

## **SECTION III. RESEARCH PROJECTS AND DISSERTATIONS – WORK IN PROGRESS**

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### ***Bandiera Rossa*, Communism and the Working Class during the German Occupation of Rome, 1943-44. PhD Project.**

In 1939, figures from French Ambassador to Berlin Robert Coulondre to Leon Trotsky and Friedrich Adler expressed the idea that, much as World War I had ended in revolutionary explosions, a still-more disastrous war would challenge the bases of international capitalism. However, in almost all countries the Communist Parties restricted their strategy – and their members – to national unity against fascism, in conformity with the future spheres of influence designed by Churchill and Stalin. As these anti-fascist fronts came to power, capitalism was restabilised with the granting of limited concessions to the working class.

The Western country where the pro-Moscow Communist leaders had the greatest difficulty imposing this anti-fascist popular front line on the working class was Italy. The mass partisan and workplace struggle was, for many, not only a fight against Germany or even against fascism, but the beginnings of a socialist revolution. Indeed, even before the March 1944 ‘Salerno Turn’ – whereby Palmiro Togliatti committed his party to unity with the monarchy and ex-fascist general Pietro Badoglio, in the interests of the Allied war effort – the largest formation in the Roman Resistance, the Movimento Comunista d’Italia (MCd’I; often known after its paper, *Bandiera Rossa*) posed a significant revolutionary alternative to the cross-class Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale.

*Bandiera Rossa* is something of a case study in what Pierre Broué called “the party that had survived Fascism”, insofar as many of its militants had been members of the pre-1926 Communist Party of Italy and drew greatly on its politics as they began to organise again during World War II. Having heard close to nothing from the exiled Communist leadership during almost twenty years of Fascist repression, and thus isolated from the degeneration of the Comintern, these rank-and-filers had never been trained in the substitutionism and popular frontism at the heart of Stalinist resistance strategies. Moreover, as well as regrouping members of various tendencies from the pre-Fascist years – from anarchists and Bordigists to ‘maximalist’ Socialists – *Bandiera Rossa* was notable for mobilising new forces from the *borgate*, the slums largely populated by migrants from central Italy and workers forced out of the centre of Rome by Fascist city planners.

My PhD dissertation is a social history of *Bandiera Rossa*, whose (albeit often eclectic) politics represent the clash between revolutionary perspectives based on a workers’ united front, and the essential conservatism of Stalinist anti-fascism. However, my study of this ephemeral formation and its militants – who have largely been buried or maligned by the Stalino-liberal mainstream of resistance historiography – will explore not only the dialectical relationship between communist partisans and Stalinism, but also look at how the class

composition of Rome helped preserve revolutionary traditions and cultivated rebellion against both Fascism and bourgeois-institutional politics in general.

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