

## Address by Giovanni Gronchi to the Constituent Assembly (24 July 1946)

**Caption:** On 24 July 1946, addressing the Constituent Assembly, Giovanni Gronchi, MP and Leader of the Christian Democrats in the Italian Parliament, calls for a vote of confidence in the new De Gasperi government.

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## Address by Giovanni Gronchi to the Constituent Assembly (24 July 1946)

### On the communications from the President of the Council of Ministers (confidence in the second De Gasperi Government)

(Constituent Assembly, sitting on 24 July 1946)

**PRESIDENT:** The Honourable Mr Gronchi has asked for the floor.

**GRONCHI:** Honourable Members, the discussions on the Government declarations — apart from what has been said by Mr Palmiro Togliatti — have on the whole been on specific points. In other words, they have focused on various aspects of the Government programme, examining their feasibility and nature, and they have added recommendations or suggestions, in general expressing consensus and confidence.

Obviously this practical examination of government policy is of some importance. Woe betide those political classes and governments that raise problems without outlining their solutions in the most tangible of terms!

In the practical action of every Ministry I should say that there is a need today for a technical approach, for closeness of contact with reality; without this, it is all too common to lapse into the kind of abstractions in which broad political assemblies like to indulge, but it is no longer the time for ideological reactions or revolutions. The very moderation of the more extremist parties' programmes demonstrates a recognition at this time of the need to keep as firm a hold on reality as possible, the need to choose the most concrete, the most practical, the most practicable solutions to the problems.

But can all these government problems be solved purely on the technical level? And can the set of measures that a government lays before the nation determine, purely by its 'technical' content, the face and political function of that government at a given moment?

What is obviously of greater relevance in steering the country and the Assembly is rather the broader political thinking against which these problems are to be set.

Without lapsing into abstractions, then, it may be helpful to say a few brief words about this thinking.

This has been our greatest preoccupation. For us, emerging from the electoral campaign with a stronger expression of confidence than was given to any other party, the problem of forming the government was not seen as a concern to jockey for position and acquire influence. It was seen as a need to steer government policy in the direction best suited to the problems and the responsibilities that we have assumed towards the nation. And if we were to express our collective thinking on the manner in which the crisis has been resolved, we should not have cause for excessive satisfaction.

We have often been accused, sometimes in acerbic terms, of being somewhat greedy for position and power. But a brief look at the distribution of portfolios in this Government and, rather than their number, the actual relevance of each of these posts to Government policy will show that our friend Alcide De Gasperi has been so moderate as to cause some bewilderment even among ourselves. (*Applause from the centre. Comments.*) Because it is of little moment, as a political force, to hold the military portfolios when the positions of real influence have been allotted to other political factions, with which we also need and desire to cooperate. (*Comments.*)

The resistance offered at certain points in the crisis, which has rendered the solution more delicate, has related to problems in the nature of planning or questions of principle that have deterred us from taking on the Education Ministry, on a par with any other party, or prevented some of the key factors determining our country's economic and social life from coming under our direct control.

Mr Togliatti, in some of his writings as a journalist rather than in the speech he has made here, has demonstrated a concept of tripartism with which we do not entirely concur. At the time he accused

Mr De Gasperi of wanting to create not a tripartite government but a government of his own. By this he meant that, to use a commonplace — one that is repeated in the newspapers as well as in this Chamber — the Christian Democrats once again are seeking the lion's share in this political situation. But here it was not a matter of setting up our own government, it was a question of responding to the country's expectations and accepting that responsibility in full, naturally having regard for the value to the nation of working with the leading political forces, but also of establishing, as *primus inter pares*, that it was more than a right, it was above all a duty, to exert the influence of our thinking and determine the path we are to take. (*Applause from the centre.*)

It was above all a duty, and we should be willing to accept the same criterion if a different political situation were to shift the weight of greater responsibilities to other parties in this Chamber.

It may perhaps be useful, then, to summarise the approach that we have sought and are seeking to impart to this Government's general policy, since it is from the set of problems stated in practical terms in the Government declarations that — as I was saying — the general direction in which we intend to steer the country's policy is to be inferred. First and foremost is a revaluation of the moral factors. This was something we also expressed in laying claim to the Education Ministry. It is not that we intend to create any monopoly or to make education the base for any party politics; our intention is to affirm the importance, in our eyes, of the formation of awareness and the renewal of school education as the factors that should be the cornerstone of our new political life and our new democracy.

We feel that this is a problem of either the shaping of awareness, in other words what is called the development of the human personality, whose necessity is universally recognised, or repression and violence. Profound transformations in political and economic systems are brought about by the slow permeation of hearts and minds, creating the conviction in the minds of individuals that those transformations will reflect greater justice and higher interests, objectively interpreted. Otherwise this abolition of privilege, this fairer distribution of wealth, this closer participation of the people in the life of the State, can be obtained only by repression or by the force of law.

But if a people does not appreciate the need for and legitimacy of such aspirations, there is no sanction, no law that would suffice to impose radical changes in custom or in the system; it is evident, then, that the appeal we are making for a renewal, for a higher level of awareness, certainly points to the safest, most practical and most enduring path towards the radical renewal we all hope to see. Whence our fervent desire for liberty, a desire that makes some people smile; whence the accent we place on this foundation of democratic life without which — in our opinion — there can be no true and real civilisation. We fear violence, not so much because violence injures the body but rather because it oppresses the soul, because it is an offence to the dignity of the spirit, because it prevents ideas from freely spreading and becoming established in the life of peoples, and from conquering minds with the only force that may legitimately be exercised: the force of ideas that reflect the higher concepts of fraternity, solidarity and justice, the concepts for which after every war, and especially after this war, humanity has an irrepressible yearning. (*Applause.*)

We need liberty, because without liberty there can be no possibility of promoting our ideas. We do not hesitate to repeat that we abhor violence as a matter of principle. Not because this is a sign of moral baseness but because we do not believe in the merits of violence as a constructive force. We believe, on the contrary, in the slow reacquisition and gradual liberation of awareness, towards which we are directing all our work, all our effort, all our understanding.

As regards the necessity of justice, we have to say once again — after the accusations of heterogeneity all too often addressed to this part of the Chamber — that in these hasty statements, our position on the economic problem may admittedly be seen as not so far distant from the traditional positions of liberal thinking; our approach, however, which has also been expressed in the specific statements made in the Government declarations, is profoundly different. In our view, the principles of justice must not be governed by technical demands or by the 'economic' laws of production, but the latter must be subject to the primacy of the principles of justice. It cannot be that in the phenomena of the collective life of a people we see only the demands of production, in their raw form of an inexorable goal. It cannot be that we apply to the social

economy of a people those criteria that may be applied to the individual life of a company, where higher revenue — maximum earnings, as some economists put it — is the only law it must obey. There is a higher social necessity, one to which even this law of profit must defer and which it must respect. There is this necessity of social justice, which means that we accept the freedom of private initiative only to the extent that it coincides with the general interest. We believe that the State cannot stand passively by as the economic life of a country evolves, because it has the duty of safeguarding the interests of the community, over and above individual interests. (*Applause.*)

When in the past, for example, certain reforms were made subject to budget constraints, such as the campaign against social diseases, against malaria, against tuberculosis, against deprivation and poverty, the concept that was obeyed was not the one we hold, for when we face certain paramount laws of the collective interest no financial demands can have greater weight or a more dominating influence.

Every effort must be deployed by the community to ensure that these problems, whose importance is paramount, can be solved. In other words, we need to place these social and human necessities first, before the economic and technical necessities and before any other demand. We see true civilisation not as mechanical progress; only up to a certain point do we place value on the fact that the machine, the substitute for man, has perfected all the technicalities of production, increasing its volume or lowering its cost, or that the machine has made available a wider mass of prime necessity goods and products if, underlying this progress by the machine, humankind remains profoundly recalcitrant and lacks any sense of solidarity, either within its own borders or in the wider international world. If, in other words, the brutality of egoism and violence re-emerges in man, in our eyes civilisation is still very far from attaining its ideal. And this is why we place the demands of the spirit over and beyond any economic demand, and this is why the demands of the spirit influence the whole of our policy. How could we allow there to be no controls over private initiative, even though we value it as one of the most effective and efficient prime movers of forces for progress today? And how can the State not perceive it as its duty to be concerned with this economic activity, when the interests of collective life are so pre-eminent today and so universally felt?

Specific interests do in fact need to be rigorously subordinated to the collective interest. This is our thinking on State intervention, wherever such subordination is not spontaneously seen as a social duty.

And then the idea of the State should not necessarily be seen as of the same nature as intervention that restricts and confines all activities.

Still in the forefront of our minds today is the figure of the totalitarian State, the vision of a State that centralises all activity. The democratic State we want to create, however, will certainly not be the surrogate of private initiative, provided that that initiative maintains its momentum and acts as a force for progress as well as respecting the collective interest, but it will act as its corrector and monitor. In substance, it will be a State that will in a reasonable manner regulate and discipline private activity for the common good.

This is what we see as the crucial concept, one that — together with certain characteristic features of our programme — undoubtedly encapsulates our current position on Government problems. Every problem, even the smallest, even the most specific, contains in itself problems involving the whole of national organisation and even the organisation of the world. Every problem reflects a small facet of that polyhedron, the activity of modern States, and every problem must be pervaded by that spirit and approach. This is our concept of the State, the concept that we feel has been expressed regarding the solution of the concrete problems by the President of the Council in his declarations.

In these concrete problems, we could debate, we could examine the solutions proposed, but I should like to put before you the political problem of whether these solutions are feasible, their feasibility depending on the support that the three major parties are to give to the Government and the extent of that support. Mr Togliatti has said that the Government programme is in practice the most acceptable for them as well. He has cited one of our motions from October, which gave a rapid outline of certain political reforms, and he called on the President of the Council to implement them, because they can win the consensus of each of our three parties.

I do not know whether he has made a distinction between the Government's current position and the position of the party at that time. We find that they are almost identical, and we believe that what the President has said on the industrial and agricultural problems is only the launch of the more radical reforms that were painted with a broader brush in our motion, in that they were projected over an as yet undetermined time period, whereas the President of the Council of Ministers has rightly told us no more than what he believes could be implemented in the period over which this Ministry could be expected to last and its life to be conducted.

But I cannot but point out that the Socialists and Communists do not adopt an identical attitude to the Government programme. There has been a down-to-earth exposition of the practical problems by my friend and colleague, Ivan Matteo Lombardo, focusing the attention of this Assembly on those problems, and he has done this in full accord, I should almost say in harmony, with the declarations that have been made by the Government.

My colleague Palmiro Togliatti on the other hand has adopted a rather more detached stance, if you will allow me to say so. From his parliamentary bench he has considered the Government's exposition of its thinking more as an observer than as a collaborator; he has pointed out certain deficiencies and, in essence, rather than declaring himself satisfied he has expressed a measure of moderate pessimism. In this lies the political problem of the present Government. Either it truly succeeds in achieving that national unity that must spring from a sincere and loyal convergence of the three leading parties and the Republican Party that stands by its side, and to do this it must win that general confidence by its policy of open but firm reconciliation; or, if cracks and uncertainties appear in the very structure by which it is supported, may I say here that the policy of national unity will be gravely compromised. And it has been very often compromised in the past, despite what has been said, when too many of the men belonging to the other parties in the six-party coalition, men who were part of the Government, secured both the advantages of government and the benefits of opposition. (*Loud applause from the centre and right.*)

This is a path that should resolutely be abandoned today. To be charitable, I should observe that in a government as many-sided and complex as the six-party coalition, in which a point of convergence always had to be found — and the point of convergence was often far more of an artificial compromise than a happy medium and a realistic vision of things — a certain freedom of attitude might be the expression of a sense of responsibility and also, let us be frank, a psychological need within a party.

But this Government, which for the first time has raised the problem of its composition when it is formulating a programme, and for the first time has debated that programme, before arriving at the distribution of ministerial offices, should have the broadest and most reliable convergence of its member parties, without over-subtle or facile distinctions. The inescapable conclusion is that the reason why the solutions advanced by the Government are inevitably not as ambitious as each one of us would want is not its desire to accentuate one particular political viewpoint, but the wish to place a realistic limit on the options for the implementation of those solutions. All that a Government must do is to produce its programme, not to start from Adam and Eve and go on to examine the problems of the world in a universal perspective. In other words, it must confine itself to the practical possibilities of implementation without arousing expectations out of a desire for popularity.

In this area too, the limitations and inadequacies that have been complained of in some quarters are certainly not due to a diversity of approach or uncertainty as to application.

There is, however, a malaise that we must look at with frankness. That malaise is in fact due to your friends, Mr Togliatti, for we do not know whether and until when their loyal and reliable support for a Government action can be counted upon. The very contradictions on which you have based your declarations, reflecting mainly on foreign policy, give us cause to doubt, and reinforce the doubt, that many of you — perhaps because of your party's policy — consider and assess domestic policy first and foremost in the light of foreign policy. This does not mean that we lend credence to the rumours that your dependence on countries abroad, your relations with them, might adversely affect your workings, your physiognomy, your party life.

But this certainly places you in a sphere of spiritual influence that gravitates towards another country which, with its massive and magnificent efficiency, has created a myth in your minds and might peradventure limit your freedom of judgment and your thinking on domestic policy. (*Applause from the centre and right. Interjections. Comments from the left.*)

**Giancarlo PAJETTA:** The territory of another state is smaller, Mr Gronchi, but its influence is greater. (*Comments.*)

**GRONCHI:** Allow us to express our thought freely, because the extreme moderation you display as regards the possibility of dealing with certain problems, the extreme moderation of the manner in which you express yourselves, is in curious contrast to the fever of the masses on the fringes of your party. You cannot claim that you are extraneous to this fever of the masses because you cannot claim that you do not exert a prevailing influence, as otherwise you would have to arrive at the conclusion that these masses are beyond even your control, and for a party of the masses such a consideration would be tantamount to a declaration of impotence. (*Applause from the centre and right.*)

*A voice:* And your fringe members? (*Noises.*)

**PAJETTA:** You had them vote for the monarchy. (*Noises. Comments.*)

*A voice:* It's an original sin! (*Comments.*)

**GRONCHI:** My Communist colleagues, these observations come from someone who, within his party, has always fought against the 'anti' policy. There are colleagues here who have heard me speak at the congress, in the national councils, and they know what my position is.

*A voice:* But they didn't agree with you.

**GRONCHI:** No matter. I am saying what my position is at this time. (*Interjections. Comments.*)

The 'anti' policy that is sometimes practised in certain small sections of my party as well, but that above all is widely practised by other political forces and factions, is I agree most sterile and dangerous. It is sterile because it leads only to a negative and unconstructive position. It is dangerous because it could, involuntarily, reproduce that situation from which we have emerged due to our own merits and — it should also be stated — due to the merits of the Socialist movement, which at the last congress and elsewhere has examined its own problems, and the problems of all the sincerely democratic forces, in such depth that they can be said to be forces of equilibrium. (*Applause.*)

When an 'anti' policy is created or is followed obsessively, all we can do is to look to the opposite extreme. Once the two extreme positions are thus created, there is a risk of reproducing the situation in 1920–1921 when, to win back the freedom that was said to be threatened by what was called the ruling bolshevism, those in the middle saw no salvation except to run into the arms of the fascism that was then emerging. When in other words the forces of all parties, including ours, all the parties of the left and centre left — if I may resort to this rather vague political geography — were shattered, because it was felt that they had no real efficiency, they had no real possibility of guaranteeing the freedom that paradoxically could, it seemed, be safeguarded and fostered only by a dictatorship.

It is evident that, if I address certain comments to you, I do this not in a purely negative spirit. I feel as much as you do the need for national unity. I know that we have to travel a long road together, because the political configuration of our nation would demand this of us as a practical necessity even were we not already objectively convinced of the need. But it is evident that, in order to lay the foundations of a democratic republic, the forces cooperating on this work must not give the sensation that they are just using democracy as an instrument or regarding it as a transitional phase, but they must give the sensation that they believe in the reality and stability, in the development and evolution, of a democratic method that rules out the method of resorting to dictatorship and violence. (*Applause from the centre.*)

You who inevitably claim that Marxism is relevant to all times — and it is you alone, because your Socialist cousins are somewhat more cautious (only the Gospel can, in the affirmation of moral principles, perpetually reflect and dominate the life of centuries and millennia, whereas all the doctrines that link their fate with the fate of economic factors inevitably show their age after a few decades of life, even if they are the fruit of powerful minds such as Marx, Engels and others of the same school) — and you who advocate this method, you cannot deny that recourse to violence is ineluctably at its root. I use this term in the widest and broadest sense of the word. There comes a moment when evolution is not enough to overcome resistance, when it does not serve to break down class distinctions. Only in a world of fable or mythology would every man or every class be willing to sacrifice their own selfish interests for the interests of other individuals and classes, but outside this metaphysical world it is only through the constraints and sanctions of law that such an organised regime can be achieved. So in your view of history in practice, if you openly admit it, the dilemma is: bourgeois revolution or revolution of the proletariat, with democracy very often being seen as a sort of transitional element.

It may be that this is no longer the situation from now on. It may be that a process of revision is spreading among you as well. And if we were to read some of your recent statements, we should have to agree that this is so, because you no longer even need to be a Marxist to obtain your party card: it is enough to respect your political programme. Now your programme is ours; it is the programme of any democratic party. And let me make it clear to you that I should make no bones about applying for your party card if it were merely a matter of accepting your programme.

*A voice:* It's just a question of time!

**GRONCHI:** But why do you want to deprive your action of what is the only ferment from which it derives all its value and all its revolutionary force? You have a principle and an ideological base that underlies your demands, that is at the basis of your approach to your practical problems, and you must not be irritated if you find those among us who are perplexed and doubtful. You must not be surprised if there is this sense of malaise in the country, with people saying 'until when?' and 'up to what point?' It is this malaise that takes on a political dimension, and it is the political problem itself that threatens the stability of this Government.

There is certainly further proof of what I am saying in the repercussions of foreign policy as well. We are faced with problems in which the attitude of our parties has been the same. Admittedly, those unhappy and painful proposals on the western frontier originated from a head of government, Georges Bidault, who has grounds for a close relationship with us, but it is also true that while the Socialists adopted various different attitudes your men warmly supported this same point of view. And I should like to point out that, although Mr Bidault has committed the error of thinking that by giving way on the position of our eastern frontier he would have won support for the Rhineland solution at which he was aiming, his internal government situation and the equilibrium of parties meant that he could not afford to appear less nationalist than the Communists.

The same situation is being created today and has been created as regards Trieste, so that Mr Togliatti is right in saying that we should be careful not to re-awaken this nationalistic mentality, and that we should be careful not to appeal to sentiments that all too often spill over into chauvinism. I agree entirely. But are you quite sure that this spirit and this state of mind do not spring from the excessively sceptical and cold and negatory attitude of most of the Italian political parties, and that they are not becoming established, as they were established, over time, like the myth of Italy's 'mutilated victory' — one of the ideological reasons for the rise of fascism? Are you really sure that it lies in our hands to prevent our pain and our regret from taking on this nationalistic hue, or could this not create and reinforce many states of mind and reactions that would assail the very foundations of our democratic life? (*Applause.*)

All these spiritual factors need to be taken into account, even though we must contain them in the formats recommended by our political and, I should say, cold consideration of the realities. Account needs to be taken of these idealistic motives, because they are a part of the life of a people. A people is not just an economic entity, not just a social entity, it is something more. When we speak of traditions, language, the

shared community of life and thought, we are not evoking rhetorical and literary phantasms but are observing living reality, far removed from the ranting and raving of imperialism, from all the aggravations of *lebensraum*; we are looking at the most genuine, the most natural seed of all national communities. (*Applause.*)

This is why we need to approach these problems with respect.

This war is oddly reproducing the situations that the other war seemed to be starting to solve. All wars create new expectations among the people, partly because after every storm the hope is that calm weather will return, partly because those who govern and the ruling classes themselves encourage such expectations in order to induce the people to make the supreme contribution of which they are capable: the best of themselves, their life, their affections. After every war the expectation is created of a humankind somewhat different from the one laid low by the war. As it was then, so it is today.

And today the international equilibrium being created is strangely similar to the equilibrium then. If we were to re-read the Atlantic Charter dispassionately it would seem prehistoric, for we live in a very different spirit and spiritual atmosphere at this time.

There is no longer any sense of solidarity or fraternity. We have returned to the policy of antagonisms, which are so great as to have led the Slav world to flood into Europe as has never before happened in history — never in a stable manner, since 1876 saw Russia in Albania, but in 1877, as a result of the Treaty of Berlin, Russia withdrew behind its natural borders. (*Interjections. Comments.*)

Now I do not overrate this expansionism as having the force of ideological expansion, and some people, those most given to a theoretical and metaphysical view of political events, think that Russia is aiming to bolshevise Europe or the world; but I estimate it for what it is: a massive bloc of peoples who, with convergent interests, view their economic and also political problems against the watershed line on which Italy is located.

And this is why our position is so delicate, so delicate as naturally to keep us from joining either bloc, as feared by Mr Togliatti. The consequences for us of an alternative of this kind would only be fearful, since we should — to borrow Manzoni's image — be like the earthenware pot between two iron pots.

But this kind of position also suggests the line we should adopt at this juncture. We refer to sentimental reasons, and they have their own value, but in our foreign policy we should above all refer to two realistic concepts. The first is that we must abide by those principles that are being belied today: we should do away with the politics of clientelism, of opposing blocs. In other words, we must abide by a principle of far broader solidarity that creates a federation of peoples, the only basis for a more secure peace. The second is a sort of question that we could put to the Allies or the 'Four' who have decided — now it seems by a signed and sealed treaty — on the destinies of our nation.

The problem of Italy is not just an Italian problem, it is a European, a world problem. It is European because we have a population of 45 million people who, due to the scarcity of natural resources, do not even have the possibility of raising the tenor of their social life or of nurturing their own children.

It is a nation that has looked to colonies to meet its need for expansion, something that was a social necessity as a national whole; it is a country that has seen emigration as one means of solving the agonising problem that is intensifying even today, quite apart from the paralysis of industry and from unemployment.

If you take the colonies away from Italy you will dissipate its raw materials. If you threaten its independence, you may have peace in Europe but with a restless people, to which you have denied its reasons for living. And this is the approach to the problem that we must recommend to those who have the very difficult task of reorganising the world. Europe cannot be reorganised unless Italy is in its rightful place, derived not from the frenzy of imperialism but from its capacity, its constructive resolve to work. This is all we are asking at this point. (*Lively applause.*)



This probably offers us the greatest reason for our optimism as we gather around the Government; we should not engage, and we should recommend to others not to engage, in too detailed an analysis of questions of approach and method. The time will come to examine all this, either in the new Assembly Committee on International Treaties or in the other debates that will take place when they can be freely conducted, since each of us will know that this freedom of debate will in no respects undermine our national positions.

But it will not be out of place to say how, basically, there have been criticisms from some quarters not of the method but of the general approaches, and to agree that we could strike out on this one path.

I have heard Mr Togliatti repeat one of his concepts, that the best method of solving the question of our eastern borders is by direct agreement. We too are convinced of this. It is just that agreement is like marriage: there have to be two of you. And it is clear that while we are ready and willing, this has not, to put it euphemistically, been matched by the other side. Everyone is aware that our attempts, both direct and indirect, to enter into contact with those who opposed us and who still oppose us as our antagonists have all failed. There was no alternative other than accepting the patient, painstaking work of interplay and influence conducted through the 'Four' who hold the destinies of Europe in their hands.

Today our national interest demands that we tell the Government that it should press on with its efforts to defend the integrity of our territory to the best of its ability, that it should consider the pressing need to adopt and firmly maintain a position that that can never be seen as based on hostility, which might create difficulties for us in the future. Mr De Gasperi, who will be the leader in this final phase of the negotiations, will come back and report on the results of the efforts, and this Assembly will have to decide. I do not want to say today what its decision should be. I know that we have no interest in becoming estranged from international life, in isolating ourselves from the life of Europe. Our ideals and even our needs coincide, and we should reintegrate as soon as possible, not only for what I might say are the economic reasons, since for some time yet we shall still come too closely under the powers of the English-speaking world, but also so that we can develop to the utmost our potential for expansion, which despite so many difficulties and the slow-moving pace of trade is manifested today.

I do not say, nor do I suggest, to the Assembly today what our thinking might be. I say that today our duty is to be behind the Government in true national unity, because there is a universal feeling that, over and above the party divisions, we all hold the same concept of justice, reflecting the defence conducted up to this time of our integrity, our interests and our rights.

I think I have described briefly what I feel, and what we feel, is our position on the political life of our nation at this time. We shall not disappoint the expectations. There are many of you inside and outside this Chamber who are waiting with some curiosity to see how the ideals relate to the practical problems. Someone has said that we are the *ultima Thule*, the farthest outpost, of the Italian bourgeoisie, that the reason why we have won so many votes is because the middle classes have seen us as their last bastion of defence. Even if this had happened, even if there existed some tattered remnants of the ruling class that would seem to have disappeared from political life — since there is not the slightest sign of a conservative party in our political geography — we could not have been asked more ingenuously to defend something that contrasts with our thinking, with our programme and with our attitude.

I believe that you will see the heterogeneity, of which our group has so often been accused, disappear when it comes to applying the criterion of social justice to the solution of concrete problems, because we cannot be worthy of the name we have chosen unless we wish to meet this demand for social justice over and above any political — or, worse, electoral — consideration. (*Applause from the centre.*)

The name we have assumed has a tradition, and it is no coincidence that we have chosen it after the name of our forerunner, 'Partito Popolare'. It is a tradition that dates back to 1902 and to 1908, with even earlier precursors in the 19th century, when the prisons of Milan hosted not only Filippo Turati and Andrea Costa but also Don Davide Albertario. (*Applause.*)

We can go back fairly far into the past, even before many of our friends took part in the struggle for freedom, to show how this demand for freedom is not just a transient concern but the very essence of our thinking. This is why we feel that we are laying the foundations for a true democratic life; this is why we want, in the past as in the future, to take on for ourselves greater responsibility for directing these first few steps of the Republic; this is why we are sure that, through our influence, freedom and democracy will take substantive form by establishing a legal order that will provide the soundest of foundations for the future. *(Loud applause. Many words of congratulation.)*