely CISL and UIL, played in the shift of the CGIL to a more pro-European and western stance. These are part of an extensive section of Italian labour socialist literature that sees in the “socialist culture the linchpin of the renewal not only of industrial relations but also of political relations and many signs of modernisation in this country.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Maffei shows how the socialists were, already in 1944, very cautious in making concessions to Soviet propaganda.<sup>32</sup>

The picture that the literature gives us is a varied one. We gathered from it the idea of a complex landscape of theoretical standpoints from which we can analyse our topic of interest. The literature (or absence of it) on trade union diplomacy informs us on the need to maintain the national dimension in our analysis from which we have to move beyond to embrace a regional and international level of understanding. What we can also expand on, is the impact that the national dimension had on the choice of international affiliation. The literature seems to suggest that major international choices arise from the necessity of pursuing national interests. It is the regional dimension that we consider the most relevant for our thesis.

As we have seen in the very brief historical background, following the secession, the CGIL’S ideological ties became strongly connected with the soviet world, both nationally and internationally. At the same time, the international positions of the union were, in practice, uncritical acceptances of the decisions of the WFTU. The ties with the federation were strong, as shown by the fact that Di

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<sup>26</sup> Carrieri, ‘All’ombra della Federazione unitaria. I rapporti dei sindacati con i partiti e il sistema politico’, 64.

<sup>27</sup> Iuso, ‘L’Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL’.

<sup>28</sup> Iuso, 296.

<sup>29</sup> Ciampani and Rosati, ‘La Federazione Cgil, Cisl, Uil: la dimensione internazionale ed europea’; Gabaglio, ‘CGIL e FSM, un lungo addio’; Ciampani, ‘Italian Trade Unionism and the ETUC: In Favour of a European Social Actor’, 69.

<sup>30</sup> Ciampani, ‘Italian Trade Unionism and the ETUC: In Favour of a European Social Actor’, 69.

<sup>31</sup> Pepe, ‘Piero Boni, una vita per l’unità e il rinnovamento del sindacato’, 85

<sup>32</sup> Maffei, ‘All’origine del mito: 1944, la Cgil e l’URSS’.

Vittorio, the secretary of CGIL, became president of WFTU in 1949. Our work is set in this historical context to analyse the way in which the local and the global level interact in labour diplomacy, and what drives the behaviour of unions concerning international affiliations. In our specific case, the research question that guides us is the following: starting from the historical position of embeddedness in the soviet myth and anti-western ideology, **what are the causes and modalities of the ideological switch of the Italian trade union CGIL, from communism to reformism?**

Sub-research questions are the following: how did internal ideological conflicts within CGIL influence the move towards a centrist position? And how did the ideological transformation in the union's reference parties shape the CGIL. Did CGIL perceive the WFTU as becoming less effective or relevant in achieving its goals compared to the ETUC? The scope of the thesis is then to shed light on several academic debates. Firstly, regarding trade union diplomacy, specifically what determines the affiliation to an international centre. The analysis is going to focus on the reasons behind the shift, the impact a possible change of ideology had, or the need to pursue national interests; the extent to which the internal factions' competition played a role is also going to be examined. The second theme on which we will delve regards regional labour integration. Lastly, we will widen the historical and historiographical debate around Italian trade unionism. To do so, the thesis will be structured in a chronological sense. Within the chronological dimension of analysis, we will expand on different themes relevant to the evaluation of the conditions in which the shift of the CGIL occurred. We will look at a variety of sources connected to the CGIL's internal evolution, but also its international placement and the relations with the PCI. In addition to this, we will use primary sources concerning the ETUC, the WFTU and the CGIL. The primary sources come from the archives of the Italian Senate and the international institute of social history in Amsterdam.

The next chapter will focus on the years that go from the end of the unitary experience to the invasion of Budapest by the Warsaw pact forces. In this chapter the difference between the national and the international level will be strongly marked, as here stand the premises of the entire thesis and it is therefore necessary to expand largely on them. On the national level, the centre of our analysis is going to be the journey that allowed the CGIL a major agency and autonomy both from its political party of reference (the PCI) and the formation of the two factions within the union, the socialist and the communist one. On the international one, we will show how a first timid conception of regional agency started in those years, through a complicated and dialectical relationship with the European integration process. The third chapter spans from the end of the 1950s to 1968, a crucial year for our topic as it features the uprising of Prague and the progressive approach of Italian trade unionism on the wave of the 'global revolution' of 1968. In this chapter we will focus on the "loneliness" of the CGIL, in a moment of detachment from old positionings without, however, a new goal to pursue. This is the decade in which collaboration between the Italian trade unions, favoured by grassroots movements, opens the possibility of an institutionalisation of the CGIL among the European trade unions affiliated with the ICFTU. The fourth chapter will conclude the historical reconstruction by analysing the final years that led to the shift of the CGIL within the realm of western trade unionism,

with the entrance in the ETUC in 1974 and the change of status in the WFTU from “affiliate” to “associate,” prelude to its definitive exit in 1978. Finally, in the last chapter we will draw the conclusions of the thesis. We will argue that the shift was guided by the material conditions in which the CGIL was set. As a trade union embedded in a capitalist society, it was not possible to escape the need to confront it, especially with the European integration process. We will also reach the conclusion that the shift does not happen in total adherence of the CGIL to the western values, but on the contrary represents the conclusion of the reworking of the western capitalist economic system that it had decided not so much to embrace as to inevitably have to work within, and that it will manage to do without losing its identity.

# Chapter 2. 1948-1956: between constriction and autonomy

## 2.1 The national dimension

The years that go from the end of the unitary experience to the turning point of the Hungarian spring, are turbulent ones for the CGIL. The two main factions, the socialist and the communist one, were efficiently working together, especially because of the strong oppression the confederation was facing, due to the rampant anti-communism that sparked in the early days after WWII in the west. Stalin's crimes had not yet been exposed by the Khrushchev administration in the Soviet Union. The uncertainty over the palingenesis of the international order - which was unfolding rapidly in those years - had not yet led to a 'cooling down' of the prospects for war that would instead mark, with ups and downs, relations between the two blocs for the ensuing forty years. Our line of analysis on the internal front is going to look at two main aspects, in the national sphere, the role that the CGIL was building for itself as a trade union: its relations to the PCI and the PSI; the beginning of the definition of an autonomous course of action and the internal ideological dimensions, mainly between the communists and the socialists. We are then going to focus on the international dimension, our second macro line of analysis. Here we will display the positions that the confederation had towards the WFTU, in the period in which the Komintern was still under Stalinist ideology, and the nascent European integration. We will stress the often-overlooked nuance of the positions that stemmed within the confederation regarding the European process and the emerging dissatisfaction with the eastern bloc, to restore the complexity that necessarily lies behind historical processes that are affected by so many different implications.

In the immediate post-war period, Italy was in extreme social and economic conditions. Despite the fact that the elections of 1948 had shown a substantial political presence of the Popular Front (the communist and socialist coalition), the government had strong anti-communist stances and the grip of the allied forces on the country was still very strong, as shown by the occupation of Trieste by a temporary military government jointly chaired by the US, UK and New Zealand that ended only in 1954. The international and local scene was coming to terms with the new, highly polarised geopolitical order in which the Western and Eastern blocs were pitted against each other on economic, political and cultural issues. In this context, the CGIL and its internal factions, mimicked the cohesion of their respective parties. The main point of contention that the confederation absorbed from the

parties was the contrast to the European Recovery Plan (ERP). The ERP consisted not only in the deployment of loans and economic benefits, but also in the export of a model of industrial development characteristic of US capitalism.<sup>33</sup> This was one of the major points of dispute that led to the end of the unitary experience and profoundly marked post-war trade union approaches. Both CISL and UIL began their trade union activity trying to be the bridgehead of US programming in the peninsula, and to adapt it to the particularities of the Italian industrial situation. Moreover, the ERP did not come without cost to the member states, as the United States would not permit access to funds to governments that even had a communist or socialist presence within the majority, thus contributing to the political isolation of those parties ideologically anchored to Moscow.<sup>34</sup> These precarious political conditions drastically undermined the possibility of autonomy of the CGIL, that was, in those years, under direct control of the PCI. This was clearly shown by the strong representation that the PCI had at the factory level; it was the party that had the major ties with the worker, not the union.<sup>35</sup>

It is at first very important to understand the peculiar Italian context of leftist political parties and trade unions, specifically why political parties had so much control over their respective trade unions.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, we have to analyse the relations between these two actors, as it is in this relation that we can understand and assess the room for manoeuvre that the trade unions progressively managed to have thought time, expressing and developing their own agency in dealing with the labour market and – and this is what is crucial to our thesis – in their international dimension. The peculiarities of the Italian situation are expressed by Carrieri in what the author calls “relational asymmetry”,<sup>37</sup> and are constituted primarily of three points: firstly, the socialist and communist landscape in Italy saw the emergence of political parties prior to the one of trade unions and contributed to the creation of the unions. Unlike other parts of Europe, where unions gemmed from the individual decision of workers. Therefore, in the Italian case, the political parties retained the ideological and organisational tools of those trade unions, limiting from the start their autonomy. The second reason has to do with the context out of which trade unions emerged back in Italian society after the fascist years had outlawed free trade unionism outside of the dimension allowed by fascism. As mentioned in the historical reconstruction, the restoration of trade unions was a political act of the CLN that came out of the Pact of Rome (1944) where each party had its own representation.<sup>38</sup> This resulted in an absence of protests and strikes until the early post-war years. Moreover, Italian society lacked skilled trade unionists and the figures who went on to hold trade union posts at that early time were party cadres with little or no

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<sup>33</sup> Iuso, ‘L’Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL’; Di Donato and Moro, ‘PCI e socialdemocrazie europee da Longo a Berlinguer’.

<sup>34</sup> Iuso, ‘L’Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL’.

<sup>35</sup> Weitz, ‘XIV. The CGIL and the PCI’.

<sup>36</sup> These considerations work in part for the catholic trade unions too, but with some differences into which we will not delve here.

<sup>37</sup> Carrieri, ‘All’ombra della Federazione unitaria. I rapporti dei sindacati con i partiti e il sistema politico’, 64.

<sup>38</sup> A unified labour was functional, at that time, to the resistance movement against fascism and, in perspective, to the economic reconstruction of Italy. This resulted in an absence of protests and strikes until the early post-war years.

knowledge of the subject, lent out for a forced need of the moment. Luciano Lama himself - the future secretary of the CGIL from 1970 to 1986 - was designated by the party to his section of the CGIL. Lastly, the reason the political dimension prevailed over the unionist one lies in the weakness, due to the concurrence of things said so far, of the individual unions that were created after the breakdown of the unitary CGIL of which we gave a reconstruction above. None of the unions that came out of the unitary CGIL had the strength to actually impose themselves as independent and autonomous actors in the economic and political scene, if nothing else for the lack of membership that even the largest one of them (the CGIL) had. To continue with Carrieri, it is interesting to notice that the breakdown of the unitary CGIL shows a political prevalence in the motives, it was not grounded in strictly unionist terms.<sup>39</sup>

The relation between political parties and trade unions at the onset of the reconstruction period was therefore *de facto* marked by a tight control of the political component. It is here important to stress that these relations weren't based on a fixed and written set of rules and constitutions but were the result primarily of shared values and ideas. This created a fluid and flexible network, which was the ultimate reason that eventually made changes in the relationship possible.

For the post-unitary CGIL, these were the years of the so-called "transmission belt" where the union acted as a sounding board mainly for the PCI's demands against the government.<sup>40</sup> As the studies by Ceron and Negri show party-union or CGIL-PCI relationships was stronger than the rival internal faction, such as the PSI.<sup>41</sup> In fact, the PCI adhered to the Marxist-Leninist theory of the "transmission belt", which holds that the communist party should be the driving force behind party-union ties and that trade unions should only serve as the party's representative in the marketplace. Therefore, the PCI vehemently objected to any attempt by the CGIL to acquire additional autonomy. Moreover, Weitz gives a detailed reconstruction of what the labour situation was like in Italy in the early 1950s.<sup>42</sup> Much of the labour conquests that shape the contemporary market relations, and that were also present just a few years later, were setting up in those times. The very right to be present at factory level for trade unions was not guaranteed until the Workers Law of 1970.<sup>43</sup> Other forms of trade union pressure were seen, at the time, to tacitly comply with the *status quo*, therefore were not seen as a useful tool in those years for the CGIL. For example, collective bargaining was a prerogative of the CISL for the first half of the decade<sup>44</sup> as "[t]here were no open contract negotiations. Contracts were established for national economic sectors largely through uni-lateral decrees of management."<sup>45</sup> The climate of repression that communist forces were facing in the early years of the 1950s created a difficult environment for the unionists to develop an independent position that detached from the one

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<sup>39</sup> Carrieri, 'All'ombra della Federazione unitaria. I rapporti dei sindacati con i partiti e il sistema politico', 65.

<sup>40</sup> Weitz, 'XIV. The CGIL and the PCI', 545.

<sup>41</sup> Ceron and Negri, 'Trade Unions and Political Parties in Italy (1946–2014)'.

<sup>42</sup> Weitz, 'XIV. The CGIL and the PCI'.

<sup>43</sup> Calavita, 'Worker Safety, Law, and Social Change', 202.

<sup>44</sup> Iuso, 'L'Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL', 286.

<sup>45</sup> Weitz, 'XIV. The CGIL and the PCI', 546.

of the PCI. Moreover, the staggering economic conditions of the Italian economy in the years that preceded the economic boom witnessed in the late 1950s, shaped the agenda of the confederation, forcing it to focus on the national dimension.

Nonetheless, some considerations can be made on what can be described as an early practice of agency from the CGIL. The trade union started in those years to translate into practice their theoretical and ideological approach as a union of the working class, and not just of the members. This approach will profoundly characterise this union in the landscape of capitalist countries for a long time. This is manifested in the “Piano del Lavoro” (labour plan), an economic plan proposed in 1949 from the secretary general of the CGIL, Giuseppe Di Vittorio, to pull Italy out of the shallows of post-war reconstruction. Opposed by both Alcide De Gasperi (leader of the DC and Prime Minister of Italy at the time) and Palmiro Togliatti (leader of the PCI), consisting of a neo Keynesian approach,<sup>46</sup> bound in the context of a capitalist economy and not from a socialist perspective,<sup>47</sup> the plan can be seen as a first attempt to produce an autonomous analysis of the industrial and labour conditions of the Italian economy.<sup>48</sup> The plan will be a central element of the CGIL’s policy agenda until the mid-1950s.

In relation to the party-union ties, we have seen a still inflexible situation. The economic state of the country pressured the CGIL to focus on the precarious conditions of Italian workers. The forced compliance with the party directives was, on the one hand, the inevitable consequence of a political and labour environment that was not friendly for soviet aligned forces. On the other hand, an ideological set-up proper to the Marxist tradition that saw the trade union as an instrument of collective agitation subordinate to party interests. Still, a timid expression of agency can be traced to the Work Plan of 1949, that does not share the radical intransigent positions of the communist at the time, but already appears to have the lucidity of framing Italy’s economic, political and social course in what for historical contingencies was an inescapable certainty, namely to place the country in the context of the Western bloc. At the same time, what prevails is, on the one hand, the personalistic and isolated role of the Secretary General Di Vittorio, in the realisation of this endeavour. In addition, it seems that not only the political environment, but the economic one especially, did not allow for a refined analysis of contemporaneity. The wrecked conditions of the Italian industry, and the “economic miracle” of the 1950s and 1960s still far away, the weak industrial presence led the CGIL cadres to fear the risks of corporatism in an industry that was still far from being the heart of the peninsula’s economic engine.<sup>49</sup>

In the mid-1950s, the experience of the Italian Popular Front came to an end. There are several reasons that lead to this unfolding of events. For starters, both sides developed growing awareness of the ineffectiveness of the coalition – that was formally abandoned in 1948 following defeat in the first Republican election, but that was still effective *de facto*. The de-Stalinization operated by Khrushchev at the XX congress of the communist party in the Soviet Union, was the starting point for the socialist

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<sup>46</sup> Barbagallo, ‘Di Vittorio, la CGIL, il PCI tra piano del lavoro e cassa per il mezzogiorno’, 806.

<sup>47</sup> Rispoli, ‘1949-50, il Piano del lavoro di Giuseppe Di Vittorio’.

<sup>48</sup> Iuso, ‘L’Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL’, 289.

<sup>49</sup> Weitz, ‘XIV. The CGIL and the PCI’.



embrace of democracy as the preferred political form and the western bloc as their preferred ideological and economical placement.<sup>50</sup> The communists, on the other hand, still valued their alliance with Moscow, not without, however, recognising some critical issues.<sup>51</sup> The increasing differences in views regarding the USSR's socialist experience, were the premises of the split between the two souls of the Italian left; the diametrically opposed assessment of the events in Hungary in 1956 was, at the same time, the straw that broke the camel's back, and the arrival of two parallel paths that began in the early post-war period.<sup>52</sup>

When on the 25th of October 1956, the forces of the Warsaw pact stormed in the Hungarian capital, Budapest, to bring to an end the revolutionary experience of the socialist "heresy" led by Imre Nagy, the friction between the communists and the socialists came to a disruptive end. The majority of the socialists, led by Pietro Nenni, firmly condemned the bloodshed operated by the eastern bloc forces deciding to put an end to the relations with the Soviet Union, and restoring relations with the Social democratic parties with which ties were broken in the 1940s.<sup>53</sup> In the PCI the endorsement of the Warsaw pact repression of the Budapest uprising prevailed,<sup>54</sup> at least between the majority of the cadres and the members. Not only condemning the uprising but also all forms of wavering in support of Soviet action on the part of left-wing forces were seen as detrimental to the communist unity.<sup>55</sup> The CGIL presented within its cadres' ideological stances that were far from monolithic. It displayed varied opinions on the ideological relations with Moscow and the events in Hungary. Clearly, the socialist fringe played a leading role in shaping the union's position towards the events in Hungary. Nonetheless, the response from the communist side went in multiple directions. Di Vittorio himself, member of the PCI and at the time president of the WFTU, spoke against the invasion on multiple occasions.<sup>56</sup> But most importantly, the CGIL came with a joint statement on the 27th of October 1956 which read as follows:

"The confederal secretariat sees in these mournful events the historical and definitive condemnation of anti-democratic methods of government and political and economic direction, which determine the detachment between leaders and popular masses. Social progress and the construction of a society in which labour is freed from capitalist exploitation are only possible with the consent and active participation of the working class

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<sup>50</sup> Traldi, 'Le tradizioni europeiste nel PSI e nella SPD: (1976-1989)'.

<sup>51</sup> Di Donato and Moro, 'PCI E SOCIALDEMOCRAZIE EUROPEE DA LONGO A BERLINGUER', 67.

<sup>52</sup> Formica, 'Formica: tra Pci e Psi un gioco all'eliminazione reciproca', 201.

<sup>53</sup> Weitz, 'XIV. The CGIL and the PCI', 545.

<sup>54</sup> See Pietro Ingrao's, a prominent PCI leader, editorial on the newspaper "l'Unità" (the PCI newspaper) strongly condemning the uprising as an "attempt at reactionary restoration"  
[https://archivio.unita.news/assets/main/1956/10/25/page\\_001.pdf](https://archivio.unita.news/assets/main/1956/10/25/page_001.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> There were obviously different approaches within the camps. In the socialist camp, for example, the 'tankers' stood out, which remained faithful to the Moscow line.

<sup>56</sup> Iuso, 'L'Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL', 294; Bragatin, *Per l'unità sindacale mondiale*.

and the popular masses, a guarantee of the widest affirmation of the rights of freedom, democracy and national independence [...]”<sup>57</sup>

Di Vittorio himself will then publish a personal statement confirming the union position.<sup>58</sup> The “historical condemnation” seems to represent and recall the betrayal of expectations as a result of the openness to different types of socialism that Khrushchev had referred to during the 20th PCUS congress.<sup>59</sup> This stance taken by Di Vittorio was harshly criticised by the cadres of the communist party, and the leader was subject to an internal trial that led the secretary of the confederation to a tentative retraction for the sake of Italian communism.<sup>60</sup> Even if the distancing from the soviet action was publicly held by Di Vittorio, the fierce reaction showed by the party manifested different approaches within the PCI, on the one hand the orthodox line of Togliatti, strongly Leninist, linked to the Soviet swing; on the other the more heterodox line expressed by Di Vittorio, who neglected *realpolitik* for a more direct contact with the working class. Finally, on the 20th of November 1956 policy issues, and that the confederation should not take an official unified stance.<sup>61</sup> It was considered that, where and if necessary, an internal debate should be opened to try to reach a common point.

Moreover, despite the strong opposition that the two parties were facing (and led to a decline in membership in both the PCI and the CGIL) and the pressures that came from the anti-Soviet world, especially from the PSI members for a secession of the socialists from the CGIL, internal unity was salvaged, with just a few members of the trade union actually leaving. The reasons behind this more nuanced positioning of the CGIL can then be explained in the light of the situation we detailed until now. It is important to realise that in those years internal stability had a priority over an international setting, given the new challenges the communist unions were facing. The restored and upheld unity intertwined with the necessity of maintaining good relations with the socialist side; it came with the cost of a more autonomous socialist minority within the union. This was perfectly impersonated by the figure of Di Vittorio, prioritising the stability of the trade union.

## 2.2 Towards the formation of a regional consciousness

The events of 1956 are preparatory to the introduction of the foreign dimension of our analysis. In particular, the relations with the WFTU, which formed the background to those with communism and the European question that was emerging in those years. The international framework explains the

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<sup>57</sup> The text can be found online on the CGIL’s official website <https://www.cgil.it/la-cgil/la-nostra-storia/la-ripresa-sindacale-1955-1967-sfp20uoq> and on the archive on the PCI newspaper “l’Unità”, where it was originally published.

<sup>58</sup> Loreto, ‘La Cgil e lo «strappo» di Giuseppe Di Vittorio’.

<sup>59</sup> Di Donato and Moro, ‘PCI e socialdemocrazie europee da Longo a Berlinguer’.

<sup>60</sup> Loreto, ‘La Cgil e lo «strappo» di Giuseppe Di Vittorio’.

<sup>61</sup> CGIL, ‘Comitato Direttivo CGIL 20-21 Novembre 1956 verbali’.

distance from the CGIL's initial European project. Initially, the European project followed two matrices: the liberalisation of the markets, and regarding this, collaboration between CGIL and European social democratic and socialist trade unions; and the construction of a regional entity in an anti-communist function on American will and anti-German on French will.<sup>62</sup> This translates into a European process strongly marked by the entry of western states into NATO and the detachment from the countries of the Eastern bloc in order to avoid a German slide, with its consequent unification and strengthening. On this front, diametrically opposed to its own positions, it is difficult for the CGIL to enter contact and collaboration with other European trade unions that instead espouse this world view. These critical points will only be resolved at the turn of the decade with the events in Hungary.

As Traldi argues, the events of Hungary infused in the socialist and social democrats a renewed interest for Europe and the integration process.<sup>63</sup> In the case of the Italian PSI, the distance from the PCI and the definitive condemnation of the soviet ideology pushed them towards the western sphere of influence. As they argue further, these shifts served the socialists to propose themselves as viable candidates for government positions. Moreover, the Treaty of Rome (1957) was the first big occasion where socialists diverged from the Frontist programme. The PSI abstained from the vote on the EEC instead of opposing it like the PCI. The communist world, on the other hand, was starkly against the European integration process as it was unfolding (as shown by the opposition to the signing of the Treaty of Rome). However, as Di Donato and Moro clearly show, the PCI was also working for a joint action of the European left against common antagonising themes, namely the European Single Market (ESM) and NATO.<sup>64</sup> This was the consequence, they argue, of the effects that the XX Congress of the CPSU had on the PCI. If, on the one hand we saw the endorsement of the soviet action in Hungary, the idea of a “national way” to socialism inspired the Italian communists, and created henceforth several dilemmas on how to combine the geographical presence in capitalist Western Europe (and the kind of socialism that could arise from it) and ideological presence in the Soviet sphere. Regarding the relations with the WFTU, and more in general, with the international dimension, part of the literature has been extremely harsh in its assessment of the CGIL's slow detachment from the communist ideological camp,<sup>65</sup> but as we will see in this section, disagreements with the WFTU, although initially tentative, show how membership of Soviet political and trade union structures was already uncomfortable for the confederation, following the events in Hungary. Much can be gathered from the interventions of the CGIL delegates at the 4th WFTU Congress held in Leipzig in October 1957. The aim of the congress was to elaborate and take a stance on the unitary action of trade unions worldwide. Representing Italy there were: the aforementioned Di Vittorio, president of the WFTU and communist leader; Ferdinando Santi, leader of the socialist faction and Agostino Novella, future secretary general of the CGIL and communist representative. Despite the verbosity and propagandistic

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<sup>62</sup> Iuso, ‘L’Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL’, 289.

<sup>63</sup> Traldi, ‘Le tradizioni europeiste nel PSI e nella SPD: (1976-1989)’, 143.

<sup>64</sup> Di Donato and Moro, ‘PCI e socialdemocrazie europee da Longo a Berlinguer’.

<sup>65</sup> Ciampani and Rosati, ‘La Federazione Cgil, Cisl, Uil: la dimensione internazionale ed europea’; Ciampani, ‘Italian Trade Unionism and the ETUC: In Favour of a European Social Actor’; Gabaglio, ‘CGIL e FSM, un lungo addio’.

ceremoniousness typical of Soviet institutional functions, we can trace some themes of discontentment of the CGIL with the WFTU. The most overt ones come from Santi, but those from Di Vittorio and Novella are also extremely important. The topic of main antagonism that the Italian unionists bring to the congress has to do with the different “material conditions” that characterise the experiences of the Italian trade union compared to the rest of the participants, which represented the “underdeveloped, colonial, semi-colonial and socialist countries.” We can already see here the growing need for a regional dimension - recurrent theme of the thesis - of the WFTU action, that the CGIL considered vital to an efficient industrial action. Thus Di Vittorio<sup>66</sup>: “However, the great strength represented by our WFTU in the world should not lead us to ignore our weakness, which is the weakness of our trade union movement in most capitalist countries of Europe and North America [...]” and, “(t)hese problems [...] evidently arise differently in colonial and semi-colonial underdeveloped countries. [...] (The WFTU) has to examine the possibilities of a more accentuated articulation of its programme of action, that is, [...] through extremely generic indications or, on the contrary, whether this correspondence would not be more complete through the indication of differentiated objectives.”<sup>67</sup> From Santi this perspective turns into an actual praise of the western trade unions and an open criticism of the Hungarian events.<sup>68</sup> But it is regarding the process of European integration that the positions of the two organisations appear the most misaligned. Again, all three Italian delegates, each with their own methods and sensitivities, oppose the ideological opposition that the federation had towards the EEC and the European Community of Steel and Coal (ECSC), forcing themselves into a passive and sterile position in this process. Moreover, the CGIL shows a pragmatic and lucid analysis of the situation. We can see how the union, already marginalised in national politics, cannot afford to miss the train with History regarding an event that is considered inevitable and will shape class relations. Ferdinando Santi manifested his opinions on the development of European integration and the position that western trade unions of the WFTU (the CGIL and the French CGT) should hold towards the European single market. In his analysis we can find clear signs of friction with the trade union federation's excessive ideology strictness. Santi stresses the necessity to come to terms with what is now a fact, the European common market and in general the ongoing integration process. Two main arguments are expressed by Santi to why the WFTU should open collaboration with western trade unions that are ideologically distant from itself: the first instance regards the fact that European governments and industrial and economic enterprises are coordinating their actions to better exploit the future structure of the continent, and this calls for a necessary coordination of the trade unions to tackle the capital's project. At the same time, the single market is seen as a force that is going to drastically change the European economic structure (significant emphasis is put on the disruptions that the economic migration could have created), making regional collaboration between trade unions fundamental to ensure the defence of workers' rights and cannot, therefore, be simplistically and sterilely overlooked by the WFTU.<sup>69</sup> As Santi puts it: “we may

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<sup>66</sup> Di Vittorio, ‘Intervento di Giuseppe Di Vittorio’, 47.

<sup>67</sup> Novella, ‘Intervento di Agostino Novella’, 83.

<sup>68</sup> Santi, ‘Intervento di Ferdinando Santi Segretario della CGIL’, 73.

<sup>69</sup> Santi, 71–77.

ignore it (the ECSC) as Comrade Saillant does, but the miners and steelworkers of the countries concerned cannot ignore it.”<sup>70</sup> It is important to note that in Santi’s contribution (and the other delegates’ one as well), the EEC and in general the European integration process is strongly criticised as an attempt of “monopolies and their governments to safeguard and extend their class privileges.”<sup>71</sup> What stands out, even in this context, is once again the CGIL’s class union approach, which sees support and collaboration with the ICFTU unions as a double necessity both practical and ideological. On the one hand, the pragmatism of conceiving the need to contrast the capital cartel with a regional trade union centre; in the European reality where the WFTU unions were in a clear minority. Moreover, the need to confront the technological progress of western capitalism, and to use it in favour of the working class. Secondly, the idea that it will be the improvement of the material conditions of the working class that will develop the class consciousness of the latter. Consequently, collaboration with western trade unions is seen as preparatory to the advance of socialism.

Seen with a closer lens, the immediate post-war years display a more complex outline of the CGIL. Those years coincided with the height of the cold war tension in which the two superpowers were still within a process of “territorial, cultural and economic expansion” that left very little room for the peripheries of the empires of decision-making autonomy, compressing in a bipolar logic the impulses that societies expressed. Nonetheless, timid signs of action can be seen in the CGIL. On the internal front, those years lead to a major autonomy. At the turn of the 1950s, the political situation started to stabilise. The progressive de-escalation that unfolded between the east and the west in conjunction with the de-Stalinization operated by Khrushchev in the USSR, and the election of John Fitzgerald Kennedy in the oval office, gave more room for manoeuvre to social and political actors in Italy. At the same time, the PCI itself was pushing for a more independent trade union. The PCI was facing organisational and membership problems and saw a stronger and autonomous union as an asset for them to support and relaunch the party itself.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, the growing competition from the other unions, i.e. CISL and UIL, symbolically embodied by the CGIL’s loss of the majority of seats to the CISL in the internal committees in the FIAT Mirafiori factories in Turin (1955), shook the union leadership, and urged it to dynamize the institution.<sup>73</sup> Finally, the relations with the socialist component urged the CGIL for a new course of action. The avoided schism came at the cost of a major autonomy of the socialist component, and thus of the whole confederation.

Also on the international front, the Italian communist world started to present some cracks. The strong association with the soviet bloc was already conflicting with the geographical and cultural position of the trade union, which inevitably led them to reckon with the presence in a capitalist West on the verge of a massive industrial transformation.

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<sup>70</sup> Santi, ‘Intervento di Ferdinando Santi Segretario della CGIL’.

<sup>71</sup> Di Vittorio, ‘Intervento di Giuseppe Di Vittorio’, 49.

<sup>72</sup> Weitz, ‘XIV. The CGIL and the PCI’, 550.

<sup>73</sup> CGIL, ‘Comitato Direttivo CGIL 26-28 Aprile 1955 verbali’.

## Chapter 3. 1956-1968. A departure without destination

At the turn of the 1950s, the CGIL was gaining momentum in the Italian labour scene, as a more autonomous trade union. This was due, as we saw earlier, to a concurrence of facts that lessened the ties with the party inside and outside the national borders. The renovated position of the CGIL came to be along the side of a renewed cooperation with the other two trade unions: CISL and less relevantly, UIL. What is important to outline is the transformations that happened concurrently in the Italian labour movement and opened the possibility of a newfound cooperation strongly based in the factory and distanced from the parties. A long walk towards more autonomy and connection to the grass-root organisations within the unions and to member unions that sublimated into the “global revolution” of 1968.<sup>74</sup> Although not exclusive to the Italian scene, the Italian specificity in the protests of 1968, consisted in the greater extension, duration and intensity of the conflicts and in the more profound changes that they provoked in the labour organisations.<sup>75</sup> We cannot delve here in the details of the transformation within the CISL or the struggles of 1968. We will therefore briefly dwell on the most relevant aspects of this decade for our analysis.

The end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s represented years of renovation for the CISL too.<sup>76</sup> The confederation saw a progressive secularisation of the union, particularly from the rank-and-file member unions. These member unions developed a new young leadership that questioned and criticised the confederation’s leadership on the basis of its dogmatic pro-government, pro-DC and anticommunism (CGIL). The decade had opened with the experience of a government that saw for the first time the participation of socialists: the so-called “organic” centre left. The main programme of the government consisted in the elaboration of a five years plan to redistribute the wealth produced during the economic boom. The exclusion of the CISL from the negotiations on the plan, combined with the laxity of the leadership of the CISL towards the government’s action, created great discontent in the unions’ grassroots. Specifically, in a new generation of workers and unionists that was forming in the metalworker's union of the confederation, the Federazione Italiana Metalmeccanici (FIM): the so-called “innovators.”<sup>77</sup> It is important to state that the economic miracle

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<sup>74</sup> Palaia, ‘La Cgil e il Pci fra violenza terroristica e radicalità sociale (1969-1982)’; Weitz, ‘XIV. The CGIL and the PCI’.

<sup>75</sup> Palaia, ‘La Cgil e il Pci fra violenza terroristica e radicalità sociale (1969-1982)’, 42.

<sup>76</sup> Weitz, ‘XIV. The CGIL and the PCI’.

<sup>77</sup> Weitz.

in Italy mainly affected the automotive, steel and chemical industries, therefore empowering the metalworker's member unions of all the confederations.<sup>78</sup> This applies for the CGIL too, where the Federazione Italiana Operai Metallurgici (FIOM), saw their membership grow up to 300.000 in 1963. This bottom-up push defied the previous differences between the CISL and the CGIL, specifically in union struggle tactics, and took all union and party leaderships completely off guard. But the deep motivations behind the turbulent decade were tied to the new conditions that were unravelling in the industrialised north of Italy. A new generation of workers – migrants from the South of the country that had fled a region that had barely been touched by industrialisation – was facing extreme conditions both in and outside the factories. Factory management was geared towards maximising production: very long shifts, close supervision of workers<sup>79</sup> and precarious working conditions represented the daily routine of factory work. Outside the factory, these migrants lived in ghettos, on the margin of a society where the cultural division between the North and the South is still present to this day. In this new scenario, the trade unions appeared to be unprepared, and a rift was created between the working class and trade union worlds. This discontent was channelled and used by the young leadership of the metalworkers' unions. This generation had not witnessed the years of the trade union split and was far from that 'modus operandi,' more political and less syndicalist. They were guided by the concrete conditions of workers that were getting radicalised on the need of better conditions and a serious contraposition to capitalism. These mutations affected the FIM, which for the first time, came to assume positions closer to the ones of a class union.<sup>80</sup> The first joint strike FIM-FIOM took place in 1962.<sup>81</sup> By 1964, the slogans during the protests were calling for "trade union unity." In the biennium 1968-69, after 20 years, CGIL, CISL and UIL came back to march together.

Within the confederation and the PCI, these events initially upset the leadership. In the CGIL, however, the struggle between a centralised approach, that wanted the bargaining as a confederal prerogative, and one focused on maintaining a role guide including and incorporating the bottom-up thrust, was resolved with the victory of the latter. The same cannot be said about the PCI. The party leadership was more cautious to open to this new wave of radicalism.<sup>82</sup> If on the one hand, the party leadership feared a detachment from the grassroots that could lead to a downfall in the electoral consensus,<sup>83</sup> on the other hand, they were afraid that the excessive radicalism brought by these protests could jeopardise the efforts made by the party in those years to achieve a progressive institutionalisation of the PCI, looking ahead to a possible collaboration in government with the DC.<sup>84</sup> This created a larger rift between the party and the movements, than the one with the CGIL, opening

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<sup>78</sup> Palaia, 'La Cgil e il Pci fra violenza terroristica e radicalità sociale (1969-1982)'.

<sup>79</sup> The dismissal of a worker who was reading a book by Marx during his lunch break was emblematic of this. "*Praetor rehabilitates the worker. For two books by Marx he was suspended from work.*" in "il Giorno" 17 October 1965.

<sup>80</sup> Palaia, 'La Cgil e il Pci fra violenza terroristica e radicalità sociale (1969-1982)'.

<sup>81</sup> Weitz, 'XIV. The CGIL and the PCI'; Palaia, 'La Cgil e il Pci fra violenza terroristica e radicalità sociale (1969-1982)'.

<sup>82</sup> Perrone, 'Il PCI e i movimenti di contestazione: un rapporto di incontro-scontro (1968-69)'.

<sup>83</sup> Palaia, 'La Cgil e il Pci fra violenza terroristica e radicalità sociale (1969-1982)', 52.

<sup>84</sup> Perrone, 'Il PCI e i movimenti di contestazione: un rapporto di incontro-scontro (1968-69)', 48.

for another step towards the union's major autonomy: in 1969, the CGIL approved the motion of incompatibility of offices between trade union and politics.<sup>85</sup>

The path that was underway in the Italian public arena influenced and was influenced by the unfolding of the events that characterised the 1960s on the international level. In the case of European integration, the early reservations that the union had maintained, albeit with the complexities we reported in the previous chapter, began to be increasingly resolved. The European level was therefore also marked by a cooperative effort of the Italian trade unions to march together, encouraged by the effectiveness of their joint battles on the national arena. This situation paired increasingly with the realisation of a substantial difference with a WFTU that was deaf to the requests of the peculiarities of western communism. The evolution of the geopolitical situation in the 1960s, contributed to hinder the soviet institutions that faced attacks from the communist world itself (i.e. China and Yugoslavia). Lastly, 1968 was another turning point in both the national and international level: the "Brezhnev doctrine" and the invasion of Czechoslovakia, ended the hopes of possible autonomous particularistic developments of the different communist traditions with the assent of Moscow. In this complex situation, in the span of the decade, the CGIL tried to develop an autonomous position but found itself pressured by two opposing ideologies without the sufficient strength to give a political direction of its own.

In the 1960s, the debate over the European integration within the CGIL reached a lucid and critical elaboration of the union's position in relation to the process. Despite parts of the literature undermining such internal debates by stressing the instrumental nature of the confederation's shift in the attitude towards Europe,<sup>86</sup> a closer look at the archival documentation shows a different situation. In 1963, after a conference held in Leipzig by the WFTU on the consequences of the common market, the CGIL expressed clear discontent with the approach adopted by the world federation. During the union's following executive committee, Lama tackles and develops several topics that were already present in 1957 and accrued in those years.<sup>87</sup> The themes presented here are the starting point of the CGIL's action on the international level in the decade and are expressed by other exponents too. They revolve primarily around three main points: the positive assessment of the European integration process, not in its actual form, but in its possible outcomes; the need for a more pragmatic approach towards said process by both the WFTU and the "free trade unions" both; and the reiteration of the fundamental points of action of the CGIL as a class and all-workers' union with special reference to the decolonisation struggle. On the last point, it is worth pausing for a moment because it clarifies the reworking of the positions that the CGIL will take towards the European integration process and the shift away from the WFTU. Going back to Lama's speech at the executive committee, the soon-to-be secretary general addresses the current situation in the European integration process, which was facing,

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<sup>85</sup> Palaia, 'La Cgil e il Pci fra violenza terroristica e radicalità sociale (1969-1982)'.

<sup>86</sup> Ciampani and Rosati, 'La Federazione Cgil, Cisl, Uil: la dimensione internazionale ed europea'; Ciampani, 'Italian Trade Unionism and the ETUC: In Favour of a European Social Actor'; Gabaglio, 'CGIL e FSM, un lungo addio'.

<sup>87</sup> CGIL, 'Comitato Esecutivo CGIL 11-12 Marzo 1963 verbali'.



at the time, a backlash because of the Gaullist opposition of the United Kingdom's entrance in the EEC. Lama proves great foresight in correctly evaluating this as a momentary lapse, and actually stressing the importance of a joint action against the personalism of de Gaulle's interpretation of European politics. The disagreements with France went far beyond the latter events. The integration process resulted in the participation of France with the entirety of its colonies. This was considered unacceptable as one of the founding points of CGIL's action in the international sphere was to develop the fight against colonialism and a direct help to the trade unions of developing countries to fight against the colonial powers.<sup>88</sup> This original international afflatus was developed in close concordance with the Third Worldist work of the Soviet Union and the French CGT,<sup>89</sup> but was soon abandoned in the 1950s by the Italian union in favour of a closer attention on Europe.<sup>90</sup> Nonetheless, the anti-colonisation movement remained one of the cardinal points of CGIL's ideological mission.<sup>91</sup> This tension fully manifests the uniqueness of the trajectory the confederation undertook since the end of the unitary experience in 1948. The point that was the most stressed was the class struggle nature of the trade union, intended as a platform to better the condition of the entire working class (with the perspective of the world). Far from being a utopian ideal, the CGIL intended that struggle as a pragmatic approach to face the shifts that were happening in the geopolitical and economic sphere. The practical circumstances forced the union to focus on the European dimension as that was seen as the most tangible area of intervention but also the one with the greatest potential benefits to create a class conscious in the highly technologized West. Compressed in the post-war ideological assessments and approaches, the CGIL was forced to elaborate a unique perspective that never betrayed this starting point of ecumenic struggle for all. The same 1963 appears to be a relevant year for the definition of the union's position on Europe. The debates around European integration focused on the necessity to distance from WFTU's propagandistic positions on the EEC, and as mentioned before, to a need of a more pragmatic approach to a continental trade union action.<sup>92</sup> In a speech of the same year, Santi manifests all the limitations of an active continental participation of the CGIL due to the ideological misconceptions that saw a prejudicial blocking of free trade unions to the CGIL.<sup>93</sup> More specifically:

“(T)his stemmed from the fact that the idea of Europe had grown in the hottest phases of the Cold War and, for this reason, was destined to take on, in parallel with the close

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<sup>88</sup> Siracusano, ‘Trade Union Education in Former French Africa (1959–1965)’.

<sup>89</sup> For a closer look at labour relations between communism and West Africa see <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2020.1815185> and Siracusano, Gabriele “La fine di un miraggio politico : lo sguardo del PCI e del PCF sull’Africa subsahariana francofona indipendente (1960--1984) : nuove visioni e prospettive africane dei comunisti occidentali” in *Centre d'histoire sociale des mondes contemporains*.

<sup>90</sup> Siracusano, ‘Trade Union Education in Former French Africa (1959–1965)’.

<sup>91</sup> Ciampini and Rosati, ‘La Federazione Cgil, Cisl, Uil: la dimensione internazionale ed europea’; Iuso, ‘L’Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL’.

<sup>92</sup> CGIL, ‘Comitato Esecutivo CGIL 22-23 Gennaio 1963 verbali’; CGIL, ‘Comitato Esecutivo CGIL 11-12 Marzo 1963 verbali’.

<sup>93</sup> Iuso, ‘L’Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL’. Devinat, ‘A Cold War Thaw in the International Working Class Movement?’, 353.

relationship established between Europe and NATO, connotations of ideological opposition towards Eastern Europe and, internally, of closure: towards certain trade union forces. Such a situation had not allowed the European institutions themselves to be constituted and function in clear terms of the social, economic and political content and aims of the European unitary idea.”<sup>94</sup>

This was certainly true, given the directives that came from the ICFTU Executive Board that prohibited any relation of the member unions, at first with unions from “dictatorship countries” and shortly later, with “communist controlled trade unions such as WFTU-affiliated organisations in France and Italy.”<sup>95</sup> At the same time, in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, the more relaxed geopolitical climate allowed for “western trade unions [...] to engage in contacts with their communist counterparts.”<sup>96</sup> Far from being a coherent action, this manifests, on the one hand, the looseness of the directives of both international trade union centres sought to impose on their members, on the other hand, the desire from both sides for a joint action. This took initially the shape of the inauguration of the permanent joint office CGIL-CGT in Brussels in 1967, fostered also by the result within the WFTU congress, as we will see further. This can be seen as a symbolic event. Firstly, because of the limited extent of the syndical action in the EEC in those years. Trade unions had only a consultative power and not an active decision-making role. This was true both for the experience of the joint office and for the European Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ECFTU), i.e. the regional branch of the ICFTU, closely tied to the European institutions. Secondly, because it displayed the very different European approaches of the two unions. If the CGIL saw this as a territory for confrontation and dialogue, where it could bring forward demands in concert with the European trade unions, albeit within the limits of its own trade union approach; for the CGT this was, in full Soviet ideological compliance, a strategic point to attack the European institutions.<sup>97</sup>

This newly found approach towards Europe, intertwined with the changes that were unfolding in the WFTU. Along the lines of a rupture within communist world, where old (Yugoslavia) and new (China) rivalries were affecting the soviet leadership, during the 1960s, as hinted above, in the CGIL a path towards autonomy from Soviet ideological constraints started in 1956 came to maturity. This was the decade of the confederation’s attempted reformism within the international centre, which was to fail in conjunction with the Prague Spring and the final realisation of a fundamental incompatibility in trade union action and democratic principles with the WFTU. Moreover, during the student and workers protest of 1968, the demonstrators were clearly refusing the soviet model, and embracing a Third Worldist revolutionary mythology that saw in Mao Zedong a prominent figure,<sup>98</sup> thus, creating a new problem for the leadership to remain rooted in its base.

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<sup>94</sup> Iuso, ‘L’Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL’.

<sup>95</sup> Devinatz, ‘A Cold War Thaw in the International Working Class Movement?’, 354.

<sup>96</sup> Devinatz, 354.

<sup>97</sup> Iuso, ‘L’Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL’, 305.

<sup>98</sup> Di Donato and Moro, ‘PCI e socialdemocrazie europee da Longo a Berlinguer’.

As Devinatz argues,<sup>99</sup> “the WFTU’s internal politics reveal[ed] a polycentric nature of the organisation in the period spanning nearly a decade from the early to mid-1960s through the early 1970s.” The Italian CGIL was in the forefront of this polycentricity, as we have seen, because of the need for a more autonomous regional perspective. Moreover, the union stressed its critical positions on the state of the working class in socialist regimes, picking up on themes already exposed in the aftermath of the Budapest invasion. In this sense, in the WFTU Congresses of Moscow (1961), Warsaw (1965), Budapest (1969) we can see the evolution of this rift. The congress in 1961, although not so agitated in its manifestations, saw its first explicit and public criticism of the WFTU.<sup>100</sup> The criticism that came from the Italian delegation (composed of Novella, Santi and the communist secretary Luciano Romagnoli) revolved around the usual topics of the need of major autonomy of the regional component, and a closer cooperation between East and West. The CGIL forwarded 20 amendments to the draft proposal, and all were rejected.<sup>101</sup> Nonetheless, the delegation decided to vote in favour of the proposal, while expressing serious reservations.

It is in the Warsaw congress of 1965 that all the contrasts surface within the federation for the first time since the split in 1949.<sup>102</sup> This, once again, highlights the “polycentric nature of the organisation” as the field of contrasts are multiple and involve the different approaches that socialism developed in the post war period; it also manifested the limitations of the soviet role as a unitary guide of these processes. The Sino-Soviet tensions overshadowed a proper trade union debate. Nonetheless, the congress managed to modify some of the congressional documents. The Italian delegation valued most positively the paragraphs on the autonomy of the FSM from governments and parties - destined in reality to remain pure petitions of principle - and the concrete acceptance of its proposals on the need to 'articulate' the confederal structure by reducing its centralism, as well as to 'ensure the coordination of trade union action by homogeneous areas'. This last point was of particular relevance for the CGIL as it legitimised its initiative with reference to the European Community, all the more so after the CGT, on the fringe of the congress work, revising its previous positions, declared itself available to collaborate to this end.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, even in the modalities of the discussions we can reveal changes. The secretary Lama, in his speech denounces a rift with the WFTU of some members of the CGIL. Unity was salvaged with an internal ballot that saw 25 to 10 members voting in favour of continuing the affiliation.<sup>104</sup> Nonetheless, the congress saw other heated discussions with delegates leaving the chamber during the speeches of their rivals or outright insults shouted from the stands

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<sup>99</sup> Devinatz, ‘A Cold War Thaw in the International Working Class Movement?’, 358.

<sup>100</sup> ICFTU, ‘International Confederation of Free Trade Unions Executive Board, Brussels, Agenda Item 21: Report on the WFTU Moscow Congress’; Gabaglio, ‘CGIL e FSM, un lungo addio’.

<sup>101</sup> ICFTU, ‘International Confederation of Free Trade Unions Executive Board, Brussels, Agenda Item 21: Report on the WFTU Moscow Congress’, 3.

<sup>102</sup> Devinatz, ‘A Cold War Thaw in the International Working Class Movement?’

<sup>103</sup> ICFTU, ‘International Confederation of Free Trade Unions Executive Board, Brussels (February 1-3), Agenda Item 22: Report on the WFTU Warsaw Congress’; Devinatz, ‘A Cold War Thaw in the International Working Class Movement?’; Gabaglio, ‘CGIL e FSM, un lungo addio’.

<sup>104</sup> ICFTU, ‘International Confederation of Free Trade Unions Executive Board, Brussels (February 1-3), Agenda Item 22: Report on the WFTU Warsaw Congress’, 14.

against the speakers at the time.<sup>105</sup> What was strongly starting to manifest, was the need for a radical change but the inability of the Soviet leadership, who still had a strong grip on the federation's direction, to implement those changes requested by several parties.

It was, however, in the last congress of the decade, held in Warsaw in 1969, that the apex of the tension was reached, in conjunction with the Soviet repression of the Prague uprising of 1968. In a report for the ICFTU, it was stated that “(the CGIL) [was] likely to figure prominently in any controversy (...)”<sup>106</sup> Along the side of the usual points of contestation that were growing ever stronger, but were not sorting any major effects, the Italian delegation represented the main opposition to the attempt of the soviet leadership to change the official position of the federation in regard to the invasion of Czechoslovakia of the year before. Indeed, shortly after the invasion, contrary to what happened for Hungary in 1956, the cadres of the WFTU promptly issued a statement denouncing the military aggression, with the notable exclusion of the soviet delegate. This was mainly due to the actions of the then General Secretary Saillant and President Bitossi, who were already critical of the federation's soviet structure.<sup>107</sup> The retirement of Saillant, and the passing away of Bitossi, both in the time between the events of Prague and the VII congress, created the chance for the Soviets to obtain the withdrawal of the statement. Initially, this line failed but the weight of the soviet-aligned unions (including the CGT) was too prominent, and eventually led to the federation's normalisation of the relations with the new Czechoslovakian unions.<sup>108</sup>

The conclusions we can draw from this decade is, on the one hand, the growing discontent of the union with its international affiliation, but on the other, the impossibility still for it to drift away from it. We can see the two factions expressing different, in some moments, sparkingly opposing views. With the socialists more than once openly asking, at the national congress, the disaffiliation from the WFTU, also due to the ideological pressure that the European socialist world applied to the trade unionists of the CGIL; while in the communist current it was more difficult to embrace a clear break with that movement which, in ways and formulas that were not always homogeneous and perfectly coincidental, nevertheless represented an ideological compass, although no longer a moral one,<sup>109</sup> thanks also to the timid concessions that the federation seemed to offer the CGIL during that decade. However, in practice, the socialist current will never bring about a true centrifugal thrust. Partly because it was itself much more internally diverse than much of the literature has been willing to account for. In another part, because even the communist majority, as we have seen, was aware of and carried out structural criticism in the international arena. This is because a valid alternative was still not yet present. In this sense, the 1960s represent a unique moment for the CGIL: new internal

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<sup>105</sup> Devinatz, ‘A Cold War Thaw in the International Working Class Movement?’

<sup>106</sup> ICFTU, ‘International Confederation of Free Trade Unions Executive Board, Brussels October 1969, Agenda Item 23: Report on the WFTU Budapest Congress’.

<sup>107</sup> Devinatz, ‘A Cold War Thaw in the International Working Class Movement?’; ICFTU, ‘International Confederation of Free Trade Unions Executive Board, Brussels October 1969, Agenda Item 23: Report on the WFTU Budapest Congress’.

<sup>108</sup> Gabaglio, ‘CGIL e FSM, un lungo addio’.

<sup>109</sup> Iuso, ‘L’Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL’.

interpretations, a new international set-up, and renewed internal and regional mayoral collaboration, opened the door to the turning point of the 1970s.

## Chapter 4. 1969-1974. Looking West for an arrival point

This chapter represents the end of our journey. The 1970s are the decade in which the shift of the CGIL came to completion with the Varna congress in 1973 and entry into the ETUC the following year. If, on the ideological level, the shift was already possible, due to the deterioration of the relations with the WFTU, in practical terms this was the result of the definitive institutionalisation of the CGIL among the western unions. This happened, in the “long wave” of 1968, thanks to the federation between the CGIL, CISL and UIL; decisive in establishing the confederation as a reliable interlocutor among the European trade unions.

In history, some years are particularly emblematic and contain a number of relevant events: 1972 is one of those years for our thesis. Three are the main events relevant for our analysis: the formation of the federation of CGIL, CIS and UIL; the election of Enrico Berlinguer as PCI secretary and the talks for a new, independent European confederation.

Regarding the first one, starting from the joint effort of the incompatibility of offices between trade unions and politics in 1969, which was fostered by all Italian trade unions, the federation process of the Italian trade union centres strongly intensified. In 1970, the joint meeting between CGIL, CISL and UIL started discussing the features and the possibilities of a united union. Among the discussions regarding the federation, the international affiliation was one of the most problematic.<sup>110</sup> The initial prospect was of an “organic unity,”<sup>111</sup> between the trade unions. Regarding the international side, the CGIL proposed the disaffiliation of all of the unions to their international centres, in favour of a new European collaboration.<sup>112</sup> This option was contrasted by CISL and UIL, which could not see themselves outside of their international western frame of reference. Having discarded the option of an organic unity, the question about international affiliation for the moment lost its relevance, as it was possible for the unions to stay within their original international trade union centres: after three years of debates and discussions, the Federation of CGIL, CISL and UIL was formed in 1972.

Secondly, in 1972, the PCI elected Enrico Berlinguer as secretary general of the PCI. Berlinguer was at the head of the “reformist” wing of the party, former promoter of the recognition in

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<sup>110</sup> Ciampani and Rosati, ‘La Federazione Cgil, Cisl, Uil: la dimensione internazionale ed europea’.

<sup>111</sup> “Organic unity” meant their dissolution to create a new single trade union centre.

<sup>112</sup> Gabaglio, ‘CGIL e FSM, un lungo addio’.

Moscow of the particularism of Italian Communism.<sup>113</sup> As the main advocate of “Eurocommunism,” Berlinguer will usher in a new era of the Communist Party that will see Europe as a possible alternative to block schematism,<sup>114</sup> and, most importantly, that will also lead to the definitive break with the USSR in the second half of the decade.<sup>115</sup>

In these years, Europe became the centre of the *détente* within the cold war. The aforementioned “Eurocommunism” and the *Östpolitik* led by the German SPD chancellor Willy Brandt, are just two examples of a new regionalism that invaded the old continent in those years. The free trade unions of the ECFTU and the Christian ones of the EO-WCL<sup>116</sup> agreed on the need to implement regional union representation, by a heterogeneous institution. In 1972 they formally agreed on forming, the year after, a new unitary confederation decoupled from their original international unions. Initial difficulties and disagreements rose within the ICFTU because of the fear of the non-European unions would entail a shift of the continent’s unions from the ICFTU. Even more so after the AFL-CIO left the confederation in 1969 in response to the *Östpolitik* launched by the German DGB and other unions that started a dialogue with the communist unions.<sup>117</sup> For this reason, the ETUC was founded by the 16 national confederations of the ECFTU. A year later, the original plan was fulfilled with the entrance of the Christian unions in a special congress.

The formation of the ETUC was well seen in the CGIL.<sup>118</sup> It represented the much-longed unitary European institution that the CGIL wanted as a place of regional union representation. Even if established within the Western alignment, and with the anti-communist tendencies all but dormant, the ETUC presented itself since the beginning as autonomous and unitary.<sup>119</sup> This development of events led to a definitive stance on the changed international context for the CGIL. During the works of the VIII congress of the union, held in Bari in 1973, the internal struggles between socialists and communists once again saw the union split between the possibility of a definitive distancing from the WFTU (wanted by the socialists) and the possibility of keeping the affiliation with the federation.<sup>120</sup> The times were not yet ripe for a total disaffiliation from the WFTU, but the decisions taken in the congress set the basis for the inevitable distancing from the soviet world. In the article 3 of the union’s statute following the congress, it was stated the need to “to seek an understanding with the trade union centres of the European Common Market countries”<sup>121</sup> and to “facilitate [...] trade union unity at the European level as a contribution to international trade union unity.”<sup>122</sup> It also stated the WFTU

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<sup>113</sup> Di Donato and Moro, ‘PCI E SOCIALDEMOCRAZIE EUROPEE DA LONGO A BERLINGUER’.

<sup>114</sup> Di Donato, ‘The Cold War and Socialist Identity’; Di Donato and Moro, ‘PCI E SOCIALDEMOCRAZIE EUROPEE DA LONGO A BERLINGUER’.

<sup>115</sup> Bracke, ‘Chapter 8. Internationalism and Eurocommunism in the 1970s’.

<sup>116</sup> This was the European detachment of the christian confederation WCL.

<sup>117</sup> Gabaglio, ‘CGIL e FSM, un lungo addio’.

<sup>118</sup> Iuso, ‘L’Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL’; Gabaglio, ‘CGIL e FSM, un lungo addio’; Ciampani, ‘Italian Trade Unionism and the ETUC: In Favour of a European Social Actor’.

<sup>119</sup> Gabaglio, ‘Il movimento sindacale e gli strumenti di iniziativa europea’.

<sup>120</sup> Gabaglio, ‘CGIL e FSM, un lungo addio’; Iuso, ‘L’Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL’; Ciampani, ‘Italian Trade Unionism and the ETUC: In Favour of a European Social Actor’.

<sup>121</sup> CGIL, Statuto CGIL VIII Congresso di Bari, 2.

<sup>122</sup> CGIL, 3.

membership but without any further detail. In the following months, began an increased number of contacts with European trade union centres. Fundamental, in this aspect, was the relation with the CISL and UIL. As hinted above, these trade unions were truly relevant on the European level and had participated over time in the constitution of many regional institutions, not least the ETUC itself. On their side, the entrance of the CGIL in the ETUC would have made the Italian delegation in Europe the most substantial one, making the country's delegation the widest one.<sup>123</sup> Therefore, the CISL and the UIL were major promoters of the entry of the communist confederation. But it was precisely the communism aspect that was the last knot that had to be untied to convince the rest of the European trade unions. The CGIL had moved in that direction ever since the congress in Bari, modifying their statute in order to create a new type of membership within the WFTU. The plan was to loosen ideological ties with the Soviet world, through the change of status in the federation from affiliate to "associate." Another situation in which the communist faction prevailed, as part of the socialist one wanted a total disaffiliation immediately.<sup>124</sup> At the congress of Varna in 1973, the objective was reached, despite the opposition of the French secretary general Gensous. The CGIL leadership would only have a consultative presence within the WFTU. As many commentators refer,<sup>125</sup> the Soviets were surprisingly in favour of this shift, since, in the first half of the decade, they looked favourably to the *détente* in Europe as a means to normalise the presence of communist parties in the western bloc.<sup>126</sup> Having settled the issue of international placement, the CGIL started in the following months a rapid, although not easy, process of integration in the ETUC. In 1974, the discussion started, within the ETUC, to expand the confederation to non-ICFTU trade unions. As it appears from the minutes of the meeting's executive committee, both the position of the Christian unions and of the CGIL was not taken for granted by the members and led to heated discussions within the committee.<sup>127</sup> The overall fear of the committee was the loss of leadership of the free trade unions, and this, as shown above, was seen as dangerous by the ICFTU leadership. In this sense, the stances specifically of the CISL were of ecumenic openness of the confederation. Storti, CISL secretary general, stated several times that whether the participation of the Christian and communist unions was not to be granted, the "the ETUC would show on the European stage a weakened and divided movement."<sup>128</sup> What is highlighted from the minutes is the plurality of positions among the free unions. In this sense, it is worth mentioning how a part of the assembly feared the possibility of communist infiltration in the ETUC as part of the soviet plan to interfere with western trade unionism. At the same time, other unions, in

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<sup>123</sup> Ciampani, 'Italian Trade Unionism and the ETUC: In Favour of a European Social Actor'.

<sup>124</sup> Gabaglio, 'CGIL e FSM, un lungo addio'.

<sup>125</sup> Gabaglio; Ciampani and Rosati, 'La Federazione Cgil, Cisl, Uil: la dimensione internazionale ed europea'; Iuso, 'L'Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL'.

<sup>126</sup> Bracke, 'Chapter 8. Internationalism and Eurocommunism in the 1970s'.

<sup>127</sup> ETUC, 'European Trade Union Confederation Executive Committee, Brussels, Item 555: Meeting Minutes 24-25 January 1974; 7 March 1974'; ETUC, 'European Trade Union Confederation Executive Committee, Brussels, Item 556: Meeting Minutes 9 May 1974'; ETUC, 'European Trade Union Confederation Executive Committee, Brussels, Item 556: Meeting Minutes 7 July 1974'.

<sup>128</sup> ETUC, 'European Trade Union Confederation Executive Committee, Brussels, Item 555: Meeting Minutes 24-25 January 1974; 7 March 1974'.



particular the Belgian FGTB, stated that however not communist, they would never consider themselves anti-communists.<sup>129</sup>After five meetings, and the outcome of the ICFTU's advice on affiliation, the CGIL became an official member of the ETUC on the 9th of July 1974 with 21 votes in favour, 7 against (among which there is the German DGB) and 3 abstained.

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<sup>129</sup> ETUC.

## Concluding Remarks

In answering the research question, what emerges from our analysis is that the reason for the ideological shift is a direct consequence of the material conditions in which the CGIL was operating. If it were at least easier for a political party to oppose the status quo, especially in the case of the PCI forced by historical contingencies into a role of political subalternity,<sup>130</sup> for Italy's largest trade union confrontation with reality was fundamental, as it could not afford the luxury of standing at the passive end of political action.

Therefore, what seems to result and will lead to a move, albeit critical, towards the western camp, is a reworking of the western capitalist economic system that it had decided not so much to embrace as to inevitably have to work within. This is both because it was imposed by objective material conditions, and the inescapable conditions of geography, but also because the CGIL saw in it the possibility of an expansion of the conditions of prosperity and technological progress: the contradictions of capitalism closest to Marxist analysis.

Limiting and influencing this is obviously the relationship with the ideology, expressed in the PCI and the WFTU. With the party there will always be a dialectical dimension that it will never resolve. The same autonomist path of the union will always concern the operational and organisational side of the union.<sup>131</sup> On the ideological affiliation front, the PCI will find itself in similar positions with respect to eastern communism, and will always remain a privileged interlocutor if not an unavoidable point of reference for the CGIL, albeit often with disagreements. Thus, one cannot fail to note that the CGIL's break with Moscow, imagined for at least a decade, is in close correlation with Berlinguer's election and the PCI's 'euro-communist' experience.

The move to Europe thus appears to be the decisive factor in the CGIL's displacement, but it does not appear to be the root cause of it. If anything, Europe seems the only alternative that allows the CGIL to find a 'home' without losing its identity. The CGIL is characterised by being a class union even before its political affiliation with the Soviet world. The contradictions of ideological affiliation were already evident after the events in Hungary, but at that time Europe was not an attractive pole for the trade union in the context of strong ideological pressure, where there was certainly no room, in a Europe controlled by right-wing forces, for a communist trade union. This was also true because the CGIL was alone in the European context, between strongly anti-communist social democratic forces, an over-ideologized and unreliable interlocutor such as the CGT, and a communist party that, while

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<sup>130</sup> Palaia, 'La Cgil e il Pci fra violenza terroristica e radicalità sociale (1969-1982)'; Di Donato and Moro, 'PCI e social democrazie europee da Longo a Berlinguer'.

<sup>131</sup> Iuso, 'L'Europa nel percorso evolutivo della CGIL'.

presenting its own particularisms, had not worked out a definitive position in the context of the continent. In this sense, the internal struggles within the union, far from being decisive and influential in the decision making, manifest the polycentrism of the CGIL, and the restless desire to look for an own position in the international sphere.

This “loneliness” is therefore a fundamental characteristic of the CGIL. This is confirmed by the fact that the main driving force of the turnaround is the rapprochement, first Italian then international, to the 'thawed' social-democratic world in the context of the European *détente*. This will make possible the opening of the CGIL-CGT joint committee in Brussels, and then entry into the ETUC. Moreover, this thaw resolves a clear ideological prejudice suffered by the CGIL, which was discriminated against because it belonged to a camp that was considered 'wrong,' at a time when the dialogue between blocs was extremely limited. However, it is still relevant that the CGIL was taking on the representation of millions of working class people, whose instances it demanded to be able to bring to the institutions that would then materially affect the welfare of those masses. Finally, it is interesting to note how the exit from the impasse came about precisely through a change in the structure of society, away from the “palaces” and union headquarters. It is the force of history that united the two main Italian trade unions for the first time in two decades that triggered the chain of events that will lead to the shift that is the subject of this thesis.

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