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THE INFLUENCE OF MAOISM AND OF CHINESE COMMUNISM ON THE ITALIAN LEFT, 1949-1976

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INTRODUCTION

FROM GLOBAL MAOISM TO ITALIAN MAOISM

Mao Zedong was certainly a crucial figure of the 20th century. Similarly, we may say that the Chinese Revolution was a crucial event of 20th century history. In fact, the regime established in China in 1949 has not yet dissolved. Far from that, it continues to govern, in new and unexpected ways, the world's most populous country and its strongest economy. It is impossible to predict what consequences China's rise will have in the future, but it is the duty of historians to investigate as thoroughly as possible China's history and the history of its relations with other countries. Though not an easy task, this may allow us to better understand present-day Chinese developments.

The topic of this dissertation, as its title states, is the influence of Maoism and of Chinese Communism on the Italian Left from 1949 until 1976. First of all, the title and the chosen chronology deserve explanation. Maoism is an evolution of Marxism-Leninism elaborated by Mao Zedong. Though we may say that Mao had begun to develop his own ideology since the beginning of his political career, Maoism became a state ideology only in 1949, with the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) takeover. However, it is safe to say that in reality there were not one but many Maoisms. First then, a crucial distinction must be made between Maoism *in China*, and the evolutions this ideology underwent in other countries. Within this second group, a further separation must be made between Maoism in the Third World and in the West. Julia Lovell recently gave us an overall account of global Maoism.[1] For his part, Jeremy Friedman underlined that the spread of Maoism in the Third World was part of a Sino-Soviet competition for hegemony there, what he terms a sort of "shadow Cold War."[2]

[1] Julia Lovell, *Maoism. A Global History* (London: Bodley Head, 2019).
[2] Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War. The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina University Press, 2015).

However, this dissertation investigates the influence of Maoism *and of* Chinese Communism on the Italian Left. A terminological clarification is necessary: though it is true that Maoism was an evolution of Marxism-Leninism created and embodied by one person, the Chinese Revolution – and even the Cultural Revolution – was not a one-man process. The totalitarian paradigm[3] and demonological-teratological biographies of communist leaders[4] - including Mao[5] – have instilled the conviction that revolutionary upheavals, conceding that they have anything to do with ideology and not exclusively with human evil, are at most the product of *one* person's ideology. Gregor Benton and Lin Chun, who in 2009 edited the book *Was Mao Really a Monster?*, quote Barmé saying that this kind of approach may be even termed "despot-centred history."[6] By contrast, they note that "serious studies treat the Chinese Revolution as a complex, creative process in which millions of ordinary Chinese pursued their transforming visions in interaction with the party and its leaders."[7] That is why I feel that the phrase "Chinese Communism" is needed beside Maoism.

Mao was no doubt the main ideologue, but in the sources of Italian Maoists one may see that they were inspired by an entire country, by a whole revolution made by millions of individuals, and not only by one man. In a sense, Benton and Chun's statement can be translated to Italian Maoism. The influence of Maoism and of Chinese Communism on the Italian Left cannot be reduced to a sort of huge brainwashing machine led by one high cheek-boned Big Brother. Julia Lovell shows in her recent book that supposed "brainwashing" methods in China were a myth.[8] The idea that Italian

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[3] The main references for the totalitarian paradigm are: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975); Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (New York: Praeger, 1966). See Domenico Losurdo's critique: Domenico Losurdo, "Towards a Critique of the Concept of Totalitarianism," *Historical Materialism* 2004 (vol. 12: 2): 25–55.

[4] For a criticism of this demonological-teratological approach, see: Domenico Losurdo, *Stalin. Storia e critica di una leggenda nera* (Rome: Carocci, 2008).

[5] The master work of this genre on Mao is certainly: Jung Chang and Jon Halliday*, Mao: The Unknown Story* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005).

[6] Gregor Benton and Lin Chun, ed., *Was Mao Really a Monster? The Academic Response to Chang and* Halliday's Mao: The Unknown Story (London: Routledge, 2009): 6.

[7] Ibid., 7.

[8] Julia Lovell, "The Brainwash – China and the World in the 1950s," in *Maoism. A Global History* (London: Bodley Head, 2019): 88-124.

Maoism was nothing but the acritical adoration of a foreign leader-ideologue is similarly a myth. Quite differently, the reader of this dissertation will see that Maoism and Chinese Communism inspired a number of reflections in the Italian Left: from the concept of violence and peaceful coexistence to the role of the USSR, from antiauthoritarianism in education to the concept of leading state.

This research spans the time period from 1949 until 1976. 1949 was chosen as the starting point because it was the year of the communist victory in China. As Chapter 1 shows, the 1949-1966 timespan was a period of preparation of the storm, so to speak. The Italian Left slowly took notice of the People's China and the first alternative, pro-Chinese political-publishing experiments took form. However, the core years of the influence of Maoism in China were between 1966 and 1976. This ten-year period corresponds to the classical periodisation of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Certainly, the Cultural Revolution boosted Maoism worldwide and it was at its highest point of popularity in Italy. However, alternative periodisations exist. Many considered the Cultural Revolution going from 1966 until 1969, because that was period when the most violence took place. For instance, Maria Antonietta Macciocchi's book *Dalla Cina*, based on a 1970 trip, is subtitled *Dopo la rivoluzione culturale* (After the Cultural Revolution).[9] On his part, the historian Frank Dikötter chooses yet another periodisation for his recent book on the Cultural Revolution: 1962-1976.[10] However, the end point of this study is more relevant. Apart from being considered the final year of the Cultural Revolution, 1976 was also the year of Mao's death. With Mao's passing, the personal reference for his ideology disappeared. Moreover, for the Italian Left in general in the second half of the 1970s a period of slow decline began, which would go through the so called "'77 movement"[11] until the famous 1980 "white collars' march."[12]

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[9] Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, *Dalla Cina: Dopo la rivoluzione culturale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1971).
[10] Frank Dikötter, The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962-1976 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).
[11] Luca Falciola, *Il Movimento del 1977 in Italia* (Rome: Carocci, 2015).
[12] *Gabriele Polo and Claudio Sabattini, Restaurazione italiana. FIAT, la sconfitta operaia dell'autunno 1980. Alle origini della controrivoluzione liberista (Rome: Manifesto libri, 2000).*

There is no comprehensive research on Western Maoism. Julia Lovell dedicates one of her chapters to Western Maoism, but the narrative is necessarily short and with inevitable generalisations.[13] Among forms of Western Maoism, the French case is undoubtedly the most researched.[14] This is understandable, since France certainly was the Western country where Maoism was most popular in the 1960s-1970s. The Italian case is much less researched. Daniele Perotti wrote an article on the topic in 1981.[15] In 1998 Roberto Niccolai published a book on Italian Maoism,[16] while in 2008 Stefano Ferrante published one on the "Servire il popolo" group.[17] Finally, one may find an unpublished thesis from 2015.[18] Evidently, interest towards Italian Maoism in the academic community has been sparse and scattered through time. Why is it so? The reason behind this lack of interest possibly lays in die-hard clichés. According to one of them, Italian Maoism had little

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[13] Julia Lovell, "'You Are Old, We Are Young, Mao Zedong!'," in *Maoism. A Global History* (London: Bodley Head, 2019): 266-305.

[14] Jacques Andrieu, "Aux sources du maoïsme occidental: Mais que se sont donc dit Mao et Malraux?," *Perspectives Chinoises* 37 (September / October 1996): 50-63; Jason Barker, "Master Signifier: A Brief Genealogy of Lacano-Maoism," *Filozofia* 69, No. 9 (2014): 752-764; Julian Bourg, "The Red Guards of Paris: French Student Maoism of the 1960s." *History of European Ideas* 31:4 (2005): 472-490; Jean Bourgault, "Les désarrois de l'élève Clouet. Sartre et le maoïsme," *Les Temps Modernes* 2 (2010): 2-48; Christophe Bourseiller, *Les maoïstes: La folle histoire des gardes rouges Français* (Paris: Plon, 1996); Marnix Dressen, *De l'amphi à l'établi: Les étudiants maoïstes à la usine* (Paris: Belin, 1999); Belden Fields, "French Maoism," *Social Text*, No. 9/10, "The 60's without Apology," Spring - Summer (1984): 148-177; Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and Practice in France and the United States* (New York: Autonomedia, 1988); Philippe Forest, *L'histoire de* Tel Quel (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1993); Patrick French, *The Time of Theory: A History of* Tel Quel *(1960–1983)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Remi Hess, *Les maoïstes français: Une dérive institutionnelle* (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1974); Francois Hourmant, *Au pays de l'avenir radieux: Voyages des intellectuels Français en URSS, a Cuba et en Chine Populaire* (Paris: Aubier, 2000); Yiju Huang, "On Transference: Badiou and the Chinese Cultural Revolution," *Comparative Literature Studies* Vol. 52, No. 1 (2015): 29-46; Nilo Kauppi, *"Tel Quel": The Making of an Avant-Garde* (Amsterdam: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995); Mads Peter Karlsen and Kaspar Villadsen, "Foucault, Maoism, Genealogy: The Influence of Political Militancy in Michel Foucault's Thought," *New Political Science,* Vol. 37, No. 1 (2015): 91–117; Patrick Kessel, *Le mouvement maoïste en France*. 2 vols. (Paris: 10/18, 1972); Robert Linhart, *L'établi* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1978); Virginie Linhart, *Le jour où mon père s'est tu* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2008); Michele Manceaux, *Les maos en France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972); Jean Moreau, "Les maos de la gauche proletarienne," *La Nef* 48 (June–September 1972): 77–103; Camille Robcis, "'China in Our Heads': Althusser, Maoism, and Structuralism," *Social Text* 110, Vol. 30, No. 1, Spring (2012): 51-69; Ieme Van der Poel, *Une révolution de la pensée: Maoïsme à travers* Tel Quel, Les Temps Modernes, *et* Esprit (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1992); Christina Van Houten, "Simone de Beauvoir Abroad: Historicising Maoism and the Women's Liberation's Movement," *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (2015): 112-129; Richard Wolin, *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[15] Daniele Perotti, "Il mito cinese nella nuova sinistra italiana (1960-1970)", *Il Politico* 1-2 (1981): 223-280.

[16] Roberto Niccolai, *Quando la Cina era vicina* (Pisa: BFS Edizioni, 1998).

[17] Stefano Ferrante, La Cina non era vicina: Servire il popolo e il maoismo all'italiana (Segrate: Sperling & Kupfer, 2008).

[18] Ilaria Forlini, "Il maoismo nella sinistra e nella destra extraparlamentare italiana, 1960-1979" (BA Thesis, Università Roma Tre, 2015).

importance from the points of view of both quantity and quality. A second, powerful cliché proposes that Italian Maoists were a group of freaks not to be taken seriously. A third is that Italian Maoists were senselessly extremist and turncoats at the same time. This dissertation assesses these clichés and argues that they should be largely reconsidered. Looking at my chapters, the reader will see that Maoism is Italy was far more widespread than largely held belief would have it. The second cliché, that about the "freakish" nature of Italian Maoism, probably stems from the "Servire il popolo" group, which is sometimes remembered in collective imagination because of its strangest characteristics, like "communist marriages" and internal sexual morality. After thorough research on the influence of Maoism on the Italian Left, this widespread belief can be largely deconstructed. True, Servire il Popolo militants were the Maoists par excellence, that is those who were *mostly* inspired by Mao's China and those who pushed this admiration to extreme limits.

However, looking only at Servire il Popolo one completely ignores the enormous influence Maoism had on the Italian Left. A clarification of the concept of "Italian Left" is in order. Maoism did not have much influence on the *traditional* Left, constituted by the Communist (PCI) and Socialist Parties (PSI), but had a great pervasive, almost total, influence on the Italian extra-parliamentary Left. The Italian extra-parliamentary Left (sometimes alternatively called Italian extreme Left or Italian New Left) was basically born thanks to the 1968-69 *biennio rosso* and underwent a period of increasing radicalisation throughout the 1970s. The extra-parliamentary Left was divided into a cluster of parties and organisations, and never managed to take power, neither through electoral nor through revolutionary means. However, the extra-parliamentary Left mobilised for years thousands of militants and ran several newspapers and magazines. Moreover, in its most radical expressions it attempted to take power via violent means. This work argues that in order to fully understand the history of the Italian Left, one has to study the role of its extra-parliamentary wing. By doing so, one will note the enormous, pervasive influence of Maoism on it, and will be able to put together a few crucial pieces of an otherwise scattered puzzle. Why did the extra-parliamentary Left oppose the PCI and the USSR so vehemently? Why did Italy experience such a violent political radicalisation? Why

was this radicalisation so meteor-like, and why did it grow weaker and weaker through the 1970s? Why, however, were there episodes of leftist armed violence between the 1990s and the 2000s - that is, after the supposed "end of history"? This work argues that looking at the influence of Maoism on the Italian Left one can give a more complete answer to these questions.

The following dissertation is organised into six chapters, plus an epilogue/conclusion. A few introductory remarks on these chapters and on the choice of their topics are in order. Chapter 1 is introductory in character and covers the period from 1949 until 1966, the period, so to speak, of the "preparation of the storm." It assesses the reception of the Chinese Revolution by the PCI and the PSI, through an analysis of a selected press of the two parties. Then, it shows the birth of the first pro-Chinese political-publishing experiments, like the Edizioni Oriente, the first Marxist-Leninist groups, the *Quaderni rossi* and *piacentini*.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to "Servire il popolo," which was its main slogan as well as the title of its main newspaper. "Servire il popolo" Maoists have always been considered the Italian Maoists par excellence, and this is certainly true. Servire il popolo was the Italian political party which was most inspired by Maoism, and which absorbed its teachings most fully (note: here "fully" does not mean "correctly"). The chapter goes beyond the usual journalistic, sensationalist discourse which has existed about Servire il popolo for so many years. This group was often ridiculed because of its sometimes grotesque expressions. However, "Servire il popolo" grotesqueness is not the focus of the chapter. The chapter focuses on the reception of Maoism by this group and on its theoretical and practical application to Italian conditions. The reader will note that Servire il popolo tried hard to mobilise farmers apart from industrial workers, linking the peasant question, the Southern question and the migrant question. Servire il popolo accused the PCI of ignoring these issues.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the problematic Maoism of Lotta Continua (LC). The author deems indispensable a treatment of the influence of Maoism on Lotta Continua, because it was the largest organisation of the Italian extra-parliamentary Left. The popularity of Lotta Continua has led many

to say that LC was an eclectic organisation open to all fads. Be as it may, studying the impact of Maoism on LC is necessary. The reader will see that Mao's China was one of the main benchmarks of Lotta Continua, to the point that LC was born and died with Mao.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the Communist Organisation Avanguardia Operaia, more shortly known as Avanguardia Operaia (AO). AO was smaller than Lotta Continua, and always suffered from Milan-centrism. However, this chapter presents one remarkable element of novelty. AO has always been considered a Trotskyist organisation, but the reader will see that reality was much more complicated. In fact, AO was remarkable in that it tried to syncretise the two communist heresies of Trotskyism and Maoism (with Mao put in higher esteem than Trotsky).

Chapter 5 deals with the concepts of Maoism and antiauthoritarianism. Though it may seem surprising, Maoism was seen by many in Italy as an antiauthoritarian ideological tool. This can be seen looking at two realities, though very different in dimension: the Italian student movement and Italian anarchism. The Italian student movement was largely a movement which fought authoritarianism and traditional methods in education. It saw the so called "objectivity" and "neutrality" of knowledge as something grossly hypocritical to say the least. These Italian students were strongly inspired by the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and tried to apply its teachings to Italian education. Similarly, certain Italian anarchists looked at the Cultural Revolution as to a libertarian experiment.

Chapter 6 deals with two party-less Maoist journals: the *Quaderni piacentini* and the Italian *Monthly Review*. These two journals were selected for discussion for two reasons. Firstly, because they were political journals not directly depending on any party. Secondly, because the *Quaderni piacentini* was an original Italian journal, while the Italian *Monthly Review* was the Italian version of a famous US Marxist journal. Comparing the two approaches is therefore engaging.

The Epilogue/Conclusion gives a few concluding remarks with a comparative framework. It explains why Italian Maoism decreased so abruptly by comparing it with other European and other non-

European countries. It also shows that the legacy of Italian Maoism has been longer and more complex than typically believed.

THE PREPARING OF THE STORM
THE PCI, THE PSI, AND ITALIAN MAOISM FROM 1949 TO 1966

Introduction

This chapter deals with the relations between Red China and the Italian left from 1949, the year of the victory of the Chinese Revolution, until 1966, the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. This chapter aims to challenge certain widespread but problematic views about Italian Maoism. First, that Italian Maoism was a meteoric phenomenon which blew up in 1968, coming out of the blue, and which lost momentum soon afterwards. Second, that Italian Maoism was a small and negligible phenomenon. To challenge the first view, an overall analysis of the traditional Italian left and of the first pro-Chinese formations is indispensable.

By traditional left one can mean the two main Italian leftist parties of the time, the Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party or PCI) and the Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party or PSI). As we shall see, both parties had to come to terms with the challenge Maoist China posed to the Soviet Union, which until the early 1960s was regarded as the only legitimate leader of the global Communist movement. The PCI ultimately sided with the USSR in the Sino-Soviet split, though its attitude was more possibilist and problematic than that of the Parti Communiste Français (French Communist Party or PCF).[19] Conversely, the PSI engaged more closely with the Communist world than other social-democratic parties. Its attitude to the Sino-Soviet split was also nuanced. While PSI

[19] Walter Tobagi, Storia del movimento studentesco e dei Marxisti-Leninisti in Italia (Milan: Sugar, 1970): 18.

secretary Pietro Nenni initially did not side with any of the two countries, the PSI later condemned Chinese behaviour, though trying to understand it. However, the nuanced positions of the PCI and the PSI did not satisfy certain Communist and socialist dissenters (like Raniero Panzieri), who felt they should be closer to China. This dissent with PCI and PSI stance on China elaborated in the first half of the 1960s was one of the factors which ignited pro-Chinese political-publishing experiments which will further develop after 1966. Such were the *Quaderni rossi*, the *Quaderni piacentini*, the Edizioni Oriente, *Nuova unità*.

It is in these stimuli we can see the embryo of Italian Maoism. The term "Italian Maoism" needs further definition. By Italian Maoism it is intended rather to mean *the overall influence of Maoism and of Chinese Communism on the Italian left*. In fact, there were rather small organisations which came into history and into collective memory as the Maoists par excellence, such as the *Marxisti-Leninisti* and especially Servire il popolo.[20] However, the situation was more complex, since virtually *all* the Italian extra-parliamentary left was influenced by Maoism. This included Lotta Continua – which was probably the largest organisation of the extra-parliamentary left – but also Avanguardia Operaia, an organisation which to the present day bears the mistaken cliché of being Trotskyist, rather than a Maoist organisation. Maoism also influenced semi-academic journals like the Italian *Monthly Review*, the magazine-newspaper and political movement *il manifesto*, and a Third-Worldist magazine like *Terzo mondo*. It intertwined with the antiauthoritarianism of the student movement and of Italian anarchists.[21] Last but not least, the influence of Maoism in Italy was one of the factors – though not the only one, and possibly not the most important - which contributed to the spread of leftist political violence, which found its highest expression in the Red Brigades.[22] Therefore, it is

[20] Not by chance, the Unione dei comunisti italiani (Marxisti-Leninisti) – Union of the Italian Communists (Marxist-Leninists) or UCI(m-l) – better known as "Servire il popolo," is the only Italian Maoist organisation which has a dedicated monography, though written by a journalist rather by a historian. Stefano Ferrante, *La Cina non era vicina* (Segrate: Sperling & Kupfer, 2008).

[21] The largest comprehensive study on Italian Maoism so far is: Roberto Niccolai, *Quando la Cina era vicina* (Pisa: BFS, 1998).

[22] This is a trend noted, but not analysed in full, by Julia Lovell in a recent book. Julia Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History*, (London: Bodley Head, 2019).

argued that the importance of Maoism in the Italian left should be radically reassessed. The widespread conviction according to which Maoism in Italy was a negligible and small phenomenon is seriously flawed in two ways. Firstly, it gives a judgement only on the traditional left, ignoring the extra-parliamentary left. Though the extra-parliamentary left never took power, its prolonged and widespread activity contributed to shape Italian society in a way that we still feel today. Secondly, those who claim that Maoism in Italy was unimportant underline that there never were large, full-fledged Maoist organisations. But they fail to analyse the organic, molecular influence Maoism had in Italy, one which was truly widespread.

The PCI and China: A Policy of Attention?

The Italian Communist Party did not have any distinctive policy towards Red China until the early 1960s, with the explosion of the Sino-Soviet split. The evolution of PCI stance on China may be well followed reading *Rinascita*, an important PCI intellectual journal, which would surely be more useful than the daily *l'Unità*. *Rinascita* hosted more profound reflections, while *l'Unità* mostly published drier chronicles. The beginning of PCI's serious reflection on Chinese issues may be traced back to January 1963, when *Rinascita* published a *Renmin Ribao* editorial. In this piece, titled "Le divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi" ("The Differences Between Comrade Togliatti and Us") the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) replied to criticism Togliatti had expressed at the 10th PCI Congress. The CCP advocated a firmer, more aggressive stance against imperialism, claiming that the US peaceful intentions could not be trusted, and that preparing for war was indeed the best means to prevent war. Imperialism was nothing but a "paper tiger," so went the famous expression, and the Communist movement should not fear even the atomic bomb.[23] *Rinascita* decided to publish further Chinese documents, however siding with the Soviet policy of peaceful coexistence and sometimes trying to minimise the importance of the dispute: the debate was about important, however long-term issues,

[23] "Le divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi," *Rinascita*, January 12, 1963, 15-17.

and it showed the dynamism and the vitality of the international Communist movement.[24] Significantly, *Rinascita* continued to publish a series of China-related articles not directly related to the Sino-Soviet split, on Chinese economy[25] and foreign policy.[26] Despite everything, Giuseppe Regis claimed: "Today China objectively represents […] the most radically revolutionary force of the international socialist formation."[27]

However, the deepening contrasts could not be hidden: as Giuseppe Boffa highlighted in a July 1963 *Rinascita* article, Chinese Communists openly made accusations of "revisionism" not only against Yugoslavia, but the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and practically all Soviet-oriented Communist parties.[28] But *Rinascita* continued to feel the need to better know the Chinese reality, despite its disagreements with the CCP, hence its continued publication of articles on Chinese history[29] and Mao's works.[30] In 1964 there was a further escalation in Sino-Soviet disagreements, prompting *Rinascita* to publish a long series of Soviet and Chinese articles and letters on the issue.[31] The official policy of the PCI as expressed by leaders like Gian Carlo Pajetta seemingly continued to be a qualified criticism of the "dogmatic" and "wrong" Chinese positions, trying to avoid clear-cut answers and "excommunications."[32]

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[24] I.F., "Imperialismo e coesistenza nei giudizi dei compagni cinesi," *Rinascita*, February 23, 1963, 12.
[25] Giuseppe Regis, "Lo sviluppo economico nella repubblica popolare cinese," *Rinascita*, March 9, 1963, 14-15; Giuseppe Regis, "Le difficoltà incontrate dal secondo "Piano" cinese," *Rinascita*, March 23, 1963, 13-14; Lisa Foa, "Il rapporto città-campagna nell'economia della Cina," *Rinascita*, October 26, 1963, 13-14; Emilio Sarzi Amadé, "Bilancio a Pechino del riaggiustamento," *Rinascita*, January 16, 1965, 14-15; L.F., "Orientamenti economico della Cina dopo l'operazione 'riaggiustamento,'" *Rinascita*, October 9, 1965, 11.
[26] Lisa Foa, "Ciu En-lai in Africa," *Rinascita*, January 11, 1964, 11-12; "De Gaulle, la Cina, lOccidente atlantico," *Rinascita*, February 1, 1964, 2; Edgard Snow and Zhou Enlai, "I rapporti diplomatici cino-francesi," *Rinascita*, February 15, 1964, 15.
[27] Giuseppe Regis, "Prospettive dell"economia cinese," *Rinascita*, April 6, 1963, 14-15.
[28] Giuseppe Boffa, "Le divergenze sovietico-cinesi e l'unità del campo socialista," *Rinascita*, July 6, 1963, 9-10.
[29] Silvia Ridolfi, La storia della Cina dal 1895 ai giorni nostri," *Rinascita*, July 6, 1963, 12-13.
[30] Silvia Ridolfi, "Scritti di Mao Tse-dun," *Rinascita*, May 2, 1964, 29.
[31] "Sulla lotta del PCUS per la compattezza del movimento comunista internazionale," *Rinascita*, April 11, 1964, 13-28; "Le sette lettere scambiate tra Partito sovietico e Partito cinese," *Rinascita*, May 23, 1964, pp17-21; Otto Kuusinen, "La critica ai compagni cinesi nell"ultimo discorso di Kuusinen," *Rinascita*, May 30, 1964, 14-15.
[32] Gian Carlo Pajetta, "Polemiche sulla Cina," *Rinascita*, April 18, 1964, pp1-2; Gian Carlo Pajetta, "L'errore dei comunisti cinesi," *Rinascita*, September 26, 1964, 1-2.

By mid-1964, an open split seemed more and more likely, as the CCP did not moderate its accusations of "revisionism."[33] The situation clearly got even more complicated with the Chinese atomic bomb. Interestingly, *Rinascita* thought that together with its dangers, the rise of new powers could facilitate the birth of a "polycentric" world.[34] The PCI "policy of attention" towards China was exemplified by talks between a delegation of the PRC peace committee with PCI leaders in Rome in late 1964,[35] by the praise of *Rinascita* for Italo-Chinese trade agreements, and by continuing articles which tried to understand the Chinese reality.[36] In fact, not only was the agreement praised, but *Rinascita* pointed out that the PRC still had to be recognised by Italy[37] and by the UN.[38] The Chinese political-military strategy was explained,[39] but criticised as well.[40]

The PSI Attitude Towards Red China

The attitude of the PSI towards Mao's China is worthy of serious scrutiny. Though the historian Mariamargherita Scotti argued that the Italian Socialist Party in the post-war years tried to gain an ideological and cultural autonomy from the stronger PCI,[41] Giovanni Scirocco noted that on the international level the PSI was somewhat "strangled" between the two blocs. Scirocco already underlined that the PSI showed a generally positive attitude towards Communist China, as it did towards the USSR.[42] Moreover, the historian Aldo Agosti stressed that the PSI even had not one, but a few "lefts," which could possibly look with interest at the Chinese experiment.[43] Looking at the

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[33] CCP CC, "La risposta del PC cinese alla lettera del PCUS," *Rinascita*, August 8, 1964, 12.
[34] Sergio Segre, "Dopo la bomba cinese," *Rinascita*, October 31, 1964, 10-11.
[35] "I cinesi a Roma," *Rinascita*, November 28, 2.
[36] Giorgio Signorini, "Il posto della Cina popolare," *Rinascita*, June 19, 1965, 14-15.
[37] "Quanti sono i Messeri che ignorano la Cina?," *Rinascita*, December 12, 1964, 2.
[38] Silvia Ridolfi, "Nuovi schieramenti all'ONU sull"ammissione della Cina," *Rinascita*, December 12, 1964, 12-13; "Il governo Sato," *Rinascita*, January 2, 1965, 14.
[39] Giuseppe Boffa, "Note sulla strategia politico-militare cinese," *Rinascita*, May 29, 1965, 16-17.
[40] Emilio Sereni, "La strategia di Lin Piao: città e campagne," *Rinascita*, October 23, 1965, 9-12; Hsiao Hoa, "Esercito e partito nella Cina popolare," *Rinascita*, February 5, 1966, 14-15.
[41] Mariamargherita Scotti, *Da sinistra* (Rome: Ediesse, 2011).
[42] Giovanni Scirocco, "La Cina," in Politique d"abord: Il PSI, la guerra fredda e la politica internazionale (1948-1957), (Milan: UNICOPLI, 2010): 110-113.
[43] Aldo Agosti, "Le sinistre socialiste," in *Il partito provvisorio* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2013): 26-37.

approach of the PSI to China through the pages of *Mondo operaio*, the party's ideological journal, it becomes clear that the PSI felt it could not leave the Chinese events without attention and that, especially initially, its showed an attitude of support similar to that of the Italian Communist Party. This support was expressed about various sides of Chinese life: from economy to foreign policy, from culture to internal governance.

Even before Mao's final victory, the last phases of the Chinese Communists' war against the nationalists are commented upon with a certain sarcasm in *Mondo operaio*. In late 1948, when Communist victory was seen as probable, *Mondo operaio* reported that "Mrs. Chiang Kai-Scheck" was met coldly by the American president Truman, since her "proposal to constitute in the Far East an anti-Communist bloc similar" to the NATO seemingly was not much appreciated. The journal implied that by that time the US had probably given up hope in Chiang's victory, therefore "the tea offered by Truman to Mrs. Chiang must have been rather bitter." Moreover, *Mondo operaio* was convinced the American "*Big Businessmen*" (in English and italicised in the text) were rather interested in developing economic relations with China.[44]

In early 1949, with Communist victory even closer, the PSI secretary Pietro Nenni boasted optimism about the potential of the successful Chinese Revolution. The Chinese success at Nanjing convinced Nenni that, at the beginning of 1949, capitalism did not have a "nice look," going as far as to consider this success similar to "Soviet victory in Stalingrad." According to Nenni, with Mao's victory "four hundred million men […] appear on the stage of history, makers of their own destiny." Their victory amounted to "the breakdown of American and European imperialism," to "one of those events that, like the 1789 bourgeois revolution or the 1917 Bolshevik one, mark the beginning of a new era."[45] Only one week later *Mondo operaio* triumphantly reported Chiang Kai-Shek's resignation,[46] and Antonio Borgoni praised the oriental masses for their victorious revolution, which triumphed in spite

[44] "La Signora Chiang senza aiuti," *Mondo operaio*, December 18, 1948, 1.
[45] Pietro Nenni, "Crollo in Cina," *Mondo operaio*, January 22, 1949, 1.
[46] "Le dimissioni di Ciang Kai-Shek," *Mondo operaio*, January 27, 1949, 4.

of, or possibly because of Chinese backwardness, since "in Asia there is not the support of large soft and wimp bourgeoisies," which are nothing but "scant groups in front of the enormous totality of peasants and workers." Seemingly, *Mondo operaio* was justifying the Chinese Revolution with the same rationale used by the Bolsheviks to justify the October Revolution: the principle of the "weakest link of the chain," where socialism could triumph precisely because of the weakness of the local bourgeoisie. Borgoni was convinced that in Asia "a great liberation war" was being fought, "which the United Stated suffocated here, in Europe."[47]

Remarkably, in September 1949, not long before the final Communist victory, *Mondo operaio* defined Mao a "poet general,"[48] therefore beginning the spread of a romantic image within the left. Some of Mao's poems were even published by the Avanti! publishing house. Between 1950 and 1951, the journal published Mao's life as told to the American journalist Edgar Snow in 1936, in eleven parts.[49] *Mondo operaio* built Mao's figure also underlining his intellectual stance, and his deep interest in the arts and in cultural matters.[50] His influential text on contradictions within the people was published by the journal in 1957.[51] Culture and education in China were praised: *Mondo operaio* published a speech of the Chinese vice-minister of Education Chien Chun Fui, who underlined the class nature of culture and education in the new China. Education was now "at the service of the people," illiteracy was being fought against, schools were being built for peasants and workers, the "universal truths of Marxism and Leninism" were being spread, labour was at the centre of the Chinese education system.[52] Remarkably, cinema was a side of Chinese culture quite discussed and

[47] Antonio Borgoni, ibid.
[48] Edoardo Bruno, "Mao Tse Tung generale poeta," *Mondo operaio*, September 17, 1949.
[49] "Mao-Tse-Tung: la mia vita." The eleven parts of Mao"s life were published in *Mondo operaio* on the issues of: October 15, 1950, 6; October 22, 6; October 29, 6; November 4, 6; November 11, 6; November 18, 6; November 25, 6; December 9, 8; December 23, 6; December 30, 1950; and of 9 January 6, 1951.
[50] Franco Catalano, "Arte e letteratura nella nuova Cina," *Mondo operaio*, February 3, 1951.
[51] Mao Zedong, "Sulle contraddizioni nel popolo," *Mondo operaio*, June 1957, 52-62.
[52] Chien Chun Fui, "Politica dell"istruzione e della cultura nella Repubblica Popolare Cinese," *Mondo operaio*, April 4, 1953, 9-12.

praised in *Mondo operaio*. In fact, Chinese films presented at the Karlowy Vary cinema festival in 1951 and 1952 were positively commented on and presented with pictures.[53]

The socialist journal also used triumphant tones to celebrate the official declaration of the People's Republic of China in October 1949. In fact, in an article titled "In the new China of Mao Tse," the journal explained that "the new people's government" was managing "the passage from colonialist to collectivist economy, from imperialist exploitation to socialist construction."[54] The positive work done by Chinese Communists for the reestablishment of the economy was further underlined in 1954 by Andrea Dosio, according to whom "great progress" was already being achieved.[55] More specifically, Fernando Montagnani, who had visited China in 1956 with a trade union delegation, wrote an article praising its collectivised agriculture.[56] However, possibly the most remarkable article on Chinese economic matters was published in early 1962. Gilbert Etienne had been in China in 1958, during the Great Leap Forward, and declared: "There is no general famine, but a really serious food crisis."[57] This shows that the PSI press, too, either minimised or ignored the enormous Great Leap Forward famine, either because of lack of information, or intentionally.

Remarkably, the PSI of the time still had a friendly attitude towards the Soviet Union (though it was not organically linked with it), and this is exemplified by the fact that in November 1949 *Mondo operaio* published a Malenkov's speech in occasion of the 32nd anniversary of the October Revolution, when he praised Communist victory in China buttressing it with Lenin's and Stalin's predictions. Quoting Lenin, Malenkov noted that "the result of world struggle between capitalism and Communism finally depends on the fact that Russia, India and China constitute the overwhelming

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[53] Giuseppe Bartolucci, "Il VI festival di Karlowy Vary per la pace e per un mondo migliore," *Mondo operaio*, August 11, 1951; Giuseppe Bartolucci, "Successo del lavoro, della pace, della vita felice al VI° festival cinematografico di Karlowy Vary," *Mondo operaio*, August 25, 1951; Luigi Fossati, "Il festival di Karlowy Vary," *Mondo operaio*, August 23, 1952, 17-20.

[54] Virgilio Dagnino, "Nella nuova Cina di Mao Tse," *Mondo operaio*, October 8, 1949, 7.

[55] Andrea Dosio, "I grandi progressi della Cina popolare," *Mondo operaio*, August 21, 1954, 16-19.

[56] Fernando Montagnani, "Collettivizzazione agricola in Cina," *Mondo operaio*, August-September 1956, 502-4.

[57] Gilbert Etienne, "Le difficoltà economiche della Cina," *Mondo operaio*, January-February 1962, 23-29: 23.

majority of the world population." In fact, Malenkov underlined, with Communist victory in China the number of those living in socialism amounted to 800 million.[58]

The PSI showed a markedly pro-Chinese attitude regarding its system of internal governance. In fact, Tungpi Wu's articles published in 1952 praised the representative conferences and congresses of the Chinese people.[59]

As far as foreign policy was concerned, the PSI showed marked pro-Chinese attitudes regarding Sino-American relations during the Korean and Vietnamese crises. Pietro Burgo in *Mondo operaio* positively judged the British attitude to the Chinese question, which initially seemed more realistic and softer than the American one,[60] and consequently criticised the British about-face in January 1951.[61] Moreover, the PSI was proud of being an interlocutor of People's China in support of the cause for its recognition by the Italian government. In fact, *Mondo operaio* wrote in 1955 about a letter written by the Chinese prime minister and foreign minister Zhou Enlai to Pietro Nenni concerning Sino-Italian relations. The journal clarified that the Zhou's letter was "a right recognition of the action our party has carried and carries out in defence of Italian interests."[62]

Remarkably, the PSI saw the rise of Chinese Communism as a part of larger movement of "yellow and black" peoples who were revolting against colonialism and taking their future into their own hands. *Mondo operaio* polemically compared the fate of contemporary Oriental peoples to that of their ancestors in the Roman Empire, when they were slaughtered as gladiators or used as food for morays in patricians' pools. One more remarkable comparison was done between growing US influence in Italy and the regime of semi-colonial concessions in pre-revolutionary China. In fact, *Mondo operaio* noted,

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[58] "Il rapporto di Malenkov al Soviet di Mosca," *Mondo operaio*, November 12, 1949.
[59] Tungpi Wu, "Le Conferenze rappresentative del popolo cinese," *Mondo operaio*, July 19, 1952, 14-16; and September 6, 1952, 14-15.
[60] Pietro Burgo, "Gli inglesi e la pace con la Cina," *Mondo operaio*, December 23, 1950, 7, 10.
[61] Pietro Burgo, "Sorpresa a Londra dopo il voto all"O.N.U. contro la Cina," *Mondo operaio*, February 3, 1951, 6.
[62] "Ciù En-Lai a Nenni," *Mondo operaio*, September 10, 1955, 28.

> while the Bandung conference was meeting, the Italian Court of Cassation decided that the Italian judiciary has no competence in controversies stemmed in work relations between Americans staying in Italy and Italians: the regime of Capitulations was transferred from the Chinese coasts to the Italian coasts, from Canton to Leghorn and Naples.

The author polemically concluded that he was afraid that "colonialism, dead in Asia," was seemingly arising in Europe, and that Italians were risking "to play the role of Chinese and Africans" with Scelba's collaboration.[63]

Mondo operaio progressively followed the development of Sino-Soviet tensions. In October 1956, *Mondo operaio* first noted that the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) 20th Party Congress was discussed at the 8th CCP Congress,[64] where Mao yet vaguely noted that the "political and ideological conclusions" of the Soviet congress had to be "followed by important developments in the internal life of the USSR and of other socialist countries."[65] In late 1959, Luciano Vasconi gave the first hints at serious disagreements between the two powers, noting that there were "problems of tactics in the Sino-Soviet alliance"[66] and that China was already taking a more aggressive stance in the colonial world. But it was Pietro Nenni himself who commented on the quickly growing discord between the two countries in the summer of 1960.[67] Nenni recognised that disagreements were present within all socialist countries and, though generically advocating peace, he did not side with either of the opponents. *Mondo operaio* tackled the issue of the Sino-Soviet rift similarly to the Communist *Rinascita*, that is, it reported long polemical documents from both sides.[68]

Only in late 1963 *Mondo operaio* took a clear stance in the Sino-Soviet rift, with an article written by Luciano Vasconi.[69] The article is remarkable because in it Vasconi expresses his opinion about China and about the PCI as well. Vasconi had no doubt that Chinese positions were wrong, since they

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[63] G.P., "Cinesi vecchi e nuovi," *Mondo operaio*, May 7, 1955.
[64] "L"ottavo congresso del P.C. cinese," *Mondo operaio*, October 1956, 607-8.
[65] Ibid., 608.
[66] Luciano Vasconi, "Cina: anno decimo," *Mondo operaio*, November 1959, 10-17: 10.
[67] Pietro Nenni, "Il mondo comunista e la coesistenza pacifica," *Mondo operaio*, July-August 1960, 7-10.
[68] "Documentazione," ibid., 11-62.
[69] Luciano Vasconi, "Il PCI e la Cina," *Mondo operaio*, October 1963, 7-10.

grossly underestimated the danger of a potential war. Regarding the PCI position, however, Vasconi noted that a Central Committee document previously published on *l'Unità* was written in an unclear, convoluted language which could lead to different interpretations. While the PCI cautiously allied with the USSR, it recognised that even among socialist countries there were "acute and deep contradictions,"[70] therefore implicitly admitted that Soviet primacy was not an eternal value.

The document published on *l'Unità* also timidly advocated for more democracy in economic planning among socialist countries, and underlined that a total fracture between the USSR and China was absolutely to be avoided: "insults, anathemas, accusations of treason which the Chinese comrades *first* [my emphasis] launched must decidedly be condemned."[71] Vasconi's conclusions are extremely interesting, and are worth commenting. In his opinion, the PCI document was so unclear and convoluted that both sides could find in it support as well as criticism. In short, Vasconi criticised the PCI's unclarity and lack of courage in this issue, and underlined that serious problems in economic and democratic relations among socialist countries had already been underlined many times, but the PCI had always turned deaf ears, and was seemingly taking notice of the issue late in the game.

Interestingly, Vasconi came back to the issue in 1964, though voicing his personal opinion.[72] Vasconi was convinced that Khrushchev's attitude towards China was due to the "remains of Stalinism." In sum, Vasconi showed a cautious and understanding attitude towards Chinese concerns, which in his opinion were also due to Khrushchev's "theorisation of the society of wealth […] and of consumption borrowed from the West without criterion and without ideological in-depth analysis." More precisely, Vasconi thought that the PSI should not criticise the PCI because of his possibilist position towards China: that "would be a worrying symptom of little ideological clarity, of drying up of our own egalitarian and internationalist ideals." China had to be "'recovered' to coexistence, and not repelled

[70] Ibid., 8.
[71] Ibid., 9.
[72] Luciano Vasconi, "Noi il PCI e la Cina," *Mondo operaio*, April 1964, 10-16.

towards positions of desperate revolt."[73] Vasconi concluded with the hope that a correct development of the debate could possibly hinder the monolithic character of Communism. However, the Sino-Soviet conflict would exacerbate until the explosion of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, which Vasconi reported in all its enigmatic character.[74]

Panzieri and China

Addressing the attitude of the PSI towards China, it is impossible to ignore the role of the intellectual linked to the PSI Raniero Panzieri. Panzieri, born 1921, was the founder of the important journal *Quaderni rossi* - which will be analysed later on – who suddenly died in 1964. Therefore, while he did not live to see the period of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, during his political and intellectual activity he showed an interest in the Chinese question which deserves attention. Roberto Niccolai notes that the roots of the *Quaderni rossi* can be traced back to the publication of the *Sette tesi sulla questione operaia*, written by Panzieri and Lucio Libertini in 1958. The main thesis of their work was the importance of direct "workers' control" as opposed to the bureaucratic, suffocating role of the party. Niccolai argues that "much of the criticism posed by Panzieri, and many of the relative proposals, appeared extremely similar to those Mao Zedong, thousands of kilometres away, was posing in 'his' socialist China, which was also hit by the germ of bureaucratism."[75] Niccolai's remark is evocative, but remains a hypothesis, since there is no clear evidence that Panzieri borrowed his ideas on workers' control from Mao.

However, there is evidence that Panzieri, as a multifaceted intellectual, was interested in China, and he left proof of this both in published and private writings. In September-October 1955 Panzieri visited China with a delegation guided by Pietro Nenni. Panzieri published his travel notes in *Mondo operaio* in November 1955,[76] but he also wrote a private diary of the trip, which remained

[73] Ibid., 12.
[74] Luciano Vasconi, "Gli enigmi di Pechino," *Mondo operaio*, June-July 1966, 46-51.
[75] Roberto Niccolai, *Quando la Cina era vicina* (Pisa: BFS, 1998): 42.
[76] Raniero Panzieri, "Note di un viaggio in Cina," *Mondo operaio*, November 5, 1955, 3-5.

unpublished until 1982[77] with the original kept at the Archive of the Feltrinelli Foundation in Milan. In his "Note di un viaggio in Cina," Panzieri first underlined Chinese intentions on foreign policy, expressed by Zhou Enlai. China seemingly intended to establish normal relations with all countries, including Italy. Panzieri's judgment on the main Chinese leaders is positive: he appreciates Zhou Enlai's "simplicity" and "diplomacy." According to Panzieri, when the delegation met Mao Zedong in person, Mao compared the events of the Chinese Revolution with the history of the Italian workers' movement, seemingly showing familiarity with the subject.

Moreover, Mao considered "the force and the unitary policy of the Italian Socialist Party [unity with the PCI] as an original element of enormous value for the international workers' movement." Panzieri was convinced that the Chinese Revolution opened "new perspectives to the future of the world," and was positively impressed by the functional, modern architecture of Peking, which he thought was developing in harmony with the old buildings.[78] Moreover, Panzieri appreciated the decision of the Communist government to open to the public once closed spaces like the Forbidden City or the Summer Palace. In fact, "thousands of visitors, especially young," animated these now open spaces with "calm and intense joy because of a freedom whose sense they found in culture and beauty made available to the love of all the people."[79] Panzieri was also greatly impressed by the Peking opera, which he saw as one the symbols of the attitude of the new China towards tradition: enmeshing tradition with modernity in order to obtain harmonious results.

Reading Nenni's diary entries from the trip, the impression is that he had a substantially positive opinion on China, even believing that a "purer" revolution was ongoing there than in the Soviet Union. It is also clear that Nenni interpreted that visit as sort of semi-official one, since at the time Italy and China still had no diplomatic relations.[80] However, Panzieri's private diary of the visit is worth of

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[77] Raniero Panzieri, "Diario cinese (1955)," in *L'alternativa socialista* (Turin: Einaudi, 1982): 165-74.
[78] Ibid., 4.
[79] Ibid., 5.
[80] Pietro Nenni, *Tempo di guerra fredda: Diari 1943-1956* (Milan: Sugarco, 1981): 691-703.

serious scrutiny, when compared to Nenni's. What is remarkable is Panzieri strong criticism of Nenni's attitude. In fact, in Panzieri's opinion, Nenni was rather indifferent during the visit, and moreover, "only caring about being the ambassador of the Italian government and of being able to tell S.[Segni] and M.[Martino]"[81] that he had expressed the Italian position. One of the hottest topics of the meetings between the Italian delegation and the Chinese leaders was the issue of Italy's recognition of the People's Republic. Panzieri was convinced that Nenni "made a meagre impression" discussing the issue with Zhou Enlai, since Nenni could do nothing but "present the point of view of the Italian government," which provoked Zhou's "interruptions and evident disdain […] because of [Nenni's] ridiculous arguments."[82] Nenni tried to put all the blame on American influence, but Mao and Zhou considered his attempts a "rough […] game."[83] During the meeting with Mao – who, in Panzieri's words, was "with the simplicity of genius, the father of the Chinese Revolution" – Panzieri thought that Nenni was "sincerely subjugated" and that he had to answer Mao's arguments "with tact."[84] In the end, Panzieri thought that Nenni could not but look like a "useful idiot"[85] in front of his interlocutors. Evocatively, Panzieri concludes his short Chinese diary predicting that China, "a revolution for the world is preparing with joy."[86]

Spaghetti-Maoists: to the Left of the PCI

Angelo Ventrone recently noted that Maoism in Italy was the main alternative model to *operaismo*.[87] Roberto Niccolai, the author of the only organic book to date on Italian Maoism, correctly notes that the spread of China-oriented ideas in Italy began because of the disagreements some members of the PCI and PSI had with the official lines of their parties.[88] Certainly, many of the original "Chinese"

[81] Panzieri, "Diario cinese," 169.
[82] Ibid., 167.
[83] Ibid., 169.
[84] Ibid., 168.
[85] Ibid., 169.
[86] Ibid., 174.
[87] Angelo Ventrone, "Vogliamo tutto": Perché due generazioni hanno creduto nella rivoluzione, 1960-1988 (Rome: Laterza, 2012).
[88] Roberto Niccolai, "Delusi dal PCI e dal PSI," in *Quando la Cina era vicina* (Pisa: BFS edizioni, 1998): 21-7.

elaborations which developed on the left were also due to the complex relations between the PCI and intellectuals and to the more general ongoing changes in Italian society.[89] Therefore, a short historical contextualization is in order, so as to understand the ideological and political development of this "Chinese thread" in the Italian left. Among certain Italian Communists a growing discontent spread with the post-war PCI strategy of parliamentarianism and, after the 20th CPSU Congress in February 1956, some did not agree with the repudiation of Stalinist legacy.[90] However, still another, in a way opposite kind of dissent was caused by the Soviet crackdown in Hungary in October-November 1956: certain Italian Communists thought that Soviet intervention in Hungary amounted to nothing less than a criminal invasion, a betrayal of the principle of Socialist internationalism.[91]

And that is why China began to become attractive to certain Italian Communists. It represented a young, pure revolution which consistently and bravely applied the precepts of Marxism-Leninism, in contrast with the Soviet "revisionist" about-face, and criticised Soviet "gentrification" and policy of appeasement toward the US. The anti-colonial characterisation of the Chinese Revolution in a way evokes the difference between Eastern and Western Marxism conceptualised by Domenico Losurdo in a recent book. Using this terminology, Maoism was seen at the time as a sort of "Eastern," anti-colonial Marxism as opposed to Western sclerotised Marxism.[92] Chinese accusations towards the USSR would progressively rise with time, until open collaboration with US imperialism was blamed on the Soviet Union, which was even accused of "social imperialism," that is, of being an apparently socialist country acting in reality as an imperialist power. However, a more direct polemic between

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[89] On the relations between the PCI and intellectuals, see: Nello Ajello, *Intellettuali e PCI: 1944-1958* (Rome: Laterza, 1997); Nello Ajello, *Il lungo addio: intellettuali e PCI dal 1958 al 1991* (Rome: Laterza, 1997); Albertina Vittoria, *Togliatti e gli intellettuali* (Rome: Carocci, 2015). On how changes in the 1950s and 1960s influenced the catholic world, see: Daniela Saresella, *Dal concilio alla contestazione: Riviste cattoliche negli anni del cambiamento (1958-1968)* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005).

[90] On PCI "duplicity" between parliamentarian democracy and revolution in the post-war years, see: Pietro Di Loreto, *Togliatti e la "doppiezza"* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1991).

[91] On the 1956 Hungarian uprising see: Charles Gati, *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006). For an account of a Hungarian historian from the point of view of the USSR see: István Zicherman, *1956 Szovjet Szemmel* (Nyíregyháza: Anno, 2009). For an account of a pro-Soviet American historian, see: Herbert Aptheker, *The Truth about Hungary* (New York: Mainstream, 1957).

[92] Domenico Losurdo, *Il Marxismo occidentale* (Bari: Laterza, 2017).

the CCP and the PCI dated back to the early 1960s. In fact, between 1962 and 1963 the CCP published two famous articles titled in Italian "Le divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi" and "Ancora sulle divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi," which were a scathing answer to criticism the CCP had been subject to at the 10th PCI Congress held in early December 1962. These two articles would remain fundamental texts for the Italian *filo-cinesi* in the following years.

Quaderni: *rossi* and *piacentini*

Niccolai notes at the beginning of his book that the two journals *Quaderni rossi* and *Quaderni piacentini* were the first Italian political-publishing experiments which showed a certain attention to China.[93] The *Quaderni rossi* were founded in 1961 by the PSI intellectual Raniero Panzieri. Before the Cultural Revolution, the *Quaderni rossi* gave space to Chinese issues with articles written by the Italian sinologist Edoarda Masi (1927-2011). Edoarda Masi was an academic who wrote on China with a certain degree of sophistication: though she did not hide her sympathies for Communism, her research was always animated by a sheer, deeper intent to know China better. This line is clear from her articles which deeply analyse Chinese positions,[94] their Western interpretations,[95] and the theoretical teachings of Chinese Communism.[96]

Vittorio Rieser, interviewed by Niccolai claims that "the *Quaderni rossi* were the first leftist group in Italy which in some way made reference to Mao, meaning that then there were not m-l groups yet, and other groups of the PCI left were basically of Trotskyist type and then violently anti-Chinese and later anti-Cultural Revolution."[97]

According to Niccolai, the *Quaderni piacentini* were founded by Piergiorgio Bellocchio in 1962, also in an answer to the 1956 events. Already in 1962, the intellectual, writer and poet Franco Fortini, who collaborated with the journal, polemically expressed the need to "learn Chinese" to understand the

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[93] Roberto Niccolai, "Tutto iniziò con i Quaderni," in *Quando la Cina era vicina* (Pisa: BFS edizioni, 1998): 39-64.
[94] Edoarda Masi, "Lettura delle posizioni cinesi," *Quaderni rossi*, 4, 1964, 232-56.
[95] Edoarda Masi, "Interpretazioni occidentali della politica cinese," *Quaderni rossi*, 4, 1964, 301-4.
[96] Edoarda Masi, "Insegnamenti teorici del comunismo cinese," *Quaderni rossi*, 6, May-December 1965, 351-72.
[97] Vittorio Rieser quoted in: Niccolai, "Tutto iniziò," 43.

Sino-Soviet split, in an article titled "Le chinois ça s'apprendre." Fortini basically polemised with the hegemonic ignorance on China, and with the lack of will to know better this distant reality. But, Fortini argued, one third of humanity could not be ignored, and he therefore called to "ask to know China, to speak China, contest China, demand China."[98]

Fortini's statement of purpose was followed publishing a series of articles by the abovementioned Edoarda Masi. In 1964 Masi tried to establish the "real terms" of the Sino-Soviet split,[99] and to show the importance the peasant war had in the Chinese Revolution, analysing Victor Serge's correspondence[100] (this started an engaging dialogue between Edoarda Masi[101] and Valentino Campi).[102] In March 1966, shortly before the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Masi critically reviewed Charles Bettelheim's book *La construction du socialisme en Chine*, pointing out the importance Chinese Communists gave to ideology and superstructure, rejecting the abstract determinism according to which new modes of production create new social relations. Remarkably, her remarks somewhat "predicted" the oncoming storm, as the Cultural Revolution was conceptualized exactly to be a giant movement to change people's ideas and mentality.[103] The *Quaderni piacentini* also tried to present the Sino-Soviet split in a sort of ironic way, publishing a "ballad" titled "Da che parte stai" (Which side you are on).[104] Apart from Masi's articles the *Quaderni piacentini* also published a contribution by Jan Myrdal, a journalist who interviewed the peasants of a village in rural China.[105]

The Birth of the *marxisti-leninisti*

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[98] Franco Fortini, "Le chinois ça s"apprendre," *Quaderni piacentini*, October 1962, 12-13.
[99] Edoarda Masi, "I termini reali del conflitto Cina-Urss," *Quaderni piacentini*, 14, 1964, 2-11.
[100] Edoarda Masi, "La rivoluzione e i contadini," *Quaderni piacentini*, 15, March-April 1964, 38-41.
[101] Edoarda Masi, "Tesi teoriche e pratica politica," *Quaderni piacentini*, 21, January-February 1965, 21-4.
[102] Valentino Campi, "Rivoluzione contadina e rivoluzione proletaria," *Quaderni piacentini*, 19-20, October-December 1964, 5-15.
[103] Edoarda Masi, "Note sulla fine del progresso," *Quaderni piacentini*, 26, March 1966, 6-14.
[104] Paul Jarrico, "Ballata per il 1964 - Da che parte stai," *Quaderni piacentini*, 15, March-April 1964, 2.
[105] Jan Myrdal, "Un villaggio della Cina popolare," *Quaderni piacentini*, 23-24, May-August 1965, 18-32.

"Revisionism" is a key word which we often encounter in the review of Italian Maoist sources. Briefly defined, "revisionism" was considered a departure from the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism. While "Marxism-Leninism" was considered the top of ideological orthodoxy, "revisionism" was a kind of betrayal which had to be fought against. This is crucial to understand the proper meaning of the Italian term *marxista-leninista* (*M-L*), as it was used in Italy especially in the 1960s and 1970s. The *marxisti-leninisti* were those Italian Communists who polemically broke with the official Communist party considered "revisionist," and who progressively organised themselves in a cluster of alternative journals and parties. Therefore, the reader is warned that it is this meaning which is attributed to the terms "Marxism-Leninism" and "Marxist-Leninist" within this dissertation.

Viva il leninsimo, the Embryo of Italian *marxisti-leninisti*

Viva il Leninismo, whose only three issues were published between 1962 and 1963, is considered to be the first Italian Marxist-Leninist publication.[106] In reality, they were three monographic issues with slightly different titles: while the first was in fact titled *Viva il Leninismo*, the second, published in October 1962 was titled *Viva sempre il Leninismo*, and the third *Viva ancora il Leninismo*, published in February 1963. The authors of *Viva il Leninismo*, who came from the PCI, openly supported CCP positions which attacked "modern revisionism" and criticised the Italian centre-left government.[107] The difference between the incorrect Soviet strategy and the Chinese strategy, they said, was clear and they could not but support China.[108]

The positions of *Viva il leninsimo* regarding the Sino-Soviet split were exemplified in a February 1963 article: "Per la vittoria del leninsimo contro lo sciovinismo da grande potenza." *Viva il leninsimo* argued that the Sino-Soviet split was nothing less than an expression of a class conflict between China, an important stronghold in the anticolonial struggles, and the USSR which had taken an incorrect position. Interestingly, *Viva il leninsimo* noted that the Soviet position on the CCP was wrong since

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[106] Niccolai, "Delusi dal PCI," 24.
[107] Viva sempre il leninsimo, October 1962, 1.
[108] "La formazione di una vera guida rivoluzionaria è necessaria in Italia," *Viva ancora il Leninismo*, February 1963, 1.

Stalin's time, therefore extending to him its criticism of the USSR. The CCP correctly wanted to prepare for the inevitable civil war, but the USSR rather pushed for an alliance with Chiang Kai-shek's nationalists which would turn out to be the wrong move. Moreover, the article criticised the general Soviet position according to which, since the USSR was the stronghold of world socialism, struggles anywhere else had to be subordinated to it, therefore showing a sort of "great power chauvinism." However, the Chinese did not abide to this incorrect policy and could therefore be a source of inspiration. As we can see, here in embryonic form are the pro-Chinese positions which will be developed later.[109] *Viva il Leninismo* professed in favour of "Leninism" as opposed to PCI revisionism, and advocated an alliance between the factory working class and "poor and very poor peasants," thus evoking CCP policy.[110] The journal's positive attitude to China and the CCP is exemplified by pictures representing Chinese socialism in a positive light.[111] Moreover, the birth of the Italy-China Friendship Association was advertised on the pages of *Viva il Leninismo*.[112]



Scuola serale per operai di una fabbrica di Shanghai, nella Repubblica Popolare Cinese.

[109] "Per la vittoria del Leninismo contro lo sciovinismo di grande paese," *Viva ancora il Leninismo*, February 1963, 3-7.
[110] Viva sempre, 4.
[111] Viva sempre, 5.
[112] Viva ancora il Leninismo, February 1963, 3.

Fig. 1. *Viva il leninismo* presents positive images of Chinese socialism. The caption reads: "Night school for the workers of a Shanghai factory, in the People's Republic of China." From *Viva sempre il leninismo*, October 1962, 5.

The Edizioni Oriente Publishing House

According to Niccolai the "Edizioni Oriente" publishing house was founded in June 1963 by the economist and China expert Giuseppe Regis. This publishing house would fulfil an important function in spreading Chinese documents in Italy. Interviewed by Niccolai, Regis stated that

> at the time really little was known about Mao and China. Academic sinologists continued to deal with old China, no correspondent from Italian newspapers had followed people like Snow, Smeedley, Belden during the Liberation War and in the first years of people's power. Only "l'Unità" had correspondents: Velio Spano who covered the final period of the Liberation War and then Emilio Sarzi Amadé at the time of our permanence. Apart from that, like today, news cut from reactionary Hong Kong, American and British agencies. That is why together with other comrades and friends we founded Edizioni Oriente with the intent to present in our country the liveliest things which appeared in the Chinese press.[113]

Niccolai classifies the Edizioni Oriente among the "party-less Maoist journals," though it was a clearly Marxist-Leninist-inspired publishing house. Therefore, its main periodicals, the homonymous *Edizioni Oriente* and *Vento dell'est* will be treated in the Marxist-Leninist section.

Edizioni Oriente

The periodical *Edizioni Oriente*, which was published by the homonymous publishing house, published a lot of translated CCP documents which could then be read by an Italian public, however small. Many of them reflected the Sino-Soviet split and presented usual criticism against "renegade Tito's clique."[114] More precisely, the Chinese articles published by *Edizioni Oriente* pointed out that Sino-Soviet divergences began with the 20th CPSU Party Congress and that they were also influenced by the judgement on Stalin (the second 1963 issue of *Edizioni Oriente* was largely dedicated to this topic). According to the CCP, Khrushchev's total negative judgement on Stalin set back the cause of

[113] Interview with Giuseppe Regis: Roberto Niccolai, "'La tigre di carta': le riviste maoiste senza partito," in *Quando la Cina era vicina* (Pisa: BFS edizioni, 1998): 73.
[114] "Per una netta divisione dalla cricca del rinnegato Tito," *Edizioni Oriente* 3 (August 1963): 24-26.

Communism worldwide and was *de facto* a service to US imperialism[115] (which was openly compared to German[116] and Japanese fascism).[117] Some of them reiterated the Chinese position on war and imperialism criticising J.F. Kennedy's hypocrisy[118] – for example pretending to want a ban on nuclear weapons[119] – and warning that the US[120] or India may try to exploit Sino-Soviet divergences.[121] Chinese positions on women's issues were expressed, too,[122] and space was given to documents of other pro-Chinese Communist parties, from Vietnam to Malay to New Zealand.[123]

Some of the Chinese articles published by *Edizioni Oriente* argued that one of the sides of Soviet "revisionism" was the lack of support to anticolonial struggles. However, the USSR accused China of propagating a sort of "racism the other way round," that is, of considering the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America more "revolutionary" and "active" than the others.[124] Possibly one of the highest signs of the tension between the "established socialist power," the Soviet Union, and the Communists of colonial countries took place on March 4, 1965, where the Soviet police allegedly attacked a demonstration of foreign students – all from colonial countries – against the US embassy in Moscow.[125]

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[115] *Edizioni Oriente* 5 (October 1963): 11.
[116] Luo Jui-Ching, "Celebrando la vittoria sul fascismo tedesco proseguiamo fino in fondo la lotta contro l'imperialismo americano," *Edizioni Oriente* 25 (June 1965): 7-20.
[117] Luo Jui-Ching, "Il popolo ha vinto il fascismo giapponese e potrà certamente sconfiggere anche il fascismo americano," *Edizioni Oriente* 29 (October 1965): 41-56.
[118] "Il grande complotto di Kennedy," *Edizioni Oriente* 3 (August 1963): 13-20.
[119] "La frode nucleare degli Stati Uniti smascherata," *Edizioni Oriente* 3 (August 1963): 31-34.
[120] "Non bisogna lasciare che l'imperialismo americano si intrometta nelle divergenze cino-sovietiche," *Edizioni Oriente* 3 (August 1963): 21-3.
[121] "I reazionari indiani nel coro anticinese," *Edizioni Oriente* 3 (August 1963): 27-30.
[122] *Edizioni Oriente* 3 (August 1963), 35-49.
[123] Ibid., 50-80.
[124] "Dei difensori del neo-colonialismo," *Edizioni Oriente* 6 (November 1963): 26-42.
[125] "La polizia sovietica reprime la manifestazione antiamericana a Mosca," *Edizioni Oriente* 21 (March 1965): 1-2.



Fig. 2. "Soviet police attack students who protest against American aggressors," *Edizioni Oriente* 21 (March 1965), cover picture.

Texts explicating Chinese positions on war and peace were also published: as underlined before, the CCP argued that being prepared for war and having a firmer stance against imperialism was the best way to achieve peace. Moreover, the CCP argued, even nuclear weapons were not crucial in a hypothetical war between imperialism and socialism, since the outcome of wars was historically determined by the fighting peoples, and not by weapons, however modern and disruptive.[126] Interestingly, the development of the Chinese atomic bomb was seen as a success for a future elimination of nuclear weapons on a world scale.[127] Chinese Communists insisted that they were indeed in favour of a policy of peaceful coexistence between the socialist and the capitalist worlds,

[126] "Due differenti linee nella questione della guerra e della pace," *Edizioni Oriente* 7 (December 1963): 5-22.
[127] *Edizioni Oriente* 17 (November 1964): 3-11.

but that the Chinese line of peaceful coexistence was different from the Soviet one, deemed too weak.[128]

However, *Edizioni Oriente* also presented articles dealing with ideological struggle in the realm of philosophy and social sciences, where Marxism-Leninism was also applied,[129] as well as in the field of law.[130] The importance of education and culture, especially for the young, was underlined.[131] The Chinese agricultural[132] and industrial situation was explained and praised.[133] In the field of international politics, *Edizioni Oriente* underlined exclusive Chinese sovereignty on Taiwan,[134] while solidarity declarations with other countries were published, too, like Mao Zedong's on Panama,[135] Zhou Enlai's on African peoples,[136] together with articles on the Congolese struggle of national liberation.[137] Almost entire issues were dedicated to the escalating Indochinese situation.[138] Khrushchev's ousting in late 1964 was seen basically as a positive event.[139]

Vento dell'est

Niccolai points out that the theoretical quarterly journal *Vento dell'est* was founded in February 1963 by the Edizioni Oriente group. The journal *Vento dell'est* had a different cut from *Edizioni Oriente*: while the latter published mainly official Chinese documents, the former also tried to host research projects, essays, and theoretical elaborations. Mirelle de Gouville, who began a collaboration with the journal from France, said to Niccolai:

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[128] "Due politiche di coesistenza pacifica diametralmente opposte," *Edizioni Oriente* 8 (January 1964): 3-24.
[129] Chou Yang, "I compiti che devono assumersi gli studiosi di filosofia e di scienze sociali," *Edizioni Oriente* 9 (1964): 3-32.
[130] "L"essenza della lotta," *Edizioni Oriente* 12 (June 1964): 56-58.
[131] *Edizioni Oriente* 16 (October 1964): 22-53; Ko Ching-Shih, "Un teatro in pieno sviluppo al servizio della base economica del socialismo," *Edizioni Oriente* 17 (November 1964): 44-69.
[132] *Edizioni Oriente* 12 (June 1964): 34-55.
[133] "Note sull"industria cinese," *Edizioni Oriente* 18 (December 1964): 70-72.
[134] "La sovranità della Cina su Taiwan non sopporta intrusioni," *Edizioni Oriente* 13 (July 1964): 3-7.
[135] Mao Zedong, "Dichiarazione del presidente Mao Tse-tung: Il popolo cinese sostiene risolutamente la giusta lotta patriottica del popolo di Panama," *Edizioni Oriente* 9 (1964): 33-4.
[136] Zhou Enlai, "L"esempio dei popoli africani che osarono fare la lotta armata e strappare la vittoria," *Edizioni Oriente* 9 (1964): 41-6.
[137] "Combatti, popolo congolese! (Leopoldville)!," *Edizioni Oriente* 13 (July 1964): 34-8.
[138] *Edizioni Oriente* 13 (July 1964), 15 (September 1964); 21 (March 1965).
[139] *Edizioni Oriente* 18 (December 1964): 3-20.

> Sources of information on China were non-existent here in Italy, and that is why the magazine "Vento dell'est" was created. Nothing of what was published in China was brought to Italy, there was nothing. I began to work with them immediately, from France, since I could translate directly from Chinese: within the magazine mainly I and Coccia translated […] We had the presumption to be a competent, professional and qualified information source, at the service of the left in general, with a hope to maintain this character of authority.[140]

Since the very first issue, *Vento dell'est* published the Italian translations of many crucial Mao Zedong's writings, like "Against bookish mentality"[141] and "Where do the right ideas of man come from?"[142]

Interestingly, *Vento dell'est* also published articles on hard sciences which had a philosophical link with Mao's thought, like the article of the Japanese scientist Shoici Sakata on elementary particles, originally published on *Hong Qi*.[143] Articles on political economy[144] were also published, together with a Liu Danian's article where he tried to analyse Asian history beyond the myths of Eurocentric historiography.[145] A polemic reply was also published to an Emilio Sereni's *Rinascita* article where he criticised Lia Piao's strategic views.[146]

Nuova unità

The monthly *Nuova unità* was founded in March 1964. Quoting Tobagi, Niccolai argues that the real history of Italian Marxism-Leninism began with *Nuova unità*, whereas the birth of *Viva il Leninismo* and of the Edizioni Oriente should rather be considered the "prehistory" of this political current.[147] The choice of the title of this monthly is significant. *L'Unità* was the historical organ of the Italian Communist Party founded by Antonio Gramsci in 1924. Therefore, with this title the founders of *Nuova unità* most likely wanted to express continuity as well as discontinuity. Whereas they wanted to continue their political struggle on the footsteps of the original Communist party, symbolized by

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[140] Niccolai, "'La tigre,'" 77.
[141] Mao Zedong, "Contro la mentalità libresca," *Vento dell'est* 1 (1965): 7-14.
[142] Mao Zedong, "Donde vengono le idee giuste dell"uomo," *Vento dell'est* 1 (1965): 28-9.
[143] Shoici Sakata, "Dialogo sulla nova teoria delle particelle elementari," *Vento dell'est* 1 (1965): 31-49.
[144] Wu Guanghui, "Critica alla teoria della 'base economica globale,'" *Vento dell'est* 1 (1965): 50-64.
[145] Liu Danian, "Come valutare la storia dell"Asia," *Vento dell'est* 1 (1965): 65-76.
[146] C.P., "Sereni e Lin Piao," *Vento dell'est* 1 (1965): 77-87.
[147] Niccolai, *Quando la Cina*, 103.

Antonio Gramsci, they intended to create something "new" from the PCI of the time, which in their opinion no longer represented the Italian working class.

The position of *Nuova unità* on China is clear since its very first, March 1964 issue. In fact, the magazine published a polemical text signed by the Venice FGCI (Federazione Giovanile Comunista Italiana, the PCI youth wing) in which they condemned the "anti-Marxist method of economic blackmailing perpetrated by the USSR towards the People's Republic of China and the People's Republic of Albania, while economic and military pacts are sealed with the traitor Tito."[148] Moreover, the young Venetian Communists praised "the consistently revolutionary action of the Chinese people and Communist Party […] hit by economic and political repressions while they heroically stand the siege of imperialism." In fact, "they alone in the world keep high the revolutionary flag of peace without compromises, for the liberation of oppressed peoples, for the triumph of socialist revolution, and the Leninist flag of proletarian internationalism."[149] These few lines are already insightful in gathering the political views of Italian Marxist-Leninists: China and Albania had to be praised as "real" socialist countries victims of Soviet unfair behaviour, while Tito was defined a "traitor."

The second issue of April 1964 contains a reflection on the reception of the first issue. A front-page article, polemically titled "Maximalist wing or revolutionary party?" argues that while the "bourgeois and revisionist press" ignored the new journal, "hundreds" of "workers and peasants" wrote inciting letters. Then, the article cites a comment which probably appeared in a PCI publication, where the PCI leader Giorgio Amendola commented the birth of *Nuova unità* by saying: "a situation like the present one provokes extremist pressures among the youth due to the harshness of class tensions internally, and because of the consequences of the positions held by the Chinese Communist Party." By saying this, Amendola was seemingly trying to understand the positions of the Marxist-Leninists,

[148] Albania was united with China in the polemic against the USSR, that is why statements of solidarity present in the Italian Marxist-Leninist press are often in favour of both countries. The Italian Marxist-Leninist press constantly supported and praised Albania, and Italian M-L delegations even went there on visit. However, it is possible Enver Hoxha never gained the status of consideration Mao had.

[149] Comitato Cittadino della FGCI di Venezia, "La Federazione giovanile Comunista di Venezia per una linea Marxista-Leninista," *Nuova unità*, March 1964, 8.

though he did not agree with them. For *Nuova unità* this was an occasion to present Amendola's words as a confirmation of the rightness of their theses. In fact, Amendola, the "prominent revisionist leader," hinted at the fact the more and more young Communists agreed with "Leninist positions, which are today identified with the struggle of principle conducted on international ground by the Chinese Communist Party." [150]

Mario Geymonat, son of the epistemologist Lodovico, who became a distinguished philologist later in life, was a convinced Marxist-Leninist in the 1960s, and argued in *Nuova unità* that contrary to appearances, Marxism-Leninism outside China was not a small isolated group, though it underlined the importance China had in beginning the struggle against revisionism. According to Geymonat, a founding document against revisionism, *Viva il Leninismo!* was published by the CCP in 1960, in occasion of the 90th anniversary of Lenin's birth.[151]

In *Nuova unità* Ugo Duse criticized the PCI secretary Palmiro Togliatti by saying that he unchained "hatred and contempt against the Chinese Communist Party." By contrast, Duse praised the CCP because it was "the only party which took power *against all expectations* [emphasis in the original], notwithstanding the judgement of the CC [Central Committee] of the USSR" and that the Chinese and other Asian peoples really proved they were able to apply Marxism in a creative way. One of the accusations commonly moved against China at the time was that the CCP senselessly advocated war and violence on a world scale, but Duse defended the Chinese line by saying that the Chinese were doing nothing but underlining the role of violence in history as theorised in Marxism. "If China is far," Duse somewhat triumphantly concluded, "the Marxist-Leninist positions supported by the Chinese comrades are among us, in the heart of all Communist comrades faithful to their principles, and they cannot fail to triumph."[152] *Nuova unità* did not refrain from popularising also the cultural

[150] "Ala massimalista o partito rivoluzionario," *Nuova unità*, April 1964, 1.
[151] Mario Geymonat, "La lotta per il Marxismo-Leninismo nel movimento comunista internazionale," ibid., 6.
[152] Ugo Duse, "Per un vero dibattito sulla ideologia e la politica comunista," *Nuova unità*, May 1964, 1-2.

side of socialist China, for example dedicating articles to the Italian tours of the Chinese Peking opera[153] and acrobatic theatre groups.[154]

The June 1964 issue of *Nuova unità* presented an important event for the small Italian Marxist-Leninist movement. The journal reported the visit of a delegation of the pro-Chinese Edizioni Oriente publishing house to China, and published a moving farewell letter the delegation addressed to the "Chinese comrades." The farewell letter is clearly full of admiring comments on the efficiency and justice of Chinese socialism.[155] Later in 1964, a delegation straight from *Nuova unità* visited China, and the journal published the ritual picture. Chinese agricultural communes were also praised in a two-page written piece from the American Communist Anna Louise Strong, in which, however, the disaster of the Great Leap Forward is passed over.[156]

Interestingly, in 1964 *Nuova unità* begin to publish extracts from a Liu Shaoqi's book on "how to become a good Communist." This is quite remarkable because Liu Shaoqi would later become one of the targets and *bêtes noires* of the Cultural Revolution and of its Italian followers. Liu's manual underlined the importance for Communists of theoretical study and self-change in order to make the revolution.[157]

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[153] M.G., "L"opera di Pechino in Italia," *Nuova unità*, May 1964, 6.
[154] O.P., "Il teatro acrobatico della Cina in Italia," *Nuova unità*, January 1966, 8.
[155] La delegazione italiana delle Edizioni Oriente, "Il commiato della delegazione delle "Edizioni Oriente" dai compagni cinesi," *Nuova unità*, June 1964, 2.
[156] Anna Louise Strong, "Le comuni popolari cinesi oggi," *Nuova unità*, July-August 1964, 6-7.
[157] Liu Shaoqi, "Come diventare un buon comunista," *Nuova unità*, September 1964, 5, 8; October 1964, 5; November 1964, 5; December 1964, 5, 7; January 1965, 7-8.



Fig. 3. *Nuova unità* celebrates the visit of a delegation of the Edizioni Oriente to China. The caption reads: "Comrade Mao Zedong receives the delegation of the Edizioni Oriente, led by comrade Dino Frangioni (Livio). Peking, May 17, 1964." From: *Nuova unità*, June 1964, 1.

Nuova unità rejoiced Khrushchev's destitution which happened in 1964. In fact, Ugo Balestri claimed that

> Not only did workers not despair because of Khrushchev's ousting, but we can state that in the most conscious part of the working class, even in the very large strata of PCI members, the event was greeted with satisfaction because in it […] the possibility to re-establish unitary relations in the international Communist movement, and in particular with the great Party and the great people of People's China, whose revolution is in the heart of millions of Italian workers, was immediately seen.[158]

Nuova unità's praise for Chinese policies included a Chinese proposal to destroy all atomic weapons, notwithstanding the fact that China was already an atomic power.[159] However, Chinese policy of mass militarisation was presented in very positive terms. In fact, as Manlio Dinucci argued, this policy

[158] Ugo Balestri, "Lottiamo fino in fondo contro i kruscioviani italiani," *Nuova unità*, November 1964, 1.
[159] Manlio Dinucci, "La Cina potenza atomica propone la distruzione di tutte le armi nucleari," *Nuova unità*, November 1964, 4.

was the key to the success against Japanese and Nationalist troops, and was an invincible bulwark against US imperialism. Chinese people's militias had both a historical and strategic significance.[160]



Fig. 4. The *Nuova unità* delegation received by Kang Sheng, Peking, December 1, 1964. The delegation was led by the periodical director Ugo Duse, and included Giuseppe Regis, Franco Molfese, Fosco Dinucci, Vito di Gesù. From: *Nuova unità*, December 1964, 1.

Nuova unità also published an illuminating *Hong Qi* (Red Flag) article which put openly US imperialism *on par* with Nazi-Fascism: the defeat against German, Italian and Japanese Fascists should have illuminated the road towards the defeat of US imperialism.[161] The two phenomena were put *on par* also by an explicit picture portraying bunches of cadavers, some of them still with the sadly recognizable striped clothing, in a Nazi concentration camp in Poland. The caption tellingly reads: "Thus yesterday's German Fascism in Poland! Thus today's American Fascism in Vietnam."[162]

Another extremely interesting initiative was proposed by the former partisan, economist and China expert Giuseppe Regis in a letter to *Nuova unità* published in the August-September 1965 issue. Regis wrote that a Chinese Peace Delegation visiting Italy in November 1964 had had a meeting with the

[160] Manlio Dinucci, "Un popolo in armi," *Nuova unità*, June 1965, 3.
[161] "La vittoria sul fascismo tedesco illumina la lotta contro il fascismo americano," insert to *Nuova unità*, June 1965.
[162] Ibid., 5.

ANPI (Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia), a prestigious organisation founded by former partisans of the anti-fascist resistance. According to Regis, the delegation had invited the ANPI to send a delegation of Italian partisans to China, showing the great respect the fighters for Chinese national liberation had for the fighters for Italian liberation. The ANPI had rejected the invitation due to lack of funds, but Regis was not convinced by their answer. In fact, he thought that certain "ANPI leaders would like to put the Resistance into a Museum with beautiful commemorative plaques and sacred blessings."[163] Therefore, he maintained that a delegation of Italian partisans had to be organised autonomously by the partisans themselves, without the ANPI. He attached to the letter 100,000 liras autonomously gathered by a group of partisans, and asked *Nuova unità* to support them in this initiative. Regis's letter is significant, because it shows that in the Italy of the time there were partisans who saw a parallel between the Chinese and Italian struggles for national liberation, to the point that they were ready to raise money to organise an official visit to China.

Nuova unità also gave importance to the Italian peasants' movement, possibly inspired by the peasant nature of the Chinese Revolution. This may be surprising for some: since Italy was a Western country much more developed than China, one may dismiss the problems of Italian peasants and rural communities as negligible. However, Italy developed more slowly than other Western European countries like Britain and Germany, therefore it is not so surprising that Italian Maoists attempted to intercede into peasant issues.[164]

[163] Giuseppe Regis, "Una giusta iniziativa del compagno Regis per l'ANPI," *Nuova unità*, August-September 1965, 3.
[164] Manlio Donati, "La crisi dell"agricoltura e il movimento contadino," *Nuova unità*, January 1965, 5.



Fig. 5. Wall writings exalting Mao Zedong in Piacenza. According to the journal, by doing this the "Piacenza comrades oppose to the revisionists the names of the great Leninist leaders." *Nuova unità*, January 1965, 10.



Fig. 6. Visual support: "Girls from the People's Republic of China at work in a radio station." *Nuova Unità*, May 1965, 2.

Around mid-1965, Italian Marxist-Leninists made a small step towards a higher level of organisation. In fact, *Nuova unità* proclaimed the political evolution of the journal into the "Movimento Marxista-Leninista," which was founded in Milan on April 4, 1965.[165] In the May 1965 issue they distributed as an insert a polemic Chinese document about a meeting of pro-Soviet Communist parties held in Moscow in March 1965, defined "scissionista" (splitters").[166]

[165] "Appello ai compagni Marxisti-Leninisti," *Nuova unità*, April 1965, 1.
[166] Redazione di Renmin Ribao e redazione di Hongqi, "Commento alla riunione di marzo a Mosca," insert to *Nuova unità*, May 1965.



Fig. 7. Visual support: "Chinese female aviators training for their country's defence." *Nuova unità*, May 1965, 2.

Conclusions

The analysis of a selection of PSI, PCI and Maoism-oriented press during the years from 1949 until 1966 allows one to make a few conclusions. The first important element to underline is PCI and PSI attitude towards China. Though the PCI finally aligned with the USSR in the Sino-Soviet rift, its attitude was more problematic and possibilist than that, for example, of the French Communist Party - but this may not come as a surprise since the PCF was well known for its extreme subservience to

Moscow.[167] How should one interpret the PCI's "politics of attention" towards China? Was it just a sign of more independence on part of the PCI, or a product of Togliatti's "proverbial prudence," as Pietro Di Loreto called it?[168] Was it a sign of Togliatti's idea of a "polycentric" Communist movement? Probably the answer lies in a combination of all these factors. For its part, the PSI was definitely attentive towards People's China and saw its rise as an absolutely positive element in the world arena. The PSI journal *Mondo operaio* even showed a problematic and understanding attitude towards China during the Sino-Soviet rift, though the PSI probably did not suspect that Maoism could become a rib of the left also in Italy.

Another important element to underline is that the foundations of that "Maoist storm" which will shake Italy after 1966 had already been laid in the previous years, since the 1949 Chinese Revolution. The attractiveness of Chinese ideas can partly be explained by different – indeed, sometimes opposite – kinds of delusion with the USSR and the traditional left (PCI and PSI). The Marxist-Leninist galaxy was deluded by Soviet revisionism and by the repudiation of Stalin's legacy, while many intellectuals looked for new avenues following the 1956 Soviet intervention in Hungary. In any case, they were only the first steps of a "long march" which would go on to be much further.

[167] Richard Wolin, *The Wind From the East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
[168] Pietro Di Loreto, La difficile transizione: Dalla fine del centrismo al centro-sinistra, 1953-1960 (Bologna: il Mulino, 1993): 306.

THE ITALIAN PEASANT MAOISM OF "SERVIRE IL POPOLO"

Introduction

Certainly, one of the most interesting Italian Maoist organisations was the "Servire il popolo." Under this name Unione dei Comunisti Italiani (marxisti-leninisti), or UCI(m-l). However, this organisation was better known and went into history as Servire il popolo, from the name of their main newspaper. The sheer Maoist character of the UCI(m-l) is clear already from the name of the newspaper, which not by chance came to indicate the group itself. In fact, "to serve the people" was a very famous Maoist slogan. It contained a profound sense of humility, and a sense of a historical mission towards the "people". According to Maoist principles, a Communist should love the people and fight for their emancipation. The very use of the word "people" – instead, for example, of "proletariat" or "working class" – must be explained. Chinese Communists shared the Marxist orthodoxy according to which the working class had to be the leading revolutionary class. However, as it is well known, the practical reality of the Chinese Revolution was characterised by peasant, rather than workers' mobilisation. This could have not been otherwise since China at the time was an overwhelmingly peasant country, with small, geographically limited working class swathes. But beyond that, Chinese Communists argued that victory against foreign imperialists and Chinese nationalists could be achieved only through a broader alliance with other "classes" - intellectuals, small landowners, "enlightened" national bourgeoisie, and so forth. That is why the Chinese Revolution came to be seen as a struggle by "the people" against a minority of Chinese nationalists, slaves of foreign capitalist interests. This revolution should indeed be a revolution of "new democracy." The concept of "people" is therefore crucial to understand Maoism in other countries like Italy, in our case.[169]

The UCI(m-l) insisted on the necessity of a revolution of the Italian oppressed classes, but which oppressed classes? In the Italian extra-parliamentary left of the 1960s-1970s, factory workers were

[169] However, the concept of "people" was not alien to the PCI. Giulia Bassi, *Non è solo questione di classe: il popolo nel discorso del Partito comunista italiano (1921-1991)* (Rome: Viella, 2019).

the revolutionary subjects par excellence. It is enough to look at the name of a few famous extreme-leftist formations: Potere Operaio (Workers' Power), Avanguardia Operaia (Workers' Vanguard), or at certain popular slogans of the time, like "Democrazia è il fucile in spalla agli operai" ("Democracy is the rifle on workers' shoulders"). The UCI(m-l) indeed concentrated much of its energy on mobilising workers, but workers were not considered the sole revolutionary force. The Maoist concept of "people" pushed them to mobilise other social categories, like peasants, agricultural wage workers, small farmers, breeders, intellectuals, students, office workers, and sectors of the small bourgeoisie. Of these, however, agricultural workers in general deserve special attention. Why did the UCI(m-l) spent so much energy in mobilising them? The answer is twofold. On the one hand, Italian Maoists were influenced by the Chinese Peasant Revolution, and they were trying to trigger a similar process in their home country. On the other hand, there might have been a factor of sheer political calculation. This small organisation – which however enjoyed considerable funding[170] – tried to penetrate an Italian society where Communist ideology was already relatively rooted, and where some of its sectors were hegemonized by the PCI or by other leftist formations. Therefore, the Italian countryside, especially in the deep South, was targeted as a potentially revolutionary reserve, since it was somewhat neglected by the main leftist organisations.

However, a question spontaneously arises: how could these Italian Maoists think that they could trigger a peasant revolution in Italy following the Chinese example? After all, China was a huge agricultural country with hundreds of millions of peasants, who were indeed crucial to secure communist victory. Differently, Italy was a Western European country which was undergoing a rapid modernising process. However, it is precisely the characteristics and the lacunae of this process which should be taken into consideration. In the 1960s-1970s, Italy was undergoing an impetuous, but partial and contradictory modernisation. Industry and urbanisation were growing: many country dwellers were leaving their home villages to work in the cities. Moreover, in Italy this process of

[170] Stefano Ferrante, La Cina non era vicina: Servire il popolo e il maoismo all'italiana (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 2008).

internal migration meant often a South-North migration. Authors like Marco Clementi, Paolo Persichetti and Elisa Santalena underlined that Southern workers migrated to the Northern cities contributed to the radicalisation of workers' struggles.[171] In fact, migrants were often eradicated peasants – or country dwellers nevertheless – who migrated to a new environment which they often perceived as foreign and hostile. The Southerners' difficulties were of various kinds: mentality and even language problems, – many of them were probably more familiar with their regional dialects than with standard Italian – difficulties to adapt to a factory environment, and sometimes appalling working and living conditions – small, squalid rooms, etc.

Therefore, we can see that the Italian situation of the time presented certain aspects of "disorder." Italian Maoists could not but follow the Chairman's saying, according to which "disorder reigns under the sky: the situation is therefore excellent." By this, Mao meant that in a confused and chaotic socio-economic and political situation, a revolutionary could find fertile ground for his/her plans.[172] The chaotic and problematic Italian modernisation left after itself pockets of peasants' and day labourers' discontent, which could and should be politically exploited.

However, as we shall see in the following in-depth analysis of the sources, according to UCI(m-l) Maoists the Italian peasant question was strongly linked with the Southern question. In fact, I argue that the UCI(m-l) developed an ideology and a practice which I would define a "communist and Maoist *meridionalismo*." The three terms of this definition must be explained. The term *meridionalismo* indicates an Italian current of thought according to which the Italian South suffers of specific problems which strive for specific solutions. However, the *meridionalismo* of the UCI(m-l) was *communist* and *Maoist*. It was communist, because the UCI(m-l) thought that the problems of the South could be solved through communist ideology and practice. But it was also Maoist, because

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[171] Marco Clementi, Paolo Persichetti and Elisa Santalena, *Brigate rosse: Dalle fabbriche alla campagna di primavera, Volume I* (Rome: Derive approdi, 2018).

[172] This concept is elaborated in a 1971 Sergio Leone's film, *Giù la testa*. For a political analysis of the film, see: Collettivo Militant, "L'artista e le lotte di classe, ovvero: quando la critica delle armi impone una visione del mondo," *Militant Blog*, June 18, 2014, http://www.militant-blog.org/?p=10725 (accessed June 10, 2018).

it was inspired by the Chinese Peasant Revolution and was an alternative to the PCI *meridionalismo*, which through time had acquired a certain prestige and was advocated by specific journals and intellectuals[173] – the PCI was in fact accused of "anti-meridionalismo" by the UCI(m-l).[174] This is remarkable, because in his classical 1967 work *Pesant Communism in Southern Italy* Sidney Tarrow highlights that the PCI had in fact a specific policy for the Italian South. The PCI tried to adapt a Western-liberal Marxism to a peasant context.[175]

The solutions to the problems of the South the UCI(m-l) advocated were radical and revolutionary: collectivisation, peasant communes, cooperative principle, peasant self-management. However, UCI(m-l) Maoists had yet another crucial source of inspiration for their peasant *meridionalismo*, apart from Mao Zedong: the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci. Himself a Southerner – he was born in Ales, Sardinia, in 1891 – he became one of the leaders of the new born Italian Communist Party, though he was arrested in 1926 and imprisoned until his death in 1937. He became more known as a thinker and theorist than as a political leader, especially thanks to his famous *Prison Notebooks*.[176]

Gramsci's Southern origins and his political acumen brought him to develop radically new thoughts on the Italian Southern question, which he put down in his important work "Alcuni temi della quistione meridionale."[177] Shortly explained, Gramsci insisted on the specific problems of the Italian South, and thought that they could be solved only through an alliance, a "historical bloc" between the peasants of the South and the workers of the North. UCI(m-l) Maoists saw themselves as the legitimate heirs of the *meridionalista* Gramsci, with slogans like "Per un governo operaio e contadino"

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[173] But there were also important non-Communist *meridionalista* authors. See Carlo Levi's famous novel: Carlo Levi, *Cristo di è fermato a Eboli* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990).
[174] "L'antimeridionalismo del PCI," *Servire il popolo*, July 10, 1971, 1.
[175] Sidney Tarrow, *Peasant Communism in Southern Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).
[176] The most recent biography on Gramsci is: Angelo D'Orsi, *Gramsci: Una nuova biografia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2017).
[177] Antonio Gramsci, *La questione meridionale* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1966). Interestingly, Gramsci was a Southerner, but in his only and memorable speech in the Italian Parliament he was accused of "not knowing" Southern Italy. See: Antonio Gramsci, "Origini e scopi della legge contro le associazioni segrete. Discorso di Gramsci alla Camera [16 maggio 1925] contro il disegno di legge Mussolini-Rocco," https://www.inventati.org/reati_associativi/testi%20raccolti/011.html, consulted on June 10, 2018.

("For a workers' and peasants' government"). Their considering themselves the legitimate heirs of Gramsci's thought was not without consequences. Gramsci's figure was and still is fundamental in the Italian Left. His legacy was – and still is – claimed by different political groups. Gramsci's legacy was indeed one of the bones of contention between the PCI and the extreme-leftist groups.

This chapter is based on two main kinds of sources: the press of the UCI(m-l) and a selection of its internal documents kept at the Archive of the Feltrinelli Foundation in Milan. The two kinds of sources are organically helpful to better understand an organisation like the UCI(m-l). In fact, if their printed press gives us an idea of the propaganda they intended to convey, internal documents are more useful to study the ideological work and inner plans which were not necessarily made public. The analysed UCI(m-l) press goes from 1968 – the year of its foundation – until 1976 – the year of Mao's death. As mentioned before, the UCI(m-l) could enjoy relatively high funding, and that is why it could publish several magazines. The main UCI(m-l) magazines were *Servire il popolo*, a general newspaper; *Mezzo cielo*, dedicated to women (from Mao's expression "Women are the other half of the sky"); *La voce contadina*, dedicated to peasants; *La rossa primavera*, dedicated to the young; *Il giornale dei pionieri*, dedicated to children. On their part, the analysed internal documents are often not dated, so they cannot be used to construct a chronological story of the organisation. Differently, they will be used to study the political and ideological evolution of the group, its connection with Maoist thought and its adaptation and application into the Italian context.

Servire il popolo

Servire il popolo first came out in November 1968. Its slogan over the title was "Put politics in the first place", which was in fact a well-known Maoist slogan. A first, basic article explained the meaning of the slogan "serve the people". "The idea to entirely and totally serve the people, genially developed by Chairman Mao Zedong […] is a powerful ideological weapon to destroy all egoisms, and to encourage dedication to the collective interest." This short introduction already explains the Maoist concepts of "people" and of "collective interest." "The Marxist-Leninist party […] is the party

of the proletariat which brings to the people the revolutionary proposals for the solution of its problems. The party of the proletariat is the only party which serves the people's general interests."[178] As we can see, the Maoists had a concept of a vanguard proletarian party which should serve the people's general interests. In the very first issue they also underlined the importance of workers' and students' movements.[179]

Needless to say, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was praised and glorified as an experience crucial not only for China, but for all the oppressed peoples of the world.[180] Proletarian internationalism was considered crucial, and this was exemplified by pictures portraying armed workers of all races and colours marching together towards emancipation, like a sort of multicolour *Quarto stato* (see fig. 1). The Maoist mass line was considered crucial,[181] together with the absolute necessity to conduct investigations in order to understand the people's problems and to propose solutions,[182] in factories[183] as well as in the countryside.[184] According to UCI(m-l) Maoists study was a crucial instrument to train good cadres.[185]

[178] "Il significato di "servire il popolo,"*Servire il popolo*, November 1968, 1.
[179] "Gli studenti e il movimento di massa," *Servire il popolo*, November 1968, 1,8.
[180] "La grande rivoluzione culturale proletaria," *Servire il popolo*, November 1968, 3.
[181] "L'Unione dei Comunisti Italiani (marxisti-leninisti)," *Servire il popolo*, November 1968, 5.
[182] "Come lavorare nei paesi di provincia," *Servire il popolo*, November 1968, 5.
[183] "L'inchiesta nella fabbrica," *Servire il popolo*, January 1969, 5.
[184] "L'inchiesta nella zona contadina," *Servire il popolo*, November 1968, 6.
[185] "Sulla formazione dei quadri: lo studio," *Servire il popolo*, November 1968, 6.



Fig. 1. A propaganda image symbolising proletarian internationalism. From *Servire il popolo*, September 6, 1969, 4.

Interestingly, Italian Maoist propaganda was not limited to the press, but two radio stations could also be listened to by Italian Maoist sympathisers, "Radio Pechino" and "Radio Tirana" (Albania was China's European ally). Advertisement of these two radio stations regularly appeared on *Servire il popolo*, with invitations of the kind: "You can listen to the voice of the revolutionary peoples every day in Italian language."[186]

Important concepts like that of "new democracy" were explained on *Servire il popolo* with Mao's texts translated from the Chinese press, which underlined the importance of revolutionary culture for the people's emancipation. "Revolutionary culture is a powerful revolutionary instrument for the popular masses. Revolutionary culture precedes revolution, ideologically preparing it." [187] Interestingly, these Maoist concepts were compatible with the Gramscian concept of hegemony.

[186] *Servire il popolo*, November 1968, 6.
[187] "Guida per lo studio sulla nuova democrazia," *Servire il popolo*, November 1968, 7.

Therefore, it is not by chance that these two thinkers were both respected and elaborated by Italian Maoists.[188]

UCI(m-l) "populism" was sometimes exemplified by lyrical Maoist slogans which expressed love for the people, like this Mao's phrase: "We Communists are like seed and the people is like earth. Wherever we go, we must unite with the people, make roots, and bloom among the people." [189] Union within what the UCI(m-l) considered "the people" was deemed crucial.[190]

How did the UCI(m-l) relate to the political events of other European countries? UCI(m-l) Maoists clearly followed very closely anything that happened in China or in other colonial-postcolonial countries, but they gave attention to what was happening in neighbouring European countries, too. This is especially true speaking about France. In fact, apart from being a geographically and culturally close country, France had one of the strongest Western communist parties – together with the Italian – and also developed a relatively strong Maoist movement, in many ways similar to its Italian counterpart. The events of the French May were followed with attention. In their view, the May events demonstrated that the "peoples of Western Europe" were preparing "the takeover of power." In fact, "Italian proletarians must deeply study the lesson of the insurrectionary French May: the tactical defeats of a people can turn into strategical victories for the working class of all the world."[191] They thought that the year between May 1968 and May 1969 in France was "a year of proletarian struggles," therefore not considering the French events a mere student uprising.[192]

Maoist Migrants

[188] Italian Maoists were aware of these similarities between Mao's and Gramcsi's thought (interview of the author with former Italian Maoist Giuseppe Nieddu).
[189] *Servire il popolo*, January 1969, 1.
[190] "Per l'unità del popolo," *Servire il popolo*, May 15, 1969, 1-2.
[191] "La presa del potere," *Servire il popolo*, May 15, 1969, 1-2, 1.
[192] "Un anno di lotte proletarie," *Servire il popolo*, May 15, 1969, 2.

Certain sectors of society were especially cherished by the UCI(m-l) Maoists, as it was made clear in a special issue published in occasions of Mayday, 1969. According to *Servire il popolo*, the protagonists of Mayday were workers, peasants, migrants, youth and women.[193] By "migrants" *Servire il popolo* clearly meant Italian migrants who mostly lived in more developed European countries such as France, Switzerland, Germany, and Belgium. The UCI(m-l) gave Italian migrants abroad special attention, targeting them with simple, clear-cut slogans which were supposed to mobilise them.[194] A short June 1969 article described the birth of a Maoist organisation of Italian migrants in Germany, called Club of Marxist-Leninist Migrants. According to the article, titled "Long live the revolutionary organisation of migrants in Germany," Italian migrants abroad were building "a powerful communist organisation," whose work was risky and dangerous, because it yet had to work in absolute secrecy.[195] Since this very first article it is clear that for the UCI(m-l) the migrants' question was linked to the Southern question: in fact, many of the Italian migrants abroad were Southerners.

More in general, *Servire il popolo* appealed to migrants in Northern Italy and abroad to "build revolutionary nuclei."[196] Heartfelt appeals were published, as if written by Northern workers to Southern migrants working in the factories of Northern Italy. Though it might seem incredible to many present-day Italians or even more so to a non-Italian, in many Northern Italian cities there was a climate of what today we would call "racism" against Southern migrants. Old aged Southerners may still remember the sign "Dogs and *terroni* not allowed" hanging at the entrance of certain pubs in Northern Italy (*terrone* being an offensive term di designate Southern Italians). Seemingly, the UCI(m-l) was well aware of this situation and thought the bourgeois attempts to divide the working

[193] "I protagonisti del 1° maggio," *Servire il popolo*, May 1, 1969, 4.
[194] The attention Italian Maoists gave to Italian migrants abroad was specular to that French Maoists gave to foreign migrants in France (mostly Arabs and blacks from the French colonial world). Interestingly, the Maoists of both countries acted on a similar situation in reverse.
[195] "Viva l'organizzazione rivoluzionaria degli emigrati in Germania," *Servire il popolo*, June 15, 1969, 2.
[196] "Emigrati! Avanti nella costruzione di nuclei rivoluzionari," *Servire il popolo*, June 15, 1969, 3.

class had to be fought against: "What is more, you often find the scorn of some workers of the North, from whom the masters try to divide you with their dirty ideas."[197] The UCI(m-l) deemed the construction of party cells among migrants' villages in Southern Italy[198] and the return of Italian migrants to their villages during the winter holidays extremely important.[199] As we can see, the Southern-peasant question and the migrant question were linked in the view if the UCI(m-l) since, quite clearly, most migrants to Northern Italy and to foreign countries came from the Southern countryside. That is why *Servire il popolo* deemed especially important the formation of a party cell created by returned migrants in the Sicilian village of S. Cono. "The direction of the proletariat in the countryside" was guaranteed by this "cell composed of migrants come back to their land" to carry out a crucial "work of education and struggle for the peasant masses."[200] The first conference of communist migrants was held in Naples, on January 8-9, 1972.[201]

Servire il popolo often published letters written by Italian migrants abroad lamenting the sadness of their condition.[202] The political meaning of these letters was clear: even migration meant no salvation from the evils of capitalism, communist revolution was the only solution. Education and alphabetisation of Italian migrants were deemed especially important by *Servire il popolo*. A small article of July 1972 gives a characteristic example of this mentality. The article praises the birth of s "communist school" for Italian migrants in La Chaux de Fonds, Switzerland, organised by the local Maoist party cell. The improvement of workers' education and of literacy were meant also to allow pupils to read *Servire il popolo*, and this was considered a great success. More read workers helping others to improve their reading skills was a moving sign of altruism. In the magazine's words, "this

[197] "Compagni operai, compagni emigrati," supplement of *Servire il popolo*.
[198] "La cellula del Villaggio San Giuseppe," *Servire il popolo*, September 13, 1969, 2.
[199] "Ai compagni emigrati," *Servire il popolo*, December 20, 1969, 4.
[200] "La cellula contadina di S. Cono," *Servire il popolo*, January 10, 1970, 4.
[201] "Prima conferenza degli emigrati comunisti," *Servire il popolo*, January 15, 1972, 1.
[202] "Anche gli emigrati lottano per il lavoro," *Servire il popolo*, October 30, 1971, 3.

simple form of altruism" had to become "a violent weapon against the masters, like our journal is using it today against clerical fascism."[203]



Fig. 2.: A train wagon full of Italian migrants, with the writing "Long live the migrants, long live Stalin." *Servire il popolo*, June 15, 1969, 3.

Students' Movement: Italian Red Guards?

The importance the UCI(m-l) gave to Italian students' movements was linked with the ideas of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, where students did indeed play a leading role. Mao's rhetoric was used to explain the importance of Italian students' protests: "The young are the most active, most vital force of our society. They are those who study most enthusiastically, who are least linked to conservative ideas."[204] Or: "The world is yours, as it is ours, but finally it is yours. You young, full of vigour and of vitality, are in the flower of life, like the sun at 8 or 9 in the morning. Our hopes lie

[203] "Nasce una scuola comunista in Svizzera," *Servire il popolo*, July 1, 1972, 6.
[204] "La lotta degli studenti," *Servire il popolo*, January 1969, 6.

in you. The world belongs to you."[205] Mao's romantic views on the young convinced UCI(m-l) Maoists that the students' movement had to be a crucial part of the general popular movement. *Servire il popolo* followed the Italian students' movement so carefully that in April 1969 it published a special issue on the subject. It underlined the importance of applying the mass line and to conduct Maoist "proletarian investigations." In fact, only Maoist investigations were apt to correctly interpret students' reality and to successfully intervene in it.[206] "The groups of revolutionary students must analyse the reality in which they operate with a meticulous and systematic process."[207]

According to the UCI(m-l) protesting students were "young who revolted against the bourgeoisie," therefore they were integral part of the more general popular movement. However, *Servire il popolo* recognised that the Italian students' movement was not homogenous, therefore it invited to individuate and to develop the Left of the movement. Quoting Mao, the magazine pointed out that to become a real revolutionary, a student had to be ready to mix with the popular masses: "How to judge whether a youth is revolutionary? How to establish it? There is only one criterion, that is whether or not they are willing to integrate with the large workers' and peasants' masses and whether they effectively do so."[208] The Italian students' movement was followed so carefully by the UCI(m-l) also because of the importance Maoists gave to study and to the power of ideas – what in in the most orthodox Marxist tradition was dismissed as "superstructure." Therefore, a "cultural struggle" had to be fostered among the students and among other sectors of the progressive intelligentsia,[209] and reactionary ideas had to fought against.[210]

Interestingly, reports and comments on the Italian students' movement were published beside reports coming from the core of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, a revolution supposed to outroot egoism

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[205] *Servire il popolo*, May 15, 1969, 8.
[206] "L'inchiesta e la linea di massa," *Servire il popolo*, April 1969, 1-2.
[207] Ibid., 1.
[208] *Servire il popolo*, April 1969, 4.
[209] Ibid., 2.
[210] "Le teorie reazionarie," *Servire il popolo*, April 1969, 6.

and to make altruism triumph.[211] This idea of communism being a synonym of altruism was exemplified by this Mao quote: "A Communist must think more about the Party and about the masses than about individuals, more about the others than about himself. Only in this way he can be considered a Communist."[212] The "magnificent conquests of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" were supposed to inspire and to excite Italian students.[213] Comments of the *People's Daily* on students' movements in imperialist countries were also published.[214] As an example of proletarian altruism which students were supposed to follow, *Servire il popolo* published an eulogy of Norman Bethune written by Mao Zedong. Bethune was a Canadian physician who militantly decided to work in the Chinese Red Army and who died on duty. Bethune, Mao said, was a foreigner already in his 50s when he decided to help the Chinese people. He had a profession which would have made him a respectable and well-off man in Canada, but instead his spirt of proletarian selflessness brought him to such a distant country. *Servire il popolo* was clear: the example of Norman Bethune had to be followed.[215]

The inspiration UCI(m-l) Maoists drew from the Cultural Revolution was not only theoretical. In fact, they organised a youth section precisely called "le Guardie Rosse," after Chinese Red Guards. Speaking at a 1969 congress of Southern Red Guards, an UCI(m-l) representative underlined that "young revolutionaries" had to go "into the people" in order to change the world. He even quoted Mao saying that Marxism could be summarised into the slogan "it is right to revolt," which in fact mesmerised Chinese and Italian students as well. With a rhetoric usual in Maoist parlance, he compared the Mao Zedong though to a "breath of fresh air" which entered the young Maoists' minds: "the warmth of a red sun came to warm up your hearts. Your fresh and healthy ideas draw with full

[211] "Spazzar via l'egoismo," *Servire il popolo*, April 1969, 3.
[212] *Servire il popolo*, June 15, 1969, 4.
[213] "Viva le magnifiche conquiste della Grande Rivoluzione Culturale Proletaria," *Servire il popolo*, April 1969, 7.
[214] "La ripresa dei movimenti popolari nei paesi imperialisti," *Servire il popolo*, April 1969, 6.
[215] "Seguire l'esempio di Norman Bethune," *Servire il popolo*, April 1969, 4.

hands from the impetuous river of the proletarian conception of the world."[216] Students had to "resolutely" put themselves "at the service of the people" forming "propaganda squads."[217]

On 12-23 October 1969 a National Conference of the Red Guards was held, to envisage the formation of "League of Communist Youth."[218] University students' movements were deemed so important that in 1969 a "Central Section for University Struggles" was formed, which was supposed to coordinate the UCI(m-l) actions in universities.[219] However, the UCI(m-l) recognised the importance of participating in the movements not only of university students, but of high school students, too. This aspect too shows the influence of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, since there, too, schools students were as active a university ones, if not more. According to *Servire il popolo*, students had to act beside the "struggling popular masses" led by the working class.[220] Specifically, young high school students were fighting again "oppression at school and reactionary teachers."[221] Universities students had to "tear off from the hands of reactionary academic authorities every instrument of oppression […] to affirm the right to study of the masses of workers' children." This could have been achieved by developing "democratic centralism among the students."[222]

Commenting on the "hot autumn" of 1969 – the "autunno caldo," when a strong union of students' and workers' struggles took place - *Servire il popolo* claimed: "Workers showed students the meaning of real class unity and of proletarian discipline."[223] Seemingly, UCI(m-l) Maoists thought that workers and students should fuse for the common cause of the emancipation of the proletariat, and students-intellectuals had to learn from the workers' vanguard. Specifically, "classist selection in school" had to be fought against, and this task could be facilitated by the growth of a "new

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[216] "Costruire l'unità giovanile rivoluzionaria," *Servire il popolo*, May 31, 1969, 3.
[217] "Le squadre di propaganda," *Servire il popolo*, June 15, 1969, 2.
[218] "Il Convegno Nazionale delle Guardie Rosse," *Servire il popolo*, October 25, 1969, 7.
[219] "La Sezione Centrale lotte universitarie," *Servire il popolo*, November 1, 1969, 7.
[220] "È necessaria la partecipazione degli studenti all'attuale, grande mobilitazione popolare," *Servire il popolo*, November 8, 1969, 4.
[221] "Le guardie rosse alla testa delle lotte nelle scuole," ibid.
[222] "Programma di lotta del movimento degli studenti," *Servire il popolo*, November 15, 1969, 3.
[223] "Il movimento degli studenti riprende vigore," *Servire il popolo*, December 6, 1969, 3.

revolutionary rank of intellectuals."[224] High school students had to "unmask the principles on which the school of the bourgeoise is founded," to fight against "bourgeois culture, the criteria of selection, authoritarianism and the imposition of tuition fees." In fact, "young students" had to "unite with all young proletarians."[225] In early 1970, after the explosion of student struggles, *Servire il popolo* declared that "the saint alliance of school directors, police and Fascists" will not stop the student movement.[226] Strong police intervention was in fact to come in late 1970, when the police broke in 500 occupied schools.[227]

The so called university "barons" were also target of the scathing criticism of *Servire il popolo*. This term ("barone") requires an explanation. University barons were professors or administrators of public universities who were accused of running state universities like personal property, building a mafia-like net of acquaintances in order to secure illegitimate power. That is why *Servire il popolo* rejoiced the indictment of the rector of the Messina University in November 1969, writing in the headline "The baron in disgrace." These were the charges the journal polemically listed: "Speculations and traffic of teaching posts and grants – Corruption, privileges allowed to relatives and bootlickers – The bourgeoisie has the university and the men which it deserves."[228]

[224] "Le masse studentesche lottano al fianco del movimento popolare," *Servire il popolo*, February 21, 1970, 4.
[225] "Contro il governo borghese e la scuola borghese," *Servire il popolo*, February 28, 1970, 5.
[226] "Gli studenti medi in lotta in tutta Italia," *Servire il popolo*, March 21, 1970, 4.
[227] "La polizia irrompe in 500 scuole," *Servire il popolo*, December 19, 1970, 4.
[228] "Il barone in disgrazia," *Servire il popolo*, November 15, 1969, 2.



Fig. 2. "It is right to revolt," propaganda image probably adapted from a Chinese source with a Mao quote: "All wrong ideas, all poisonous herbs, all bourgeois and revisionist monsters must be destroyed." *Servire il popolo*, May 31, 1969, 5.

The peasant *meridionalismo* of the UCI(m-l)

Servire il popolo presented it *meridionalista* character and its interest for Italian peasant issues since the very beginning. In fact, in its first issue it wrote about an experience of Calabrian students studying in Rome which went back to their home region to spread revolutionary propaganda, and the peasant question is already present.[229]

[229] "Da un'esperienza degli studenti rivoluzionari in Calabria," *Servire il popolo*, November 1968, 3.

On December 2, 1968, two agricultural wage labourers were killed by the police in Avola, Sicily. *Servire il popolo* commemorated them with a heartfelt article in its January 1969 issue, accusing the "bourgeois and the revisionist" of having already forgotten them.[230] Texts supposedly written by peasants of Chinese communes were published in *Servire il popolo*, as an inspiration and an example for the struggle of Italian peasants. The experiences of Chinese peasants were supposed to foster "the proletarian principles of unity, of collaboration and of collective solidarity."[231] Clearly, the UCI(m-l) Maoists believed that only collective principles could solve the ancestral problems of the Italian peasantry.



CALABRIA 1946 - I braccianti e i contadini poveri innalzano la bandiera rossa di tutti gli sfruttati nelle giuste lotte per l'occupazione delle terre.

[230] "Padroni e revisionisti nemici dei braccianti," *Servire il popolo*, January 1969, 3.
[231] "Unire i contadini poveri," *Servire il popolo*, January 1969, 8.

Fig. 3. "Calabria 1946 – Day labourers and poor peasants raise the red flag of all the exploited in the just struggles for land occupation." From *Servire il popolo*, May 1, 1969.

Interestingly, the attention the UCI(m-l) gave to Italian peasants was not limited to the South, but also to peasant pockets present in central-Northern parts of the country traditionally less associated with peasant discontent. Such was the case of the peasants of the Viterbo province, Lazio, who in the late 1960s were protesting against the sale of rotten seed,[232] or of Vicenza, where thousands of demonstrators marched in September 1972 waving banners saying "Peasants and workers united."[233] In June 1969, the UCI(m-l) even claimed that it had "led" a general strike in Palermo.[234]

An interesting side of the peasant character of the UCI(m-l) was the organisation of "long marches." These "long marches" – clearly inspired by the Chinese Long March – were in fact a sort of propaganda marches organised by the party especially in peasant zones of the South, but in the North as well.[235] They were characterised by the usual spirit of going into "the people" and they sometimes looked like groups of young people riding bikes in the Italian countryside holding red flags. The choice of the bike as a transportation mean was also determined by the spirit of sacrifice of the young activists.[236] The marches were organised by propaganda and work squads which in fact, apart from spreading the Maoist "good news," also offered peasants heir help for agricultural work. Though this gesture was of high symbolic value, Stefano Ferrante noted that their offers were not always welcomed by the peasants, and possibly not surprisingly.[237] It is in fact easy to understand that the peasants were suspicious about the help of urban young activists who probably had never seen a hoe before.

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[232] "Lotta contadina nel viterbese," *Servire il popolo*, January 1969, 10.
[233] "Migliaia di contadini manifestano a Vicenza," *Servire il popolo*, September 23, 1972.
[234] "A Palermo l'Unione dei Comunisti ha diretto lo sciopero generale," *Servire il popolo*, June 15, 1969, 8.
[235] "Il popolo italiano è stato il vero protagonista delle nostre marce," *Servire il popolo*, September 6, 1969, 2.
[236] Interview with former Italian Maoist Pietro Dettori.
[237] Ferrante, La Cina non era vicina.

The choice of the UCI(m-l) was motivated by two reasons: apart from offering their help to the toiling peasant masses, and therefore showing their altruism and their readiness to "serve the people," this gesture was also probably dictated by a need of self-re-education. Some of the activists were in fact children of the urban bourgeoisie who had sometimes never worked in their lives, or at least who had never done manual labour before. Therefore, they felt that *doing* something was the only way to *understand* it: only by performing manual labour they could understand what a toiler did and felt, therefore re-educating themselves. The "long marches" were sometimes accompanied by "artistic propaganda squads" whose purpose was to organise popular spectacles to convey Maoist slogans. Quite interestingly, these artistic squads tried to unite ideological content with pre-existing traditions of popular theatre and story-telling, recurring even to the use of local dialects to be better understood by the masses.[238]

The construction of party cells in the Italian South was deemed crucial and extremely propagandised, like the examples of the Palermo ship construction sites and Naples clearly show.[239] Leagues of poor peasants and agricultural day labourers were created. Like *Servire il popolo* argued: "Poor peasant are the most oppressed stratum of the agricultural population. The gain a meagre living from their piece of land, but they are often forced to sell part of their labour force."[240] According to the UCI(m-l) the solution of peasant poverty in the Italian South was to apply forms of collectivism immediately, even before a supposedly successful revolution. Poor peasants should collectivise "tools, animals, and […] storehouses."[241] Additionally, agricultural wage labourers should be considered peer to factory workers.[242] The importance given to the Southern and peasant questions was exemplified also by the participation of one delegate of Sicilian poor peasants, one delegate of Southern migrants in

[238] "Le squadre artistiche di propaganda hanno svolto un lavoro eccellente," *Servire il popolo*, September 6, 1969, 3.
[239] "Le cellule dei cantieri navali di Palermo;" "La cellula del quartiere Avvocata di Napoli," *Servire il popolo*, September 13, 1969, 2.
[240] "Viva le leghe rivoluzionarie," insert no. 3 of *Servire il popolo*, September 27, 1969, iv.
[241] "Viva le leghe rivoluzionarie," insert no. 3 of *Servire il popolo*, September 27, 1969, v.
[242] "Ai braccianti il lotta," *Servire il popolo*, February 7, 3.

Turin and one delegate of the "revolutionary women of Benevento" at the UCI(m-l) National Conference in September 1969.[243]

Apulia was deemed one of the most potentially explosive Southern regions, since there "600,000 agricultural wage labourers constituted an immense revolutionary force." *Servire il popolo* continued: "Since years and years Apulian day labourers fight a harsh struggle against misery and exploitation. Hundreds of lost struggles, because of having been betrayed by revisionists, have not extinguished their courage, and now they prepare to liberate their lands from all masters and all traitors."[244] The convictions of *Servire il popolo* seemed confirmed when on December 10, 1969, 1,300,000 day labourers took part in a 24-hour strike. The magazine often underlined the number of day labourers participating in strikes and protests, and they were always more than one million: this high number probably cheered up the Maoists, who could think that in fact large peasant masses were a potential reservoir for revolution. "The agricultural proletariat" was indeed "an immense revolutionary force," and their union with the factory working class was fundamental.[245] Agricultural wage labourers had to be supported notwithstanding the trade unions' compromises with the government,[246] and their agitation continued well into 1971.[247] Apart from strikes and land occupations, one more instrument of protest was a sort of "tax strike,"[248] though traditional demonstrations continued in 1972.[249] *Servire il popolo* claimed that being a day labourer sympathising for the UCI(m-l) could be dangerous. In fact, a February 26, 1972 articled accused the police of Nuoro, Sardinia, of having brutally beaten up a local day labourer because of his UCI(m-l) affiliation.[250] In April 1972, the UCI(m-l) secretary

[243] Insert to the no. 17 of *Servire il popolo*, October 4, 1969.
[244] "I braccianti della Puglia," *Servire il popolo*, December 6, 3.
[245] "Il proletariato agricolo immensa forza rivoluzionaria," *Servire il popolo*, December 13, 3.
[246] "1.500.000 braccianti continuano la lotta," *Servire il popolo*, February 14, 1970, 3.
[247] "Giustizia nelle campagne," *Servire il popolo*, July 10, 1971, 1.
[248] "I contadini poveri respingono le cartelle delle tasse," *Servire il popolo*, October 16, 1971, 3.
[249] "1.700.000 braccianti in lotta," *Servire il popolo*, February 26, 1972, 1.
[250] "La polizia di Nuoro picchia a sangue un nostro compagno bracciante," *Servire il popolo*, February 26, 1972, 6.

Aldo Brandirali was optimist enough to say that "Advanced feelings of equality and progress" were already "in the hearts of the workers of the South."[251]

A certain attention among the Southern regions was given to Sardinia, where government policies were accused of "false industrialisation and disintegration of the countryside."[252] The UCI(m-l) could exert a certain success among Sardinian day labourers and students, though less so among shepherds.[253] In Sardinia, demands for social change were mixed with an atavistic spirit of revolt.[254] Denunciations of the magazine about the appalling conditions in which many had to live and study in Sardinia were relatively frequent, like a March 1972 article according to which "shepherd children attend uninhabitable schools."[255] However, as usual, the magazine hosted letters written in first person by its readers and supporters, who possibly found in writing a way to emotionally unload and to seek help. Such was the case of a young servant-shepherd, who wrote *Servire il popolo* in May 1972.[256]

One more important side of Southern peasant struggles the UCI(m-l) deemed important was the movement for land occupation: that is why *Servire il popolo* took care to remember the great land occupation of Melissa, Sicily, which had taken place in October 1949.[257] Peasant unrest in Sicily, however, was reported in March 1971, when Sicilian day labourers were striking for employment.[258] Needless to say, one more important propaganda point of the UCI(m-l) about the Italian South was the mafia and the supposedly false opposition to it the government showed. In fact, the UCI(m-l) – but in this it did not differ from many other leftist formations, which regarded the Christian Democratic government substantially allied with the mafia.[259]

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[251] "Sentimenti avanzati di uguaglianza e di progresso," *Servire il popolo*, April 1, 1972, 8.
[252] "Falsa industrializzazione e disgregazione della campagna," *Servire il popolo*, January 30, 1971, 3.
[253] "Capitalisti e polizia contro i pastori," *Servire il popolo*, February 6, 1971, 3.
[254] Giovanni Lilliu, *La costante resistenziale sarda* (Nuoro: Ilisso, 2002).
[255] "I bambini pastori frequentano scuole inabitabili," *Servire il popolo*, March 25, 3.
[256] "Ci scrive un servo pastore del Nuorese," *Servire il popolo*, May 27, 1972, 3.
[257] "Ricordiamo la gloriosa lotta di Melissa," *Servire il popolo*, November 8, 1969, 6.
[258] "Vasto fronte popolare nelle campagne," *Servire il popolo*, March 27, 1971, 1.
[259] "A proposito del rapporto della commissione 'antimafia,'" *Servire il popolo*, March 27, 1971, 8.

Servire il popolo often denounced "bourgeois" policies according to which low prices forced farmers to destroy their crops and their cattle. A paradox, according to the UCI(m-l) when many peasant families could not eat properly.[260] "The government destroys one million quintals of peaches," Servire il popolo claimed in July 1971.[261]

Servire il popolo often paid homage to Antonio Gramsci, not forgetting to quote his work on the Southern question: "To know Gramsci is a duty for every militant, for every intellectual at the service of the people. His life is an example for every sincere revolutionary, for every vanguard worker."[262] More precisely, the journal noted that in his lifetime Gramsci compared the state of the Italian South to that of a colony, and this concept was adopted by the UCI(m-l), too.[263] The UCI(m-l), officially become a party in April 1972, did not hesitate to say: "We are the heirs of Gramsci's party."[264]

Remarkably, the UCI(m-l) had a supportive position on the famous "Riot of Reggio Calabria" of 1970-1971. In fact, notwithstanding most leftist forces dismissed the turmoil as a provocation caused by mere local drives with the help of the Fascists, the UCI(m-l) saw it as a revolt with legitimate reasons, which had to be supported trying to gain its hegemony. This purpose failed completely.[265]

Needless to say, the sorry state of the Italian peasant masses was compared to the progress supposedly happening in the Chinese countryside, where "in twenty years a grandiose transformation [had happened] – Famine and floods [had been] defeated – The communes' system has destroyed private property […] – Technicians and scientists learn from the peasants" and where soldiers were "at work to contribute to the development of agricultural communes."[266] Quite understandably, the Chinese

[260] "La distruzione dei prodotti agricoli"; "Strage di bovini voluta dai padroni," *Servire il popolo*, February 21, 1970, 3.
[261] "Basta con la spirale folle dei prezzi," *Servire il popolo*, July 10, 1971, 3.
[262] "Antonio Gramsci: il primo grande marxista italiano," *Servire il popolo*, January 17, 1970, 5.
[263] "Prepararsi alla conferenza meridionale," *Servire il popolo*, March 7, 1970, 2.
[264] "Siamo gli eredi del partito di Gramsci," *Servire il popolo*, April 29, 1972, 8.
[265] "Giustizia per il popolo meridionale," *Servire il popolo*, October 24, 1970, 1.
[266] "L'agricoltura in Cina," *Servire il popolo*, September 19, 1970, 5.

peasantry was taken as an explicit example by the UCI(m-l), which in fact praised Mao's early investigation on the Hunan peasant movement.[267]

Countryside Encircling Cities: The Italian Strategy

In a sort of founding document, the UCI(m-l) Maoists declared that they came from different experiences. While some were coming from the two "revisionist" parties (PCI and PSIUP), others came from grassroots struggles in the Southern countryside or in the factories of the North. However, they acknowledged that their majority came from the student movement, and thought that one of their most important tasks was to conjugate it with the more general popular movement. Evoking a Cultural Revolution rhetoric, they said that the "student movement finds its origin in the antagonistic contradiction between bourgeois culture and proletarian culture," and it developed with a very strong criticism of the authoritarian nature of the bourgeois education system – again familiar Cultural Revolution motives.[268] Therefore, it is clear that the student movement in 1968 and in the following years was crucial in stimulating the birth of this Maoist organisation.

A patent reference to the Cultural Revolution reality was the birth of the "movement of the Red Guards, thus called as a homage to the exciting example of the Chinese youth."[269] "The groups of the Red Guards are essentially the leading nuclei of the youth movement and propaganda squads of right ideas among the masses."[270]

In general, the UCI(m-l) admitted that it was not easy to unite and organise elements coming from different age and professional backgrounds: young, old, workers, peasants, students. The analysis of the UCI(m-l) internal documents absolutely confirms and clarifies the *meridionalista* trend already noted in their press. In their view, Italy was characterised by "uneven development,"[271] and the South

[267] "Rapporto d'inchiesta sul movimento contadino nello Hunan," *Servire il popolo*, March 6, 1971, 6.
[268] AFF, FNSI, env. 10, 5.22, "Lettera al C.C. del Partito Comunista Cinese," 37.
[269] Ibid., 38.
[270] Ibid., 39.
[271] Ibid., 28.

was its victim. The UCI(m-l) *meridionalismo* was a consistent and thought-out strategy, which slightly reminds the Maoist motive of a peasant revolutionary countryside encircling and conquering decadent, bourgeois cities.

> Outside of bourgeois and mid-bourgeois zone of large cities, beginning from the immense Italian province, from our South, from the masses of poor peasants and underpaid workers, from the masses of migrants who abandon the poor zones of our country to find work in the large cities of the North, great will and possibilities to fight are present, which bring an explosive force to the industrial proletariat and to the whole of young students and intellectuals who are abandoning the bourgeoisie to put themselves at the service of the people.[272]

In fact, "the South is the zone where the most active will to fight comes from," but there was a cadres' problem. This evidence confirms the already gained impression: as a small extremist party, the UCI(m-l) built itself through the support of the most backward, poorest areas of Italy. "[L]arge cities" were not deemed the potentially most attractive areas for the development of the party.[273] This probably came to be in part because destitute peasants could be more "revolutionary" than others, and in part because these pockets of peasant poverty and discontent may have been neglected by the PCI. The UCI(m-l) explicitly said that those strata of the population had to be mobilised that "in the Italian revolutionary experiences of past epochs had always been considered outside the revolutionary strategy of the working class."[274] Moreover, this attention to the peasant question hardly came to be by chance, given the influence of the Chinese peasant revolution. The UCI(m-l) work had to be founded on "red bases" from which revolutionary ferment was supposed to spread into the rest of society: "peasant zones, provincial villages, popular quarters in the periphery of cities." These red bases, taking into account "the strong contradiction between city and countryside" in Italy, had to proceed with "the encirclement of bourgeois and mid-bourgeois centres where the strength […] of

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[272] Ibid., 32.
[273] Ibid., 26. This is confirmed by the interview with the former Italian Maoist Pietro Dettori.
[274] Ibid., 42.

the class enemy is concentrated."[275] Concretely, the Italian peasant revolution would have been possible only after strong ideological work in the countryside, trying to eradicate "the mere destroying anger" which characterised the peasantry, and building "new inner relations based on mutual help, cooperation, solidarity, to win the oppression" of the landowners. Moreover, peasants should work "to become stronger in the struggle against the forces of nature."[276] As we can see, the UCI(m-l) political activity was always characterised by strong moral undertones. However, this revolution could be possible only with "absolute unity of the peasant people in the zone where the transformation is under way."[277]

This strategy, however, was to be conducted not by the party alone but also by related organisations, like "Peasant Councils," "Committees of Popular power" and "youth and women's organisations."[278] Briefly, the UCI(m-l) envisioned on Italian a revolutionary strategy quite similar to the one adopted by the Chinese Communists for the takeover of power. Italian "red bases" – remindful of the Chines "red zones" – had to develop into centres of self-government all the time stronger and more linked to each other, until they could constitute a real instrument for all-out state power on a national basis.

The UCI(m-l) was adamant that the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was a stimulus to the assimilation and creative application of Mao Zedong thought to the Italian conditions, and it certainly inherited from its Chinese comrades the tastes for poetic and flowery language. The UCI(m-l) thus described its political tasks: "We are beginning sowing, and every kind of storm hinders flowering, but, like all Communists of the world, we put roots into the people, and our people is a good and fertile earth, roots are well-defended and flowers will inevitably grow large and beautiful."[279] Apart

[275] Ibid., 36.
[276] Ibid.,42.
[277] Ibid., 43.
[278] Ibid., 37.
[279] Ibid., 2.

from these stylistic characteristics, the UCI(m-l) made clear that its main task was "to serve the Italian people"[280] (a variant of the well-known slogan).

Italian Mao Zedong Thought: A Creative Application?

In his standard work on Italian Maoism, Roberto Niccolai underlines that the Maoism of the UCI(m-l) was all but creative. Effectively, many freak and colourful habits of the UCI(m-l), like the "communist marriages" and their complicated sexual moral earned it a fame for lack and seriousness and frivolity among militant of other leftist organisations of the time.[281] To ironize on these characteristics of the organisation would be all too easy, but this is not what this scholarly work purports to do. Quite differently, I argue that an organisation as ridiculed and as demeaned spent a lot of energy on ideological work. Needless to say, the study of Mao Zedong's thought was deemed extremely important.[282]

Revisionism: An Ideological Devil

Another key word the UCI(m-l) used in its theory was "revisionism." As we know, Mao began the Sino-Soviet split labelling the Soviet Union as a "revisionist" power.[283] This label was taken so seriously that the UCI(m-l) did not hesitate to call for "death to American imperialism" and, equally, to "Soviet revisionism."[284] However, this label invested also all communist parties which were loyal to Moscow, and this obviously included the Italian Communist Party, too, which also enjoyed the status of the largest communist party in Western Europe. Therefore, the UCI(m-l) criticism against the PCI was scathing. Possibly, their approach towards the PCI did not differ very much from that of other extreme leftist formations, which were in fact born out of polemics with it. However, the criticism of Italian Maoists seemed possibly more radical and totalizing, because it stemmed from a

[280] Ibid., 3.
[281] Niccolai, *Quando la Cina*, 116-125.
[282] AFF, FNSI, env. 10, 5, 7-850, "Comunicato dell'Ufficio Politico n.2," 1968, 1.
[283] Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).
[284] AFF, FNSI, env. 10, 5.22, "Lettera al C.C. del Partito Comunista Cinese," 45.

more general, international context. Many other Italian extreme-left formations could criticise the PCI from an Italian perspective, but the Italian Maoists felt behind the support of China, the largest socialist country, which backed and galvanised them with its fascination and its huge population. They therefore felt they were attacking the "Italian friends of the new Russian tsars"[285] as agents of a large socialist power. But, more directly, which were the accusations the Maoists launched at revisionism? According to their inner documents, the criticism of the UCI(m-l) against revisionism could be summarised into a few points. The "concept of the parliamentary and peaceful road" to power, the "peaceful and unprincipled competition with imperialism," reformism and economism (the tendency to concentrate workers' struggles only on economic gains and not on the complete takeover of power) were strongly criticised.[286]

According to the UCI(m-l), the "revisionism" of the PCI had begun already after the Second World War, according to the well-known motive of the "betrayed resistance." However, it was in 1956 that the "Italian followers of the Khrushchev's clique" expelled from the party a few elements who still had Stalin as a crucial point of reference.[287] This is important, because Mao as a consistent follower of Stalin was one of the repeating motives of Italian Maoism. This "link" between Stalinism and Maoism was all too clear within the UCI(m-l) and other Marxist-Leninist formations, and this can be seen also looking at the derogatory terms used against Stalin's great adversary in the world communist movement, Trotsky. According to the UCI(m-l), Trotskyism was nothing but a "masked revisionism," a "ten times dead cadaver."[288]

But the list of accusations moved against PCI revisionism was long, and in a certain way reminded Chinese virulent documents. Reading and understanding UCI(m-l) internal documents is not easy task, because the layman may find difficult to disentangle oneself in a myriad of obscure terms and

[285] Ibid., 13.
[286] Ibid., 20.
[287] Ibid.
[288] Ibid., 20.

accusations. “Frivolous intellectualism” which operated a “scission between theory and practice” was one more accusation UCI(m-l) Maoists moved against PCI revisionism.[289] This clearly reflected Mao’s strong criticism of intellectualism and his conviction that a real intellectual should have been a manual worker, too. The constant importance of theory and practice was underlined even when mentioning the process of cadre-training. Intellectuals of bourgeois origins had to undergo nothing less than a real “education-reform” and “re-education,”[290] so they could “completely integrate […] among the masses.” Conversely proletarians had to study party ideology to become cadres.[291] Revisionism was accused of fostering an “individualistic spirit of revolt” and to talk a lot about revolution without doing anything concrete to achieve it.

Remarkably, extremely popular figures in the Left of the time like Ernesto Che Guevara and Fidel Castro were not spared criticism. According to the UCI(m-l), “individual act[s] of revolutionary participation” had given “a certain influence to the ideal, though individualistic charge of the figure of the *castrista* guerrilla.” In fact, though Guevara and Castro had “represented for a certain period the flag of rebellion” for the youth, rebellion cannot go without transformation, and that is why “‘*castrismo*’ was not able to develop the criticism to revisionism.”[292] The concept of *transformation* was a crucial tenet of Maoism the UCI(m-l) especially cherished. One more popular accusation against Italian revisionism was “bureaucratism”: the PCI was accused of having long grown far away from the masses, “in whole similar to bourgeois parties.” Conversely, they argued, the extreme bureaucratisation of the PCI had caused the opposite tendency, that is “anarchism which rejects organisation and centralisation,” or excessive political spontaneity. Additionally, UCI(m-l) strongly criticised representative as opposed to direct democracy, again clearly building on the slogans and experiences of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. According to the UCI(m-l), the “mandate principle,

[289] Ibid., 21.
[290] Ibid., 28.
[291] Ibid., 26.
[292] Ibid., 21.

which starts from the idea that masses are amorphous and that the world is changed by the parties on the masses' mandate" had to be fought against. On the contrary, real communists should "go to school to the masses."[293]

Quoting a known Maoist concept, the UCI(m-l) argued that antagonistic contradictions and contradictions within the people were present in Italian society, and that "the leading revisionist clique of PCI-CGIL-PSIUP" was one of the main antagonists. Interestingly, the UCI(m-l) avowedly criticised disunity in the Left and senseless polemics against the many leftist groups, though with its behaviour seemingly presented some of these characteristics. The correct attitude, they said, was "unity and struggle," one of the many dialectical binomials which may indeed seem an oxymoron. The mistake of considering any disagreeing person as an enemy of the people had to be avoided.[294]

The self-description of the following steps of the Italian Marxist-Leninists – who would de facto embrace Maoism as a logical third ideological element – was the following: they first tried to organise within the PCI thinking that it could be changed from within, then they began to organise in autonomous, alternative groups. The Marxist-Leninists thought they could not otherwise since revisionism had infected the masses with "bourgeois ideas of individualism and egotism,"[295] to which they opposed an "altruist and collectivistic conception of the world."[296] Moreover, "the society of wealth" and "opulence" was a false myth. This wealth had an "abstract character," since it was "reserved to the few" and it was "lacking positive social ad human values."[297] As we can see, UCI(m-l) Maoists concentrated not only on the struggle for the control of the economic machine. The new society they wanted to build had to be a morally better one. Needless to say, "practical application" of ideas was deemed extremely important, and its lack, according to a UCI(m-l) self-analysis, was of

[293] Ibid., 22.
[294] Ibid., 24.
[295] Ibid., 15.
[296] Ibid., 41.
[297] Ibid., 31.

one of the causes of the initial difficulties of the Marxist-Leninist movement. In fact, only "sectarian, intellectual" organisations separate from the people were created.[298]

The Strategy for the Takeover of Power

The organisation was convinced that the situation was ripe for revolution in Italy, too.

> In our country every day those dramas and those deep social injustices come to light that characterise bourgeois society, and at the eyes of our people they certainly filled their patience […] All objective conditions that make the socialist revolutions necessary and important have long been present in our country, too.

According to UCI(m-l) Maoists, it was "right to revolt!" against the "old and putrid social system of the bourgeoisie." The socialist revolution in Italy could only succeed if "Mao Zedong thought, integrated into the concrete conditions of the revolution in our country," was brought to the large masses.[299] Needless to say, the concept of "the people" was crucial in UCI(m-l) thought. More precisely, they deemed the Italian people composed of three main elements: "the proletariat, the poor peasants, and the young."[300] The youth was considered especially important – again repeating a well-known Maoist theme – since it ideally was an inter-class component which could work as a catalyser for all-out revolution. This rhetoric sometimes reached high points of lyrism in the UCI(m-l) language: "To begin from the people, to integrate into it, to learn to love it to serve its interests, to serve the people to unite it, unite it to make it do the revolution."[301] Moreover, UCI(m-l) militants felt that they had to be "first pupils than teachers of our people."[302] One of the main ways to learn from the masses was obviously the tool of the investigation. "Systematic investigations" and class analysis were

[298] Ibid., 16.
[299] Ibid., 4.
[300] Ibid., 32.
[301] Ibid., 4-5.
[302] Ibid., 6.

needed. In fact, through investigations "a first integration among the masses is realised, and you can learn from their ideas and their experiences."[303]

The strategy of the UCI(m-l) had it clear that sooner or later their activity should turn into an armed revolution. In fact, "mass actions which develop in forms of unarmed struggle are the inevitable prelude of armed struggle." This conviction was based on the famous Maoist slogan "'power is based on the barrel of the rifle;' for is this is a truth verified in practice." The UCI(m-l) had no illusions that the takeover of power was possible without violent means. The bourgeois state had to be destroyed, and this was not "possible without exceeding in armed forces and in will to fight the armed force and the repressive will of the bourgeoisie."[304] In the end, the UCI(m-l) envisioned nothing less than the creation of a "Red Army"[305] to carry out the complete takeover of power – again, the terminology was closely following the Chinese example. The UCI(m-l) underlined that waiting for the whole world to rise to start the Italian revolution was wrong: Italian Maoists should on fact count on their own forces – a well-known Maoist slogan – taking advantage of the "spiritual and material force" of Mao's thought. Their convictions were buttressed, they said, by the fact that "imperialism is a paper tiger which is doomed to a sure defeat, and socialism impetuously advances on the rifles' barrels held by the revolutionary peoples of the entire world."

More concretely, the UCI(m-l)'s military strategy had to follow the Chinese example of Protracted Revolutionary People's War, which was possible only in case of deep mobilisation.

The Maoist mass line was deemed crucial in the work of the organisation,[306] and the UCI(m-l) was so optimistic to argue that the process which would bring to the dictatorship of the proletariat had

[303] Ibid., 34.
[304] Ibid., 39.
[305] Ibid., 40.
[306] Ibid., 5.

already begun.[307] Strategically, the UCI(m-l) hoped to apply in Italy the well-known Maoist strategy of developing the left and singling out the right.[308]

[307] Ibid., 6.
[308] Ibid., 34.

The Problematic Maoism of Lotta Continua

Introduction

As it is widely known, Lotta Continua (LC) was the largest organisation of the Italian extra-parliamentary Left. Possibly because of this, it is also one the organisations of the Italian New Left which enjoyed most attention by writers, since it has at least a few dedicated books. In his book, former LC militant Luigi Bobbio makes clear that Maoism had much importance for the organisation, and that delusion due to the evolution of Chinese foreign policy was one of the reasons for its dissolution.[309] Here it will be seen that Lotta Continua was a very "Chinese" organisation, similar to many others on the extreme Left, though it was proud of elaborating Maoism in a special way. While certainly, all organisations in this study claimed to do so, so far this statement seems possibly truer about Lotta Continua than about other organisations. LC was not Maoist in the sense Servire il Popolo and other M-L groups were, and it was always proud to underline this fact. However, it did think that in China a crucial experiment was ongoing which had to be studied, and that some of its elements could have been elaborated and applied to the Italian context. In the following paragraphs, we shall see that LC drew inspiration from China on matters of revolutionary violence, culture and international politics, to name a few.

Lotta Continua and Maoism

An internal document dedicated to Lotta Continua's plan to "take the city," shows that LC borrowed the Maoist concept of protracted struggle: "for us revolution is a protracted process."[310] The inspiration Lotta Continua drew from Mao's concept of violent protracted revolutionary struggle is confirmed by a statement made by Adriano Sofri in September 1968, when he was part of the Pisa

[309] Luigi Bobbio, *Storia di Lotta Continua* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1988). On the dissolution of Lotta Continua, see the recent: Attilio Pantaloni, *La dissoluzione di Lotta continua* (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2019).
[310] AFF, FNSI, Busta 17, 7.1 Lotta Continua nazionale e generale, 7.1.2 Documenti, "Su prendiamoci la città," 1.

Potere Operaio. Sofri was convinced that "even in countries of late capitalism" it was not insurrectional strategy, but "protracted armed struggle" which was necessary to take power.[311]

The same applies to the Maoist concept of struggle between two lines. Lotta Continua thought in fact that "in every field there are two lines, two ways to face or to solve the problems: one proletarian and communist, the other bourgeois and revisionist." The "first frees the creativity of the masses, it makes them the protagonist of class struggle" while "the second surrenders them to the enemy unarmed, to the boss, who does not stand watching, but exploits every occasion to fight, divide, exploit the proletarians."[312] Moreover, the internal documents of LC show a contempt for bookish knowledge and the conviction that proletarians should transform themselves.[313] Professional intellectuals as a separate caste detached from the masses were nothing but a "large body with two small wings," *Lotta continua* said quoting Mao.[314]

Lotta Continua, not differently from Avanguardia Operaia and other Italian leftist organisation, thought that communist victory in China was not due to chance but to special characteristics of the CCP which were praised over other examples. In fact, in its theses for the first congress held in Rome in January 1975, LC pointed out that successful

> revolutionary processes which established themselves in the second post-war period […] (China, Vietnam, Cuba, Albania) […] show as common trait the autonomy of the political vanguards which guided them from not only from any centre of international direction, but also from any preestablished tactical scheme.

According to Lotta Continua, the Chinese revolution was a paradigmatic example of this pattern of autonomy and of tactical flexibility, acting independently from the Comintern and the Cominform. Apparently, LC argued that deep knowledge of the local conditions and resistance to external pressure

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[311] AFF, FNSI, Busta 20, 7.1.17 Milano (1) A) Documenti, "Intervento per il convegno di sede di Milano," 27-29.VII.1973, 1.
[312] AFF, FNSI, Busta 17, 7.1 Lotta Continua nazionale e generale, 7.1.2 Documenti, "Su prendiamoci la città," 3-4.
[313] Ibid., 4-5.
[314] "Un governo di 'saggi' e di 'esperti'?," *Lotta continua*, June 13-14, 1976, 5.

were key factors in securing communist victory in the aforementioned examples. In fact, in "China the autonomy of the direction of the revolutionary process was founded […] on the recovery of a strategic autonomy from the schemes of the tradition of the III Internationale," claiming the "superiority of politics over the economy." According to LC, this strategy allowed communist power to "deepen […] the link of the Party with the masses." Moreover, LC was convinced that the rightness of these positions was demonstrated by the "refusal of the Chinese Communist Party to constitute itself in the organisational centre of a new Internationale." According to Lotta Continua, this attitude, "far from being the symptom of a nationalist deviation," intended to "favour the development of revolution in the world."[315]

Rather of extreme interest, Lotta Continua borrowed the concepts of "red bases" and of "people's war" from the Chinese Revolution, but adapting it to the Italian context in a particular way:

> To build a 'red base' in capitalistic society cannot mean – like in China […] – stealing zones from the military control of the enemy, and starting the construction of an alternative power within them. The historical and social conditions in which revolutions takes place in Europe are different and such a thing is unthinkable here. But the construction of 'red bases,' that is of a political and organisational background beginning from which armed struggle would develop is indispensable for those who sees the revolution as a 'people's war,' as a protracted process.[316]

More precisely, LC thought that

> to build a red base in capitalistic society does not mean to eliminate every interference of bourgeois power on it, but to reduce it more and more until the bosses are forced to exert it only in the most brutal and open form of military occupation, because every other form of political, ideological, and even economic control clashes with the organised force of all proletarians.

[315] AFF, FNSI, Busta 21, 7.1.22 Primo congresso nazionale Roma, 7-11 genn. 1975, "Sulla questione dell'Internazionale," 3.
[316] Ibid., 5.

That is, the "red base" as Lotta Continua understood it was a sort of "background of armed struggle."[317] In 1975 LC argued that the development of this kind of red bases was far from workers' autonomy as it was known at the time. However, only a few years before, in 1972, *Lotta continua* reported on a Parma antifascist committee which, in the words of one of its members,

> is comparable to what Mao called the 'red bases': this proletarian zone of the Oltretorrente, where the Arditi del Popolo were born, [an armed organisation which opposed early fascism] can become a red base, where fascism cannot enter, where the order the committee will impose will not be the fascist order, but an order which must prefigure the revolutionary, proletarian, communist order.[318]

This metaphorical borrowing of the concept of Chinese red bases is extremely interesting and shows how Maoist thought could be borrowed and elaborated by Italian leftist organisations in unexpected ways. However, the above quotes are useful also in how they demonstrate another crucial element, that is the importance and the inevitability of violence according to many extra-parliamentary leftist organisations. The conviction that violence was necessary and inevitable to bring about political change in Italy was widespread in the Italian extra-parliamentary Left. Since those years numerous reflections have been published on the causes of this violent upsurge. However, I argue that one of the reasons has so far been neglected, that of the violent charge present in Maoist thought. As we will see also from the documents of other M-L organisations, Italian young radicals inspired by Mao thought that his rejection of peaceful coexistence should be taken quite literally. In fact, they did not reject peaceful coexistence only on an external international level (US and Soviet imperialism could not be opposed peacefully) but also on an internal domestic one, that is "we cannot oppose peacefully the bourgeoisie of our own country." Lotta Continua was also convinced that the US and the USSR

[317] Ibid., 6.
[318] L'assemblea del comitato antifascista Mario Lupo," *Lotta continua*, September 17, 1972, 2.

were bound to eventually fall into conflict with each other: "As the Chinese comrades say, 'distention is not the wind which blows into the tower.'"[319]

Quite unsurprisingly, Lotta Continua sided with China in the dispute between it and the USSR. LC noted that "Peoples' China, beginning from 1960, has practically broken every link of economic, political and military dependence with the USSR and is conquering a complete autonomy all effects of which will be felt in the international field with the Cultural Revolution." According to LC, the Cultural Revolution was a political struggle "between the supporters of the 'Soviet way' and the supporters of an autonomous policy entirely relying on the masses' creative resources." Lotta Continua had no doubt that the USSR could be accused of "imperialism."[320]

Remarkably, Lotta Continua argued that the "attack on the positions of Liu Shao Qi and Lin Biao" was being waged in China "correctly retrieving Marxist theory (the most important productive force is the proletariat) against a revisionist theory, which is identified with command of economy over politics, of the watchword 'develop production' over 'continue the revolution.'"[321] Lotta Continua argued that Mao's warning that "the economic conditions and the attitude towards the revolution of every class and social stratum must be considered" had to be followed.

However, in a way not unfamiliar since it has been seen also in other leftist organisations, Lotta Continua tried to draw comparisons between Italy and China in order to develop a more suitable revolutionary strategy. In fact, according to LC "in the China of the revolutionary period class structure was much more simplified than in a country like Italy." Moreover, in China "it was much easier to define the attitude towards the revolution, whose program was much clearer" also because it had gained "greater maturity." According to LC "workers' struggle" in Italy had a "much greater

[319] AFF, FNSI, Busta 21, 7.1.22 Primo congresso nazionale Roma, 7-11 genn. 1975, "Sulla questione dell'Internazionale," 5.
[320] AFF, FNSI, Busta 17, 7.1 Lotta Continua nazionale e generale, 7.1.2 Documenti, "Il bipolarismo," 5.
[321] AFF, FNSI, Busta 17, 7.1 Lotta Continua nazionale e generale, 7.1.2 Documenti, "Revisionismo e comunismo. L'analisi delle classi e la dittatura del proletariato," 78.

practical – and theoretical – implication than in China (where the working class, very combative, was nevertheless a restricted minority)" and "because of its strength" was at the time "the necessary point of reference of any social analysis."[322]

Another element of Maoist practice which LC borrowed from Maoism was investigation. According to LC investigations should not be done by the organisation itself but by the masses,

> because it is their experience, the life they live every day in the factory as well as in the quarters which must provide the criteria to distinguish friends from enemies, and which allows for every group, for every family, for every individual to gather the necessary elements to give them a correct class collocation to find the shortest and most efficient way to involve themselves within the struggle.[323]

Moreover, "through the investigation and the action which must be developed on it [the investigation] the life of a quarter, of a factory, of a school from private must become public, all must feel themselves under the eyes of the proletarians, at the centre of their attention, and know that they can count on them for anything if they are right, and that they can only fear if they are wrong." The investigation was in fact necessary to

> single out the 'left,' the most combative strata, groups, individuals and those who live the largest number of contradictions, on the one hand, and to isolate the enemies, the bosses, the persecutors, the exploiters, the scabs, the agents of the enemy, on the other hand in order to be able to publicly denounce them and to trace a clear line of demarcation between friends and foes.

However, LC made clear that an investigation made "no sense if its results" were mere "heritage of a restricted group." In fact, LC thought investigations should have been the means of a "systematic action of denunciation of the conditions of oppression within which proletarians live, and of the instruments through which their exploitation is realised."[324]

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[322] Ibid., 79.
[323] AFF, FNSI, Busta 17, 7.1 Lotta Continua nazionale e generale, 7.1.2 Documenti, untitled document, 21-22.
[324] Ibid., 22.

Lotta Continua also borrowed the concept of the "mass line" from Maoism, to the point that it even had a journal with that title.[325] According to Adriano Sofri's introductive reflection to the 1975 LC congress, "mass line must be rigorously applied to the problem of force."[326]

The inspiration Lotta Continua drew from China can also be told by implicit references present in leaflets. Interestingly, a leaflet distributed on March 18, 1971 presented many of such references. First of all, the leaflet was calling the ENI workers of San Donato (Milan) to strike, on the day of the 100th anniversary of the Paris Commune. Striking workers were emboldened by China's world status, though China is not named explicitly. In fact, 100 years after the Paris Commune "one third of world population demolished Capitalist Dictatorship, edifies Socialism and decidedly struggles against US imperialism and USSR social imperialism." Somewhat confusing figures, these workers said the one third of humanity (China had actually less than one third of world population at the time) was fighting against both the US and the USSR: opposition to these two "imperialisms" was clearly borrowed from Maoism. Moreover, the leaflet rejoiced the fact that by that time Italian proletariat was increasingly able to "single out the *Red Line* [my emphasis] which divides the exploited from the exploiters and their servants."[327] Red line and black line were terms coming from the Cultural Revolution lexicon.

Interestingly, there is a contribution of Maoism to radical leftist thought which was seemingly neglected by Lotta Continua, the issue of women. It is only in early 1975, close to the end of the timespan of this research, that the newspaper *Lotta continua* published a text which tackled the Chinese contribution to women's issues. The text was written by the Turin Women's Commission of LC, and posed the Chinese answer to women's issues as juxtaposed to the Soviet one. According to LC women, the Soviet Union had long ceased to be a model for women's emancipation. In China the

[325] AFF, FNSI, Busta 17, 7.1 Lotta Continua nazionale e generale, Collettivo ENI, "Linea di massa."
[326] AFF, FNSI, Busta 21, 7.1.22 Primo congresso nazionale Roma, 7-11 genn. 1975, "Riflessione introduttiva di Sofri – I Convegno 1975 - 'Sulla tendenza del movimento di lotta.'"
[327] AFF, FNSI, Busta 17, 7.1 Lotta Continua nazionale e generale, Collettivo ENI, leaflet "Parigi, 18 marzo 1871."

situation was different: there "the participation of female proletariat to social work and to political struggle" was facilitated by a more decentralised model where economy was led by politics. More specifically, in agriculture, collectivisation helped to emancipate peasant women. Generally, there had been a "profound identification of women in the Chinese revolutionary process, which has seen them massively participating and expressing radical positions in all the acutest phases of class struggle, especially in the Cultural Revolution." According to LC women, this "identification" did not only mean "improvement of women's condition or conquest of a complete parity with men," but a struggle to liberate women's "revolutionary potential, to modify themselves and society, to make communism."[328]

Revisionism and Social Imperialism

Lotta Continua was originally influenced by the Chinese experience and by Maoism because it drew inspiration from the very beginning of the Sino-Soviet polemic. Lotta Continua sided with China and referred to Chinese views to interpret the degeneration of the Soviet Union. According to Lotta Continua, Chinese accusations of revisionism levied against the Soviet Union were "the first criticism 'from the Left' on the historical experience of the Soviet Union." Interestingly, Lotta Continua thought that previous expressions of dissent, such as that of the Yugoslavs in 1948, were right rather than left wing. LC also maintained that, "given the weakness of the European communist movement," criticism against the USSR logically came from China.

However, inspired by Chinese positions, Lotta Continua noted that they were often transplanted in Europe in an equivocal way and not appreciating all their complexities. Therefore, a sort of "return Stalinism" often came out of the Chinese positions, which were in fact more complicated. As a consequence, Lotta Continua conceded that the "importation to the West of the Chinese method of attack to revisionism" - which was based on a "revolutionary experience and on social criticism and

[328] "Sulla questione femminile," *Lotta continua*, January 3, 1975, 3.

had therefore much vaster implications and potentialities" – "was deviant to some extent, though it uplifted a critical movement of notable extent." LC thought that Chinese criticism was largely assimilated "in its abstract ideological elements," therefore it "scarcely penetrated into the working class, and has therefore dried up." One more problem was that Chinese positions were "often deviated" to Third-Worldism.

Having listed all the points of criticism of this specific assimilation of Maoism in Italy, the organisation was proud to claim that "Lotta Continua has experienced less than anyone else that theoretical baggage of 'Marxism-Leninism' and of 'Maoism'" in this precise sense. At the same time, Lotta Continua claimed to have been able to "grasp […] the essential meaning of Chinese positions on class struggle as permanent factor and main point of reference in every internal and international situation, neglecting the ideological frills of *imported Maoism*" (my emphasis).[329] Criticising the Italian revisionist leader, *Lotta continua* claimed to "have learnt more from the distant Mao Zedong than from the close Berlinguer."[330] Interestingly, one more criticism against the USSR which LC borrowed from China was about the "persecutions of which 'innocent citizens' are victims and the use of asylums in a repressive sense."

However, Lotta Continua pointed out that the ever severe criticism of China against the USSR had different shades through time. For example, LC noted that the Chinese had begun to use the term "social imperialism after [the 1968 the invasion of] Czechoslovakia," whereas they previously used the terms "hegemonism" and "great power chauvinism." This is remarkable, because it is widely held that the opposition to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia had an anti-Communist orientation. Contrastingly, here it can be seen that sectors of the Italian extreme Left found a way to criticise the Soviet invasion from the Chinese perspective. Again, according to LC, the Chinese stated that the "passage from the Khrushchev era to the Brezhnev era" marked the "passage from restoration of

[329] AFF, FNSI, Busta 21, 7.1.22 Primo congresso nazionale Roma, 7-11 genn. 1975, "Le origini del revisionismo sovietico."
[330] "Si sono schierati, le masse li travolgeranno," *Lotta continua*, May 20, 1976, 1.

capitalism to social imperialism." According to the Chinese Communists, the new Brezhnev era was characterised by nothing less than "revolutionaries and innocent" people "thrown into concentration camps and into asylums" and by a real "policy of robbery of the Third World." However, with "all the force of its attacks, China" remained the "most braking factor of Soviet social imperialism."[331]

Lotta Continua tried to summarise its complex relation towards China in its internal documents for the 1975 congress. China was considered an extremely important point of reference, to the point that the "only real discussion of international nature which occupied our organisation and our newspaper in the first times of its existence was […] on Chinese foreign policy." However, LC felt it had to express an important caveat:

> The 'thaw' in relations between China and the West did not provoke in our ranks the terrible delusions of betrayed lovers but neither the minimal temptation to justify everything and always with reckless or dishonest enthusiasm. *We were, as we are now, Marxist and Leninist, but certainly not 'em el.'* [my emphasis]

In a self-analytical account, Lotta Continua noted that its attitude towards China had probably been influenced by the "last remains of a need of a guide-state." However, LC was convinced to have later understood that the "Chinese comrades not only do not want to lead an Internationale of this kind, but they could not even do that." In fact, the situation in China and in Italy was too different.[332]

The Lotta Continua leader Adriano Sofri was to come back to the issue of Maoism in his self-critical remarks delivered at the 2nd LC Congress held in Rimini between October 31 and November 4, 1976. Mao had died less than two months before, on September 9. Sofri's remarks are insightful, both because they were delivered shortly after Mao's death, and because the Rimini Congress de facto sanctioned the dissolution of the organisation. They may therefore be considered a sort of critical summary of the relation Lotta Continua had with Maoism. Even close to the end of LC, Sofri wished the organisation should "count on its own forces" in order to overcome its difficulties. More precisely,

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[331] AFF, FNSI, Busta 21, 7.1.22 Primo congresso nazionale Roma, 7-11 genn. 1975, "Il socialimperialismo."
[332] AFF, FNSI, Busta 21, 7.1.22 Primo congresso nazionale Roma, 7-11 genn. 1975, "Sulla situazione internazionale."

Sofri argued that "the effect on the conscience of many revolutionary militants here [in Italy]" of what was going on in China could not be ignored. In fact, though Sofri was pleased that the "myth of the guide-state" had been largely dismissed, Italian Leftists still felt the need to "seek in the most advanced experiences of struggle for communism and in the revolutionary thought they produced a guide for their struggle."

Therefore, Mao's thought was still relevant after his death. Sofri did not forget to criticise the deleterious "dogmatic embalming of Mao's thought" which Italy had experienced, but he maintained that it had been a rather "marginal" phenomenon, which did not impede the development of a "new Left linked to the new struggles of the working class and to their contents." Remarkably, Sofri argued that "Mao's thought paradoxically acquired the more weight the more the 'Marxist/Leninist' attempt failed […] in a phase in which the foreign policy choices of China lifted criticism and perplexity among revolutionaries." In fact, "Mao's teaching conquered a growing influence" especially thanks to its "critical and antidogmatic nature," and this was witnessed by the success of Mao's "unpublished writings and speeches."[333] Sofri recognised the "overpowering subjective character of Maoist thought," which was "at the antipodes not only of Stalinist economism" but also of the "objective realism of the theory of crisis and revolution." Sofri argued that Maoism was a fertile "method" which favoured a "habit to criticism," rather than a set of pre-packaged ingredients. Guido Crainz – an LC member who was later to become a distinguished historian – also noted that Maoism implied a "warning" against "mechanical interpretations" and invited to "develop analysis in an autonomous way."[334]

Moreover, Sofri went as far as to say that right after Mao's death the LC national committee said that "study and reflection of Mao's life and thought had a very close relation to our congress," more specifically regarding the "question of political realism and of political utopia." Remarkably, Sofri

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[333] AFF, FNSI, Busta 21, 7.1.23 II congresso nazionale Rimini 31.10-4.11.1976, "Relazione di Adriano Sofri," 2.
[334] Guido Crainz, "Il marxismo ci insegna a contare sulle proprie forze: anche in campo teorico," *Lotta continua*, March 2, 1976, 4.

thought the organisation and the extreme Left in general were facing a crisis of conscience and strong loss of faith in the future of the revolution. Thus, Sofri was saying that "utopia" in a positive sense – that is the ideal force to change reality – had to be rediscovered to counter "realism" in a negative sense – that is, acquiescence to power, defeatism, etc. Sofri thought that precisely Maoism could give Lotta Continua and the Italian Left in general the necessary revolutionary élan. In conclusion, Sofri underlined that "you do not react to realism grabbing on to old flags" or seeking refuge in an "external authority." Quite the reverse, there was a need to "come back to practice, to class struggle, to its contradiction," and this Maoist incitement could have possibly given new hope to the Italian new Left.[335] It is remarkable that Adriano Sofri felt he should set his conclusive remarks in a Maoist way. However, we know from hindsight that even this last call was not enough to save the organisation from dissolution.

Mao and Culture in Lotta Continua's Cadres' School

Similarly to Avanguardia Operaia and to other extreme-Left organisations of the time, Lotta Continua too, had its own cadres school. The LC cadres' school issued training material which is extremely valuable in the analysis of the ideological characteristics of the organisation. "Classical communist thought: Marx-Lenin-Mao," the "Chinese model" and "Chinese foreign policy" were topics to be tackled in cadres' schools.[336] More precisely, the newspaper *Lotta continua* noted that Mao's contributions to the field of political economy were worthy of serious study.[337] In general, LC thought that the "study of Marxism-Leninism" had to be developed "especially among workers." In fact, only the "when the experience of struggle and the theoretical work meet they allow this [the study of Marxism-Leninism] to exit from academicism and from bookish character," a warning clearly

[335] AFF, FNSI, Busta 21, 7.1.23 II congresso nazionale Rimini 31.10-4.11.1976, "Relazione di Adriano Sofri," 3.
[336] AFF, FNSI, Busta 20, 7.1.17 Milano (1) A) Documenti, "Progetto di una scuola quadri per la sede di Sesto S.G.," 1972, 1.
[337] "Perché bisogna studiare l'economia politica," *Lotta continua*, September 26, 1972, 3.

reminiscent of Mao's contempt of bookish learning.[338] This strong conviction that theoretical and cultural activity could be useful only if connected with the practical is confirmed by comments made at the 1976 Congress of Lotta Continua. There, one delegate underlined that even "discussions […] on Mao's thought," however important, were only a "particular application of the 'base formation' obtained with militancy in factories."[339] Workers liked Mao because he "speaks like a worker."[340] The importance LC gave Mao in the matter of cultural organisation is confirmed by Mao's words which are the top of a document establishing the creation of the LC Revolutionary Cultural Committee: "culture and art" had to "become integral part of the entire mechanism of revolution," they had to be used "as a powerful weapon to unite and educate the people, to hit and to annihilate the enemy, and to help the people fight like one man against the enemy."[341]

More in detail, the "perspective of communism" within the "Chinese experience" had to be studied, with special attention to the "main phases of the Chinese Revolution, the different problems and the different solutions given to every phase."[342] Moreover, Mao had to be studied together with Stalin regarding the national question. Mao's teachings were thought to be useful to understand the development of workers' movements in different countries. For example, LC disagreed with the view that the more capitalism is developed in a given country, the more movements grow against it. This would have meant that "between social being and conscience" there could be only "identity and not contradiction, too," referring to Mao's famous writing.[343] "Chinese foreign policy" had to be studied "in the light of the Maoist principles on the relation between national revolution and socialist revolution." However, Lotta Continua doubtfully underlined that "the instruments of Maoist analysis"

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[338] AFF, FNSI, Busta 20, 7.1.17 Milano (1) A) Documenti, "Documento di L. Pero, G. Mattioli, L. Spagno e altri per l'uscita da LC," January/February 1973, 25.
[339] AFF, FNSI, Busta 20, 7.1.17 Milano C) Congresso 1974, "II Congresso LC, Rimini 1976 - Bollettino congressuale n. 2," 23.
[340] Ibid., 26.
[341] AFF, FNSI, Busta 20, 7.1.17 Milano C) Congresso 1974, "Costituzione del Comitato Rivoluzionario per la Cultura," 8.
[342] AFF, FNSI, Busta 20, 7.1.17 Milano (1) A) Documenti, "Progetto di una scuola quadri per la sede di Sesto S.G.," 1972, 3.
[343] AFF, FNSI, Busta 20, 7.1.17 Milano C) Congresso 1974, "Convegno nucleo grafici – Mi fine 1974," 2.

could be "insufficient" to interpret the "transformation of imperialism, of class structure, in particular of dominant classes," of Middle Eastern and Latin American countries and of "their relation with US or USSR imperialism."[344]

Remarkably, Mao's figure was put together with Stalin's regarding the national question. However, the combination of the two figures was not by chance, since many on the Left saw Mao as the successor to Stalin. Interestingly, LC partially shared the criticism of the Chinese Communists against Khrushchev's total repudiation of Stalin. However, LC also thought that the Students' Movement (MS) of the University of Milan was somewhat exaggerate in its Stalinism: "the adherence of this group to Stalinian politics is absolute, it goes well over the judgements which the Chinese comrades give on Stalin." In reality, LC thought that the *Statale* MS denied Mao Zedong thought, though claiming "loyalty" to it. According to Lotta Continua, the MS forgot the "statement of the Chinese Communists on the continuity of class struggle even after the victory of the revolution."[345] However, in occasion of a students' strike on November 1974 *Lotta continua* saw it fit to publish a few of Mao's writings on school. Mao's views on school could be linked with those which had been developing with the Italian students' movement. According to Mao, students were studying too much, study load had to be reduced to leave room for additional reading, creativity had to be rewarded as opposed to passive learning. Examination techniques and authoritarianism in education were criticised, too.[346]

More precisely, Mao's teachings on the party and on "work style" were considered worthy of serious study. The "party-mass relation, the deviation of the work style in the Party, the investigation, the theory-practice relation" were all subjects which needed to be studied, together with the "practical use of the concept of contradiction."[347]

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[344] AFF, FNSI, Busta 20, 7.1.17 Milano (1) A) Documenti, "Progetto di una scuola quadri per la sede di Sesto S.G.," 1972, 3.
[345] AFF, FNSI, Busta 20, 7.1.17 Milano (1) A) Documenti, "Osservazioni sul Movimento Studentesco della Statale,"Milan 1973, 5.
[346] "Mao sulla scuola," *Lotta continua*, November 28, 1974, 2.
[347] AFF, FNSI, Busta 20, 7.1.17 Milano (1) A) Documenti, "Progetto di una scuola quadri per la sede di Sesto S.G.," 1972, 3.

Unsurprisingly, Lotta Continua violently opposed revisionism, and in order to fight, it was first necessary to study it. LC argued that Marx, Lenin and Mao were all fundamental authors to fulfil this task:

> To tackle the study of revisionism departing from its structural base means […] forcing us to make the same effort Marx made to analyse capitalism, Lenin to interpret the dynamics of development of imperialism, Mao to face the new problem of class antagonistic contradictions in the phase of construction of socialism.[348]

Lotta Continua was concerned with revisionism in general, it clearly singled out "modern revisionism" (Mao's term) as specifically dangerous for the Italian context, with its leaders ranging from Togliatti to Berlinguer.[349] To give an example of Soviet revisionism, Lotta Continua mentioned the difference between a "formal" and "real re-appropriation" the working class could make of bourgeois property. "A 'formal' re-appropriation which does not want to become real de facto restores capitalism" whereas "attacking the second, decisive aspect too, of the phase, means to have done a historical quality jump. China and the USSR teach, in their opposite historical-political experiences."[350]

As we can see, the USSR and China were seen as perfect antipodes: in the USSR capitalism had been restored, because nothing but a "formal" re-appropriation had taken place. In China, conversely, a real re-appropriation had taken place. Moreover, Soviet social imperialism was much more dangerous than it could seem at first glance. In fact, according to LC social imperialism "absolutely" did not integrate "peacefully in the world market: who thinks this must also consistently argue that the 'tendency to war' of which the Chinese comrades speak is a colossal blunder, or a propaganda expedient." Remarkably, Lotta Continua shared Avanguardia Operaia's criticism on the Trotskyist interpretation on the nature of the USSR. In fact, Lotta Continua strongly disagreed that the Soviet

[348] AFF, FNSI, Busta 19, 7.1.8 Torino generale, "Materiali preparatori per un dibattito sul revisionismo," December 1975, 2.
[349] Ibid., 4.
[350] AFF, FNSI, Busta 19, 7.1.8 Torino generale, "Materiali preparatori per un dibattito sul revisionismo," December 1975, 7.

Union could be defined a "bureaucratically degenerated workers' state, […] which could be straightened with a merely political revolution."[351] Quite more radically, LC thought that the USSR could be defined as an imperialist country almost on a par with the United States. In its theses for the first national congress of the organisation, held in Rome in January 1975, LC clearly stated: "Lotta continua declares the United States the number one enemy of the proletariat, and the social imperialism of the USSR the counterrevolutionary overturning of October and of Leninism."[352]

In sum, LC absolutely rejected the "'strategic' conception of a long period peaceful coexistence between antagonistic social systems"[353] The experience of the Chinese Revolution was taken as example also comparing it with the Italian antifascist Resistance and with its post-war consequences. In fact, after the Resistance the PCI put before itself the goal of establishing a "progressive democracy through the collaboration with the D.[emocrazia] C.[ristiana] and not with open struggle against the D.C." But, according to Lotta Continua, the "antifascist front was right until the fall of fascism, afterwards the main enemy became the bourgeoisie and the party which represented it, the D.C." Lotta Continua thought that that Italian Communists should have acted similarly to the "Chinese Communists," who were allied with the Kuomintang until the defeat of the Japanese, but later turned against the Kuomintang as their main enemy.[354]

The importance of culture and of superstructure in Mao was underlined by Mao's remarks published in *Lotta continua* in 1975. In these remarks Mao criticised the Soviet model of agricultural development, which, he argued, had excessive confidence on mechanisation. "But how is it possible that things proceed well if you do not uplift peasants' political consciousness, if you do not transform men's ideology and you rely only on machines?" Therefore, Mao underlined that "transformation and education of men according to socialist ideology" were extremely important problems. [355]

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[351] Ibid., 10.
[352] AFF, FNSI, Busta 21, 7.1.22 Primo congresso nazionale Roma, 7-11 genn. 1975, "Tesi per il congresso 75 – I parte."
[353] Ibid., 10.
[354] AFF, FNSI, Busta 20, 7.1.17 Milano (1) A) Documenti, "Lotta Continua," September 1972.
[355] "Mao: i figli dei 'quadri' sono meno intelligenti dei figli dei non 'quadri,'" *Lotta continua*, March 9, 1975, 4.

Remarkably, *Lotta continua* once showed how the big character poster (Italianised in "ta tze bao") was culturally transferred to an Italian political context, advocating for students' and workers' struggles (fig. 1).

Fig. 1. "Spring dazibao" published in *Lotta continua*, March 5, 1976, 3.


LA PROPOSTA POLITICA DEI C.P.S. ILLUSTRATA, CANTATA E BALLATA
TA TZE BAO DI PRIMAVERA
O DELLA RIAPPROPRIAZIONE DELLA VITA, DEL CORPO, DELLA SCUOLA E DELLA FORZA
LUNEDI 15
1° GIORNO DI AUTOGESTIONE
SI DISCUTE DI NOI R.I.D.
SI OCCUPA LA SCUOLA, SI ABOLISCONO I CORSI
SI ABOLISCONO I PROFESSORI!
QUELLI DI CENTRO DESTRA SI CANCELLANO, QUELLI DEMOCRATICI SE CI STANNO BENE, SE NO...
SI FA SENZA
MARTEDI 16
DURI CORTEI DI SCUOLE FEMMINILI PARTONO ALLA CONQUISTA DI QUELLE MASCHILI
CERTO CHE UNA SCUOLA SOLO MASCHILE E' UNA TRISTEZZA, MA UNA TRISTEZZA...
PESSIMO GIORNO!
OGGI SI DISCOTE DI DONNE!
CI SI ORGANIZZA, SI LOTTA CI SI CONOSCE MEGLIO, NOI E IL NOSTRO CORPO
MERCOLEDI' 17
DURI CORTEI DI SCOLARI MARCIANO SUI LICEI
NOI DELLA 3° ELEMENTARE ABBIAMO MOLTO DA INSEGNARE A QUELLI DEI LICEI
PRATICAMENTE SI INIZIA LO SCASSO DELLA SCUOLA, SI ABOLISCE OGNI DIVISIONE VERTICALE, SESSUALE E ORIZZONTALE
IL PRESIDENTE E' UNA FAVA
MERCOLEDI' STIAMO IN CATTEDRA NOI DISOCCUPATI ORGANIZZATI
UNO DUE TRE E QUATTRO CA VOLIMMO FATICA!
5,6,7,8 CA SUCCERE O' QUARANTOTTO
COMPITO A CASA: SE DONAT CATTIN COSTA ALLA CIA UN MILIONE, QUANTO GLI COSTA TUTTO UN GOVERNO MORO?
IL RISULTATO IN CROCIANI O IN DOLLARI?
GIOVEDI' 18
LO STUDIO E' NOIA, FATICA, ASSOEFAZIONE? E CHI HA MAI DETTO COSE COSI' BALZANE?
AUTOGESTIONE VUOL DIRE EDUCARE GLI EDUCATORI E IMPARARE CHE IMPARARE E' BELLO
E CHE BISOGNA OCCUPARE LUOGHI, SALE, BARCHE E ORGANIZZARE MILIONI DI CIRCOLI GIOVANILI
E LOTTARE CONTRO RASPUTIN E LA SUA BANDA DI SPACCIATORI D'EROINA E DI HERCOLES
MALFATTI E' UN PEPE!
IL PRESIDENTE NON SI TOCCA!
PER DISPOSIZIONE DELL'UFFICIO D'IGIENE
SI PARLA DI FABBRICA, DI SALARIO, DI POTERE E CI SI ORGANIZZA PER PRENDERLO
GIOVEDI' FINISCE QUESTO BORDELLO DI 4 GIORNATE DI AUTOGESTIONE.
PROVVEDITORE
IO HO AVUTO UN'AUTOGESTIONE MOLTIPLA CON SOSPETTO DI OCCUPAZIONE
VENERDI 19
IL PAPA E' VERGINE
MI DISPIACE PER LUI
LA MADONNA E' VERGINE
LO SPACCIO SANO NO!
MALFATTI E' VERGINE?
SABATO 20
DIFENDE
DOMENICA 21
E' PRIMAVERA, ED E' BELLO STARE FUORI TRA I SOLI E I PRATI A CANTARE, GIUOCARE, GODERE E AMARCI L'UNA SU L'ALTRO
LUNEDI 22
SOLO TRE GIORNI DI FESTA? NOI NE FACCIAMO MOLTE MA MOLTE DI PIU'
C'E' LA FESTA DI RINGRAZIAMENTO (ALLA CIA) IL MESE DI BAGORDI PER IL COMPLEANNO DI CROCIANI, LE SANTE POMPE COMANDATE E IL CEFIS DAY
VE LO RICORDATE LICOLA?
UNO SPETTRO SI AGGIRA PER L'ITALIA
SOLO CHE QUESTA VOLTA LICOLA E' VICINO GORIZIA, PAVIA, GELA MATERA, MILANO, IGLESIAS E PANTELLERIA, E PER L'OCCASIONE SI OCCUPANO VILLE PRIVATE A VECCHI BARONI BAVOSI, O A PRESIDENTI EDILIZI, E NON SI RESTITUISCONO PIU'!
SE UNO HA UN ROBINETTO D'ORO CHE PERDE, CHI CHIAMA, LA FONTANIERE O BULGARI?
MORO!
MA DOPO GLI CONTROLLA LE TASCHE!
SI TORNA A SCUOLA E SI COSTRINGONO PRESIDI E PROFESSORI A METTERE I VOTI SU QUESTA SETTIMANA DI STUDIO.
VOTI CHE DECIDIAMO NOI, COME VOGLIAMO NOI, SE NO SI RICOMINCIA SUBITO SUBITO
MARTEDI 23
NON SO SE SOPRAVVIVERO' SINO A QUEL GIORNO
SI PORTA TUTTA LA FORZA, LA BELLEZZA DEL MOVIMENTO A OCCUPARE I PROVVEDITORATI, LE PREFETTURE, E I MINISTERI, IL NOSTRO PROGRAMMA CONTRO IL LORO, IL NOSTRO IMPARARE E VOLERE CONTRO LA LORO ASSUEFAZIONE E LA LORO CONTROFORMA
IL PRESIDENTE E'
SPAZIO LIBERO PER INSULTI E VERITA' PERSONALI
PERSONALE E' POLITICO
E IL PRESIDENTE?
E' UNA BRIOCHE!
QUANTO E' LUNGA L'ITALIA?
NON LO SO
PER L'APPUNTO, SI FA UN CORTEO LUNGO LUNGO, LUNGO E POI ANCHE LARGO, LARGO CON MOLTA TESTA E SENZA CODA
E' NON FINISCE QUA!

The Newspaper *Lotta Continua*

Lotta Continua began to issue a newspaper with the same name in 1969. The newspaper was published until 1982, even after the informal dissolution of the organisation in 1976. Therefore, this publication embraces the entire timespan of this research, until Mao's death and the end of the Cultural Revolution.

The fact that Lotta Continua was influenced by the Chinese experience is clear from the very first issue of the newspaper, dating from late 1969. In fact, there an article celebrated the twentieth anniversary of Chinese Revolution. Admiration for communist China was clear. According to the newspaper, until the Chinese Revolution "hunger had been the permanent condition of the overwhelming majority of the people […] famines" killed "tens of millions of people" every year. But, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, "masses have defeated and thrown out imperialism, destroyed the feudal system, collectivised economy, and definitely defeated hunger, illiteracy, destitution." Moreover, *Lotta continua* was happy that after the Revolution "class struggle was not suffocated, but potentiated" thanks to the Cultural Revolution.[356]

Lotta Continua clearly saw the Chinese Cultural Revolution as a source of inspiration and of slogans which were reproduced in the Italian context. Not by chance, *Lotta continua* advocated nothing less than a "cultural revolution in Italian factories," with slogans clearly coming from the Chinese experience (struggle against factory hierarchy, and against salary differences and material incentives).[357] *Lotta continua* also rejoiced at attacks against the organisation, buttressed by Mao's words according to which "if the enemy attacks us it is good, not bad."[358]

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[356] "Cina: vent'anni di rivoluzione," *Lotta Continua*, November 1, 1969.
[357] "La rivoluzione culturale nelle fabbriche italiane," *Lotta continua*, November 7, 1969.
[358] "Se il nemico ci attacca è un bene, non un male," *Lotta continua*, November 29, 1969.

Remarkably, *Lotta continua* considered China a model also regarding ecology. In fact, according to an August 1972 article, in "China the 'recycling of garbage products' is in use, differently from capitalist waste, in China revolutionary parsimony and the defence of man and nature" ruled.[359]

LC and the Southern Countryside

Lotta continua reported on agricultural wage labourers' struggles. [360] In fact, LC was more interested in the countryside than other extreme leftist organisations, to the point that in early 1970 it had a special coordination meeting on Southern Italy.[361] Beginning from early 1970, Lotta continua began to report more in detail on Southern struggles, to show a precise interest of the organisation.[362] The conviction that struggles in Northern factories had to be linked with Southern struggles was exemplified by "trips to the South" organised by Lotta Continua. Basically, these trips meant that Southerners working in Northern factories took advantage of their summer vacations to spread political propaganda in their native villages.[363] Interestingly, stating its policy towards the South, Lotta Continua arrived to the conclusion that it had to do something similar to what was happening in China.

First of all, the violence necessary to achieve revolutionary goals was absolutely not hidden in *Lotta continua*. In its theses for the 1975 Congress, Lotta Continua clearly based its policy on Mao's view according to which a point has to be reached when "the bourgeoisie will be really reduced to impotence and the majority of the proletariat will be determined to conduct armed insurrection and war."[364] Moreover, *Lotta continua* published in 1975 a few Mao remarks on war and civil war: "A great revolution cannot happen without civil war. It is a law. If you see only the negative side of war and not the positive side, you will have only a partial vision of the problem of war. And talking only

[359] "L'imbroglio ecologico dei padroni," *Lotta continua*, August 26, 1972, 3.
[360] "Le lotte bracciantili in Puglia," *Lotta continua*, January 31, 1970, 11, 14.
[361] "La prima riunione di coordinamento sul mezzogiorno," *Lotta continua*, February 21, 1970, 2.
[362] *Lotta continua*, February 28, 1970.
[363] "Perché il 'viaggio nel sud,'" *Lotta continua*, July 1970, 11.
[364] "Sulla questione della forza," *Lotta continua*, January 9, 1975, 2.

about the destructive character of war harms popular revolution."[365] Clearly, Mao was underlining that war and civil war were unavoidable. The people should have been educated to this, and war should not be depicted only in a sombre light.

According to LC, more and more riots should be fostered until the total takeover of power, on the model of the Reggio Calabria uprising.[366] A further clarification of the military leanings of Lotta Continua, and of how they were inspired by China, can be seen looking at a 1971 article dealing with "proletarians in uniform." "Proletarians in Uniform" was a sort of sub-organisation of Lotta Continua meant to do propaganda work among soldiers. As *Lotta continua* explained, Proletarians in Uniform was a sort of antimilitarist organisation, but it was not a *pacifist* one. Soldiers of Proletarians in Uniform were against the Italian army because it was a bourgeois one, and therefore an instrument of oppression of capitalism on the proletariat. However, they did not mean to oppose bourgeois militarism with peaceful means. They thought they should organise to constitute a proletarian army – possibly inspired by the Chinese People's Liberation Army – and take power. In fact, *Lotta continua* underlined that "revolutionary experience of class struggle in other countries" was "rich of indications and of perspectives." The experience of the Chinese People's Army was certainly "the most important," where "the Party commands the rifle," that is, where military force is under political control. *Lotta continua* published a Chinese text of the People's Army, underlining that the secret of its success in the face of enormous difficulties was in its "internal democracy."[367] The Chinese Communists underlined that in the People's Army political education was crucial: soldiers had to acquire class consciousness, and to engage in educational and productive activities so that they could become a sort of Gramscian "collective intellectual" of the masses.[368] Remarkably, LC thought that

[365] "Mao: i figli dei 'quadri' sono meno intelligenti dei figli dei non quadri," *Lotta continua*, March 9, 1975, 4.
[366] "Del nostro lavoro nel meridione," *Lotta continua*, January 29, 1971, 20-21, 21.
[367] "I compagni Cinesi sull'Esercito Popolare," *Lotta continua*, June 11, 1971, 30.
[368] "La direttiva di Mao del 7 maggio 1966," *Lotta continua*, June 13-14, 1976, 5. For a comparison between Mao's and Guevara's concepts of the guerrilla army engaged in educational and productive activity, see: Marco Gabbas, "Guerrilla War and Hegemony: Gramsci and Che," *Tensões Mundiais / World Tensions* v. 13. n. 25 (July-December 2017): 53-76.

Chinese military methods could be partially exported even into a European context. This can be gathered looking at the attention the newspaper gave to Irish struggles conducted by the IRA. In fact, in August 1972 *Lotta continua* quoted the IRA stating: "our struggle will continue according the principles of Mao's guerrilla."[369] The inspiration Proletarians in Uniform drew from Mao can be inferred also by anecdotal evidence, for examples by soldiers shouting "Lenin, Mao Tse Tung" while marching.[370]

However, more in detail, Lotta Continua was also inspired by the reality of the Chinese red zones. *Lotta continua* clarified that red zones had to be constituted with military help, and proletarian soldiers had to be mobilised to "retake the city," a recurrent LC slogan. Interestingly, LC's plan to "take the city" was mildly reminiscent of Lin Biao's slogan of "the countryside encircling the cities," with the difference that the countryside was not as important for LC as it was for Chinese Communists, nor, for that matter, as it was for Servire il Popolo. However, the concept of the red zones remained: they were definitely needed to take power all over the country. According to *Lotta continua*, the building of red bases meant the "organisation of situations, social sectors, strata of the proletariat [,] territorial structures where the struggle against the social system in its totality would allow to establish a communist way to live, to organise, to struggle." This was nothing less than a "phase of preparation towards the phase of armed struggle, of the construction of the people's army": "soldiers' struggle" had to be united with the "needs of proletarian masses." One possible means was "developing mass struggles in the zone militarily subject to military servitude (like Sardinia, Friuli, Alto Adige)."[371]

Chinese communes were conceptualised in a different way. In fact, in an early 1971 article, *Lotta continua* advocated for the constitution of "people's communes," a term reminiscent of the communes established in China during the Great Leap Forward. However, LC stated that these "communes'" objectives were similar to the red zones.' According to LC, "military ability" was the "highest

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[369] "L'ordine regna in Irlanda: 8 assassinii padronali," *Lotta continua*, August 2,1972, 3.
[370] "Proletari in divisa oggi," *Lotta continua*, November 3, 1972, 3.
[371] "No al controllo dell'esercito sulle masse proletarie," *Lotta continua*, July 25, 1971, 27.

expression of the masses' creative possibilities."[372] But, apart from military action, the proletariat should have gained hegemony through the use of wall newspapers (also redolent of Chinese big character posters). Progressively, the masses would have been able to take power and to found people's communes.

Lotta Continua and Chinese Foreign Policy

A more detailed explanation of Lotta Continua's views on China may be found in a long December 1970 article dealing with two related issues. One was that a few Western governments, including Italy, had recognised the PRC; the other was that Mao Zedong had sent flowers to De Gaulle's funerals. Evidently, many LC activists were perplexed and dubious about these two facts. Did they mean that Chinese revolutionary credentials were not clean after all? For this reason, LC decided that it should tackle the issue in *Lotta continua*. Remarkably, the analysis of this article substantially confirms trends already present in the organisation's internal documents. In fact, by way of introduction, the authors of the article made clear that: "to us it can never happen to fall into a feeling of discouragement that China has 'betrayed' us, because we have always looked at China […] as the most interesting and important attempt of the building of communism, but we have never felt being a sort of Italian branch of China." *Lotta continua* clarified that LC policies and practices were formed in Italy, in a specific national context, though Italian struggles were certainly linked with struggles all over the world. However, the newspaper pointed out that "in certain occasions, we can perfectly well disagree with the Chinese comrades, and proclaim so openly. We may be sorry for that, but that will certainly not be enough to put us into crisis. We have never been sellers of Mao's little medals and never will be." Being especially concerned with Chinese foreign policy, Lotta Continua asked itself whether their Chinese comrades had, in fact, changed? In the end, LC doubted that there had arisen a "new" Chinese foreign policy. In reality, the PRC, as a state like all others, had always tried

[372] "Del nostro lavoro nel meridione," *Lotta continua*, January 29, 1971, 20-21, 21.

to establish diplomatic and trade relations with other countries. This was not only absolutely normal, but also indispensable to break imperialist encirclement. The newspaper also noted that recognition of China came after the Cultural Revolution's two-year break, where in fact China stopped most of its foreign policy activity. In conclusion, *Lotta continua* was convinced that "accusing" China "to fall, more or less consciously, into the trap of imperialism is premature and childish judgement."

Moreover, *Lotta continua* thought it saw a positive development in the Chinese attitude towards foreign communist forces, especially in Western Europe. In fact, while Lotta Continua noted that the Chinese had previously supported, even financially, "this or that Marxist-Leninist group," now they underlined, rather, the importance of autonomous development of revolutionary forces worldwide. Revolutionary forces in all countries had to develop autonomously, according to their own conditions, and it was not China's task to "recognise" them as effective revolutionaries. LC though in fact that Italian "so called Marxist-Leninist groups" did nothing but "literally" rehashing "a series a small formulas taken from Chinese newspapers." As an example of the seriousness lacking within these groups, *Lotta continua* cited the "grotesque use of Dinucci's photograph (secretary of the Marxist-Leninist CP of Italy) besides Mao."[373] LC's judgement of Chinese gestures, however, was not without doubts and criticism. More in detail, LC was perplexed at the flowers sent by Mao to Charles De Gaulle's funeral. In fact, flowers and the "telegram to the widow could have even been justified, with true 'Chinese' finesse, as a homage to the great antifascist fighter, to the defender of French independence and to China's friend." However, this homage came right when De Gaulle was brutally repressing the French Left – including, it is important to underline, French Maoists. Therefore, LC thought that Chinese comrades should have kept in mind that "sometimes a diplomatic act can have indirectly counterrevolutionary effects." Apart from that, *Lotta continua* also criticised lack of Chinese clarity regarding the Palestinian issue, and the small amount of Chinese aid towards world liberation movements. Finally, the newspaper concluded that China had fundamentally "to continue

[373] "Rivoluzione e diplomazia," *Lotta continua*, December 11, 1970, 28-29, 28.

to be, for the revolutionaries of all the world, the living model and example of an uninterrupted revolution." LC could not but continue to observe "with vigilant attention, the future development of Chinese communism."[374]

LC criticism on China continued in 1971. Lotta Continua considered China the "background of world revolution," and thought that the Cultural Revolution was the "episode of class struggle richest in political indications of all the post-war period,"[375] which helped to fight both Stalinism and revisionism (however, *Lotta continua* elsewhere noted that "the analysis the Chinese have so far provided on the essence of Stalinism is still weak and insufficient").[376] Interestingly, LC thought that Stalinism and revisionism had helped hindering "workers' autonomy" during the 50 years following the October revolution. Therefore, Lotta Continua thought that the Chinese Communist Party had "immense political responsibilities, not only regarding the struggle of Chinese masses, but towards the development of class struggle all over the world." Interestingly, LC thought that the famous ping pong match between the American and the Chinese teams should not be criticised. In fact, that could have been a perfectly reasonable attempt to

> strengthen solidarity between Chinese masses and US masses, constituting a first step towards the opening of Chinese borders to American visitors and then to the spread of a larger knowledge of the Chinese Revolution among the masses that in the United States struggle against American government and imperialism.

Lotta Continua thought that Chinese comrades had behaved according to a "black line" in at least two respects.[377] First of all, they thought that, after the Sino-American diplomatic opening, Nixon had released too self-confident declarations which China should have retorted. Secondly, China viewed critically the secessionist attempts within Pakistan, whereas LC thought they should have been supported.

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[374] Ibid., 29.
[375] "I compagni cinesi di fronte al Pakistan," *Lotta continua*, April 23, 1971, 23.
[376] "I compagni cinesi e Stalin," *Lotta continua*, May 24, 1971, 3.
[377] "I compagni cinesi di fronte al Pakistan," *Lotta continua*, April 23, 1971, 23.

However, the perplexities of Lotta Continua were to increase with the announcement of Nixon's visit to China in the summer of 1971. As *Lotta continua* said, the situation was now more serious, because Nixon, "the president-hangman […] whom the revolutionary masses of all the world are used to consider a living symbol of imperialist oppression," had visited China. First of all, the newspaper claimed that LC should not fall either into "frustration" or into "opportunism." Once again, LC underlined: "We deem to be 'Maoist' in the rightest sense you can be, that is not repeating Mao's thoughts in scholastic way or carrying around his image on badges, but fighting here for communism and against imperialism, creatively using" Mao Zedong's teachings.

In fact, the "Chinese experience continues to be for us the greatest revolutionary experience of our century," and one of the main teachings was that the proletariat of every country should count on its own forces.[378] One of the characteristics of Chinese foreign policy which LC disliked was the conviction that contradictions among imperialist countries were more important than contradictions between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie of each imperialist country. This was all the more wrong, *Lotta continua* argued, since especially in Western Europe and in the US strong movements were arising which were seriously endangering bourgeois supremacy. More precisely, LC thought that Nixon's visit to China may be a strong negative blow at the American Left. LC also thought that the careful Chinese policy of attacks and concessions – for example regarding Vietnam – could have been inspired by the guerrilla principles of "not to disperse one's own forces, but to attract the enemy to a spot where it is weak," like in a "morass, and there to encircle it, hit it, to defeat it." However, LC was beginning to have doubts about the efficacy of this strategy, which rejected the "two, three, many Vietnams" principle (conversely advocated by Ernesto Guevara). Finally, *Lotta continua* pointed out: "We do not ask the Chinese comrades to support us or anyone else. We only ask them not to sacrifice revolutionary vanguards" of the world.[379]

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[378] "Nixon in Cina," *Lotta continua*, July 25, 1971, 28-29, 28.
[379] Ibid., 29.

Lotta continua came back to the issue of Nixon's visit in February 1971, shortly after the visit had taken place. The newspaper reiterated its nuanced positions towards China, and ironically mentioned that the M-l groups could do nothing better than to behave as though nothing had happened. Additionally, *Lotta continua* pointed out that after Nixon's visit had been announced the previous summer, the Chinese leadership still did not clarify its positions.[380] Seemingly, *Lotta continua* grew more and more critical towards China in the early 1970s. In fact, although until early 1973, LC at the very least always recognised the important role of China in supporting the Vietcong, it then began to express scepticism about both the USSR and China.

In late January 1973, when the Vietnam war was experiencing a temporary truce, *Lotta continua* expressed fears that without the "obstacle represented by Vietnam, the USSR and China" could provide a "more or less tacit consent to the ambitious plans of [US] imperialism." *Lotta continua* was seemingly beginning to recognise that China was already shifting towards "détente" – which it had previously violently opposed - and "multipolarity."[381] That is, China was beginning to look at its own interests first and to long towards a world status quo where it could feel reasonably safe. Was not a complete US withdrawal too dangerous, since it would have left the Soviet Union as an unbalanced power in Asia?[382] Apparently, China was even favouring European unification as a deterrent to Soviet influence.[383] In February 1973, Henry Kissinger had important talks with Chinese authorities, and *Lotta continua* underlined that the American leaders were treated like "friends."[384] However, in the subsequent months *Lotta continua* tended to present Chinese-American talks as a clumsy and not very successful US diplomatic attempt. According to the newspaper, the US was certainly longing for better relations with China, but this was unlikely to happen because of Chinese obstinacy on

[380] "Nixon va a Pechino," *Lotta continua*, February 24, 1971, 2.
[381] "Vietnam: e ora?," Lotta continua, January 28, 1973, 3.
[382] This realpolitik interpretation of Chinese foreign policy has been endorsed by Henry Kissinger in his book: Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Allen Lane, 2011).
[383] "Francia – La legge elettorale ha garantito la permanenza del regime," *Lotta continua*, March 14, 1973, 3.
[384] 22 ore di colloqui tra Kissinger e i dirigenti cinesi a Pechino," *Lotta continua*, February 21, 1973, 5.

certain issues (Taiwan) and because of the US and the PRC were two too different systems.[385] With hindsight, LC's view may seem naïve, since the Sino-American rapprochement continued and became one of the causes of the end of the USSR.

However, in Lotta Continua there were some voices which were more critical and less tentative than the average. This can be seen in a letter sent by a group of Sicilian LC members to *Lotta continua* in 1976. In the letter, the four authors strongly criticised China for supporting Holden Roberto in Angola, and for opening up to the "penetration of capitalistic consumer goods" and to their ideology. This was allegedly demonstrated by Giovanni Agnelli doing business with China. Moreover, the Sicilians' criticism of China hit against the entire Chinese foreign policy of rapprochement with the US. While *Lotta continua* had been somewhat trying to present Sino-American talks as a necessary evil, or as a shrewd tactical expedient to eventually gain the upper hand, the Sicilians were simply outraged by Chinese behaviour. In their opinion, the legendary "USA-China ping pong match" had turned de facto into "support of that pig of [Gerald] Ford at presidential elections."[386] The authors were convinced that a rightist turn had taken place in Chinese politics, and they wished success of Cultural Revolution-like initiatives which had been taking place at the time (dazibaos at universities, etc.). Interestingly, the answer of *Lotta continua* to these comrades' perplexities was to admit that Chinese foreign policy openly regarded the Soviet Union as a more dangerous enemy than the United States.

Interestingly, in its February 22-23, 1976 issue, *Lotta continua* announced Richard Nixon's visit to China, when he was no longer president of the United States because of the Watergate scandal. This visit marked the fourth anniversary of Nixon's first 1972 visit, and therefore had "a certain official character," according to the newspaper. However, *Lotta continua* expressed some irony about Nixon's visit: his visit to China would have been equal to Liu Shao Qi or Lin Biao going to the US. Moreover, *Lotta continua* underlined probably with some more irony, Nixon was scheduled to go to

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[385] "Kissinger a Pechino: nulla di fatto," *Lotta continua*, December 1, 1974, 4.
[386] "Sulla politica estera cinese," *Lotta continua*, January 4-5, 1976, 2 .

see the dazibaos of Peking University.[387] However, just the following day, on February 24, the newspaper gave more details on the visit which had just taken place. According to *Lotta continua*, the visit really had an "authoritative and official" character, and Mao allegedly told Nixon to bring his "best wishes" to Gerald Ford. However, Nixon's visit supposedly did not interfere with the campaign against right-wing deviationism, which in the words of the *ad interim* Prime Minister Hua Kuo-feng was a "continuation and a follow-up of the Cultural Revolution."[388] Remarkably, China at the time was following apparently contradictory policies: while on an international level it was getting closer to its former imperialist arch-enemy, at home there were small ferments slightly remindful of the Cultural Revolution. Possibly, this might have been one of the paradoxes of Mao's "dialectics," which surely puzzled many. *Lotta continua* issues of this period also often mention Deng Xiaoping. At the time he was still seen with suspicion, and LC probably could not foresee that he would become Mao's successor and the introducer of capitalism into China.[389]

Lotta continua's disappointment with Chinese foreign policy grew increasingly: by late February 1976, the newspaper was saying that Soviet revisionism received *de facto* "space" by the "Chinese policy of 'opening' to all the wrecks of Western reactionary parties and of abandonment of national liberation movements against US imperialism, of which Angola offers the clearest example."[390]

Lotta Continua Travels to China

Remarkably, Lotta Continua too repeated the pattern of sending emissaries to China, who would later report on their travels. In fact, beginning in December 1970 *Lotta continua* published reports of one of its members who had spent one month in "red China, […] the country where proletarians rule." The anonymous traveller underlined the beautiful colours of Chinese sights, and the *de facto* parity between the sexes. However, doing all possible jobs, the Italian traveller thought that "the Chinese

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[387] "Nixon è giunto a Pechino – Sarà portato a vedere i tatsebao," *Lotta continua*, February 22-23, 6.
[388] "Il dibattito politico in Cina," *Lotta continua*, February 24, 5.
[389] See: Philip Short, *Mao: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001).
[390] "Berlinguer," *Lotta continua*, February 29-March 1, 1976, 6.

woman moves always with a grace to make our women envious." The traveller also noted the abundance of big character posters.[391]

Remarkably, a later, 1971 issue presented a debate between two Italian workers who had both been in China. One of them worked for the Fiat-Mirafiori factory, and the other for the Milan Alfa-Romeo. According to unnamed worker of the Alfa-Romeo factory, "many workers of Alfa would like to go to China, even though, in my opinion, it is not an experience to mythicise and to directly transport here. The problem is to take those aspects which are general and applicable, which are good for all the world." Moreover, the bourgeoisie always insisted that there was not alternative to their order. Therefore, showing proof of the contrary was crucial. Interestingly, the interviewer thought that the experience of travelling to China could be used to "correct and to improve political work" and to "build the organisation." According to the Fiat worker, having come back one year before, the Chinese travel was useful to "give credibility to our theories, which were based on books." In China they could see that the "Chinese beginning from their positions did what we want to do beginning from ours." The Fiat worker continued saying that October Revolution used to be a point of reference, "then everything went to the devil" and then "China gave us some breath, our theories were not abstract anymore, they were realisable." He thought that spreading information about China through small means was important, since large means were sabotaged by the bosses. Moreover, the workers thought their Chinese experience helped them strengthening their convictions. [392]

Lotta continua published accounts of a LC member having been in China also two years later, in 1973. Remarkably the LC activist had been in China in a trip organised by the Edizioni Oriente. This shows that different Italian realities inspired by China were in contact with each other and sometimes collaborated. Possibly not by chance, one of the first remarks of this account is a comparison between China and other countries the traveller had seen on his way to and from China: India and Turkey.

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[391] "La Cina rossa," *Lotta continua*, December 11, 1970, 30.
[392] "La politica al primo posto," *Lotta Continua*, October 5, 1971, 28.

Needless to say, the picture seen in those capitalist countries was much different than what they saw in China: “One should not arrive thus, in one jump, from Milan to Peking. One should first stop at New Delhi, as happened to us on our way back: not without the spectacle of hunger, of lepers, of begging children, suddenly popped out from the pages of books to come towards us” which caused “in some of us (also because of heat and tiredness) crises and real collapses.” Istanbul also presented a sad view, showing traces of repression against local revolutionary forces. Pakistan was not better, since a “huge crowd of malnourished poor” could be seen.

China was completely different: for the traveller, it had been “the paradise of politics” thanks to the “Cultural Revolution seen (if it wouldn’t be enough) with the deforming glasses of the students’ movement, of the libertarian revolt, of the word to the masses.” Remarkably, the traveller is telling us that he was perfectly aware of the influence of Italian events on his judgement of China, and that he could draw parallels between the two realities. However, he also underlined that the Chinese themselves were well aware of being a “developing country,” though one having undergone with the Chinese Revolution a change comparable to the birth of Christ. Moreover, the traveller was convinced that his trip was useful to understand that the Italian “Marxist-Leninist” views on China were inappropriate. According to the anonymous writer, the Italian Marxist-Leninist had an “absurd” relation with China. This “absurdity” was embodied by the “pretension to represent China as a model valid for us” and by “repeating formulae and slogans without understanding them.” These slogans had a precise meaning in China, but they were inapplicable in Italy. Ironically, the author declared: “let’s leave to our supposed ‘Marxist-Leninists’ the task to build a great alliance between workers and peasants” to produce “more tractors.”

The anonymous writer also had something interesting to say about the Cultural Revolution. He was not convinced that the Cultural Revolution had simply been a “spontaneous rebellion of the masses against the Party, expression of a matured and autonomous revolutionary consciousness.” Quite differently, it was clear that the Party had directed the events, and that there had been a “lucidly

prepared and carried out 'plan.'"[393] Perhaps unsurprisingly, also the anonymous traveller had remarks which showed China as an ideal world: not only there was "no trace of violence," but it was also "really rare to witness accidents of any kind." Moreover, "vice has no citizenship, at least public. Begging does not exist. Poverty, even when you see it, it is always contained, clean, decent. Dishonesty is a category which you leave in Islamabad and find again in Hong Kong." Finally, the author had to add that "the most beautiful thing one understands in China, **concretely**, is that it is possible to live better than we do. With more affection, with more serenity, with more joy. But they have already taken power…"[394] A barely implicit suggestion that that Italian working class had to struggle to obtain something similar.

Sometimes, however, much rarer, similar travels took place the other way round, that is, Chinese delegations came to visit Italy and had a chance to speak with local activists. That was the case of Chang Hsiou-Chin, a Chinese union leader who visited Italy in 1973 and released an interview to *Lotta continua*.[395]

The Death of Lin Biao, the End of the Cultural Revolution and Mao's Death

In February 1972 *Lotta continua* first tackled the issue of Lin Biao's death. It was in fact a prickly issue which begged an explanation: at the time, LC felt still unable to pronounce a judgement.[396] In August 1972 *Lotta continua* came back to the issue, noting that confusion and unclarity ruled, but it felt its duty to state that similar events in Chinese politics negatively looked like "palace riots." *Lotta continua* was also sceptical about the accusations moved against Lin Biao. Lin Biao may have made mistakes, the newspaper argued, but epithets such as "ambitious […] traitor" used to label him were remindful of "intrigues for power in Stalin's Russia, if not even at the tsars' court."[397] However, *Lotta*

[393] "Un mese in Cina," *Lotta continua*, July 17, 1973, 3.
[394] "Un mese in Cina," *Lotta continua*, July 21, 1973, 3.
[395] "Incontro con il sindacato di Shanghai," *Lotta continua*, July 22, 1973, 2.
[396] "Nixon va a Pechino," *Lotta continua*, February 24, 1971, 2.
[397] "Sul 'caso Lin Piao,'" *Lotta continua*, August 1, 1972, 4.

continua later remarked that silence often ruled for a long time over certain prickly events of Chinese politics.

Lin Biao's fate was connected with the fate of the Cultural Revolution more in general. Since Lin Biao, together with Mao, had embodied the Cultural Revolution in the minds of many foreign Maoists, a doubt spontaneously arose: was the Cultural Revolution defeated? Paraphrasing, *Lotta continua* also asked the question: "What has remained of the Cultural Revolution?" The use of the past tense makes us think that by August 1972 LC considered the Cultural Revolution concluded. However, it did not consider it defeated, since, it argued that an individuals' fate might not necessarily coincided with that of political events. *Lotta continua* was reasonably sure that Mao's prestige and power within the Party were still strong, and it explained the increasing rarity of his declarations with old age – Mao was 79 at the time.[398]

In October 1972, *Lotta continua* published an intervention where Maoism was defined a 1969 illusion "on a virgin working class, a white board where you can write anything."[399] The author of this opinion probably meant that in 1969 – the Italian "workers' year" as opposed to 1968, the "students' year" – the Italian working class was still immature and could be influenced by many fads, yet three years later the situation was already different.

In case there was need for any further confirmation, by September 1973 *Lotta continua* was consistently speaking about the Cultural Revolution in the past tense. The occasion was given by reflections on 10th Congress of the CCP. In fact, *Lotta continua* openly spoke about an "after-Cultural Revolution" period, "a phrase which sounds very disappointing to a Western reader, but which undoubtedly refers to a reality." The newspaper also underlined that the congress was rather short, since it lasted only 5 days as opposed to the previous two congresses, which had lasted 13 and 24 days respectively. The explanation of *Lotta continua* was that the aim of this congress was to sanction

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[398] "Il caso Lin Piao e la lotta tra linee diverse nel Partito Comunista Cinese," *Lotta continua*, August 17, 1972, 2-3, 2.
[399] "La 'verginità' è finita," *Lotta continua*, October 21, 1972, 4.

an already established political change, rather than discussion.[400] A similar function, according to *Lotta continua*, was performed by the National Peoples' Congress held in January 1975. The newspaper argued that this congress, also issuing a new constitution, sanctioned post-Cultural Revolution normalisation.[401]

On December 26, 1973 *Lotta continua* saw it fit to report Mao's 80th birthday. According to the newspaper, "Chairman Mao has always been contrary to the cult of personality," therefore *Lotta continua* avoided to publish hagiographic accounts, but it did want to wish Mao a "long life so that chairman Mao could continue again for a long time to lead the people towards greater and greater successes, and to contribute again to the road for revolution, in China and in the world."[402]

In early 1974 *Lotta continua* felt it should dedicate a few words to the Chinese reception of a Michelangelo Antonioni documentary on China broadcast on Italian television the previous year. First of all, *Lotta continua* was negatively surprised by the verbal violence the movie received by the Chinese press. While Antonioni's documentary could be criticised, it was difficult to state that its authors were "perfidious, spies, despicable" individuals who acted with "unspeakable goals." [403] However, *Lotta continua* did think that the documentary did not give politics enough place. In conclusion, the newspaper thought that virulent attacks towards Antonioni were directed not only against him, but also towards similar forms of expressions regarding China.

Interestingly, *Lotta continua* noted that on December 5, 1974 the Cultural Revolution had officially ended, as it was announced by the Chinese newspaper *Red Flag*.[404] This is remarkable because it presents still again another ending point of the Cultural Revolution, as opposed to the two classical ones of 1969 and 1976 (Mao's death). However, I must note that confusion on the end date of the

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[400] "Cina – Un primo bilancio del X congresso," *Lotta continua*, September 6, 1973, 3.
[401] "Cina – Il Congresso Nazionale del Popolo e la nuova costituzione," *Lotta continua*, January 21, 1974, 3.
[402] "Il presidente Mao ha compiuto 80 anni," *Lotta continua*, December 26, 1973, 3.
[403] "Il 'caso' Antonioni," *Lotta continua*, February 19, 1974, 3.
[404] "Cina," *Lotta continua*, December 7, 1974, 3.

Cultural Revolution was due to the same confusion of official sources: in March 1976 *Lotta continua* published another *Red Flag* article according to which the Cultural Revolution had to continue.[405] On December 28, 1974, *Lotta continua* celebrated Mao's 81st birthday with a few lines noting that, according to the Chinese comrades, the situation of workers' struggles in Western Europe was "excellent."[406]

In January 10, 1976, *Lotta continua* announced the death of Zhou Enlai. Though certainly he had not enjoyed the same degree of popularity of Mao for LC, the newspaper, quoting the official Chinese communication, wrote: "He was a good member of the Chinese Communist Party, a great proletarian revolutionary of the Chinese people, a loyal revolutionary fighter, an outstanding leader of the Party, of the state."[407] More in detail, *Lotta continua* shortly explained its admiration for Zhou. It noted that, though he had been ill since 1973, he nonetheless was the protagonist of the 10th Party Congress. The newspaper thought that giving this role to Zhou, Mao probably wanted to "pay a last homage to the man that, without ever adulating him or indulging in his cult, had been beside him most long and most faithfully." *Lotta continua* further noted that Zhou Enlai's legacy lied in his "diplomatic activity, of great and patient builder of the place China today occupies in the world."

However, the newspaper made it clear that it mourned not only as a "member, only more cultured and refined, of the family of diplomats and heads of state." It mourned a "great revolutionary, whose life has known sixty years of struggles against imperialism and for socialism. […] In the comrade Zhou Enlai, forever alive, we bid farewell with one of the greatest revolutionaries of our century."[408] Returning to the issue of Zhou's death, in the next issue of *Lotta continua* a headline read: "He will bid farewell only with his people and his comrades," since foreign delegations were not admitted to Zhou's funeral. *Lotta continua* gave this a sort of sentimental meaning, as if a diplomat who had spent

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[405] "Cina – Continuare la rivoluzione culturale," *Lotta continua*, March 9, 1976, 5.
[406] "Il presidente Mao ha compiuto 81 anni," *Lotta continua*, December 28, 1874, 2.
[407] "Era un buon membro del partito comunista cinese, un grande rivoluzionario proletario del popolo cinese, un leale combattente rivoluzionario, un eminente dirigente del partito, dello stato," *Lotta continua*, January 10, 1976, 5.
[408] "Chu En-Lai," *Lotta continua*, January 10, 1976, 6.

decades of his life dealing with foreigners now wanted to bid farewell only among Chinese.[409] His urn had been accompanied from the hospital to the Palace of Workers' Culture by an "immense crowd."[410]

Campaigns reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution were reported in *Lotta continua* even in 1975 and 1976.[411] At first sight, these post-Cultural Revolution sparkles seemed nothing compared to the previous turmoil. However, it is safe to hypothesise that ongoing changes in Chinese internal politics may have puzzled European admirers of China. After a few years of Cultural Revolution, there was an adjustment saying that the movement had gone too "left" (that is, too "right"), and that Lin Biao was a traitor, followed by umpteenth changes in the opposite direction. Remarkably, though *Lotta continua* generally tried to portray Chinese events in a positive light, by early 1976 it could help sensing that the umpteenth "anti-rightist campaign" had "sometimes […] ritual and twisted elements."[412] Another reason for surprise was the appointment to the Prime Minister post of Hua Kuo-feng, when Deng Xiaoping was expected to be appointed instead.[413]

However, the newspaper still generally supported the ongoing turmoil: though the Cultural Revolution had officially ended, what was happening was in some way a sort of its subtle continuation, according to principles which were still valid. What was happening was an "uninterrupted revolution conducted by millions of men and women." However, *Lotta continua* also criticised the fact that the Chinese dealt only with the "internal aspects of the building of socialism, while the problems of the line of international politics continued to be separated and disconnected with the internal ones and stolen from public discussion and mass mobilisation." *Lotta continua* reiterated that Chinese foreign policy was reduced to an "already almost exclusive campaign against Soviet social imperialism."[414]

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[409] "Si accomiaterà solo dal suo popolo e dai suoi compagni," *Lotta continua*, January 11-12, 1976, 5.
[410] "Una folla immensa ha accompagnato l'urna di Chu En-Lai," *Lotta continua*, January 13, 1976, 5.
[411] "Cina: attaccato degli studenti il ministro dell'educazione," *Lotta continua*, November 28, 1975, 6.
[412] "Contro il vento deviazionista di destra," *Lotta continua*, February 19, 1976, 1.
[413] "Il nuovo primo ministro cinese: Hua Kuo-feng," *Lotta continua*, February 9, 1, 6.
[414] "Cina," *Lotta continua*, February 19, 1976, 6.

These notes written in 1976 are remarkable, since their basic tenet fundamentally agrees with Kissinger's views on the Sino-American rapprochement (China siding with the US because it considered the USSR more dangerous).[415] However, Kissinger's analysis is more pragmatic and diplomatic, whereas *Lotta continua* still saw ideological motives in Chinese behaviour, however wrong.

An umpteenth Chinese upheaval was announced by *Lotta continua* on March 11, 1976, when Mao criticised Deng Xiaoping declaring that the "people does not agree with those who put again into question the results of the Cultural Revolution."[416] One of Deng's famous slogans to be criticised was "it does not matter if the cat is black or white, what matters is that it catches mice." This phrase was seen as proof of Deng not seeing the difference between socialism and capitalism, as long as they served certain goals. Interestingly, *Lotta continua* paraphrased Deng's sentence by saying in March 1976 that the "cat is red and it must catch mice." According to the newspaper, in

> China a leader of the revolution who said: 'it does not matter whether the cat is red or black, what matters is that it catches mice' is put in charge by millions of revolutionaries, because being red or black has importance beyond anything else. The Chinese say that the cats must be red and catch a lot of mice.[417]

However, it looks as though until the very end in Lotta Continua there were different opinions about the turn of Chinese internal and international policy. In early March 1976 Guido Crainz warned in *Lotta continua* that a "hasty liquidation of Chinese positions" would have been presumptuous. However, Crainz was certainly critical about Chinese underestimation of "the autonomy of the class movement" of European countries, including Italy, from Soviet social imperialism (which was seen as the main enemy). Paradoxically, following the orthodox Chinese view had brought certain M-L groups to the "aberrant consequence" of supporting NATO as a bulwark against Soviet social

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[415] Kissinger, *On China*.
[416] "Cina - Mao contro Teng," *Lotta continua*, March 9, 1976, .
[417] "Il gatto è rosso e deve prendere i topi," *Lotta continua*, March 31, 1976, 1.

imperialism. After all, were it not the Chinese comrades who said that "there can always be contradiction between the policy of the state, or of the states where the dictatorship of the proletariat is implemented, and the interests of the world proletariat"?[418] Crainz was beginning to see that such a situation was arising regarding China.

On April 6, 1976 *Lotta continua* reported street clashes in Tiananmen square, Peking, in the name of Zhou Enlai. However, the newspaper seemingly did not have clear idea on the significance of these clashes. It reported that on the previous Sunday, April 4 – which is the day of the dead in China – the square had been filled with flowers, poems and portraits in Zhou Enlai's honour, with "many tens of thousands of people" staying until late evening on the square and its surroundings.[419] When on Monday morning flowers and banners began to be taken away, a crowd of a few thousands openly protested against this, delivering speeches and proposals. As the crowd grew larger, policemen and the workers' militia tried to block the entrances to the square, while a large portrait of Zhou, posters and poems were put on an obelisk at the centre of the square. The protesters later knocked over a few cars and set a building on fire. The following day, the newspaper quoted official Chinese sources defining those protests "of reactionary nature, counterrevolutionary and hostile to Chairman Mao and to the Central Committee."[420] However, *Lotta continua* did not think that protests in the name of Zhou Enlai were directed against Mao.[421] The Tiananmen incidents were not a "popular demonstration against the Maoist line" but were created "artificially in the framework of ritual ceremonies of the ancestors' cult which had been exalted on purpose, profiting of the profound popular respect for Zhou Enlai's figure" (moreover, he "had wanted to break the rites rejecting burial and having his own ashes

[418] Crainz, "Il marxismo ci insegna."
[419] "Cina – Nel nome di Chi En-lai, scontri sulla piazza Tian An Men," *Lotta continua*, April 6, 1976, 5.
[420] "Cina – Il 'Quotidinao del popolo' rilancia la mobilitazione contro il deviazionismo di destra," *Lotta continua*, April 7, 1976, 1.
[421] See: Short, *Mao,* 622-624; Frank Dikötter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

dispersed to the wind").[422] The incidents had been "exaggerated and dramatized" by the international press to present them as a "popular anti-Mao demonstration."[423]

On April 8 *Lotta continua* happily announced that Deng Xiaoping had been "readily purged" after a "struggle with mortuary crowns."[424] Henry Kissinger expressed worry.[425]

On September 10, 1976, *Lotta continua* gave the news of the Chairman's death. According to *Lotta continua*, he had been "one of the greatest – if not the greatest – figures of the international workers' movement." He had "exerted the most profound influence one can imagine on the peoples of all the world," and more precisely, his teachings were considered an "inexhaustible reserve of […] ideas and of sharp weapons to transform reality."[426] *Lotta continua* also gave voice to Italian workers who mourned Mao everywhere in the country.[427]

Conclusions

The cross-analysis of internal sources of the newspaper *Lotta continua* allows one to make a few conclusions. The claim of Lotta Continua of being "Maoist" *sui generis* is probably realistic. LC showed both in its internal documents and in its press of being an organisation strongly influenced by Maoism and Chinese communism, but it did not accept them blindly. Instead, it tried to study and to learn as much as possible about China, and it did borrow a few important contributions which it tried to elaborate and to apply to the Italian context. One first, important appropriation was the basic tenets of Chinese analysis on international politics. Virtually all sources clearly show that the USSR was not a point of reference for Lotta Continua: the USSR had long stopped being revolutionary and it had become social imperialist, only China could then provide some form of inspiration. A second

[422] "Cina," *Lotta continua*, April 7, 1976, 6.
[423] "Cina," *Lotta continua*, April 8, 1976, 6.
[424] "Destituito da tutte le cariche il revisionista Teng Hsia-ping," *Lotta continua*, April 8, 1976, 1, 6: 6.
[425] "Shanghai, città operaia in festa. Operai, soldati, donne scendono nelle strade," *Lotta continua*, April 10, 1976, 5.
[426] *Lotta continua*, September 10, 1976, 1.
[427] "'Ci lascia un insegnamento: l'avanzamento sociale e umano si realizza dando il potere ai lavoratori,'" *Lotta continua*, September 11, 1976, 1.

important borrowing was the concept of popular revolutionary violence and of red bases. The consulted sources show that Lotta Continua took Mao's inflammatory declarations of class struggle quite literally. There could not be coexistence with capitalism neither at the international, nor at the national level, and this meant that the proletariat of every country had to organise a violent struggle against its own bourgeoisie. Revolutionary violence was considered an absolutely viable means for political struggle. The importance given by Mao to culture and to superstructure was also carefully analysed by Lotta Continua, since they thought that his teachings could be useful to gain cultural hegemony in Italy.

However, the shifts in Chinese foreign policy were crucial in depriving Lotta Continua of much enthusiasm. China's rapprochement with the US, Chinese support for NATO and for European unification, Lin Biao's denunciation as a traitor, the abandonment of the Cultural Revolution in favour of a more "business as usual" attitude at home certainly took much sympathy away from China. Remarkably, this sort of "decline" of revolutionary China was parallel to the decline of Lotta Continua as an organisation. Of the only two congresses held by LC, the second and *de facto* final one was held in Rimini between October and November 1976, a little more than one month after Mao's death. Even during the congress discussions and final remarks, Mao was present and taken by Adriano Sofri as an example which should be followed in order to avoid defeat. But eventually this defeat could not be avoided. It is indeed remarkable that Mao Zedong and this small organisation of his Italian admirers perished approximately at the same time, though they had walked together since Lotta Continua's birth in 1969.

Avanguardia Operaia Between Trotskyism and Maoism

Introduction

Roberto Niccolai has argued that Avanguardia Operaia (AO), founded in the autumn 1968 and with strong roots in the Milan area, was a special organisation which interestingly synthesised the two communist heresies of Trotskyism and Maoism.[428] In fact, these two "heresies" had something in common, since they both represented an alternative to the Soviet status quo. In his 1988 work, Belden Fields has shown that these two communist currents may well be compared on a historical level.[429] This comparison would have probably seemed blasphemous to an Italian *marxista-leninista* of the time, since Trotskyism was sometimes named in their propaganda material as a "ten times dead cadaver."[430] However, thorough research work conducted both on the AO press (the theoretical journal *Avanguardia operaia*; the newspapers *Bandiera rossa* and then the *quotidiano dei lavoratori*) and on the internal material of the organisation kept at the archives of the Feltrinelli Foundation in Milan shows that Avanguardia Operaia was a plural, eclectic organisation which went *beyond* Trotskyism. The organisation was strongly influenced by Maoism, though by a particular Maoism which it elaborated in a special way. This chapter will show how AO was influenced by Maoism and how AO elaborated it in its own way.

A Chinese Avanguardia Operaia?

The fact that China was one of the crucial points of reference for Avanguardia Operaia is confirmed by the internal material of the organisation kept at the archive of the Feltrinelli Foundation. AO claimed to be an organisation "whose main theoretical references are Marxism, Leninism and

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[428] Roberto Niccolai, "Avanguardia Operaia," in *Quando la Cina era vicina* (Pisa: BFS Edizioni, 1998): 167-181.
[429] Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and Practice in France and the United States* (New York: Autonomedia, 1988).
[430] AFF, FINL, env. 10, 5.22, "Lettera al C.C. del Partito Comunista Cinese," 20.

Maoism."[431] Avanguardia Operaia clearly stated in its internal documents that Peking was "the centre of the proletarian revolution" and that China was "the only power bulwark of world revolution."[432] Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Paris Commune in 1971, Avanguardia Operaia noted in a Mayday leaflet that

> revolution in China has represented the third great revolutionary fact of world importance [after the Paris Commune and the October Revolution], and with the Cultural Revolution the Chinese proletarian masses, guided by the Communists, defeated bourgeois tendencies, strengthened their dictatorship and started socialist construction with an internationalist view of class struggle.

Avanguardia Operaia considered "revisionism" a word of opprobrium, and the Soviet Union was guilty of "great-Russian chauvinist social imperialism." Proof of the struggle of peoples of Eastern Europe fighting Russian social imperialism was the workers' riot in Poland. Interestingly, Avanguardia Operaia thought that Soviet revisionism was basically a continuation of Stalinism. Avanguardia Operaia also thought that Marxism-Leninism was the right ideological tool of the moment, and that a Marxist-Leninist party had to be founded. Avanguardia Operaia greeted Mayday 1971 with the slogans "Long live the Chinese Revolution and the Proletarian Cultural Revolution!"[433] Maoist language had seemingly been assimilated by Avanguardia Operaia.[434] This included not only the aforementioned concepts of revisionism and Marxism-Leninism, but also the concept of "protracted struggle."[435]

However, Avanguardia Operaia did not have China as a mere symbolic point of reference. Quite the reverse, AO thought that it should learn from China concrete lessons which could be useful for revolutionary struggle in Italy. This can be seen reading an issue of AO's internal bulletin of October

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[431] AFF, PITCR.a.301, scattered sheet.
[432] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, "Seminario sull'imperialismo," 7.
[433] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, Comitati Unitari di Base – C.U.B. Borletti, leaflet "W LA RIVOLUZIONE SOCIALISTA MONDIALE W I MAGGIO INTERNAZIONALISTA." See also: AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, Comitati Unitari di Base – C.U.B. Borletti, leaflet "Contro l'imperialismo Usa – Contro il socialimperialismo Urss Contro l'imperialismo Italiano – Contro il revisionismo."
[434] See Kotkin's concept of "Speaking Bolshevik." Stephen Kotkin, "Speaking Bolshevik" in *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 198-237.
[435] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.2. Documenti politici, untitled document, 19.

1975. The "Chinese experience" offered AO "useful and precious general indications regarding our own struggle for the building of the revolutionary party of the Italian proletariat" since in China a "proletarian revolution" was going on which was "the most advanced in social transformation and which could face the sharpest form of counterrevolution, that which departs from the 'new' bureaucratic bourgeoisie."[436]

In November 1973, the Central Committee of Avanguardia Operaia even issued a special resolution on China. Apart from its canonical and usual praising of communist China, what is remarkable is that Avanguardia Operaia criticised the "relations of trust [China sometimes had] towards the revisionist and social imperialist USSR." However, AO was convinced that there was a fundamental "contradiction between class relations in China and […] in the USSR" which could not but bring to open conflict. Such is the interpretation Avanguardia Operaia gave to the Sino-Soviet split. Interestingly, the resolution underlined that it was the Cultural Revolution which brought the organisation to support China, notwithstanding certain criticism towards Chinese "Stalinist remains."[437] The resolution clearly stated that the opinion of Avanguardia Operaia on Mao's China was "overall positive," therefore an "adequate propaganda campaign in support of China" had to be promoted.[438] Though the organisation believed that the Cultural Revolution had taken a "moderate turn," by late 1973 they were sure they had committed a mistake: the Cultural Revolution was a genuine revolution which had to be absolutely supported, and what was happening in China was "at the antipodes of the Stalinian experience of the 'building of socialism in one country.'"[439]

[436] AFF, FNSI, Busta 24, 7.2.14 Comm. Naz. Scuola, Bollettino Interno N. 1 (supplement to the *Quotidiano dei lavoratori*, October 1, 1975).
[437] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.2. Documenti politici, "Risoluzione sulla Cina" (Milan, November 1974), 2.
[438] Ibid., 3.
[439] Ibid., 10.

The Development of the Chinese Heresy According to AO

The importance the Chinese experience had for Avanguardia Operaia is shown by the fact that the organisation tried to buttress its support for China with historical as well as with ideological reasoning. Therefore, an overview of the history of the Chinese Communist Party and of the Cultural Revolution *according to AO* is useful to understand the reasons of its "Chineseness." AO analysed these elements both in the journal *Avanguardia operaia* and in its internal sources. Between 1971 and 1972 the journal published long overviews on the national question and class struggle in China between 1910 and 1927,[440] on the post-revolutionary upsurge thanks to Mao's role,[441] and the tactic of the anti-Japanese united front.[442] According to Avanguardia Operaia, China was "the term of concrete historical reference from which to depart" to analyse "a whole series of problems regarding the realisation of socialism." China was, in fact "the only country presently under the dictatorship of the proletariat."[443] AO's analysis on the relation between the PRC and the USSR is particularly remarkable, as it shows in a way the background of the Cultural Revolution. In fact, according to AO "though formally adhering to the III Internationale […] the Chinese Communist Party realised its role in the Chinese Revolution with notable margins of substantial autonomy both from the III Internationale and from the Soviet leadership."[444] Moreover, the successful revolutionary perspective of the CCP was demonstrated by the fact that "in the course of the [revolutionary] struggle they not only maintain power in the liberated zones, but they consolidate there the experience of the soviets and of the political mobilisation of peasant masses."[445] The "soviets' movement" established "centres

[440] "Questione nazionale e sviluppo della lotta di classe in Cina (1910-1927)," *Avanguardia operaia* 13 (February 1971): 27-33.
[441] "La ripresa della rivoluzione in Cina dopo il 1927 e il ruolo di Mao Tse-tung," *Avanguardia operaia* 16 (May 1971): 14-18.
[442] "La tattica del 'fronte unito anti-giapponese' in Cina," *Avanguardia operaia* 27 (November-December 1972): 21-27.
[443] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, "Teoria e prassi del Partito Comunista Cinese," 1.
[444] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, "Premessa," 2.
[445] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, "Premessa," 3.

of 'red power' in which a policy of democratic self-government and of land reparation is carried out."[446]

AO thought that CCP victory took place in spite of Soviet sabotage, since the USSR ceded Mongolia "into Chang Kai-Shek's hands" and even requested the "dissolution of the Chinese Red Army." AO compared the victory of the Chinese Communist Party with the failing policies adopted in Europe under the aegis of the III Internationale, and substantially sided with China, underlining that its success was due to precise ideological and strategic characteristics, "because of the exclusive merit of the CCP leadership." AO argued that, in contrast to Blum's France or Republican Spain or post-war Italy, where III Internationale policies had disastrous consequences, "Chinese leaders […] arm the people with rifles and with theory" whereas "the leaders of the Internationale of the CPSU and of the USSR disarm the proletarians taking the rifles away from them and stuffing them with fetishisms."[447]

Then, once in power the first task of the Chinese Communists was to develop the economy and to "eliminate the problem of hunger." "In this phase," AO's analysis continued, "it was inevitable for China to ask Stalin and the USSR for help and collaboration." AO's judgement on this side of Chinese policy is mixed. In fact, while AO admitted that since Soviet help was indispensable to develop productive forces, China thus ran the risk to implement "methods and criteria of planification" imposed by Stalinism.[448] However, AO was convinced that in China agriculture was collectivised "without forced expropriation, but trying to favour the formation of 'communes' of cooperative kind with political propaganda and with the struggle of poor peasants."

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[446] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, "(conquista del potere – esperienze storiche) Cina."
[447] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, "Premessa," 3.
[448] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, "Teoria e prassi del Partito Comunista Cinese," 2.

However, AO continues, a clash with the USSR and with the pro-Soviet element of the Party was inevitable, and its first step took place with the Great Leap Forward. According to AO, one of the points of disagreement between Mao and the USSR was educational policy. In fact, the Chinese school system was strongly meritocratic, as "remains […] from the Chinese imperial system."[449] According to AO, a "moderate centrist bloc […] formed by the old Chinese bourgeoisie" and led by Liu Shao Qi wanted to "give more importance […] to intellectuals in schools."[450] But beyond that, AO underlined that disagreements between China and the Soviet Union were more profound. China accused the "revisionists" of "falling into dreams of agreements among opposed classes and interests for the 'common good'"[451] and the Soviet Union of hiding "very precise expansionist goals" under its "aid policy" to the developing countries.[452]

In fact, according to other AO analyses, revolutionary policies in Chinese schools had been implemented before the Cultural Revolution. These included selecting "students among children of workers and peasants who had a revolutionary conscience." These students "showed their class consciousness in class brotherhood," for example practicing "mutual help" in their studies and avoiding feelings of superiority towards the work of peasants and workers.[453]

The Cultural Revolution According to AO

Avanguardia Operaia thought that it should have "complete solidarity with the Chinese Cultural Revolution," which represented "a correct interpretation of the Marxist theory of the uninterrupted revolution."[454] The Cultural Revolution led by Mao was thought as a "campaign of political socialist

[449] Ibid., 3.
[450] Ibid., 3-4.
[451] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, "Premessa," 4.
[452] Ibid., 8.
[453] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, "Partito, tecnici e classe operaia nella rivoluzione cinese," 5.
[454] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.2. Documenti politici, "Progetto di statuto di 'Avanuardia Operia' presentato dal direttivo del Gruppo," 1969, 3.

education,"[455] and as the realisation of Lenin's prediction: "the renewal of the Party under the stimulus of the criticism exerted by the masses."[456] The Cultural Revolution was a "project to make the spiritual subjective energy contained in the masses a great material objective force," an "attempt of universal historical proportion" to "give space to the intellectual and creative force of the working class." The role of the Party in this endeavour was to "let the conscience of the proletariat grow, to lead the masses, among them the workers of peasant origin, many petty bourgeois and intellectuals, to transform into proletariat."[457] In other words, no less than a "class struggle on a large scale" had to be unleashed "in the field of ideology and for power."[458] Remarkably, AO thought that party purges were a fundamental and just part of the Cultural Revolution. As it explained, this epuration was just because it took place "not because of obscure corridor manoeuvres, but under the constant exercise of power on the part of the masses."[459] AO also admitted that during the Cultural Revolution conflicts with the workers arose. In fact, there were cases when "the red guards were attacked by workers" led by "revisionist" cadres.[460] In sum, AO was convinced that with the Cultural Revolution Mao had "the courage to launch the masses in the struggle to attack the intermediate Party cadres." Though such "a choice presented unforeseeable risks," it "demonstrated the great creative abilities of the masses to move forward class struggle until its ultimate consequences."[461]

According to AO, the Cultural Revolution ended with a compromise sanctioned by the 9th CCP Congress, where "some conquests were consolidated" and "some ultra-leftist positions" were "braked," like the Shanghai commune which was "too detached from […] Chinese reality."[462]

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[455] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, "Teoria e prassi del Partito Comunista Cinese," 4.
[456] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, "Premessa," 9.
[457] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, "Partito, tecnici e classe operaia nella rivoluzione cinese," 16.
[458] Ibid., 23.
[459] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, "Premessa," 9.
[460] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, "Teoria e prassi del Partito Comunista Cinese," 5.
[461] Ibid., 6-7.
[462] Ibid., 7.

Interestingly, AO considered the Cultural Revolution finished by 1970-1971, when a foreign policy was promoted which saw the "defence of China" as "the best guarantee in the struggle against imperialism" and which left "the global dimension of class formation out of sight."[463] However, AO argued that this was an evolution of a Chinese foreign policy which had always been based on a changing balance between "proletarian internationalism" and "peaceful coexistence."[464] AO criticised this turn in foreign policy, stating that its "severe limitations" brought to a "series of defeats of class struggle on an international level."[465]

AO and Chinese Foreign Policy

Similar to Lotta Continua and to other extreme Leftist organisations, AO too was perplexed about the Chinese invitation to the "hangman Nixon" in the summer of 1971. *Avanguardia operaia* thought that the US, stuck in the Vietnamese war, had become convinced that dialogue with China may have been a better option than a radicalising conflict or shameful defeat. The journal was afraid that this might have been the first step to create more zones of influence in the world – a sort of multipolar-polycentric world – to defeat the Vietcong one way or another. However, this was not going to happen, since US imperialism was in reality a "paper tiger." *Avanguardia operaia* was perplexed at Chinese foreign policy, which they judged too contradictory. On the one hand, China supported the revolution the world over. On the other, it had ties with Romania and Yugoslavia and favoured the process of European unification. China seemingly did not limit itself to building inter-imperialist contradictions, but wanted a strong European pole to dialogue with it.

Finally, *Avanguardia operaia* expressed worries that inviting the "hangman Nixon" to China while "his planes massacre with napalm bombs Palestinian militants" and US aggression was continuing in Indochina might not have been a good idea.[466] Was not this visit against the interests of the

[463] Ibid., 8.
[464] Ibid., 9.
[465] Ibid., 10.
[466] "Sull'invito dei compagni cinesi al boia Nixon," *Avanguardia operaia* 18 (July-August 1971): 1.

international proletariat? *Avanguardia operaia* tried to give an answer to these perplexities with an italicised paragraph which is worth quoting in full:

> *In an absolutely clear way Avanguardia Operaia reiterates that, not recognising any leading country or party, and not having other interests than those of the world proletariat, it does not at all intend to give in on the ground of internationalist principles and of consistently* [internationalist] *policy. Avanguardia Operaia argues that, until Stalinism will condition, in more or less wide measure, the action of the most experienced and most influential department of the international proletarian revolutionary movement, the CCP, every revolutionary organisation will have to act closely abiding by the principle "count on one's own forces."*

This long quote is worth close analysis, since it exemplifies the position of the organisation in a very difficult, contradictory period. As with Lotta Continua, Avanguardia Operaia too makes clear that it recognises no leading country. AO regards China "*the most experienced and influential department of the international proletarian revolutionary movement,*" but at the same time it thinks it is infected by Stalinism. *Sic rebus stantibus*, AO nevertheless came back to a Chinese slogan, "*to count on one's own forces*." This seemingly paradoxical conclusion is possibly the best explanation of AO Maoism. Since 1969, AO had hoped that China may give a reasonable coordination with international revolutionary forces, but in 1971 they regretted that China had chosen the "easier, but certainly wrong road to recognise, almost everywhere, groups exclusively characterised by the fact of being mouthpieces of every Chinese stance" (an evident reference to Italian M-Ls). By way of conclusion, *Avanguardia operaia* warned that all revolutionary forces should carefully follow what was going on in China.[467]

In the autumn of 1971, *Avanguardia operaia* analysed the stances of the other leftist forces on the Chinese foreign policy about-face. "Also Chinese politics must be evaluated with the Marxist method," the journal claimed. While Lotta Continua reacted critically, the reactions of the other organisations could be divided into two types: those who basically agreed with Chinese foreign policy, and others

[467] Ibid., 2.

who saw Nixon's visit even as a defeat of US imperialism. The Manifesto, the UCI(m-l) and the Capanna group held the former view. By contrast, the latter view was held by other M-L and local groups. *Avanguardia operaia* maintained that unqualified approval of the Chinese move was due to a Stalin-like belief in "socialism in one country": since China was the stronghold of world revolution, anything in its interest will be in the interest of world revolution. The journal polemically added that to hold the second view was due to nothing short of a religious attitude: China could not but be right.[468] Conversely, AO reiterated that it deemed the Chinese move not only "'legitimate,' but due to express […] dissent."[469] Towards the end of 1971, *Avanguardia operaia* saw fit to comment on Chinese entry into the UN. The journal thought that this move was positive. US imperialism could no long evade China.[470]

In March 1972, *Avanguardia operaia* further elaborated on Nixon's famous visit to China. According to the journal, Nixon had "the merit (the merit characteristic of the hangman who dominates imperialism)" to have understood that, in order to survive, US imperialism needed a new policy.[471] The strategy of dialogue with China was part of this new policy: AO thought that in order to oppose China and the USSR, the US was trying to get closer to the weaker one, to be able to better counter both. Conversely, China was supposedly trying to awaken the Bandung spirit, therefore trying to lead a front of newly independent Third World countries neutral from the two superpowers. Moreover, China was supposedly using a skilful "diplomatic game to neutralise China's potential adversaries." [472] Overall, *Avanguardia operaia* stressed that China's new course was going to be unsuccessful for a number of reasons, not least because Nixon's imperialism was different from Eisenhower's: "not anymore the policy of frontal clash, but that of manoeuvre and deceit." However, AO continued to believe that the new Chinese policy still gained some success: after all, Nixon was "forced" to visit

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[468] "Anche la politica cinese va valutata col metodo marxista," *Avanguardia operaia* 19 (September-October 1971): 29.
[469] Ibid., 48.
[470] "La Cina all'ONU," *Avanguardia operaia* 20 (November-December 1971): 1.
[471] "Obbiettivi di Nixon e nuovo corso estero della Cina," *Avanguardia operaia* 23 (March 1972): 12.
[472] Ibid., 13.

China without even the establishment of formal diplomatic relations, after twenty years of enmity.[473] But this success was counterbalanced by the images of "Nixon and Zhou Enlai drinking a toast, Mao smiling [and] shaking the American hangman's hand" which were "already a propaganda weapon for all reactionary forces of various Asian countries" to criticise China-leaning revolutionary forces.[474]

In autumn 1972 *Avanguardia operaia* thought that changes in Chinese foreign policy mirrored changes in the power balances within the Chinese Party: Cultural Revolution leaders like Chen Boda were being put aside, while Zhou Enlai's moderate line was supposedly gaining momentum. Coming to the prickly issue of Lin Biao's death, the journal bluntly declared the given version of the facts was "absolutely unreliable," moreover giving a "worrying picture of certain methods of political struggle which recently took place in China."[475] *Avanguardia operaia* insisted that the available version was unreliable, because it looked rather like an "allegorical fable of the kind of those needed to create 'typical heroes' or 'typical monsters'."[476] To believe that plot was simply impossible. "The fact that the most prestigious communist party in the world gives a fantasy-political version of what happens at its highest levels is something whose gravity cannot be underestimated."[477] AO's worries are similarly confirmed by internal sources.[478]

According to undated internal documents of the organisation, but certainly later than Lin Biao's death in September 1971, "Chinese foreign policy [had been] based on proletarian internationalism and on peaceful coexistence" before the 9th CCP Congress. The reference to peaceful coexistence is remarkable, since China and its supporters had always underlined their *opposition* to the Soviet policy of peaceful coexistence. Evidently, AO thought that the peaceful coexistence advocated by China was different from that of the Soviets. AO claimed that after the 9th Congress China sought to develop

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[473] Ibid., 14.
[474] Ibid., 15.
[475] "Dittatura del proletariato in Cina e 'complotto Lin Piao'," *Avanguardia operaia* 26 (September-October 1972): 17.
[476] Ibid., 17-18.
[477] Ibid., 18.
[478] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Gruppi sulla linea – Indicazioni sul metodo da utilizzare per la relazione inziale, 7.

"diplomatic relations aimed at defending China from the encirclement of the USSR." However, "this political line based on the development of diplomatic ties with all countries brings about the abandonment of the internationalist dimension, which must be dominant in a communist party." Therefore, AO was convinced that within the CCP "the leftist tendency in favour of a foreign policy manoeuvred only within the limits of the isolation of the superpowers was defeated by a centrist tendency."[479]

Remarkably, later, 1974 documents portray the Chinese policy of rapprochement with the United States as a necessary evil, largely caused by a concrete military danger represented by the Soviet Union. The organisation argued that concessions to the United States were necessary because they helped China to secure a more stable position which would finally be useful in case of a global revolutionary upsurge.[480] However, elements of criticism remained in the organisation's analysis. Regarding the struggles of Third World countries, Avanguardia Operaia argued that China had put too much hope in the bourgeoisie of those countries. According to the organisation, the bourgeoisie of those countries had already sufficiently demonstrated its inability to foster development and independence, therefore only the real proletariat of those countries had to be supported. Moreover, Avanguardia criticised China's stance on Western Europe, which was deemed too mild. Avanguardia Operaia conceded that a strong Western Europe might have been a deterrent towards the USSR and its European satellites; however, the imperialist character of Western Europe should not be forgotten. The organisation went as far as to accuse China of refusing "to have authentic relations with Marxist-Leninist and revolutionary organisations" of Western Europe.[481]

Concluding its analysis, Avanguardia Operaia reiterated its overall positive judgement about China, qualified by a certain criticism: "speaking about China" was "a fundamental task, as it is evident, for

[479] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Gruppi sulla linea – Indicazioni sul metodo da utilizzare per la relazione inziale, 7.
[480] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.2. Documenti politici, "Risoluzione sulla Cina" (Milan, November 1974), 21-24.
[481] Ibid., 26.

a really Marxist-Leninist organisation," and it had been a mistake not to "defend China among the proletarian and democratic public opinion from the attacks of the bourgeoise, of revisionism, and from the insinuating campaigns on a 'no longer revolutionary China.'"[482] Interestingly, Avanguardia Operaia thought that China should be defended by the attacks of "revisionism" – clearly impersonated in Italy by the PCI.

Apart from leaflets, political documents of the organisation can shed light on its position towards China. During its fourth congress in 1974, Avanguardia Operaia noted that "Chinese comrades" had been right in underlining that the relation between the USA and the USSR were of conflict, and not of peaceful coexistence.[483] Chinese role in the support of the "struggle of anti-imperialist peoples and countries" had to be recognised. Avanguardia Operaia used as an example the "political, economic, [and] military support" China had given the Indochinese peoples.[484] Interestingly, the organisation underlined that the Chinese entrance into the UN could help it support Third World peoples, echoing the official Chinese rhetoric.

Chinese Foreign Policy in the *quotidiano dei lavoratori*

The *quotidiano dei lavoratori* clearly sided with China in the Sino-Soviet split, since in late 1974 it claimed that Brezhnev, "the leader of world revisionism," expressed threats against China.[485] Soon afterwards, the newspaper noted that China strongly attacked US policy in the Middle East and Indochina right when the "travelling salesperson" Henry Kissinger was visiting Peking. According to the newspaper, this was no coincidence. On the contrary, China wanted to give a "warning, a very precise warning" that diplomacy had its limits. The *quotidiano* thought that Kissinger was unlikely to "leave Peking with great results." On the contrary, he was presumably facing serious "difficulties

[482] Ibid., 28.
[483] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.2. Documenti politici, Comitato Centrale, ed., "La situazione politica e i nostri compiti" (Milan, June 1974), 1.
[484] Ibid., 5.
[485] "Breznev: minacce contro la Cina," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, November 27,1974, 8.

in the talks with Chinese leaders," which were supposedly going on in a "cold" atmosphere.[486] From this interpretation of the AO newspaper, it seems clear that AO acknowledged the beginning of Sino-US talks, but at the same time did not think that they meant Chinese capitulation to US imperialism.[487] The *quotidiano* often used strong, sarcastic language to criticise American leaders who, according to AO, had had illusions about potential Chinese flexibility. In February 1975, the newspaper ironically reported that the "gangster Nixon," by then former US President, wanted to become ambassador in China. "It is not known what Nixon wants to go to China for," commented the newspaper.[488] Clearly, the newspaper often united their attacks against the USSR with those attacks on the US.[489]

The *quotidiano* often mirrored Chinese positions which sought to represent both the USSR and the US in a negative light. For example, according to a December 1974 article, American and Soviet raids were responsible for no less than the "world food crisis."[490] More specifically on the USSR, the *quotidiano* pointed out on March 8, 1975 that their women were "hyper-exploited." They were sometimes fired when pregnant, and many of them had to resort to prostitution.[491] In April of the same, year, the USSR was accused of having good relations with Israel,[492] and of having a network of spies in East Asia.[493] In January 1976, the newspaper even pointed out that there were bread shortages in the Soviet Union.[494] At the end of the same month, the AO newspaper reported Chinese criticism on Soviet revaluation of religion. According to the *quotidiano*, while China was against any "organised form of cult," in the Soviet Union there was an increasing diffusion of "churches," with a precise "social basis." In China, religious propaganda was forbidden by the constitution, while freedom of belief was granted.[495] In February 1976, China once again attacked the USSR defining it

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[486] "Duri attacchi cinesi agli Usa," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* November 28, 1974: 8.
[487] See also: "Nuovo, duro attacco dei cinesi agli Usa," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* December 3, 1974: 8.
[488] "Nixon in Cina?," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, February 4, 1975: 8.
[489] "Attacchi a Usa e Urss," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* December 19, 1974: 8.
[490] "Fame nel mondo 2° - La posizione dei compagni cinesi," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* December 6, 1974: 8.
[491] "Sfruttatissime le donne in Urss," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, March 8, 1975: 8.
[492] "'L'Urss corteggia i sionisti'," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, April 15, 1975: 8.
[493] "Spie sovietiche sotto accusa," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, April 26, 1975: 8.
[494] "'In Urss manca il pane," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, January 18/19, 1976: 8.
[495] "L'Urss rivaluta la religione," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, January 27, 1976: 8.

a "country of one thousand concentration camps, where more than one million people are in prison" (the agency Nuova Cina claimed to know the location of 250 of these camps). The USSR managed to imprison "more political adversaries than the old tsars." Nuova Cina even compared Soviet camps with Nazi lagers: "imitating Hitler, Soviet authorities have adopted the method of slowly starving prisoners, limiting the quantity of nutrition given to them, to torture them." Moreover, they added "chemicals to prisoners' food to provoke intoxications."[496] The KGB intentionally sowed discord among the convicts to provoke brawls, giving thus an excuse to shoot them with machine gun fire. Umberto Tartari reported accusations that something similar was present in China too, but without giving it much credit.[497]

The newspaper also underlined Chinese support of Palestinian struggles.[498] On May 1, 1975, after communist takeover of Saigon, while China was in celebrations, there was supposedly silence in the USSR.[499] However, between 1975 and 1976 China even began to declare that "Soviet revisionist social imperialism" was even more dangerous than US imperialism.[500] In January 1976, China feared that the USSR was busy in nothing less than "frantic preparation of war."[501] Mario Gamba even feared that China may consider opposition to the USSR more important than fostering world revolution.[502] In February 1976, China claimed that Italy was under nothing less than a "Russian danger." Fostering its interests in Italy, the USSR wanted to make the Mediterranean a Soviet "internal sea."[503]

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[496] "Sui mille lager sovietici," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, February 27, 1976: 8.
[497] "La lotta di classe in Cina: un grosso dibattito realmente di massa per la 'dittatura totale'," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, February 28, 1976: 3.
[498] "Appoggio della Cina alla lotta dell'Olp," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, June 7, 1975: 8.
[499] "Esplode ovunque nel mondo l'esultanza di tutti i proletari," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, May 1, 1975: 8.
[500] "Attacchi contro l'Urss," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* October 8, 1975: 8. See also: "Cina: gli editoriali del 1° gennaio," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* January 2, 1976: 4.
[501] "I pericolo vengono da Mosca, dicono I cinesi," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, January 6, 1976: 8.
[502] Mario Gamba, "Kissinger in crisi a Pechino," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* October 25, 1975: 8.
[503] "Sul pericolo russo in Italia," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* February 19, 1976: 8.

The *quotidiano* clarified the pattern of China opposing the USSR more than the USA on the occasion of Nixon's visit to the country in February 1976. Remarkably, the newspaper dedicated two different articles to the event: a more neutral report on February 24, and a commentary the next day. The report quoted Chinese prime minister Hua Guofeng saying that "imperialism which bears the label of socialism" was the main "hotbed of war." Hua, for the first time in a public speech, even went as far as to compare the USSR with Nazi Germany, mentioning the "fool ambitions, superior to its strengths, of this expansionism, which has in itself the germs of defeat," and which "will have no better end than Hitler's."[504] According to AO, this comment did nothing to better acclaim Chinese behaviour. This event could be a "possible damage for the image of revolutionary China." Judging according to said comment, Nixon's first 1972 visit was explainable and justifiable, since at the time China was looking for a "gap in the siege" of USA-URSS relations.

However, the *quotidiano* criticised the Chinese for not seeming to notice how much the situation had changed by then. Nixon had been "involved in mob affairs, [he was] despised by the majority of the American people." He was even "kicked out of the White House" and "expelled from the lawyers' bar like any evildoer caught with jam on his fingers." Sino-American relations had grown much colder since then, because according to the newspaper they had begun as an electoral manoeuvre and could not lead very far in the long run. Had Sino-American relations been better, the *quotidiano* argued, Ford or the "ultra-reactionary Reagan" would have come to China. After all, could not the "worst Western reactionary [be] used against Soviet expansionism"?[505] This line of thinking had already brought Fanfani, Heath, and Strauss to China. All this considered, Nixon had certainly received excessive attention in China, as though he was still a head of state. AO was convinced that Nixon could give little or nothing in exchange for this warm welcome. In sum, the *quotidiano* believed that by behaving like this, China lost much but could gain nothing. The *quotidiano*'s

[504] "Cordiale incontro tra Nixon e Mao Tse-tung," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* February 24, 1976: 8.
[505] "Nixon in Cina: a chi porta vantaggio una visita come questa?," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, February 25, 1976: 8.

perplexities about Chinese behaviour in foreign policy continued: the newspaper could not explain why China viciously attacked "the conquests of the Angolan people" who had recently gained independence. The attacks were all the more inexplicable since even Europe was building ties with the new government, not to "leave the USSR the monopoly of anticolonialism."[506] Probably the reason was Soviet support for the MPLA.

Though the *quotidiano* reported these strongly anti-Soviet Chinese remarks, Claudio Cereda underlined that AO and the MLS (Movimento Lavoratori per il Socialismo) had disagreements on this. The MLS declared to have "no trust in our bourgeoisie," which "tomorrow [may be] certainly willing to submit itself to Soviet social imperialism, even though today it screams against it, but less and less as it [the Italian bourgeoisie] intensifies economic relations with it [Soviet social imperialism]." The government of the time was no less than "lacerated between those who work for the USA and those who work for the USSR," while the PCI wanted to "brutally insert Italy into the orbit of Soviet influence and covertly and silently manoeuvre in that direction."[507] According to Cereda, the MLS's fears were simply exaggerated.

The *quotidiano* also stressed Chinese attempts to maintain good diplomatic relations with France. In fact, in May 1975 Dominique Ferrero reported Deng Xiaoping's visit to Paris, which confirmed good Franco-Chinese relations since De Gaulle's decision to recognise the PRC in 1964. More precisely, China and France had common ground in the principles of independence and of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries (not by chance, France tried to pursue a foreign policy independent from that of the US).[508] However, Deng was also interested not only in cultivating better relations with Europe as a whole, but it actively supported the process of European unification.[509]

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[506] "Grave attacco all'Angola da parte di 'Nuova Cina'," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, February 26, 1976: 8.
[507] "Alcuni spunti sul congresso dell'M.L.S.," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* February 24, 1976: 8.
[508] Dominique Ferrero, "Teng Hsiao-Ping arriva oggi a Parigi per discutere dei rapporti con l'Europa," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* May 10, 1975: 8.
[509] "Francia e Cina: l'Europa al centro delle discussioni," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* May 17, 1975: 8.

According to the *quotidiano*, in late May 1975 Sino-American relations were deteriorating to the point that a visit scheduled by Gerald Ford may have been cancelled.[510]

On a level of Chinese observation of international events, between 1974 and 1975 the *quotidiano* reported ambivalent Chinese remarks on the international situation. In China's opinion, the situation was characterised by both an upsurge in revolutionary activity in the West and by dangers of war due to the ambitions of the two superpowers.[511] Might Europe be the theatre of a Third World War?[512] However, the *quotidiano* also went more in depth on the situation of specific countries. In January 1975 a Chinese analysis of the Italian situation was published, according to which Italy was undergoing a serious economic and political crisis. According to the agency Nuova Cina, the "class contradiction" had become "more acute," and strikes were increasing.[513] Not long afterwards, the newspaper informed its readers on the Spanish communist organisation Bandera Roja which, in its words, could exert certain successes because of its correct assimilation of Maoist thought.[514]

According to *Avanguardia operaia*, also the Palestinian people and the Arab world more in general could potentially rise thanks to a strategy of uninterrupted revolution, though Algeria, for example, was far from being a case where this theory was purely applied. There were different kinds of people's war in Algeria; colonialism had been defeated but in a bourgeois direction, therefore not applying the concept of uninterrupted revolution. The maxim according to which "political power comes from the barrel of the gun" does not mean that the barrel of the gun equals socialism.[515]

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[510] "Durissini con gli Usa," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* May 23, 1975: 8.
[511] "La Cina sugli scioperi in occidente," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* December 27, 1974,:1; "Per la Cina possible la guerra," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, January 8, 1975: 8; "La Cina sui conflitti nel mondo," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, January 10, 1975: 8; "Le idee della rivoluzione culturale nella nuova costituzione della Cina," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, January 21, 1975: 1, 8; "Il compagno Ciu En-lai esalta le conquiste della Cina rivoluzionaria," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, January 22, 1975: 8; "La Guerra è vicina," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, March 2/3, 1975: 8.
[512] "In Europa la terza guerra," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, March 20, 1975: 8.
[513] "La Cina sulla crisi italiana," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, January 14, 1975: 8.
[514] "Origine e sviluppo in Spagna dell'organizzazione leninista Bandera Roja (I parte)," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, January 17, 7.
[515] "Dalla lotta nazionale palestinese verso la guerra di classe per il socialismo nel mondo arabo in un processo di rivoluzione ininterrotta,"*Avanguardia operaia* 9 (October 1970): 3.

"Vanguard" Maoism and Trotskyism

From its 1969 draft statute we know that Avanguardia Operaia defined itself a "Marxist-Leninist organisation" opposed to any form of revisionism.[516] But, apart from this generic definition – many other extreme-leftist organisations of the time would have defined themselves Marxist-Leninist – what kind of elaboration did Maoism undergo within Avanguardia Operaia? This question is especially relevant since Maoism was a crucial point of reference for AO. Looking at AO's attitude towards Maoism and Trotskyism through press and archival sources is especially useful, since these were two communist heresies quite widespread at the time and which should have supposedly been opposed to each other. However, as we shall see, the complexity of Avanguardia Operaia's ideological elaboration escapes this set pattern.

The journal *Avanguardia operaia* expressed scathing criticism also of Trotskyism since late 1969. According to *Avanguardia operaia*, Trotskyism had regrettably become a "system of dogmas," and therefore was not able to precisely interpret China's international role and the Cultural Revolution.[517] "The revolutionary experience currently ongoing in China *practically* indicates how proletarian power can be safeguarded […] through mobilisation of the masses, and *theoretically* indicates" that a correct class analysis of enemy forces was necessary.[518] In the light of Chinese teachings, AO thought that the Trotskyist interpretation of the USSR as a "degenerate workers' state" was incorrect. Moreover, "dogmatic Trotskyists" could not see Maoism as a "contribution to Marxism-Leninism founded on a very important revolutionary experience and on the application of dialectical materialism in a concrete to a concrete, national and international, context of political and class struggle."[519] *Avanguardia operaia* contended that Italian Trotskyists were seriously mistaken about the Cultural Revolution. Italian Trotskyists, in fact, argued that Mao could not claim to be against

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[516] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.2. Documenti politici, "Progetto di statuto di 'Avanuardia Operia' presentato dal direttivo del Gruppo," 1969, 1.
[517] "Il sistema di dogmi del trotskismo," *Avanguardia operaia* (November-December 1969), 31.
[518] Ibid., 31-32.
[519] Ibid., 32.

bureaucracy (the "new bourgeoisie") because he was himself part of the bureaucracy, therefore waging a fraction struggle and manipulating the Chinese masses.

By 1972, AO thought that Trotskyism could be considered a defeated tendency. While AO saluted the strengthening of "a Marxist-Leninist bloc," it argued that "defeated tendencies (Trotskyists, Stalinists, anarcho-syndicalist adventurists)" were becoming extinct.[520] The fact that "Trotskyists" and "Stalinists" were listed together as defeated tendencies is quite telling: evidently, AO considered both of these options outdated. In fact, "moral sermons from this or that 'unarmed prophet'" were no longer useful, argued Avanguardia Operaia, probably referring to Deutscher's famous biography on Trotsky. Seeing Trotskyism and Maoism as two separate and dogmatic systems was a mistake, because one could not ignore that Maoism "orientates and hegemonizes vast revolutionary masses, developing vanguards on a world level," limiting the space of other revolutionary tendencies, like Trotskyism. [521]

In its internal documents, Avanguardia Operaia underlined that Chinese policies should not be "judged subjectively like 'talking crickets.'"[522] More precisely, it criticised the "counterrevolutionary positions expressed by various European Trotskyist and *bordighista* groups, among them, in Italy, Lotta Comunista." As we have already seen, Avanguardia Operaia's take on China was largely positive but not without criticism. In this precise case, they criticised China for not supporting what they regarded a just struggle for national self-determination in East Bengal. However, China's positives exceeded the negatives, and AO felt it should defend China. The aforementioned Trotskyist and *bordighista* organisations, according to AO, denied "the proletarian character of the revolution in China and in Indochina and in other backward countries," since they could not conceive that "in such countries any revolutionary process could take place but a strictly bourgeois one." AO defined

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[520] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.2. Documenti politici, Segreteria politica dell'Organizzazione Comunista AVANGUARDIA OPERAIA, untitled document, Milan, March 1972, 10.
[521] Ibid., 11.
[522] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, Teoria e prassi del Partito Comunista Cinese, 1.

these views no less than "theoretically aberrant" and even similar to Stalinism, interestingly building on Trotsky's concept of combined development, and underlining that the aforementioned groups did not understand that "revolution in backward countries" was "at the same time antifeudal and antiimperialist, national and anti-capitalist, democratic and socialist."[523] In mid-1970 also the journal *Avanguardia operaia* engaged in the polemic against Lotta Comunista, judged a *bordighista* group. According to Lotta Comunista, in China there was not socialism but state capitalism, whereas Maoism was nothing but the expression of the "young Chinese bourgeoisie."[524]

A useful hint at what kind of organisation Avanguardia Operaia was can be found in a "Discussion document" written by the Executive Committee in October 1969. Reading this document, it seems that Avanguardia Operaia considered itself a "Marxist-Leninist" organisation which included theoretical contributions both from Trotsky and Mao, but it defined itself neither Trotskyist, nor Maoist. In fact, AO criticised several "dogmatic formations […] inspired by *bordighismo*, Trotskyism, Maoism" stating that "the specific *bordighista*, Trotskyist or Maoist form of the ideology of Maoist groups can lead sectors of revolutionary militants to the rejection of Bordiga's, Trotsky's and Mao's contribution to Marxism-Leninism." In other words, Avanguardia Operaia appears an open organisation which accepted contributions from bordighismo, Trotskyism and Maoism, but argued that they should not be accepted dogmatically.[525]

More specifically, AO criticised the "canonisation of Trotskyism" operated by the 4th Internationale, which had allegedly reduced it to a "fetish." Otherwise, AO thought that Trotskyism could "be considered a theoretical contribution to Marxism-Leninism," as well as "a political current in the

[523] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.2. Documenti politici, Comunicato della Segreteria d A.O. sulla rivolta Popolare nel Bengala Orientale," 1972. On AO's criticism towards Lotta Comunista, see also: AFF, FNSI, Busta 24, 7.2.14 Comm. Naz. Scuola, "A proposito del social imperialism cinese ovvero l'economicismo di 'Lotta Comunista.'"

[524] "Una polemica con i bordighisti sulla natura di classe del potere in Cina," *Avanguardia operaia* 7-8 (July-September 1970): 42.

[525] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.3. Sui gruppi politici, Documento di discussione a cura del Comitato Direttivo "Contro il dogmatismo e lo spontaneismo dei gruppi rivoluzionari piccolo borghesi," Milan, October 1969, 8.

workers' movement."[526] The comparison Avanguardia Operaia makes between Maoism and Trotskyism in 1969 is so remarkable that it deserves to be quoted in full:

> the difference between Maoism and Trotskyism is that the first is the direction and the theoretical production of one of the largest revolutionary movements in history, and the second could never be the direction of a mass revolutionary movement. Thus, Maoism could develop creatively, that is it could verify its generalisations, it could enrich or correct them, and thus present itself as contemporary development of Marxism-Leninism. Differently, Trotskyism has essentially remained Trotsky's personal contribution, which his followers have continuously rehashed, never verified it in practice, and reduced it to a system of dogmas.

"Trotskyism," the analysis concluded, was not the contribution "of a party or a revolutionary movement operating for decades" to Marxism-Leninism.[527] Note worthily, that these quotes suggest Avanguardia Operaia was a complex and eclectic organisation open to different theoretical contributions. Even more note worthily, AO seemingly valued Maoism more than Trotskyism.

The document said that "in the best case" the mistakes of Trotskyism led to "an imprecise attitude to questions bearing great political importance, that is […] the Chinese Cultural Revolution and China's international function." Moreover, it argued that the "practical test" going on in China demonstrated the "Trotsky's definition of the USSR as a 'degenerate workers' state'" was not correct. Finally, Avanguardia Operaia stigmatised Trotskyist dogmatism, which showed "attitudes of total sectarian closure towards […] the Cultural Revolution" and "to the theoretical production of the Chinese comrades."

> Maoism cannot be seen, by the dogmatic Trotskyists (or *bordighisti*, or others) as a contribution to Marxism-Leninism founded on a very important revolutionary experience and on the application of dialectical materialism to a national and international concrete context of political and class struggle; Maoism is rejected as necessarily irreconcilable with the Trotskyist system, and the more it orientates, polarises and hegemonizes vast popular forces, developing vanguards on a world level, and then

[526] Ibid., 9.
[527] Ibid., 11.

> compresses the space of other revolutionary tendencies which could not emerge like it has been and is with the IV Internationale, the more it is necessary to reject it.[528]

Continuing its criticism of Trotskyist dogmatism, AO argued that it mistakenly accused the Chinese Communists of "leftist centrism." Trotskyism was not able to "come to terms with new and very diverse […] revolutionary experiences […] in the workers' movement, especially with the Chinese one."[529]

More specifically, AO thought that the wrong analysis of the Soviet Union brought Trotskyists to charge "the Chinese comrades as if with the worst of guilts to define bourgeois the 'workers' bureaucracy'" that is "Liu Shaoci and the forces which he politically represented." Dogmatic Trotskyists, in sum, argued that Mao's supporters did not understand the "real social nature of the bureaucracy" because "Mao and the party forces which followed him are a wing" of that very same bureaucracy "which unleashed the Cultural Revolution because of its fractional ends (a social struggle which has… fractional ends!), manipulating the Chinese masses."[530]

Interestingly, in its cultural policy Avanguardia Operaia was inspired by the importance Maoism gave to culture and superstructure. Quoting Mao in a document on its cultural policy, AO noted that to "overthrow a political power it is always necessary first of all to create the public opinion and to work in the ideological field; this is true for the revolutionary class as well as for the counterrevolutionary class."[531] In an internal document, AO drew explicit inspiration from Maoism in its policy on the school movement: "All out political struggle against bourgeois school find its point of reference in the experiences and in the conquests of the Great Proletarian Chinese Cultural Revolution and in its realisations regarding the school system, the organisation of culture and of science." According to Avanguardia Operaia, the Cultural Revolution put "science at the service of the working people, the

[528] Ibid., 12.
[529] Ibid., 13.
[530] Ibid., 14.
[531] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.10. Comm. Naz. Cultura, Foglio di lavoro sull'intervento dell'organizzazione nel settore culturale, 2.

machines at man's service" while "school as a body separate from the rest of the popular masses" and the "capitalistic 'meritocratic' conception" were eliminated. Moreover, in China "teaching was not the bourgeois ideological mystification but the real revolutionary explanation of the world, and which can then be implemented only by the class which is the motor of history: the working class."[532] However, Avanguardia Operaia insisted that the students' struggle could not be left to this "spontaneity," since this would have meant, as an example, "to leave a group of students studying, possibly with an 'advanced' professor, socialist China, but […] without a revolutionary link and perspective."[533] AO's ideas were sometimes buttressed by reports on the *quotidiano dei lavoratori* which narrated Chinese struggle against the "barons of science."[534]

However, AO's positions on China sometimes faced internal opposition. In fact, evidence of dissent within the Roman section of the organisation can be found in a letter sent by the Political Office to all the cells of the organisation in June 1973. In this letter the political office mentioned criticism on China moved by Vincenzo Sparagna (evidently coming from the Roman section). In the letter, we can read that after Lin Piao's death, Sparagna argued, there was no longer the dictatorship of the proletariat in China.[535]

Certainly, AO thought that a sort of "revolutionary continuity" was needed between China and the rest of the world. However, AO strongly criticised simplistic methods of analysis, like those which were limited to judging Mao as cardboard cut out of Stalin, in a negative or positive sense.[536]

We have seen that AO was de facto very much inspired by Maoism and critical of Trotskyism without being anti-Trotskyist. However, these two terms were quite used in the heated ideological debate in the revolutionary Left of the time, sometimes as words of opprobrium. That was the case especially

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[532] AFF, FNSI, Busta 24, 7.2.14 Comm. Naz. Scuola, "Note politiche sulla riforma dell'università," 10.
[533] Ibid., 11.
[534] "Sotto accusa in Cina i 'baroni della scienza'," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, February 7, 1976: 8.
[535] AFF, FNSI, Busta 24, 7.2.14 Comm. Naz. Scuola, "A tutte le cellule dell'organizzazione – Riposta dell'UP alla lettera del compagno Sparagna."
[536] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, "Premessa," 1.

with the term "Trotskyist" which, as we have seen, the most orthodox Maoists and M-Ls invested with a negative connotation. Interestingly, the dialectics between these two terms and ideologies can be seen in the debate between AO and the Movimento Lavoratori per il Socialismo (MLS), a political movement stemmed from the Milan MS in 1976. According to Attilio Mangano, writing in the *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, the MLS accused AO of opposing Mao's thought, and of criticising Stalin and the Popular Fronts. Canonically, AO was considered guilty of Trotskyism. AO seemingly appreciated the Chinese Cultural Revolution, but in fact contradicted its teachings, undervaluing the danger of social imperialism.[537]

Maoist Training

The "acquisition of the essential elements of Marxism-Leninism" was considered part of AO "grassroots elementary training."[538] This training was supposed to take place through the study of texts printed by the organisation itself, one of which was significantly titled "THE ABC OF MARXISM-LENINISM."[539] More specifically, a few Mao's famous writings were considered "classical texts" to be studied. Lists of readings included *On Contradiction, On Praxis* and *On New Democracy*, together with a booklet on the Chinese Revolution.[540] Texts titled "A proposito di social imperialismo: Su due recenti prese di posizione dei compagni cinesi" and "Una polemica con i bordighisti sulla natura di classe del potere in Cina"[541] were also present, together with indications of the necessity of studying "the party in Mao."[542]

More specifically, Mao's teachings were thought useful for the activity of the Avanguardia Operaia cadres' school. In fact, criticism of "liberalism" and more general teachings on efficient party work

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[537] "Mls: da dove nascono le idee giuste?," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, February 19, 1976: 7.
[538] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.2. Documenti politici, Segreteria Politica Nazionale, Nota di lavoro alle sezioni – Attività di formazione quadri per l'anno 1973," February 1973, 4.
[539] Ibid., 5.
[540] Ibid., 8.
[541] AFF, FNSI, Busta 24, 7.2.14 Comm. Naz. Scuola, Bollettino Nazionale di Avanguardia Operaia 1, October 1970, 26 (Scuola quadri).
[542] Ibid., 27.

were inspired by Mao's texts such as "Against liberalism," "To rectify the work style in the Party" and "On stereotyped Party style."[543] On the concept of "uninterrupted revolution" texts like "The people's democratic dictatorship" and "On the right solutions of the contradictions within the people" were advised.[544] The American journalist Edgar Snow's books on Mao and on China like *Stella rossa sulla Cina* and *L'altra riva del fiume* were also advised.[545] According to the internal sources of the AO cadres' school, Mao's China was not only a subject left to individual study, but it was publicly discussed in group meetings. In fact, we know that by early 1972 "all [AO] cells" had led "at least two broad discussions on the Chinese Revolution (following the articles of the newspaper and a few reference articles)."[546]

However, the study of the "revisionist party", the PCI, was also considered necessary: one booklet was produced by the organisation called *The Revisionism of the PCI, Origins and Development*, though those in charge of cadres' training thought that it could be integrated with books written by authors like Paolo Spriano (*Storia del Partito Comunista Italiano*) and Giorgio Galli (*Storia del PCI*). Renzo Del Carria's book *Proletari senza rivoluzione* was also listed; remarkably, this was a popular book among Italian Marxist-Leninists, since it held the thesis that the Italian proletariat had always failed to make the revolution so far because of inadequate leadership.[547]

Marxism-Leninism was so important for Avanguardia Operaia that in early 1972 it took steps to found "a national organisation founded on Marxism-Leninism and on a correct mass line," another Maoist term.[548]

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[543] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Gruppi sulla linea – Indicazioni sul metodo da utilizzare per la relazione inziale, 8.
[544] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Gds linea 1973.
[545] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Chimica.
[546] AFF, FNSI, Busta 25, 7.2.16, Comm. Naz. Scuola Quadri, Note alle cellule e alle zone/sezioni, Letter from the Rome Cadres' School Commission to the Milan Cadres' School Commission, January 5, 1972.
[547] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.2. Documenti politici, Segreteria Politica Nazionale, Nota di lavoro alle sezioni – Attività di formazione quadri per l'anno 1973," February 1973, 9.
[548] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.3. Sui gruppi politici, Letter sent by the Direzione nazionale of AO, signed by Massimo Gorla, to the Gruppo Gramsci of Parma, January 11, 1972.

Avanguardia Operaia and Other Maoists

It is also necessary to give a quick look at the attitude Avanguardia Operaia had towards the other Maoism-inspired organisations, analysing both the AO press and the internal sources. It has already been demonstrated that Avanguardia Operaia was strongly influenced by Maoism, but how did it relate to its leftist neighbours on this issue, Marxist-Leninist and not? Avanguardia viewed the PCd'I critically, notwithstanding "the support of the CCP" it still enjoyed,[549] as well as the UCI(m-l).[550] More specifically, it defined the PCd'I (m-l) as a "dogmatic group inspired by Maoism."[551] Criticising Lotta Continua, an AO political document stigmatised a dogmatic interpretation of Maoism: the "historical, social, political, logistical conditions of Italy and China" were not "identical."[552] By superficially interpreting Maoism, LC was putting politics "in the last place," added *Avanguardia operaia*.[553]

In late 1969, that is towards the end of the "biennio rosso" and of the workers' 1969, the journal *Avanguardia operaia* denounced that M-Ls adored Mao's thought "with a fetishist and anti-materialist attitude," and that they managed to create six parties and a dozen other groups in the preceding three years.[554] AO criticism also underlined that Italian M-Ls were even more fragmented than anarchists or anarcho-syndicalists, traditionally sceptical of organisation *per se*. However, while criticising Italian M-Ls, AO dared to criticise China, too. Paradoxically, AO thought that at first China was not radical enough in its denunciation of Soviet revisionism. In fact, "Chinese Communists […] revealed evident deficiencies in the analysis on the origins of revisionism." According to AO, in 1963 China still considered Khrushchev a "comrade" and did not recognise the capitalistic nature of the Soviet Union, rather considering it victim of a "deformation," being close to Trotskyist analyses.

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[549] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.2. Documenti politici, "Documenti di analisi politica," 12.
[550] Ibid., 13.
[551] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.3. Sui gruppi politici, Documento di discussione a cura del Comitato Direttivo "Contro il dogmatismo e lo spontaneismo dei gruppi rivoluzionari piccolo borghesi," Milan, October 1969, 4.
[552] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.3. Sui gruppi politici, "Lotta Continua – La strategia come mito il programma come bluff."
[553] "Lotta Continua a 'congresso': la politica all'ultimo posto," *Avanguardia operaia* 9 (October 1970): 22-24.
[554] "Il dogmatismo del PCd'I (m-l) 'Il Partito'," *Avanguardia operaia* (November-December 1969), 23.

However, the PCd'I (m-l) "shakes Mao's portrait without abandoning Stalin's" and, according to *Avanguardia operaia*, could do nothing more than spreading party press and Mao's portraits.[555] AO also noted that a split which took place in late 1968 divided the PCd'I (m-l) along the "red line" and "black line," with terms borrowed from Chinese political discourse. Paradoxically, the "black line" of Pesce-Risaliti-Dinucci enjoyed "discrete, but not excessively [discrete] support (Mao recently met Dinucci and was photographed together with him) of the CCP." According to AO, "to be rejected by their idol" could mean a "terrible shock" for the "red line."[556]

The UCI(m-l) was strongly criticised by AO. In fact, according to AO archival sources dating to late 1969, the UCI(m-l) not only "expressed […] the radicalism of petty bourgeois and lumpen-proletarian strata," but it was even "ever more similar to the first hour fascist movements,"[557] to the point that AO feared that it could begin a "long march towards fascism."[558] Later, in early 1970, *Avanguardia operaia* came back to the issue of the UCI(m-l), shortly sketching its history and its modus operandi. *Avanguardia operaia* noted that the UCI(m-l) was born by a fusion of former Falcemartello Trotskyists with some student strata. The journal also noted that the first experience of political work for the UCI(m-l) was in summer 1968 in the Southern regions of Calabria and Apulia, therefore at least implicitly recognising the peasant nature of the group. AO claimed that the UCI(m-l) largely rejected theoretical work, preferring on-the-ground investigations and social practice instead. *Avanguardia operaia* also criticised an idealistic tendency of the UCI(m-l), which even framed class struggle as having a sentimentality which pit love and altruism on one side and hate, individualism and egotism on the other: love for the oppressed supposedly stemmed from hate for the class oppressor.[559]

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[555] Ibid., 24.
[556] Ibid., 25.
[557] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.3. Sui gruppi politici, Documento di discussione a cura del Comitato Direttivo "Contro il dogmatismo e lo spontaneismo dei gruppi rivoluzionari piccolo borghesi," Milan, October 1969, 17.
[558] Ibid., 21.
[559] "L'Unione dei Comunisti Italiani ovvero: l'unione senza una ragione," *Avanguardia operaia* 4-5 (March-April 1970), 36, 38.

Avanguardia operaia also criticised the UCI(m-l) concept of "people:" according to AO, the UCI(m-l) considered the "people" a more important category than classes, therefore accusing the UCI(m-l) of "populism." UCI(m-l) "populism" went as far as to say that "97% of Italians can be united and led to make the socialist revolution." *Avanguardia operaia* went on saying that UCI(m-l) populism exaggerated Mao's teachings on investigations and on bookish knowledge, by exalting only direct knowledge as opposed to direct knowledge acquired by personal, first-hand experience. According to AO, the UCI(m-l) contempt for indirect knowledge could have deleterious consequences, since it was not necessarily only "the people" expressing the "right ideas": "proletarian" as well as "bourgeois ideas" could be found within the people. AO thought that the UCI(m-l) was largely composed by bourgeois elements with class complexes, who tried to solve them by "serving the people." To "love the people," UCI(m-l) members should do nothing less than "impose on themselves a severe lifestyle, proletarising themselves in all aspects […] (beard, hair, clothing, sexual relations…)." Moreover, the AO journal thought that the UCI(m-l) program for a revolutionary government was characterised by a generic maximalism, such as forbidding pornography or the production of luxury items; declaring unemployment a crime; and granting the right to religious practice, though priests had to work for free. *Avanguardia operaia* was convinced that the UCI(m-l) could extract nothing but the exterior aspects of the Chinese Cultural Revolutions, which in Italy could only look "folkloristic."[560]

Remarkably, AO criticised the "canonisation of Maoism" as well as that of Trotskyism, as we have seen before. AO admitted that the "proliferation of groups inspired by Maoism indicates, on the one hand, the attractive force of the Cultural Revolution and of Mao's theoretical production among ever vaster strata of militants of revolutionary orientation," but at the same time noted that these were still scattered, isolated groups uncapable of effective political action.[561] "In general," AO argued, "the Italian Left, though having vastly grown in the last years (also thanks to the existence of the

[560] Ibid., 37.
[561] AFF, FNSI, Busta 22, 7.2.3. Sui gruppi politici, Documento di discussione a cura del Comitato Direttivo "Contro il dogmatismo e lo spontaneismo dei gruppi rivoluzionari piccolo borghesi," Milan, October 1969, 16.

theoretical-political pole constituted by revolutionary China and by the CCP), cannot go beyond the phase where it is composed essentially by intellectuals and by students" and this caused the "appropriation of Maoism in fetishist and idealistic terms."[562]

More generally, "dogmatic-Maoist" formations were considered guilty of "vulgar commonplace beliefs on Trotskyism and Bordighism as 'counterrevolutionary', 'fascist' tendencies […] coming from the theoretical legacy of Stalinian revisionism." "Thinking that being inspired by Maoism means sinking in adoration towards it, that is assuming a fetishist anti-materialist (and anti-Maoist) attitude, towards Maoism, these groups" rejected on principle Bordiga's or Trotsky's contribution to Marxism-Leninism. Dogmatic-Maoist movements were accused of having substituted a "mythical vision of the USSR" with a "mythical vision of China, whose internal processes are not even remotely grasped."[563]

Avanguardia operaia, AO's Theoretical Journal

After its foundation in the autumn of 1968, AO quickly began to develop a press of its own. In May 1969, a separate issue waiting for authorisation was published under the title *Il giornale di Avanguardia operaia*. Probably unsurprisingly, China was mentioned in this early issue, saying however that to support China and other similar realities – Vietnam, Cuba – was not enough, since much more in-depth analysis and reflection was needed. Already in this early issue, AO presents Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet reality as dated, and conversely appreciates the Cultural Revolution and its "theoretical elaboration."[564] In this early account we also find the first traces of criticism for the Italian "pseudo-Maoist groups [which] make Chinese positions look idiotic, attempting […] a recycling of Stalinism and not at all noting" the large differences between Maoism and Stalinism.[565]

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[562] Ibid, 16-17.
[563] Ibid., 19.
[564] "Un contributo al dibattito sulla natura dei rapporti sociali dei paesi dell'Est europeo," in *Il giornale di Avanguardia operaia* (May 1969): 29.
[565] Ibid., 29-30.

AO already thought that the USSR was an imperialist country like the USA, therefore believing it opposed to revolutionary countries like China, North Vietnam, Cuba and North Korea.[566]

Shortly afterwards, in November-December 1969, another single issue titled *Avanguardia operaia* underlined the contribution of "Chinese comrades to the theory and practice of socialist revolution," a contribution which went against both revisionism and dogmatism. Interestingly, the journal did not see radical differences among those who saw Mao as a perfect continuator of Stalin or as a completely different figure.[567] Moreover, in this initial important contribution AO warns the reader against the "canonisation" of the theories of different leaders, which usually causes "excommunication" for all others, and does not allow a critical synthesis of all precious contributions. What is more, "fetishism of organisation" had to be avoided: AO had in mind the concrete example the UCI(m-l), which boasted its being "glorious" notwithstanding its rather short experience. AO certainly saw a line of continuity between the Russian Revolution and the Chinese Cultural Revolution. However, AO thought that success during the Chinese Revolution was possible thanks to thought and action independent from European and world communism more in general, that is, independent from the III Internationale and from Soviet leadership.[568] AO argued that the CCP was victorious thanks to a wise interpretation of the tactic of the popular fronts, whereas in Europe it had been applied in disastrous ways. AO referred to the CCP alliance with the Guomindang, where however the CCP sought to maintain military and political autonomy. According to AO, the III Internationale committed a huge mistake preferring the European way to that of the Chinese, for example endorsing Togliatti's interpretations and boycotting the PCC in various ways. AO mentioned the importance of Chinese criticism of modern revisionism, exemplified by the famous articles "Sulle divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi" and "Ancora sulle divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi."[569] AO

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[566] Ibid., 31.
[567] "Il contributo dei compagni cinesi alla teoria e alla pratica della rivoluzione socialista," *Avanguardia operaia* (November-December 1969), 5.
[568][568] Ibid., 6.
[569] Ibid., 7. These texts were widely read by AO activists. Personal testimony of former AO activist Giosi Deffenu.

regarded for the Cultural Revolution, "the first practical and large-scale realisation of the revolutionary alternative posed by Lenin in the USSR at the time of the NEP," against economist tendencies.[570]

In mid-1970, referring to the Indochinese situation, *Avanguardia operaia* noted that the "Maoist strategy of uninterrupted revolution finds […] concrete application and development" in different countries. The successful Indochinese revolution was possible thanks to precious Chinese teachings on the link between national-democratic revolution and socialist revolution, on the united fronts, and on peaceful coexistence.[571]

Sino-Soviet and PCI-AO Polemics

The place AO tried to occupy in the political debate between China, the USSR and the PCI is worth serious scrutiny. This is evident by analysing an article published in *Avanguardia operaia* in mid-1970, in which AO defended the positions of the "Chinese comrades" from supposed revisionist (that is, PCI) misinterpretations. First of all, *Avanguardia operaia* noted that paradoxically the PCI press dedicated more and more space to Chinese positions, somewhat neglecting "violent […] anti-communist" comments of "Soviet social imperialists." According to the journal, this was not by chance: the PCI clearly tried to find a middle ground between proletarian internationalism and Soviet revisionism, in the hope of becoming the leader of revisionist European communist parties. The PCI wished to acquire autonomous space thanks to the alliance between Soviet revisionism and global capitalism. By doing so, however, the PCI was entangled in "inter-imperialist" contradictions. *Avanguardia operaia* insisted that the PCI denied the objective Soviet counterrevolutionary role in Asia, proposing a Sino-Soviet alliance. Giancarlo Pajetta allegedly underlined in *l'Unità* that the slogan "URSS e Cina unite in Indocina" was present in demonstrations of the FGCI, the PCI youth wing (elsewhere, *Avanguardia operaia* noted that PCI students were forced to "mask" themselves

[570] Ibid., 10.
[571] "L'imperialismo senza via d'uscita in Indocina," *Avanguardia operaia* 6 (June 1970): 1.

with slogans on "Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought").[572] According to AO, China clearly supported a strategy of protracted people's warfare, whereas the USSR was prone to diplomatic solutions. In reality, unity of action between China and the USSR was impossible, and the ideological dispute could not be put aside: the PCI was doing nothing but insisting on the counterrevolutionary Soviet principle of peaceful coexistence.[573]

However, analysing Chinese positions *Avanguardia operaia* found something to criticise: in their opinion, the Chinese comrades appreciated too much the figure of Stalin, while attacking revisionist theories de facto introduced by Stalinism. Contrary to Chinese theories, AO believed that restoration of capitalism in the USSR had taken place not with the 20th Party Congress, but under Stalinism. After all, did not Stalin reject the extinction of the state, advocating on the contrary its strengthening, and theorise socialism in one country, notwithstanding large class differences in Soviet society?[574] Moreover, China also erred in denouncing social imperialist influence of "certain Eastern countries," ignoring therefore others because they were apparently critical of Soviet dominion.[575]

The *quotidiano dei lavoratori*

In 1974 AO published a few issues of a daily newspaper titled *Bandiera rossa.* In July 1974 the daily interviewed Maria and Giuseppe Regis on a dazibao campaign which was going on in China. They reported that according to the Chinese, Italy was between "two main [imperialist] fires." Moreover, Chinese comrades also sent their greetings to Turin FIAT workers "who like them are struggling for revolution."[576]

However, in November 1974 AO began to issue a daily newspaper with another title, *quotidiano dei lavoratori*. Remarkably, from the very beginning this newspaper seemingly took inspiration from

[572] "Borghesia, revisionisti e sindacalismo collaborazionista gestiscono con difficoltà la loro politica di tregua sociale," *Avanguardia operaia* 11-12 (December 1970-January 1971): 4.
[573] "Su due recenti prese di posizione dei compagni cinesi," *Avanguardia operaia* 7-8 (July-September 1970): 25.
[574] Ibid., 26.
[575] Ibid., 29-30.
[576] "I compagni cinesi dicono che l'Italia è presa tra i due fuochi principali," *Bandiera rossa*, July 2, 1974, 7.

Mao. On November 27, 1974 the *quotidiano dei lavoratori* published an article on Mao's advice given in 1948 to the editors of a Chinese newspaper. The article, signed S.C., was probably written by Silverio Corvisieri, the founder of the journal, who evidently wanted to stress that since the very beginning the *quotidiano dei lavoratori* took inspiration from Mao and thought it should act according to his advice.[577]

Chinese Culture, Ideology and Way of Life in the *quotidiano dei lavoratori*

Interestingly, in late 1974 Attilio Mangano reported about a sort of pro-Chinese issue of the Italian comics book "Diabolik." This Italian comics character was a very skilful thief, but in one of his stories he goes to China (disguised under the name "Kuantaj") where he discovers that in that country there is no reason to steal. Under socialism, stealing is a "useless provocation." Moreover, according to Diabolik's partner, the sexy Eva Kant, "those people have fought much to conquer their own independence and now try to live in a different way …. in equality, and in respect for others." Diabolik notes "few cars and many bikes" on the streets, but no "destitution." At the end of the story, Diabolik simply refuses to steal against Kuantaj's people. Mangano did not know whether this story was a single occasion or the beginning of a radical change in the comics series. However, he rejoiced the event, comparing it with the "irreverent and para-fascist vulgarities with which the Chinese appear in other comics, brutal and fanatical but always with the queue, bad people who persecute the various 007s and CIA agents." Moreover, Mangano thought that this story meant no less than "the beginning of a class discourse on theft, violence and private property."[578]

Remaining in the field of culture, in late 1974 the *quotidiano* reported that the Milan leftist cultural club "La Comune" was going to show a film on China shot by a comrade recently returned from there. The club regularly hosted similar events, as a proof that these issues were widely discussed in the

[577] S.C., "Mao parla ai redattori di un quotidiano Comunista del 1948," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, November 27,1974, 3.
[578] Attilio Mangano, "Diabolik va in Cina e rifiuta di rubare," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* November 30, 1974, 6.

Italian Left of the time.[579] The "cultural revolution" was also used as a metaphorical term to indicate alternative cultural initiatives, as for example alternative theatre performances in self-managed schools.[580]

AO links with China were also shown by interviews with revolutionary Chinese characters. For example, in December 1974 the *quotidiano* published an interview with a Chinese worker who had written a famous dazibao, collected by Maria and Giuseppe Regis.[581]

In June 1975 Leos Valentin reported on the visit of 19 Chinese athletes who had come to Rome to participate in a competition with Spain, Italy and Romania. Valentin tried to stress the cultural and political side of the event, which was much more than a sport happening. Chao Chuang Chin, the leader of the Chinese athletic team, underlined that they were not interested in competition, but in forging friendship and brotherhood through sport. According to Valentin, these nineteen athletes had been nothing less than nineteen "ambassadors for their country." The event had a strong political connotation, which could be confirmed by the attempts to promote it among the workers, for example charging a mere symbolic sum of 100 liras for entrance. Moreover, it was the first time Chinese athletes participated in a sporting event in the West, since the country was encountering many difficulties in being admitted (or readmitted) to many international sports organisations. The Chinese athletes' performance was not outstanding, since they were not full-time sportsmen: they all worked and studied and could train no more than three hours a day. Valentin insisted that the public had not come to watch a competition, but rather "to applaud Mao's Chinese." The author of the article confessed to have been an active spectator, applauding the Chinese and hissing "Franco's Spaniards." Chinese athletes were even physically different.

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[579] "Di ritorno dalla Cina," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* November 30, 1974, 6.
[580] S.P., "La 'rivoluzione culturale' nelle scuole e il teatro come strumento di lotta," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, January 22, 1975: 6.
[581] "Intervistato a Shangai l'operaio che scrisse un famoso da-tse-bao," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* December 15/16, 1974: 8.

The hammer thrower Chi Shao Ming was "tall, thin like a cane," while the other competitors were "inflated like calves by anabolic steroids." In general, physical prowess compensated for the low technical performance: the Chinese athletes were real "widebodies" (*marcantoni*), "very tall, very dashing," contrary to widespread belief about Chinese short height. As one fan said, "Of what use are records? They did the revolution…" The atmosphere was that of a real popular celebration, with banners reading "class struggle and internationalism build unity of the proletarians of the whole world"; a Vietnamese flag had written upon it "solidarity with the anti-imperialist struggle of the world's people". The joyful atmosphere was ruined only by large presence of police and *carabinieri*. A tinge of sympathy was also brought by the red and yellow outfits of Chinese athletes, resembling those of the Roma football club. The "celebration," however, ended in clashes between hooligans, police and carabinieri – who used teargas - with shouts "Ps Ss" (Ps: Italian acronym for police forces).[582]

The newspaper also took the occasion of this sporting event to publish the remarks of Umberto Melotti on sports in China. Melotti, who had recently come back from a Chinese trip, reiterated that Chinese authorities meant to use sport also as a diplomatic tool to come closer to Europe and to foster friendship with other countries. Melotti claimed that it was thanks to the famous ping-pong diplomacy that the Chinese cautiously opened towards the US. It had been "a step of subtle diplomacy, which was going to give a decisive blow perhaps to American policy in Asia and contribute towards preparation, in the long run, for an imperialist defeat in Vietnam." Moreover, China used sports also to keep ties with hostile Asian countries. According to Melotti, sports in China were part of formation of the new man, together with work and studying, following Marx's and Mao's teachings on the full-fledged development of man. After all, had not Mao dedicated his first written work to gymnastics? School was an important, but not exclusive part of this education. Again, according to Melotti, sport

[582] Leos Valentin, "Bandiere rosse e grande entusiasmo Popolare ieri in tutto lo stadio Olimpico," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, June 27, 1975: 6.

in China was practised from the kindergarten to the retirement home, through schools, factories, and Communes. All or almost all citizens did gymnastics every day, a few times a day.

The Chinese, Melotti said, were beginning to gain a couple of world records notwithstanding their "tiny physique, small or middle-small height." This was clearly a sign of "collective physical improvement." In fact, China was far from "breeding" champions to the detriment of the rest of the population. Not by chance, Italian TV showed that Chinese athletes ate in modest restaurants, without a private cook. More generally, Melotti thought an overall better physical condition was also due to better nutrition. He had seen no traces of malnutrition in China, and had noted that the "young, moreover, are endowed with wonderful teeth (without many hyper-advertised toothpastes, like at home [in Italy])."[583]

In December 1974, the Attilio Mangano noted the successful activity of certain M-L groups in Southern Italy, including the Maoists of "Servire il popolo." Evidently, even AO recognised that these Maoist organisations could exert some success among southern agricultural wage labourers.[584]

On the level of ideological debate, in December 1974 Attilio Mangano reported on a debate between Rossana Rossanda and Charles Bettelheim on Mao's Marxism.[585] On the anniversary of the Paris Commune on March 18, 1975, the *quotidiano* noted that the Commune and Mao were linked.[586] The *quotidiano dei lavoratori* carefully followed publishing novelties about Mao's thought, informing its readers about Mao's writing previously unavailable in Italy.[587]

In July 1975, Giorgio Bonomi praised the activity of the Italy-China association, which in more than ten years had become no less than a "mass organism." The association was widespread everywhere

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[583] Umberto Melotti, "I giovani e lo sport nella Rpc," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* June 27, 1975: 6.
[584] Attilio Mangano, "I gruppi del Sud: l'intervento tra i braccianti pugliesi," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* December 18, 1974: 7.
[585] "Marxismo di Mao: polemica Rossanda Bettelheim," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* December 21, 1974: 3.
[586] "Da Marx a Mao: gli insegnamenti della Comune," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* March 18, 1975: 6.
[587] Attilio Mangano, ed., "Non dimenticare mai l'aspetto principale: il problema della lotta di classe," "Il rapporto fra rosso ed esperto," "Lotta di fazione gruppo 16 maggio e ultrasinistra," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* April 1, 1975: 6.

in Italy; it had thousands of sympathisers, and had played a crucial role in the Italian decision to recognise China. According to Bonomi, positive developments had been possible thanks to self-criticism in the organisation, in additions to the fact that the combined Italy-China was finally independent from any political party - it used to be part of the PCd'I (m-l).[588]

Following the trend of the *quotidiano dei lavoratori* to assess China-related cultural issues, in May 1976 Umberto Tartari polemically commented a book by Lucio Colletti, a PCI philosopher who later in life would swerve to the political right. In his book Colletti criticised the concept of neutrality of science, a concept very dear to Mao. In the title, Tartari polemically asks whether the Chinese have become Marcuse's followers. According to Tartari, the thesis of the neutrality of science was a "traditional and revisionist" theory, which the philosopher could only try to defend with clumsy arguments. In reality, Colletti thought that the pernicious principle of non-neutrality of science was to blame on different actors. Firstly, the 1968 movement was generally responsible. Colletti blamed the Frankfurt school (Marcuse, Horkheimer, Adorno). But the worst came with the Chinese Cultural Revolution "with the thesis… of the possibility of passage to communism without the preparation of the famous material objective bases of economy," which Colletti also defined "vague nebula" or "ideological cocktail where oddities and illusions float." Tartari radically disagreed, claiming that precisely this concept was at the base of the success of Chinese comrades. Tartari rather agreed with Karol, who conversely noted that industrialisation is not a mere means to an end. Tartari sarcastically accused Colletti of having discovered a supposed "marcusianism" of Chinese Communists. According to Colletti, "if the thesis is that theoretical physics, science in general, is ideology, class science" then "science and capitalism are one and the same." Without the "objective value of science" even "materialism" has been kicked out of the window.[589]

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[588] Giorgio Bonomi, "L'associazione 'Italia-Cina' è ormai divenuta un reale organism di massa," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* July 9, 1975: 7.
[589] "Che i cinesi siano marcusiani," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, May 7, 1976: 3.

Along the same line, in early August 1976 Democratic Geology (probably an organisation of Italian leftist geologists) noted that the tackling of earthquakes in China was an example of what science could achieve when united to popular experience.[590]

In mid-July 1976, Saverio Falcone took an exhibition of 120 Chinese posters in Milan as an occasion to reflect on the originality of Chinese communist art, "another thing" which came from the practice of the masses.[591]

[590] "La Cina e i terremoti: la scienza unita alla esperienza popolare," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, August 4, 1976: 4.
[591] "L'arte è un'altra cosa. Dalla pratica delle masse nasce il processo di comunicazione," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, July 14, 1976: 6.

Fig. 1. A Chinese poster from an exhibition held in Milan in June-July 1976, and advertised by the *quotidiano dei lavoratori*. From: *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, July 14, 1976: 6.

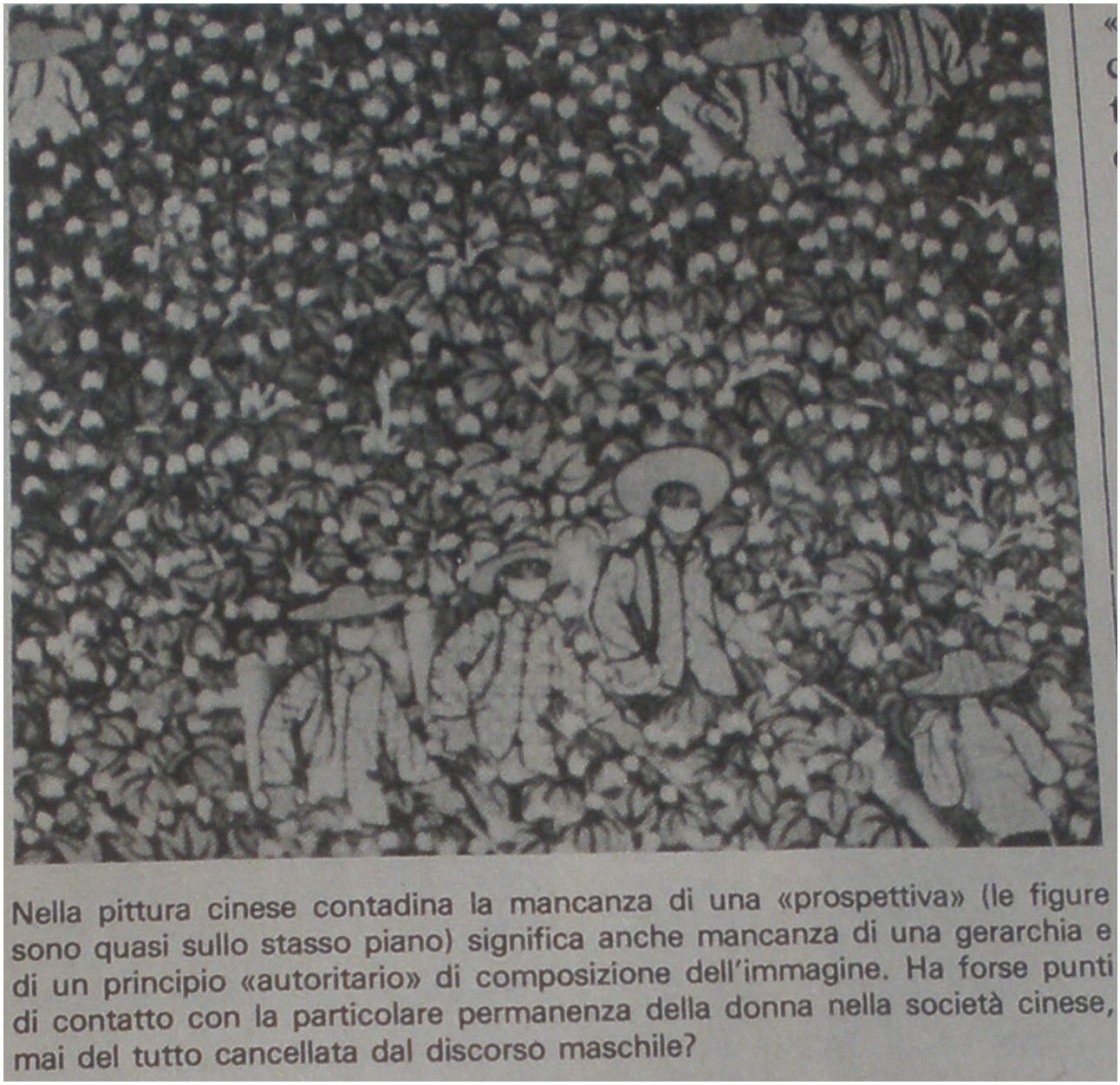


Un esempio di pittura contadina: «Il buon raccolto di laminaria», «guazzo» di Chang Ya-nan. (Da «La Cina»). La festosità di questi colori è molto lontana da certi esempi stereotipati cui ci avevano abituato i compagni cinesi.

In early September 1976 Manuela Turchetti took the publication of a book on Chinese women by the Bulgarian-French Maoist Julia Kristeva to assess gender issues in Chinese society more in general. According to Turchetti, in Chinese society an experiment of sexual emancipation was going on so that there could be a "world without male power." Kristeva had written a short essay using linguistics, structural anthropology and psychanalysis, claiming that in China there was an ancient, barbaric tradition of matrilineal society. This even outlived, though with difficulty, the misogynist Confucius, who was a supporter of foot-binding, a practice which according to Kristeva represented a sort of symbolic castration. According to Kristeva, this was an age in which women enjoyed "absolute freedom." The mother was a symbol of "social cohesion and fertility of the earth." Moreover, Taoist sexual treaties and rites of erotic initiation celebrated female sexual satisfaction. The mother was a "vestal of the love of the bodies, in sexual intercourse which [here the Kristeva quote begins] 'is not a relation of identification, of one grabbing the other, of suppression of difference." According to Kristeva, the "exploded and luxuriant pleasure without madness and infinitely repeated by the woman represents a permanent escape."

Confucian misogynist values were opposed by the first suffragist feminists during the bourgeois republic. But, assessing the women's condition in revolutionary China, Kristeva asks herself the question: does not that look like a sort of "mere material emancipation paid with virilisation, the suppression of sexual difference, the aspiration of power to the phallus"? Finally, Turchetti, quoting Kristeva, says that the "production of a new humanity in China […] is closely linked to the liberation of that unconscious, of that female desire which is decisive for the building of 'a socialism without God and without Man'."[592]

[592] Manuela Turchetti, "Sessualità e politica in Cina: per un mondo senza potere maschile," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, September 7, 1976: 6.



Nella pittura cinese contadina la mancanza di una «prospettiva» (le figure sono quasi sullo stasso piano) significa anche mancanza di una gerarchia e di un principio «autoritario» di composizione dell'immagine. Ha forse punti di contatto con la particolare permanenza della donna nella società cinese, mai del tutto cancellata dal discorso maschile?

Fig. 2. A Chinese painting illustrating Manuela Turchetti's article on Kristeva's book. The caption reads: "In the Chinese peasant painting the lack of a 'perspective' (figures are almost on the same plane) means also the lack of a hierarchy and of an 'authoritarian' principle of image composition. Does it possibly have points of contact with the particular permanence of women in Chinese society, never completely deleted by male discourse?" From: *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, September 7, 1976: 6.

The *quotidiano dei lavoratori* Follows Chinese Internal Events

Throughout its lifetime the *quotidiano dei lavoratori* often reported on Chinese internal events. In February 1975 Mario Gamba triumphantly announced the approval of the new Chinese constitution: different from those whom he polemically called "bourgeois newspapers," AO did not think that the new constitution marked stabilisation and the end of the Cultural Revolution.[593] Quite the reverse, Violetta Rinaldini underlined that it was just the coronation of a long and uninterrupted revolutionary process.[594] Different sides of Chinese internal life were praised. For example, in early 1975 a Valerio Giardini's article praised the famous barefoot doctors.[595] The *quotidiano* sometimes contained scathing criticism of what the bourgeois press wrote on China. In March 1975 Sartana (probably a pseudonym) vehemently criticised the "sinologist [?]" Pietro Sormani, who wrote "ignoble bullshit" (ignobili stronzate) on the Chinese leader Wang Hung-wen:

> in his career the physical element is not even negligible […] a handsome guy, tall, with an open face where the Oriental traits appear nuanced: he even manages, a difficult thing in China, to be elegant. This allegedly drew towards him the sympathies of one of Mao's youngest daughters and, irony of destiny, of Lin Biao's daughter, that same Lin Tou Tou who in 1971 denounced the father's escape.

Sartana mockingly noted that probably in the next articles Sormani would judge Chinese leaders Mao and Zhou Enlai according to their outfits. After all, "Zhou looks really a Chinese, and it is therefore incredible that he has had so much success in China." Probably this will be due to his hat, an Italian make which gives him a "serious Western outlook." By way of conclusion, the *quotidiano* noted that to be elegant in China is probably difficult, but Sormani was "the living demonstration of how easy it is to be fools [bischeri] in Italy."[596]

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[593] Mario Gamba, "La nuova Costituzione cinese riflette un rapporto fecondo tra il partito e le masse," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, February 4, 1975: 3.
[594] Violetta Rinaldini, "Attraversa l'intera esperienza rivoluzionaria cinese la 'linea rossa' di Mao Tse-tung," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, February 4, 1975: 3.
[595] Valerio Giardini, "Cina: I 'medici scalzi' strumento necessario per prevenire i mali," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, March 1, 1975: 3.
[596] Sartana, "Meno male che la Cina è agli antipodi del mondo," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* March 2/3, 1975: 3.

Relevant Chinese leaders who passed away were ritually commemorated: that was the case in April 1975, when Violetta Rinaldini commemorated Tung Pi Wu;[597] in December 1975, when Kang Sheng died;[598] and in July 1976, when Chu Teh passed away.[599] More attention was dedicated to Zhou Enlai's death in January 1976, since he had been one of the main figures of Chinese communism together with Mao. According to the *quotidiano*, he had been not only an "exceptional diplomat," but also a "great communist revolutionary." Remarkably, the newspaper thought that his revolutionary legacy was more important than his diplomatic skills, though the bourgeoisie liked to remember the "great diplomat, the great mediator, the man always on balance, the exceptional statesman." The *quotidiano* underlined how Zhou, who came from a noble family, could acquire his cosmopolitan culture by travelling and studying in Germany, Japan, France.[600] Conversely, Chiang Kai-shek's death the same month was used as an occasion to scorn the Generalissimo.[601]

In February 1976, Umberto Tartari commemorated the tenth anniversary of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution beside two poems by Mao.[602] These two beautiful poems, translated into Italian as "Visitando il monte Tsinkang" a "Dialogo di uccelli" had political content and that is why they were supposedly the object of public discussion in China. While the first was about revolutionary optimism, the second was a criticism of revisionism.[603]

In mid-February 1976 the *quotidiano* began to report a campaign against an "old leader who has taken the capitalist road." This unnamed leader was being criticised mentioning the famous black cat-white cat saying: "it does not matter whether the cat is black or white as long as it catches mice."[604] Clearly,

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[597] Violetta Rinaldini, "Tung Pi Wu: una lunga vita al servizio del popolo cinese," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* April 6/7, 1975: 8.
[598] "È morto a Pechino il compagno Kang Sheng," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* December 18, 1975: 8.
[599] "La vita del compagno Chu Teh, eroe della lotta di liberazione nazionale del popolo cinese," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, July 9, 1976: 8.
[600] "Onore al compagno Ciu En-lai grande dirigente della classe operaia cinese," *quotidiano dei lavoratori*, January 10, 1976: 1. Quotes from: A.D., "Un grande rivoluzionario Comunista, non solo diplomatico d'eccezione: questo è stato Ciu En-lai in una vita di lotta," ibid., 8.
[601] Claudio Brioschi, "Chiang Kai-Shek? 'Avrebbe dovuto morire prima'," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* April 8, 1975: 8.
[602] "Dieci anni fa, la rivoluzione culturale," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* February 15/16, 1976: 6.
[603] "Due poesie di Mao al centro del dibattito," ibid.
[604] "Campagna di tatzebao a Pechino," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* February 14, 1976: 8.

the target of criticism was Deng Xiaoping, though his name was still not disclosed in China, nor by the *quotidiano.* Overall, it insinuated that leaders who had taken the capitalist road should be ousted from their posts, as it had happened with "Liu Shaoqi and Lin Biao."[605] They should beware, because the day of reckoning was coming.[606] Dazibaos remindful of the Cultural Revolution were appearing in increasing numbers.[607] By late February, Umberto Tartari hinted that Deng might have in fact been the target of the attacks,[608] and mentioned that he was the author of the famous black cat-white cat expression.[609] By that time, however, the *quotidiano* reported that Deng was already clearly named and attacked on dazibaos, where he was even defined "deviationist and capitulationist."[610]

Between February and March 1976 the anti-Deng campaign was growing with thousands of dazibaos being affixed, where Deng was accused of refusing "to correct himself." The famous black cat-white cat phrase was united with a variation: "it does not matter whether you climb the mountain from north or south, as long as you reach the peak."[611] Incredibly, by early March even Zhou Enlai was attacked by the dazibao campaign,[612] while an unnamed Deng was being compared to "Bernstein, Kautsky, Trotsky, Bukharin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Liu Shaoqi, Lin Biao."[613] Moreover, he allegedly did not like "revolutionary theatre plays"[614] and was criticised for his stance on foreign policy. The *quotidiano* speculated that possibly Chinese foreign policy was growing more hostile towards both superpowers, not only towards the USSR.[615] While on March 4 the *quotidiano* speculated that Deng may resign,[616] on March 9 it reported that according to Taiwan sources he had already been deprived

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[605] "La lotta tra le due linee," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* February 19, 1976: 8.
[606] "Lettera a Mao di un gruppo di operai," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* February 22/23, 1976: 8.
[607] "Continua la lotta tra le due linee," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* February 21, 1976: 8.
[608] Umberto Tartari, "Si acutizza oggi nella Cina Popolare la lotta politica di massa per il consolidamento della dittaura popolare," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* February 27, 1976: 3.
[609] Umberto Tartari, "La lotta di classe oggi in Cina: un grosso dibattito realmente di massa per la 'dittatura totale", *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* February 28, 1976: 3.
[610] "Dazibao a Pechino: Teng è 'deviazionista e capitolazionista'," ibid., 8.
[611] "Migliaia di dazibao in tutta la Cina," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* February 29/March 1, 1976: 8.
[612] "Anche Ciu En-lai tra i dirigenti accusati dai dazibao a Canton," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* March 2, 1976: 8.
[613] "Il Quotidiano del popolo attacca Teng (ma senza nominarlo)," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* March 3, 1976: 8.
[614] "Cina: Teng non ama le opere teatrali rivoluzionarie," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* March 5, 1976: 8.
[615] "Criticata in Cina la politica estera," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* March 6, 1976: 8.
[616] "Teng sotto tiro: sono imminenti le sue dimissioni?," March 4, 1976: 1.

of his posts. Moreover, he was accused of being too conservative on women's issues[617] and was attacked by communist youth organisations.[618] By March 12-13, Mao had come to the fore in person to criticise Deng,[619] who was even compared to Confucius.[620] Between March and April the *quotidiano dei lavoratori* reported Deng was criticised by factory workers.[621] However, on March 27 the *quotidiano* reported that Deng was still holding all his posts.[622] Towards the end of the month, he was attacked personally by Mao because of his economism.[623]

Similarly to *Lotta continua*, in early April 1976 the *quotidiano dei lavoratori* reported street clashes in Tiananmen square following Zhou Enlai's death. According to the *quotidiano*, after the first night of clashes all portraits and flowers to Zhou Enlai had disappeared from the square, only to reappear the following day. It was therefore clear that these clashes had to do with the memory of the deceased leader, and they partially took place between those loyal to Zhou and those who thought Zhou should be criticised on a par with Deng Xiaoping. In fact, a group of students from the Tsinghua technical university was beaten up because they tried to remove new portraits and flowers to Zhou.[624] The situation was allegedly soon put under control, though political struggle did not stop.[625]

Finally, on April 8 the *quotidiano* announced that Deng had been ousted from all his posts, but remained member of the party[626] – a choice which could change according to his behaviour.[627] Allegedly, immense demonstrations of joy followed this decision, opposing Deng Xiaoping and

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[617] "Le donne cinesi attaccano Teng," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* March 9, 1976: 4.
[618] "Anche i giovani attaccano Teng," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* March 11, 1976: 4.
[619] "Mao Tsetung interviene personalmente nella campagna contro Teng," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* March 12, 1976: 8.
[620] "Cina: Teng Hsiao-ping paragonato a Confucio," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* March 13, 1976: 8.
[621] Ansa, "Il revisionismo di Teng contestato dagli operai," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* March 23, 1976: 8; "La conferenza operaia di Anshan critica Teng," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* March 25, 1976: 7; "Dalle fabbriche di Shanghai un nuovo attcaao anti-Teng," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* April 1, 1976: 8.
[622] "Teng conserva ancora tutti I suoi incarichi," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* March 27, 1976: 8.
[623] "L'economicismo di Teng Hsiao-ping attaccato personalmente da Mao," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* March 30, 1976: 8.
[624] "La lotta politica in Cina diventa scontro di piazza," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* April 6, 1976: 1.
[625] "Pechino: torna la calma ma la lotta politica va avanti con vigore," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* April 7, 1976: 8.
[626] "Importanti decisioni a Pechino. Teng destituito da ogni carica," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* April 8, 1976: 1.
[627] "Teng sarà espulso dal partito," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* April 21, 1976: 8.

supporting the rising star Hua Guofeng.[628] Moreover, Deng's potential supporters were warned that they had better not follow his example: they ought to change "seriously and completely" so as not to meet the same fate.[629] According to the *quotidiano*, the rising star Hua Guofeng was chosen for the post of first vice-president because of the radical opposition he had shown against Deng, for example on agricultural matters.[630] The *quotidiano* tried to buttress this point by publishing Hua Guofeng's texts on agriculture and on the Tachai movement.[631] Towards the end of May, the *quotidiano* gave a more personal touch to the reports of the anti-Deng struggle by publishing an account of Italian visitors who were in China at the time. Stefano Levi, Paola Spazzali, Donatella Borghesi, Mario Cannella and Marina Piazza were from the Italian Centre of Studies and Information on Chinese Politics and were hosted by the Chinese Association for Cultural and Friendly Relations with Foreign Peoples.[632]

In mid-June 1976 the *quotidiano* noted that Mao Zedong was no longer able to receive foreign guests, somewhat fearing that his health might have been not good (Mao was 82 at the time).[633] Finally, on September 10, 1976, the *quotidiano dei lavoratori* announced the death of the Great Helmsman with a huge title. The newspaper's reaction to Mao's death only confirms the general ideological trend which can be detected in all other internal and press sources of Avanguardia Operaia. According to the *quotidiano*, Mao had possibly been "the only one among the politicians active in the recent historical period who represented with his personality of theoretician and party leader a certain and central point of reference for the revolutionary movement all over the world."[634]

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[628] "Milioni in piazza a Pechino dopo la destituzione di Teng," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* April 9, 1976: 1; "La grande mobilitazione popolare contro il vento deviazionista di destra," ibid.: 8; "Continuano in tutta la Cina le entusiasmanti mobilitazioni," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* April 10, 1976: 8; "Un milione e 700.000 a Shanghai contro Teng," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* April 11-12, 1976: 8.
[629] "Duro monito in Cina ai seguaci di Teng," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* April 15, 1976: 8.
[630] "Hua Kuo-feng, ovvero imparare da Tachai," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* April 9, 1976: 8.
[631] "Hua Kuo-feng: 'La linea socialista è notevolmente più forte'," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* April 11-12, 1976: 3.
[632] "Viaggio in Cina nei giorni caldi della lotta contro la destra," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* May 27, 1976: 6.
[633] "Mao non riceve ospiti stranieri," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* June 16, 1976: 8.
[634] "Mao è morto," *quotidiano dei lavoratori,* September 10, 1976: 1.



venerdì 10 settembre 1976

quotidiano dei lavoratori

L. 150

Una poesia di Mao Tse-tung

Visitando il monte Tsingkang

Da lungo tempo volevo tornare vicino alle ravole oggi salgo di nuovo sul monte Tsingkang.

Lontano mille lì, torno alla terra di allora. l'antico aspetto cambiato in nuovi colori.

Qui la rondine danza, ovunque è il canto degli usignoli

e l'acqua che scorre in gorgogli.

La strada sale, trapassa le nubi più in là di Hsiangyangkù non c'è più abisso che faccia paura.

Venti e tuoni in tempesta agitar di bandiere un mondo nascosto.

Trentott'anni passati, come uno schiocco di dita.

Puoi salire i nove cieli e prendere la luna o tartarughe nel fondo dei cinque mari. ci accolgono sempre, al ritorno, canti e trionfo.

Cerchi le vette più alte, e più niente è difficile.

MAO È MORTO

«Il rispettato e amato grande dirigente del nostro partito, del nostro esercito e del popolo di tutte le nazionalità del nostro paese, il grande maestro del proletariato internazionale e delle nazioni oppresse e dei popoli oppressi, Mao Tse-tung, è morto». Con queste parole inizia il messaggio del Comitato centrale del Partito comunista cinese - firmato anche dal Comitato permanente dell'Assemblea nazionale del popolo, dal Consiglio di stato (governo) e dalla Commissione militare del Comitato centrale del partito - con il quale ieri alle 16 locali è stata annunciata in Cina la scomparsa del compagno Mao, forse l'unico tra gli uomini politici attivi nel recente periodo storico a rappresentare con la sua personalità di teorico e di dirigente di partito un punto di riferimento sicuro e centrale per il movimento rivoluzionario in tutto il mondo. Il messaggio è stato diffuso per radio e trasmesso attraverso altoparlanti collocati nelle strade e nelle piazze in tutta la Cina.

Chi non ha fatto l'inchiesta non ha diritto di parola

Una vita legata alle vittorie del popolo cinese

Il messaggio di Ao al P.C.C.

BIBLIOTECA MILANO

Conclusions

A thorough analysis of internal and press sources of Avanguardia Operaia allows one to draw a few conclusions on AO's relation with Maoism. Firstly, it is clear that AO was strongly influenced by Maoism, thought it always tried to "digest" and elaborate this Maoism in its own form. AO considered Mao's and the Chinese Communists' contribution indispensable to understand the world contradictions of the time and to draft a possible Italian and global revolutionary strategy. Quite remarkably, though AO was influenced by Trotskyism as well, it seemingly valued Maoism more than Trotskyism, motivating this choice by saying that Trotsky could do no more than give his own personal contribution to the workers' movement, whereas Mao and the Chinese Communists initiated upheavals of world importance first with the revolutionary process which brought them to power, and then with the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese Communists' feats were important not only because of the world balances they moved, but they should have been of inspiration to the Italian Left, too. Therefore, this research allows one to draw a more general conclusion on the nature of Avanguardia Operaia. In the light of the analysed sources, AO appears as an organisation whose ideology defies definition. It seemingly was a syncretic, eclectic organisation open to different theoretical contributions, and which sought to elaborate them into an original whole. Finally, one may say that this research on the Maoism of Avanguardia Operaia confirms the trend of pervasiveness of Maoism which had already been detected. AO too was strongly and explicitly influenced by Maoism, and this shows the strength and the pervasiveness of this trend in the Italian extra-parliamentary Left. In the light of this thorough research, the oversimplified image of AO as "Trotskyist" organisation seems rather a cliché, or in the words of *Avanguardia operaia*, a "fairy tale," spread by "campaign of gossips and stupid rumours."[635]

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[635] "Unificazione tra Sinistra Leninista e Avanguardia operaia," *Avanguardia operaia* 9 (November 1970): 25.

Antiauthoritarian Maoism: from Students to Anarchists

Introduction

As we could already see in the preceding chapters, Maoism in Italy was altered in several ways and into differing concepts, some of which may seem even quite far from the original Mao Zedong thought. One of these concepts - explored in this chapter - is antiauthoritarianism. This may seem like quite a surprise, since according to widespread belief, Mao's China was a dictatorial, authoritarian, if not overtly totalitarian regime.[636] However, what counts here is that Maoism was used by many Italians as an instrument of antiauthoritarianism. More in detail, this chapter will analyse two sectors of the Italian political spectre which interpreted Maoism in an antiauthoritarian way: the student movement and anarchists. However, as we shall see, the former was inspired by Maoism much more than the latter. For Italian anarchists, Chinese antiauthoritarianism was only a partial interpretation, a hypothesis rather than a certainty.

Roberto Niccolai says that "1968 and its surroundings evoke the image of a large shelf full of items, from which everyone can choose what attracts them most."[637] Niccolai is certainly right. However, he also notes that "the student is the element which links the events of that year. The student is the protagonist at Berkeley as well as in Peking, in Turin as in Paris, in Mexico City as in Warsaw."[638] This is also absolutely true: in fact, 1968 has remained in the collective imagination of many as the year of student antiauthoritarian revolt.[639] This is possibly even truer of Italy than of other countries, since here a remarkably strong student uprising in 1968 was followed by the "workers' 1969." The

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[636] For an authoritarian-totalitarian interpretation of Mao's life see: Jung Chang and Jon Halliday*, Mao: The Unknown Story* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005). See also: Simone Leys, *Ombre cinesi: Il fenomeno totalitario in Cina* (Milan: SugarCo, 1980); Simon Leys, *Gli abiti nuovi del presidente Mao: Cronaca della "rivoluzione culturale"* (Milan; AntiStato, 1977).

[637] Niccolai, *Quando la Cina*, 127.

[638] Ibid., 127-128.

[639] See: Gerd-Reiner Horn, *The Spirit of '68* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End Press, 1987).

two simplistically separated phenomena then somewhat meshed during the 1970s which saw a period of high political radicalisation, which continued to a lesser extent until the end of the 1980s. Therefore, an analysis of how the Italian students' antiauthoritarianism was influenced by Maoism is indispensable.

In this chapter I will analyse both the university student movement as well as the high school student movement, which is often somewhat neglected. Even with a superficial analysis of the sources, it is evident that Maoism was not evenly widespread in Italian universities. Milan was by far the Italian city where university students were mostly influenced by Maoism, followed by Rome and Turin, with Pisa and Florence even lower in the ranking. The reason for this Milanese prominence is that Maoism was strong in the student movement of the State University of Milan (colloquially referred to as "la Statale"), though the Catholic University of Milan also experienced students' unrest. According to the leader of the "Statale" students, Mario Capanna, rather than Italian students moving close to China, the "opposite is rather true: it was Mao's China which moved closer to the West, in the sense that it infected the great movements of mass transformation."[640]

Concerning Italian anarchism, it was again Niccolai who noted that certain Italian anarchists interpreted Maoism and the Cultural Revolution in an antiauthoritarian way.[641] Obviously, one may think that anarchism and Maoism had nothing to do with each other. After all, Maoism was an official state ideology in China, and anarchism is by definition contrary to any form of state. However, one should not dismiss the comparison as completely unfounded, since we know from biographies that the young Mao was an anarchist before turning to Marxism.[642] Be that as it may, the complexity and the chaos of the Cultural Revolution fostered an extremely interesting, however marginal, phenomenon. In fact, Italian anarchists united in the journals *Umanità nova* and *Volontà* expressed at times a possibilist attitude towards some developments of the Cultural Revolution. They in fact felt

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[640] Mario Capanna interviewed by Niccolai, *Quando la Cina*, 146.
[641] Roberto Niccolai, "Anarcritici," in *Quando la Cina era vicina* (Pisa: BFS, 1998), 160-166.
[642] See: Maurice Meisner, *Mao Zedong: A Political and Intellectual Portrait* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

that the upheaval which was happening in China presented antiauthoritarian traits which left hope for a future of real anarchy. This phenomenon was limited to these two anarchist journals: the equally anarchist *A-Rivista anarchica* and *Internazionale* did not present any sort of possibilist attitude towards China. Even in *Umanità nova* and *Volontà*, the character of this antiauthoritarian interest towards the Cultural Revolution was limited: it may be said that references to China in the anarchist press were roughly 70-80% negative and only 20-30% were positive. Frequent articles denounced the authoritarian and even totalitarian character of the Maoist state. Similar to the USSR, China was possibly criticised even more vehemently than usual "bourgeois" states, following a pattern common in anarchist thought - state socialism being considered even more totalitarian then an average bourgeois state.

The Student Movement of the State University of Milan

According to Roberto Niccolai, in the years following 1968-69, the student movement of the State University of Milan acquired a special prominence in the panorama of the Milanese extra-parliamentary Left, together with Avanguardia Operaia. Their militants "became authors of verbal, written and, in lower number, physical clashes."[643] The same Niccolai notes that the student movement of the State University of Milan (or "MS: Movimento Studentesco") became the "student movement par excellence."[644] The reasons for this prominence were that the Milan MS was the only student movement which did not dissolve quickly, and also because its leadership remained somewhat stable, avoiding to create many splinter groups. Possibly, not by chance Niccolai dates the birth of the MS to late October 1969, when Mario Capanna affixed a *dazibao* in the hall of the university which called for the need of an organically Marxism-based student organisation. However, between 1969 and 1970 the ideological base of the MS went beyond that, becoming "Marxism-Leninism-Mao

[643] Ibid., 167.
[644] Ibid., 181.

Zedong Thought." According to Capanna MS students were "attentive towards Maoism" but conscious that "it could not be transferred in a mechanical way into the Italian reality."[645]

Ideology

The MS clearly thought that the "Chinese national revolution of New democracy," together with the Cultural Revolution – these two were considered at the level of the October Revolution - strongly changed the history of revolutions.[646] China was a strong inspiration for the MS, to the point that their first political document of December 1969 was called the "libretto rosso" (red book).[647] The MS strongly thought that a revolution was both possible and necessary in Italy, and the Chinese Cultural Revolution taught that "the masses, guided by the theory m-l-Mao's thought" could make the proletariat and socialism triumph over capitalism and the bourgeoisie through the practices of people's war.[648] "Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought" was thought to be the ideology of the proletariat which the MS wished to introduce into the world of education,[649] and was considered a real science.[650] According to the MS, the Cultural Revolution showed a "new way to link theory to practice" and to the "overcoming of the capitalistic division of labour." Marxism-Leninism-Mao's thought was nothing less than a "synthesis and landing place in humanity's cognitive development."[651] The Cultural Revolution was thought to have enormously developed "school, technical and scientific knowledge, artistic and cultural production," and that is why the MS fought for the universal right to study. The MS constantly stressed the link between theory and practice: in

[645] Mario Capanna interviewed by Niccolai, ibid., 183.
[646] AFF, FNSI, Busta 36, Milano Statale, 10.1.4 Propaganda, Internazionalista, "Documento sull'imperialismo – M.S. della Statale," iii.
[647] AFF, FNSI, Busta 41, MS Milanese poi MLS, 10.3.3. Documenti 1971, "Milano città aperta alle forze democratiche e chiusa ai provocatori fascisti," 20.
[648] Ibid., v.
[649] AFF, FNSI, Busta 36, 10.1.1, Movimento studentesco milanese, "La svolta reazionaria del P.C.I.," Milan, February 8, 1972, 7.
[650] AFF, FNSI, Busta 41, MS Milanese poi MLS, 10.3.3. Documenti 1971, MS, "Contributo al dibattito sul tema del diritto allo studio e dell'U.P.A. della scuola," 6.
[651] AFF, FNSI, Busta 41, MS Milanese poi MLS, 10.3.3. Documenti 1971, "Relazione fatta al collettivo dei quadri del M.S.," March 5, 1971, 3.

fact, reading Mao was not enough, since, of course, it could offer "political qualification," but theoretical acquisitions had to be put into practice.[652]



Fig. 1. Young Chinese Red Guard shouting with clenched fist. From: *Movimento studentesco,* September-October 1971, 1.

The MS ideally wanted to merge with the more general struggles of the "popular masses," of which it felt part. However, it did not feel that it could lead the working class. More precisely, it thought

[652] Ibid., 5.

that "because of the particular history of our country" Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought influenced the MS, which in turn influenced the popular masses.[653] This ideology was not endorsed by the MS "by chance or because of a temporary fad," but because Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought was allegedly conducting many oppressed peoples in the world (the documents mention Vietnam, China, Palestine, etc.) towards victory.[654] However, according to Bruno Cavagnola, this ideology should have been developed and applied "creatively […] to the concrete and peculiar historical conditions where one operates, without paralysing scholasticisms."[655] MS students drew from China theoretical inspiration, and studied the Chinese experience.[656] However, they thought that the PRC could give concrete help for a successful world revolution,[657] and that the Vietnam War was a "direct attack against the People's Republic of China, a stronghold of socialism in the world."[658]

The MS explicitly drew inspiration from Mao Zedong's stress on the youth and on students, as it is clear in some of his quotes. Mao was convinced that students had to be mobilised. More precisely, he thought that Marxism could not spread without the mobilisation of students and intellectuals, who had to integrate with the toiling masses.[659] The International Commission of the MS published translations of Chinese articles, like one about the Paris Commune written for the occasion of its 100th anniversary, in 1971. Modern revisionists were said to oppose the ideals of the Paris Commune, and in the end the article openly said that the Chinese Revolution had to be helped by the proletariat of capitalist countries. By saying this, the Chinese Communists were explicitly fomenting political

[653] AFF, FNSI, Busta 41, MS Milanese poi MLS, 10.3.3. Documenti 1971, "Prima stesura di tesi," 9.
[654] AFF, FNSI, Busta 41, MS Milanese poi MLS, 10.3.2. Documenti 1970.
[655] AFF, FNSI, Busta 36, 10.1.1 Mov. degli studenti – Milano Statale – Generale 1968, Bruno Cavagnola, untitled document, December 1969, 7.
[656] AFF, FNSI, Busta 41, MS Milanese poi MLS, 10.3.3. Documenti 1971, "breve storia del P.C.C."
[657] AFF, FNSI, Busta 36, Milano Statale, 10.1.4 Propaganda, Internazionalista, "Documento sull'imperialismo – M.S. della Statale," vi.
[658] AFF, FNSI, Busta 37, 10.1.9 Volantini e mozioni 1968-1971, "Raccogliamo l'appello del popolo indocinese alla mobilitazione popolare contro l'imperialismo."
[659] AFF, FNSI, Busta 41, MS Milanese poi MLS, 10.3.2. Documenti 1970, "Il presidente Mao Tse-tung sul movimento della gioventù."

revolt in other countries like Italy.[660] After all, Mao was clear: "The conquest of power through armed struggle, the solution of the problem through war is the main task and the highest form of revolution. This revolutionary Marxist-Leninist principle is therefore as valid in China, as in all other countries."[661] The fact that there was an explicit intention to foment armed revolution in Western countries is demonstrated by triumphalist articles which praised the liberation struggles of the Third World, but, at the same time, urged proletarians of capitalist countries to "organise and take arms."[662] The authors of the article were pleased that American workers had allegedly taken arms to defend themselves from the police. The article also stressed that workers and students protested together in the US, a situation reminiscent of similar events in Italy.[663]

Interestingly, the MS students were interested in the Chinese position on the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia: in the international section of their internal documents, one may find an Italian translation of the August 23 *Renmin Ribao* commentary on the invasion. The commentary violently attacked the Soviet Union defined revisionist, social imperialist, and even fascist, and reiterated the famous trope according to which US imperialism and Soviet social imperialism were paper tigers. The *Renmin Ribao* also boasted that "700 million Chinese, armed with Mao's thought" supported the Czechoslovakian people.[664]

Similar to Lotta Continua and to other extreme-leftist formations, the MS thought that the correctness of the CCP line could be gauged by a comparison between the successful Chinese Revolution and the Italian "betrayed resistance." In fact, while the CCP was able to allow the proletariat to establish its dictatorship, the PCI underestimated the force of the Italian working class. A real revolutionary

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[660] AFF, FNSI, Busta 41, MS Milanese poi MLS, 10.3.3. Documenti 1971, article of the editorial staff of the Chinese newspapers *Renmin Ribao-Hong Qi-Jefanjun Bao* edited by the MS Ideological Commission, "Viva la vittoria della dittatura del proletariato!" in: Commissione internazionale MS, *Bollettino d'informazione n. 2*, Milan, April 30, 1971.
[661] AFF, FNSI, Busta 38, 10.1.16 Politecnico-Architettura, A) Documenti, Comitato di lotta di Architettura, untitled leaflet.
[662] AFF, FNSI, Busta 41, MS Milanese poi MLS, 10.3.3. Documenti 1971, "Le fiamme della rivoluzione divampano in tutto il mondo" in: Commissione internazionale MS, *Bollettino d'informazione n. 2*, Milan, April 30, 1971, 25.
[663] Ibid., 26.
[664] AFF, FNSI, Busta 36, Milano Statale, 10.1.4 Propaganda, Internazionalista, "Il fallimento completo del revisionismo moderno sovietico."

politique should have established the "new democracy," a Maoist concept which meant "freedom for the masses and dictatorship for the class enemy."[665] Clearly, the MS strongly opposed the PCI, which was accused of spitting "on the great masters of the proletariat, from Marx to Mao Zedong."[666]

Though theoretically the MS shared the same ideology of the M-L groups, it was very critical of them. According to the MS, the UCI(m-l) "banally" ridiculed Mao's figure.[667]

Interestingly, in May 1971 the MS was complaining about a situation of weakening of students' struggles, and maintained that the cause was the "incomprehension of Maoist work methods to develop the mass movement."[668] In fact, activists had experienced shortcomings in going to the masses and in developing their ideas.

The MS adherence to Maoism is clear also by the fact that it defined as "anti-Maoist" political organisations it disagreed with, such as Lotta Comunista[669] - which thought that China was a capitalist country and that Mao was a petty bourgeois[670] - and Avanguardia Operaia. However, the MS had to admit that AO was formally inspired by Maoism (though the MS conceded only that AO was "pretending" to be Maoist). According to the MS, the change of heart of Trotskyists on China dated back to 1952, when the Chinese journal *Red Flag* announced that they already looked with favour at People's China. However, turning to Italian Trotskyists, the MS claimed that their change of attitude towards People's China dated to the winter of 1969 (in the midst of the Cultural Revolution: was the MS polemically implying that AO had fallen prey to a fad?). The MS went as far as to claim that,

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[665] AFF, FNSI, Busta 36, Milano Statale, 10.1.2. Generale 1969, "Posizione dei comitati di lotta di architettura, di scienze, delle facoltà umanistiche della Statale sulla commemorazione, indetta dalla ANPI, dei partigiani fucilati nel '45 a campo Giuriati e sulla situazione spagnola."

[666] AFF, FNSI, Busta 36, 10.1.1, Movimento studentesco milanese, "La svolta reazionaria del P.C.I.," Milan, February 8, 1972, 10.

[667] AFF, FNSI, Busta 36, Milano Statale, 10.1.2. Generale 1969, "Per il rilancio politico rivoluzionario e di massa del Movimento Studentesco," 7.

[668] AFF, FNSI, Busta 40, 10.2.6 MA Facoltà scientifiche (AO), *Lotta di classe nella scuola* n. 3, May 1971 (bollettino della Facoltà di Scienze della Statale).

[669] AFF, FNSI, Busta 36, 10.1.1 Mov. degli studenti – Milano Statale – Generale 1968, Sezione ideologica dell'MS, "Lotta comunista," Milan, April 23, 1971.

[670] AFF, FNSI, Busta 39, 10.2.1 MS unitario riferentesi ad AO Milano-Cittadino, leaflet "Lotta 'comunista': nella teoria e nella prassi un gruppo fuori dal movimento operaio."

according to AO, Maoism was a "genuine reedition" of Trotskyism, and that "to adhere to Maoism means to give oneself the possibility to make vital one's Trotskyist convictions." Moreover, AO went as far as to criticise the Italian IV Internationale for "not having applied Trotskyism in practice uniting it with Maoism." This amounted to nothing less than a "fundamental limit," which contributed to make Trotskyism a "idealistic and dogmatic system."[671] AO de facto tried to assimilate the Maoist uninterrupted revolution with the Trotskyist permanent revolution. The MS quoted AO saying that the Cultural Revolution was a "uninterrupted revolutionary process," but not the "definite solution of the realisation of socialism possible only with the victory of revolution on a world level."[672] While noting this assimilation, the MS strongly disagreed with it.

Chinese Foreign Policy

The attitude of the MS towards the changes in Chinese foreign policy in the early 1970s is worth attention. In October 1971, the MS was already convinced that Chinese foreign policy "enlarged the contradictions of imperialism."[673] In the spring of 1972, the MS journal *Movimento studentesco* triumphantly declared that Nixon's visit to China was a "new victory for the Chinese comrades," scored after twenty years of "isolation and threats." US imperialism, *Movimento studentesco* stated, was forced to "recognise the reality of socialism in China." Similar to Lotta Continua and Avanguardia Operaia, the MS seemingly considered Chinese policy of rapprochement with the US a Chinese victory and an American defeat. In fact, the MS claimed that while the US were forced to make concessions, China did not retreat from crucial points like assistance to Vietnam and Korea. What is more, *Movimento studentesco* implied that defeat in Indochina contributed to the US retreat,

[671] AFF, FNSI, Busta 39, Movimento studentesco Università Statale – M., Ideological Commission, "La posizione del Movimento Studentesco Milanese sul gruppo trozkista 'Avanguardia operaia'," Milan, November 30, 1971.
[672] AFF, FNSI, Busta 36, 10.1.1 Mov. degli studenti – Milano Statale – Generale 1968, Sezione ideologica dell'MS, "Avanguardia operaia," Milan, March 10, 1971, 11.
[673] AFF, FNSI, Busta 39, Movimento Studentesco Università Statale - M., leaflet dated October 6, 1971.

together with "consolidation of socialism in China" and the fact that the peoples of the world increasingly looked at China for guide and orientation.

The MS also took the occasion to criticise PCI attitude on the issue: the PCI was in fact convinced that China finally agreed "with peaceful coexistence among countries of different social regimes," after it had been opposed to it for so long. The MS criticised other leftist political groups too, which saw in the Chinese move as a "bourgeois diplomatic policy […] opposed to the interests of international revolution."[674] *Lotta di classe nella scuola*, the journal of the Hard Sciences School of the university, defined Nixon's visit to China as an "advertising shot." The journal was convinced that the "trip will not have as a result a Sino-American agreement for the solution of the Indochinese conflict because the proletarian internationalism of the PRC cannot be put into question." However, the journal had to admit that Chinese foreign policy of the time had caused "a few perplexities."[675]

Movimento studentesco came back to the issue of Chinese foreign policy in the autumn of 1972. It reiterated its support for Chinese foreign policy, by saying that it put into crisis the division of the world into spheres of influence controlled by the two superpowers. In fact, the weakening of the two superpowers meant the strengthening of China, which was the bulwark of world socialism. There were a few other points in which *Movimento studentesco* was convinced that the Chinese move would have a positive effect. Firstly, China had the stronger position, and that it did not intend to concede anything. Conversely, the US were forced into an unconditional surrender in Vietnam. *Movimento studentesco* even quoted Zhou Enlai saying that Nixon had been forced to recognise "the rights of nations." What is more, "China never sells its friends. We will cede Nixon nothing, we will not abandon you (the Indochinese peoples), we will support you until the final victory." China was doing nothing less than putting Nixon "with his shoulders to the wall," helping the Indochinese peoples disinterestedly, but letting them decide on their own future. Secondly, the Chinese move was a great

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[674] "Una nuova vittoria dei compagni cinesi," *Movimento studentesco*, March-April 1972.
[675] AFF, FNSI, Busta 40, 10.2.6 MS Facoltà scientifiche (AO), MS Scienze, *Lotta di classe nella scuola* n. 4, February 1972, 17.

help to the American Left. It hit a strong blow at the image of the "yellow danger" presenting China as a "concrete reality, as a country which conducts a real battle for peace, which is truly friends of the people." Thirdly, the US was forced to agree to peaceful relations with China because of its isolation. Fourthly, China had won a battle for recognition after considerable obstacles. Now that it had gained its seat at the UN, China could use it as an "international tribune for the denouncement of imperialism." Only the "dumb, the short-sighted and the extremist" could think that the Chinese move privileged state needs to the detriment of those of the people.

Movimento studentesco insisted that even Chinese moves which exalted European unification were aimed at supporting any obstacle to the dominion of the two superpowers. Similarly, China supported Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Romania against the USSR, even though the leadership was considered revisionist.[676] Finally, the journal once more reaffirmed that China was giving disinterested and concrete help to all countries fighting imperialism. However, its role could be only of guidance and support: it could not substitute the revolutionary vanguards of the single countries, since "you do not export revolution on bayonets' points."[677] In late 1972, the MS reiterated its support for Chinese foreign policy, saying that it was a "realistic recognition of the advancing of revolution in the world and of the crisis of imperialism." The MS strongly disagreed with those, such as "il manifesto," who were critical of Chinese foreign policy.[678]

Students: University, Schools

The MS was self-reflective in the sense that it tried to produce analyses on the students themselves. The Struggle Committee of the Engineering Department took Mao's example, according to which students "do not constitute a class or a social stratum. However in present-day China *the majority of them can be classified within the petty bourgeoisie* [emphasis in the original] for their family origin,

[676] "Situazione internazionale e politica estera cinese," *Movimento studentesco*, September-October 1972, 11.
[677] Ibid., 12.
[678] AFF, FNSI, Busta 36 - 10.1.1, Commissione ideologica del Movimento Studentesco, "La posizione del movimento studentesco milanese nei confronti del gruppo 'il manifesto'," Milan, December 2, 1971, 7.

for their living conditions and their political positions."[679] The Struggle Committee thought that Mao's conclusions pertaining China were generally valid for Italy, too. Firstly, students were not a homogenous body, and they could be analysed only on general terms. Secondly, the Committee was convinced that the majority of Italian students were definitely part of the petty bourgeoisie.

More precisely, the students of Electronical Engineering were inspired by the Cultural Revolution and read texts about its revolutionising of the education system. The Cultural Revolution had taught these students that it was "possible to study different things in a different way," but only in a socialist society. They were convinced that the study they carried out while they remained "enclosed within the walls of schools" was "abstract, an end in itself, where you learn theories unlinked with any practical utility so that you can demonstrate other equally abstract and useless theories." Moreover, the study load was "beastly," and the Italian school system was affected by "economic and meritocratic selection." By contrast, according to the students, in China there was selection, but it was not a class selection.[680]

The influence of Mao Zedong's thought was clear even in the proposals for schools by the MS, where theoretical reflection and its application were underlined, together with the need to "put politics in the first place".[681] The MS explicitly stated that the Cultural Revolution was its point of reference in organising the movement against the "backward bourgeois school."[682] Maoist importance to link culture with practice was exemplified by an MS proposal to send half a million students to the countryside. According to this plan, doing political activity may have been easier in the countryside than in factories, because so far factory activity had been limited to moments of tension and died out afterwards. Contrastingly, the MS hypothesised that going to the countryside students may be hosted by the peasants "on equal terms," conducting at the same time "manual work and a widespread

[679] AFF, FNSI, Busta 38, 10.1.14. Ingegneria e Comitato di Lotta, "La nostra linea nella scuola," February 1974, 12.
[680] AFF, FNSI, Busta 38, 10.1.14. Ingegneria e Comitato di Lotta, Nucleo Elettronici, "Sviluppiamo la lotta,".
[681] AFF, FNSI, Busta 36, 10.1.1 Mov. degli studenti – Milano Statale – Generale 1968, MdS, "La nostra lotta è più grande della scuola!!," 5.
[682] AFF, FNSI, Busta 37, 10.1.9. Volantini e mozioni 1968-1971, "La riforma della scuola," 16.

political work meant to form a class consciousness in a whole fringe of potentially revolutionary workers." Moreover, the proposers thought that this idea could be a deterrent for the typical decrease of political activity during the summer. A "Struggle Committee in the Countryside" should have done a "preliminary analysis of the economic-political situation of the Italian countryside" and sought for contact with high-school students.[683]

We can see that, regarding the Cultural Revolution in general and its influence on school life in particular, the MS had strongly idealistic and romanticising views. This attitude, however, was not total, since in 1968 a group of students-teachers warned in a document that the Chinese experience had to be studied "without fideisms." The Cultural Revolution was certainly the "greatest historical contemporary fact after red October," but the authors hypothesised that it could deviate "towards irrationalism." Could the Cultural Revolution destroy itself? Were young children rationally able to decide about their destiny? The students-teachers denounced that during the Cultural Revolution "episodes of cultural nihilism" took place, where minorities were eliminated in a sometimes "uselessly terroristic and violent" way. Moreover, there was an official urge to "marriage, maternity and chastity," therefore impeding the free determination of one's own life, together with an exaggerate Mao's cult. His thought was often absorbed uncritically rather than critically, in a sort of religious way.[684] The authors doubted that all these problems could be explained exclusively with the negative influence of tradition.

Maoist influence was visible also in the views of the MS regarding science and culture. According to the MS, under capitalism science was inexorably separate from society, especially from the worker. But the MS thought that the Cultural Revolution showed that the "only way out was the real appropriation of science by the working people led by the working class." The MS was in fact convinced that in China a "mass movement for scientific experimentation" was going on.

[683] AFF, FNSI, Busta 37, 10.1.9. Volantini e mozioni 1968-1971, "Mezzo milione di studenti nelle campagne italiane."
[684] AFF, FNSI, Busta 37, 10.1.9. Volantini e mozioni 1968-1971, "Studiare senza fideismi l'esperienza cinese."

"Revolutionary researchers go now among the workers, the peasants."[685] Students of the Department of Physics were highly interested in Chinese educational research and would have liked to know more about specific disciplines like mathematics, medicine, and physics.[686] More precisely, the MS thought that it needed to gain hegemony among the masses through cultural work. "Theory must be transformed into material revolutionary force." Mao was an inspiration in this respect too, since, quoting him, the revolutionary class had to ideologically prepare the public opinion to take political power.[687]

The Chinese leanings of the MS can be noted even in slogans which were supposed to be shouted in their demonstrations. From the slogan "Yesterday against Hitler – Stalin, today against Nixon – Mao," we see that the MS saw Mao as the legitimate successor of Stalin. But other slogans like "Imperialism, paper tiger," "Proletari alla riscossa con la Cina rossa,"[688] "Power comes from the barrel of the gun," [689] "The working class must manage everything" were also supposed to be shouted.[690]

Medical students were also included in the general political ferment: in fact, the Nucleus Medical Students of the Cultural Revolutionary Movement wanted a "medicine at the service of the people," which could be reached with "popular clinics" and analysing the social causes of illnesses to prevent them (what the bourgeoisie did not intend to do).[691]

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[685] AFF, FNSI, Busta 37, 10.1.9. Volantini e mozioni 1968-1971, Commissione medi, "Sviluppo del movimento degli studenti," 6.
[686] AFF, FNSI, Busta 39, 10.1.21 Facoltà di Fisica, "Per un intervento politico di massa a Fisica," Milan, January 31, 1974, 6.
[687] Ibid., 14.
[688] AFF, FNSI, Busta 37, 10.1.7 Volantini 1968-1969 Comitato di lotta Statale e Com. di agitazione permanente, "Attenzione-norme," Milan, May 27, 1970.
[689] AFF, FNSI, Busta 37, 10.1.7 Volantini 1968-1969 Comitato di lotta Statale e Com. di agitazione permanente, "Attenzione-norme," Milan, September 26, 1970.
[690] AFF, FNSI, Busta 37, 10.1.7 Volantini 1968-1969 Comitato di lotta Statale e Com. di agitazione permanente, "Durante il percorso saranno gridate le seguenti parole d'ordine," Milan, February 9, 1971.
[691] AFF, FNSI, Busta 37, 10.1.9. Volantini e mozioni 1968-1971, Nucleo Studenti di Medicina dell'M.C.R. (Movimento Culturale Rivoluzionario) "Contro il governo antipopolare di Rumor per una medicina al servizio del popolo."

Alliance with Professors

The MS explicitly theorised that it should ally with "democratic professors," buttressing this idea with a Mao's quote: "We have the task to unite with the intellectuals of the old culture, with artists and physicians of the old schools, who may be useful to us, and help them, convert them, re-educate them. To re-educate them, we must first of all unite with them."[692] An example of this collaboration is an event organised in October 1974 at the Via Festa del Perdono campus meant to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the declaration of the People's Republic of China. The event was proposed by the MS, but the list of speakers is worth noting. Apart from the most official figure – a representative of the Chinese embassy – as many as five university professors were present, coming from various backgrounds. The humanities were represented by Emilio Agazzi, professor of philosophy of history; Franco Catalano, professor of contemporary history; and Franco Fergnani, professor of moral philosophy. Agazzi's and Fergnani's presence together with Catalano's made clear that the organisers gave the Chinese Revolution a philosophical as well as historical importance. However, sciences were also present, represented by Enrico Ciaranfi, professor of pathology; and Giulio A. Maccaccaro, professor of medical statistics and biometry. Probably, these last two guests were supposed to speak about Chinese progress in the medical field. Apart from them, the musician Giorgio Gaslini and the former partisan commander Raffaele De Grada were also present, together with Marco Macciò, author of the book *La filosofia della rivoluzione culturale*. The MS concluded the triumphalist leaflet by advertising the event saying that Mao Zedong's thought was a "secure guide for all peoples who fight for democracy and for socialism" (fig. 2).[693]

The Chinese leanings of the MS are exemplified also by the space given to China during the second MS festival in 1974. The progress of Chinese medicine was discussed, and Enrica Collotti Pischel and Marco Macciò informed the audience about the risk of restoration of capitalism in China.

[692] AFF, FNSI, Busta 41, MS Milanese poi MLS, 10.3.3. Documenti 1971, "La lotta politica nella scuola," 18.
[693] AFF, FNSI, Busta 36 - 10.1.1, leaflet "Celebrazione del 25° anniversario della proclamazione della Repubblica Popolare Cinese."

Participants could also visit a photographical exhibition on China prepared in collaboration with the Italy-China association.[694]

[694] AFF, FNSI, Busta 36 - 10.1.1, "2° festival del Movimento Studentesco."

GIOVEDI 3 OTTOBRE, ORE 17.30

AULA MAGNA DELL'UNIVERSITA' STATALE

VIA FESTA DEL PERDONO, 3

ALLA PRESENZA DI UN RAPPRESENTANTE DELL'AMBASCIATA DELLA REPUBBLICA POPOLARE CINESE IN ITALIA

Celebrazione del 25° anniversario della proclamazione della Repubblica Popolare Cinese

PROMOSSA, SU PROPOSTA DEL MOVIMENTO STUDENTESCO, DA:

EMILIO AGAZZI, *docente di Filosofia della Storia*

FRANCO CATALANO, *docente di Storia Contemporanea*

ENRICO CIARANFI, *docente di Patologia*

RAFFAELE DE GRADA, *Comandante Partigiano, direttore della rivista Realismo*

FRANCO FERGNANI, *docente di Filosofia Morale*

GIORGIO GASLINI, *musicista*

GIULIO A. MACCACCARO, *docente di Statistica Medica e Biometria*

MARCO MACCIO', *autore del libro "La filosofia della rivoluzione culturale"*

Venticinque anni fa l'Esercito Popolare di Liberazione, diretto dal Partito Comunista Cinese, guidato dal Presidente Mao Tsetung, sconfisse definitivamente la cricca reazionaria del Kuomintang di Chang Kai Sheck, foragggiata e sostenuta dall'imperialismo internazionale.

Sotto la direzione del Partito Comunista Cinese, guidato dal presidente Mao Tsetung la Repubblica Popolare Cinese ha conosciuto 25 anni di grandi vittorie in tutti i campi.

Il popolo cinese ha conseguito grandi successi nella costruzione del Socialismo sconfiggendo i nemici interni ed esterni della Cina.

Attraverso il "grande balzo" la Grande Rivoluzione Culturale proletaria e l'attuale lotta contro Confucio, il popolo cinese ha avuto ragione dei tentativi di Liu Shao Ci, Lin Piao e soci di restaurare il capitalismo e vendere il paese allo straniero.

In campo internazionale la Repubblica Popolare Cinese ha ottenuto grandi successi, stringendo attorno a sè il vasto fronte dei popoli oppressi contro l'imperialismo e il socialimperialismo.

La RPC si è sempre distinta per il suo conseguente internazionalismo proletario con il suo appoggio e sostegno a tutti i popoli in lotta e si batte coerentemente per sventare le manovre degli imperialisti e dei socialimperialisti.

Il pensiero di Mao Tsetung è una guida sicura per tutti i popoli che si battono per la democrazia e il socialismo.

W LA GRANDE CINA POPOLARE
W IL PARTITO COMUNISTA CINESE
W IL PRESIDENTE MAO TSE TUNG
RAFFORZIAMO SEMPRE PIÙ L'AMICIZIA TRA IL POPOLO ITALIANO
E IL POPOLO CINESE

Movimento Studentesco

EMA mi 74

Fig. 2. Leaflet advertising an event to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1974.

Interestingly, the sources also show that the MS tried to keep up to date about China by reading texts published in other journals and books. For example, MS students read about Chinese factories in a text written by Sweezy and Huberman.[695]

The Evolution of the Movimento Lavoratori per il Socialismo

The MS did not limit itself to students' struggles, since, in February 1976, it evolved into a political party called Movimento Lavoratori per il Socialismo (MLS). Interestingly, notwithstanding the long evolution of the MS, this new party retained its attachment to Maoism. This is clear looking at the plan of theses for its founding congress. The MLS had as a goal the overthrow of the bourgeois state and therefore planned the construction of a "people's army" through political work in the regular army of the time. Its ideological base was the application to the concrete Italian reality of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought.[696]

The document opens in its very first page with a Mao quote, and points out that China was the "guide of the revolutionaries of the whole world." The MLS gave special importance to the fact that its founding congress was taking place in 1976, that is in the 10th anniversary of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. The MLS was convinced that at the time China was building a "great modern and socialist country." Not only this, Maoist theory had demonstrated its "universal validity," and it was an orientation for the revolutionaries of the whole world. MLS support for China was also motivated by the evident economic superiority the Chinese socialist model had over the capitalist one. In fact, while the capitalist world was going through a "severe economic crisis," China was

[695] AFF, FNSI, Busta 36, 10.1.1 Mov. degli studenti – Milano Statale – Generale 1968, "Notte sulla organizzazione della fabbrica in Cina."
[696] AFF, FNSI, Busta 40, 10.2.12 CUB facoltà umanistiche, "Progetto di Tesi per il Congresso costitutivo del Movimento Lavoratori per il Socialismo," xviii.

developing "safely and rapidly."[697] Unsurprisingly, the MLS completely agreed with Chinese foreign policy interpretations according to which the USSR was a social imperialist country.

Moreover, the MLS also used the Cultural Revolution as an inspiration for the struggle in the ideological and cultural field. The Cultural Revolution was nothing less than "the highest and most advanced point of the present situation," and of the "ideological development of the international workers' movement." Its "decisive experience" was considered universally valid "for all democratic, progressist and revolutionary forces." The MLS thought it had learnt from the Cultural Revolution a few basic teachings. First, cultural and ideological struggle was crucial and linked to political-economic struggle. Second, knowledge had to be completely mastered by the masses and would become a means of revolutionary transformation for society. Third, culture and ideology could evolve only through contact with the masses and with revolutionary practice.

The Cultural Revolution really contributed to create a "new humanity," fostering virtues like "human and social solidarity, spirit of brotherhood" and "collaboration in work." These "moral values" were all the more important because, far from being abstract, they were realised in practice in "the daily lives of millions of people." The Cultural Revolution was nothing less that the "realisation of man's positive sides" experimented day by day. Individual liberty was realised through the "emancipation of the collective […] not to detriment of others, but […] among free and equal men." What is more, far from being divided, manual and intellectual labour could evolve by collaborating with each other. What happened in China was a realisation of Marx's theories, which "Western Marxism" considered utopian: it was truly possible to live happily in "brotherly industriousness."[698] The positivity of culture in China was compared with the decadent situation of both imperialism and social imperialism, which were considered at the antipodes.

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[697] Ibid., ii.
[698] Ibid., v. See the aforementioned book by Domenico Losurdo: *Il marxismo occidentale*.

The MLS thought that the Cultural Revolution had further developed Lenin's elaborations on knowledge. Therefore, Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought was necessary to wage a battle for a "new worldview, new knowledge and new culture," apart from social-political struggle.[699] The MLS shared with other Marxist-Leninist formations its reference to Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's importance for ideological and cultural struggle was cited right after Mao in the MLS provisional theses. Gramsci's line was considered "Marxist-Leninist," as opposed to the manipulation and falsification he fell prey to after his death. Gramsci was absolutely not a partisan of the "autonomy of culture" but, on the contrary, wanted to form an "alternative leadership to the country's intellectual life." Gramsci's "fundamental analyses and indications" were a useful guide to interpret many "phenomena and forms of cultural organisation."[700]

Bologna

Interestingly**,** Bologna students used Chinese terminology to describe their action plan within the university. Students were supposed to wage nothing less than a "guerrilla within the institutions," a "long march" in which the periphery had to fight the centre. This march was divided into the vertical and the horizontal . The vertical march implied the "negation of the student of his being a commodity, […] object of manipulation and of violence," the negation of the "social role imposed" on him.[701] This negation had to be substantiated with expropriation of the institution: students were supposed to build an alternative power creating "alternative models, new forms of human and social relations."[702] Though they are not named explicitly, this project is reminiscent of the Chinese red zones, which were indeed linked with Mao's Long March. The horizontal march meant that you have to exit school to enter other institutions, beginning from schools.

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[699] Ibid., viii.
[700] Ibid., ix.
[701] AFF, FNSI, Busta 47, 10.7. Bologna, 10.7.1 Cittadino 1968-1969 documenti, "Ruolo e destinazione sociale dello studente," 6.
[702] Ibid., 7.

Unsurprisingly, Bologna students read texts on Chinese factories,[703] and applied Mao's teachings on the importance of conducting investigations. A group of students of Political Science, for example, conducted an investigation on the Bolognina quarter. This investigation included both socio-economic analysis and a class analysis of the quarter, finding out that the inhabitants were 44% workers, and checking the state of schools, hospitals, and sport facilities. However, the investigation was not limited to the mere gathering of data, but it included visits of the students to a least a few families. The Bolognese student's behaviour was justified by Mao's words, according to which those who know only theory have to conduct investigations so that they can unite theory with practice.[704]

Turin

According to Roberto Niccolai, the Turin student movement, together with those of Trento and Pisa, was the "practical and elaboration centre of the distinctive characters" of students' unrest in 1968. The connection of the Turin student movement with China is recalled by Luigi Bobbio in his interview with Niccolai:

> I now still remember that a text of the Cultural Revolution ended up into my hands which talked about school, [Bobbio is probably talking about Mao's work *Against Bookish Knowledge*, M.G.] and said absolutely extraordinary things, against bookish knowledge, the way in which exams were done, which were done to scare the student rather than to see what he knew, that there was a selection which began in school and it was a social selection: it said exactly the same things which we were saying, therefore there was a total syntony.

Sentences like: "'right ideas come from social practice,' […] 'whosoever has not done an investigation has no right to speak,' […] were against bookish knowledge." Criticism was against those who did "not see with their own eyes but read only in books," having nothing but theory.[705]

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[703] AFF, FNSI, Busta 47, 10.7. Bologna, 10.7.1 Cittadino 1968-1969 documenti, "Note sulla organizzazione della fabbrica in Cina."
[704] AFF, FNSI, Busta 47, 10.7. Bologna, 10.7.5 Commissioni operai-studenti quartieri, Quartieri, "Movimento studentesco bolognese – Commissione quartieri," 3.
[705] Luigi Bobbio interviewed by Niccolai, *Quando la Cina*, 141-142.

Luigi Bobbio also underlined the importance of China being a Third World Country: "the fact that China belonged to that world was an important element: 'the countryside encircles the city,' which after all was what Che Guevara said. There was this idea that the metropolises would have been encircled by the countryside." Bobbio was also convinced that "in China too they looked at what we were doing. I think that there was a continuous play of mirrors, of references." And, following the antiauthoritarian leitmotiv, Bobbio added: "All these figures [Mao, Guevara] were rebellion, 'it is right to revolt' says that you have all the right to revolt against bureaucracy, centralism, against dominant powers."[706]

The Turin student movement thought that the events of the Chinese Revolution broadly speaking - that is the events which had taken place in the decades prior to the communist takeover of power - had to be studied because they could give insights on contemporary struggles. In May 1969, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the May 4 Movement, the Turin student movement maintained that May 4 had to be studied, because its developments were important "not only for the Chinese Revolution but for the preparation of revolutionary struggle in our society."[707] The Turin students underlined that Chinese students were fundamental in the development of the Chinese Revolution in several phases, from 1925, to 1936-37 to the Cultural Revolution. According to the Turin student movement, Chinese students played nothing less than a "revolutionary role" and were a stimulus for the masses. Following the reasoning of the Turin student movement, the analysis of the May 4 Movement and the role students played in it was fundamental in the evolution of Mao's thought. The Turin movement thought that "the study of these problems" was "of great importance for the [Italian] student movement," especially because of the "lack of theory and organisation" which it suffered.[708]

[706] Ibid., 142.
[707] AFF, FNSI, Busta 48, 10.8 Torino, 10.8.4 Controinformazione 1967-1968, "Cina: 4 maggio 1919 – maggio 1969," 2.
[708] Ibid., 3.

Given the importance accorded to the topic, the Turin movement organised an open discussion to which Filippo Coccia, Mireille de Gouville and Edoarda Masi were invited.[709]

The Turin students' antiauthoritarianism was clearly inspired by China, since they maintained that a "process of cultural revolution, of upturning of mentality, of criticism and rejection of the ways of thinking and behaving proper to bourgeois society and culture" was "necessary."

> The cultural revolution is therefore a preliminary condition of political revolution, that is of the takeover of power by the exploited masses, and of economic revolution, that is of the edification of a socialist society through instruments of control and of popular planning. But the most complete cultural revolution is also fruit of political and economic revolution, because only after they [political and economic revolution] will be a reality, all super-structural forms of bourgeois society will be upturned and finally the new man will be born.

However, "by cultural revolution the global revolutionary process which brings to the establishment of new relations among men and to the birth of a new kind of man must be understood."[710] A "cultural revolution" was needed also in the "style of revolutionary political work," using the mass line.[711] The Turin students, while recognising a certain positive role to the PCd'I, thought that it had a dogmatic and bureaucratic approach, showing "de facto not to have understood the value of the Chinese Cultural Revolution," since the "historical value of the Chinese Cultural Revolution was that socialism […] is built only going through the masses."[712] A real revolutionary party had to be "at the service of the people."[713]

The Turin students thought they faced a "classist culture": in order to fight it, they had to demystify "dominant bourgeois ideology, contesting and destroying it" through "Marxist education." This view

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[709] Ibid., 4.
[710] AFF, FNSI, Busta 48, 1.8.5. 1967-1968 A) Commissione fabbrica e quartieri B) Raccolta volantini, untitled document no. 735, 3.
[711] AFF, FNSI, Busta 48, 1.8.5. 1967-1968 A) Commissione fabbrica e quartieri B) Raccolta volantini, untitled document no. 735.
[712] Ibid., 10.
[713] Ibid., 11.

was buttressed by Mao's indication that intellectuals could assimilate Marxism only through contact with the working people and class struggle.[714]

In 1972 Turin Philosophy students proposed an alternative program from the theoretical exam: Mao Zedong was present among the representatives of neo-Marxism, with his work on contradiction.[715]

Trento

The student movement of the University of Trento is probably one of the most famous, because it was one of those which ignited students' unrest nationwide. Unsurprisingly, the Trento student movement too was influenced by Maoism. Interviewed by Niccolai, Marianella Pirzio Biroli Sclavi recalls: "the Cultural Revolution as we perceived it was […] the same thing we were doing in Trento: we went to the factories, met the workers, we discussed with them, we invited them to the department."[716] Moreover, the Cultural Revolution "was something which gave hope: we understood it through our 'cultural revolution,' that is what mattered was that we had done a cultural revolution, in Trento for sure, but also elsewhere. […] We had found that the cultural revolution was something possible, because we were doing it."[717]

Trento students read Edoarda Masi's articles, and agreed with her that the developments in the Third World, like the Chinese Cultural Revolution, deserved an international campaign of information.[718] Quoting an article written by Pierre Jalee in *Frères du monde*, Trento students lauded the Chinese process of building a socialist economy. Though China was still a poor country, it had begun a

[714] AFF, FNSI, Busta 49, MS Università Torino (Org. egemonizz. dal coll. Lenin poi AO), "Documento per l'assemblea degli studenti," 4.
[715] AFF, FNSI, Busta 49, MS Università Torino (Org. egemonizz. dal coll. Lenin poi AO), 10.8.9 Organismi legati al collettivo Lenin (poi AO), leaflet "Programma alternativo per Teoretica," April 17, 1972.
[716] Marianella Pirzio Biroli Sclavi interviewed by Niccolai, *Quando la Cina*, 137-138.
[717] Ibid., 138-139.
[718] AFF, FNSI, Busta 46, 10.6 MS Università – Trento anni '68-'70 – "Comunità di Studio e Ricerca degli L/S di Sociologia a Milano," Movimento per una Università Negativa, "Vietnam," 3.

process of primitive accumulation which would later foster its development.[719] China was even the topic of a "counter-course" organised by the students in the academic year 1967-1968, where lectures on the different phases of the Chinese Revolution were to be delivered by Filippo Coccia, Mario Cannella, Giuseppe and Maria Regis.[720]

A group of Marxist-Leninist students of the University of Trento underlined the importance of fighting bourgeois intellectuals and putting politics in the first place. Mao Zedong thought had to be spread in order to foster revolutionary conscience.[721]

In December 1968 Mauro Rostagno and Renato Curcio wrote a document where Mao, an author they deemed "fundamental," is also present.[722] This document signed by Rostagno and Curcio is extremely interesting, because Rostagno will later join Lotta Continua, whereas Curcio was going to be one of the founders of the Red Brigades (this confirms the magmatic nature of the Italian extra-parliamentary Left: as we can see, two activists who were politically and intellectually formed in the Trento student movement were bound to join different organisations). Rostagno and Curcio admitted that they were "mythically" influenced by Mao – but also by Che Guevara and Rosa Luxemburg. In their opinion, the student movement was a "overall mass mobilisation of a social anger which is […] politically organised" into a few concepts. One of them was the "concept of social practice," explicitly taken from Mao. That is: "the only way to acquire new knowledge is this: to take part in aggressive struggles which transform reality"[723] (this passage is evocative taking into account the later political

[719] AFF, FNSI, Busta 46, 10.6 MS Università – Trento anni '68-'70 – "Comunità di Studio e Ricerca degli L/S di Sociologia a Milano," Movimento per una Università Negativa, Pierre Jalee, "L'imperialismo e il neocolonialismo," da *Frères du monde* n. 37.
[720] AFF, FNSI, Busta 46, 10.6 MS Università – Trento anni '68-'70 – "Comunità di Studio e Ricerca degli L/S di Sociologia a Milano," Movimento per una Università Negativa, "Programma dei controcorsi per l'anno accademico 1967-1968."
[721] AFF, FNSI, Busta 46, 10.6 MS Università – Trento anni '68-'70 – "Comunità di Studio e Ricerca degli L/S di Sociologia a Milano," 10.6.1 Trento: generale e Mov. Per una Università Negativa, Studenti marxisti-leninisti, "Studenti della facoltà di sociologia di Trento!"
[722] AFF, FNSI, Busta 46, 10.6 MS Università – Trento anni '68-'70 – "Comunità di Studio e Ricerca degli L/S di Sociologia a Milano," 10.6.4 Foglio di Mauro Rostagno e Renato Curcio, "Proposta di foglio di lavoro," Trento, December 1968, 7. The document was also published in 1980: Renato Curcio and Mario Rostagno, *Fuori dai denti* (Milan: Gammalibri, 1980).
[723] Ibid., 15.

development of Renato Curcio). According to Mao, social practice was composed by three elements: class struggle, struggle for production and scientific experimentation.[724]

Rostagno and Curcio insisted that a politics of mere "defensive reaction" was not enough, an "offensive politics" had to be elaborated instead, taking special care of the difference between strategy and tactic. Rostagno and Curcio were also inspired by Lin Biao's writings on guerrilla warfare, like "Viva la vittoriosa guerra Popolare." Possibly, guerrilla terminology was used in a not exclusively metaphorical sense, since in the very same document we find an urge to go "from the weapons of criticism to criticism by weapons."[725] An adequate organisation was required to wage this "offensive," together with unity between the movement and the people. However, the two authors were clearly inspired by the guerrilla tactic which stressed taking advantage of the difficulties of the enemy. "Disintegration" had to be brought "into the enemy camp. (That is: our victory depends not only on the operations of our forces, but also on disintegration of enemy forces)." Moreover, it was opportunistic not to fight when you could win, and adventurist to fight when you could not win: the necessity of strategic withdrawal was taken into consideration. More precisely, offence and defence had to be combined. The movement was supposed to build "permanent structures 'at the service of the people'," metaphorically seen as "the camp" (examples included political education, free kindergartens and afterschool care, together with political work in factories, schools, quarters). "Long march" was another metaphorical term which was used to describe Rostagno's and Curcio's political plans. This long march had to go two ways: *through* the institutions to defensively disintegrate them (structures at the service of the people) and offensive mass campaigns *against* institutions to destroy them.[726]

However, Curcio and Rostagno saw serious shortcomings in the functioning of assemblies, which were one of the symbols of radical students' democracy. The two authors thought that straightening

[724] Ibid., 3.
[725] Ibid., 54.
[726] Ibid., 38.

up these shortcomings would have been a "protracted" process, and again took China as an example, proposing a "rectification campaign." After all, the Chinese Communist Party, "formed by amazing cadres formulated through 50 years of struggle," still fought against "errors and deviations." In other words, Rostagno and Curcio thought that the movement needed a small permanent cultural revolution to corrects its mistakes (which however could be corrected, but never completely eliminated: after all, like Mao said, you can eliminate antagonism, but not contradiction, which is eternal).[727] Contradiction within the people was possible, but it had to be fought not through personal attacks, but by attacking the political mistake ("cure the illness to save the patient," as the Chinese said).[728]

Similar to many other Mao-inspired Italian activists, Rostagno and Curcio gave incredible importance to superstructure: "Structure becomes visible as it is through the process of breaking the superstructure." Rostagno and Curcio advised those "orthodox Marxists" who disagreed to read Mao.[729] The protracted struggle the two envisioned needed a strong organisation, as taught again by Mao.[730]

High School Student Movement: Milan

Students unrest which shook Italy around 1968 was characterised by the fact that apart from universities, high school students were also active. A group of Milanese high school called Iniziativa Comunista was inspired by Mao's words according to which intellectuals could show their commitment to revolution only by uniting with the working people. In February 1972, they wrote a document where they tackled the issue of inserting the high school student movement into the more general struggle of the popular masses. However, the working class always had to be the leading class: "the working class must manage everything," according to a popular Cultural Revolution slogan. Following Mao, this was part of the issue of solving contradictions within the people. According to

[727] Ibid., 40.
[728] Ibid., 41.
[729] Ibid., 54.
[730] Ibid., 65.

Iniziativa Comunista, the "political character" of the student movement "was revealed in the vast availability of student and intellectual cadres […] to deny their role of bourgeois intellectuals putting themselves at 'the service of the people' as a consequence."[731]

Anarcho-Maoism: The Reception of the Cultural Revolution in Italian Anarchism

Remarkably, *Umanità nova* began to assess the Cultural Revolution only in early 1967. This might have been either because of slow incoming news, or because the anarchist press was primarily busy with other issues. However, Umberto Marzocchi says in a January 1967 article that, notwithstanding the "gregarious indoctrination of the dictatorship, the events which shake China concern us closely, deeply." Marzocchi describes China as in complete chaos, with the army sometimes neutral, sometimes supporting the Party hierarchy, sometimes supporting the Red Guards. This, however, may have been a symptom of the "disintegration of the state apparatus." Whereas Marzocchi clearly describes the senseless violence of the Cultural Revolution, he positively notes that with the spontaneous strikes in Canton, Shanghai and Nanking, "the struggle has taken on different, more serious aspects, closer to the real situation which characterises the economic and social turmoil of the country," with "workers' demands for fairer living conditions." According to Marzocchi, in China two kinds of struggles were going on: one struggle carried out by the Chinese workers' struggle and one struggle for power at the top of state apparatuses. However, he thought that workers' struggles were "seriously set up and largely outdoing" the struggle for power.

Seemingly, Shanghai was the centre of the struggle, and Marzocchi quoted the Japanese newspaper *Hinon Kezai* saying that in Shanghai "the people seemingly took power 'with methods […] reminiscent of the principles of the Paris Commune' and, like the communards, they seemingly 'confiscated real estate and property belonging to the new capitalists to put them under revolutionary

[731] AFF, FNSI, Busta 52, 11.1.1 Cittadino, Collettivo Iniziativa Comunista, "Gli studenti medi per la rivoluzione socialista," February 1972.

control.'" Marzocchi was not quite sure whether "the working class" had really defeated "local bureaucratic Party structures," or whether "the workers had been overcome and aligned by the Maoist group."[732] Though unsure and full of doubts, *Umanità nova* was clearly following the Chinese events, and was possibly sympathetic to a Commune-like revolution. Moreover, Marzocchi quoted Franco Gerardi from the socialist newspaper *Avanti!*, according to which

> the workers of Canton and Shanghai […] resemble like water drops the mariners of Kronstadt and the workers of Budapest, that is those workers' *élites*, those more conscious and evolved workers' masses which inevitably clash with communism when communism remains war communism and shows itself uncapable of taking the tiring road of the peaceful construction of socialism.

Therefore, Marzocchi commented: "Certainly, it is not anarchism as a social doctrine which penetrates Chinese populations, but the aspiration to liberty, for those who have taken conscience of their situation and feel all the weight of authoritarian power resting on their shoulders, it becomes a necessity to revolt."[733] According to *Umanità nova*, what was happening in China confirmed Bakunin's warnings that the state could not be absorbed.

The anarchist journal *Volontà*, similar to *Umanità nova*, presented possibilist tones towards the Cultural Revolution. In a March 1967 article Alberto Moroni drew an explicit parallel between what he called "the second Chinese Revolution" and the world-wide youth rebellion. Moroni was sure that the Cultural Revolution had brought Chinese socialism to "break the banks of the Party and of the state." The evolving Chinese socialism was "neither organised by the state nor led by the Party, but realised by the people."[734] Remarkably, Moroni accused Italian Maoists of not understanding the libertarian character of what was happening in China.[735]

Umanità nova reviewed positively enough Mao's red book in March 1967, quoting concepts with which anarchists could agree. For example, controversies could "be solved only with democratic

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[732] Umberto Marzocchi, "Cina in subbuglio," *Umanità nova*, January 28, 1967, 1.
[733] Ibid., 2.
[734] Alberto Moroni, "La seconda rivoluzione cinese e la ribellione dei giovani," *Volontà*, March 1967, 129.
[735] Ibid., 130.

methods, with discussion, criticism, persuasion and education;" they "cannot be solved with coercive and authoritarian means." Moreover, "desires freely expressed by the masses, decisions which they themselves have taken and those we take from them" had to be taken into consideration. The reviewers made clear that almost all of the "most serious correspondents of the world press […] agreed on the tendentially egalitarian character of street demonstrations." Going further, *Umanità nova* anarchists said that "a few sentences come close to anarchism, for example […]: 'authoritarianism is a mistake in any job, […] because it violates the principle of free acceptance."[736] Following the usual interpretation, *Umanità nova* anarchists argued that in the Cultural Revolution and in Mao's thought there was a *potential* for anarchy, but this could not be developed by Mao and his acolytes. Hope rested in the Chinese masses which could have potentially interpreted anti-authoritarian drives in the right way.

In April 1967, Gianni Furlotti underlined that, notwithstanding the fact that it was almost impossible to know exactly what was happening in China, the Cultural Revolution had "spectacular mass dimensions" with "new ferments, instinctively orientated towards libertarian solutions of socialism."[737] Even when generally criticising Chinese and Italian Maoists, *Umanità nova* was convinced that "libertarian islands" existed "in the larger sea of the Chinese 'Cultural' Revolution," which "certainly must have their own activity and their own public of sympathisers."[738] In August 1967 Alfredo Mazzucchelli reiterated that the Chinese events had to be analysed without "prejudices and commonplace beliefs." In fact, he argued that the Chinese leaders were "much more tolerant towards economic experiments in libertarian direction." Mazzucchelli argued that Mao had had the merit of having dismissed the Russian-Stalin-like methods of agricultural collectivisation to create innovative communes.[739] In May 1968 Domenico Demma reiterated that the principle of socialism

[736] "Il pensiero di Mao Tse Tung," *Umanità nova*, March 18, 1967, 3.
[737] Gianni Furlotti, "Cina senza volto," *Umanità nova*, April 29, 1967, 2.
[738] Gianni Furlotti, "Abbasso l'anarchia!," *Umanità nova*, May 20, 1967, 2.
[739] Alfredo Mazzucchelli, "Fallimento di una politica," *Umanità nova*, August 5, 1967, 1.

not only as a distribution system, but as a "revolutionary moral," was the libertarian, "great leitmotiv of the Chinese Cultural Revolution."[740]

Umanità nova was sure that in China a struggle was ongoing conducted by "a large part of the Chinese people and […] our anarchist comrades." The magazine was sure that Chinese anarchism was growing during the Cultural Revolution, and that many Chinese workers, peasants, students were "violently demonstrating against 'the dictatorship of the proletariat.'"[741] Though in 1974 *Umanità nova* considered finished the Cultural Revolution, even though anarchist activity was continuing.[742] *Umanità nova* commented on Mao's death in September 1976 with a very critical article.[743]

Conclusions

As we have seen, between the 1960s and the 1970s Italian students were involved in a strongly antiauthoritarian movement, which took much inspiration from Maoism. However, the student movement was not exclusively antiauthoritarian, since it contained drives to democratise the education system fighting against classism and to wage a revolution in sciences and mentality. The power of the antiauthoritarian drive of Maoism was probably enhanced by the vagueness (or one may say the flexibility) of slogans like: "It is right to revolt!" Such a vague slogan leaves unanswered questions like: Why to revolt? How? Against whom? Probably, this vagueness was part of the success of Maoism among Italian students, who could freely choose what and who they should revolt against, according to the situation. After all, some of those who participated in the high school student movement admitted much later that they went to demonstrations shouting "Long live Marx! Long live Lenin! Long live Mao Zedong!" without knowing who these characters were.[744] To paraphrase

[740] Domenico Demma, "Il dibattito su Cuba e la Cina," *Umanità nova*, May 25, 1968, 2.
[741] A.R., "La dittatura del proletariato il maoismo e gli anarchici cinesi", *Umanità nova*, July 20, 1968, 3.
[742] M.V., "Cina: rivoluzione o lotta per il potere?," *Umanità nova*, March 23, 1974, 3.
[743] "Mao Tse Tung," *Umanità nova*, September 18, 1976, 1.
[744] Personal conversation with Marzia Deiana.

a joke by Giobbe Covatta, "when we were students we protested at an age when we were old enough to protest but young enough not to know why we were doing it."

Conversely, the phenomenon of anarchist interest towards China concerned an ideology with deeper roots and which was traditionally hostile to authoritarianism. However remarkable, it was a rather marginal phenomenon. The antiauthoritarian drives of the Cultural Revolution were considered potentially positive, since they could have evolved into real anarchy. Since the Cultural Revolution was an extremely complex phenomenon, these hypotheses were partially grounded. In fact, the Cultural Revolution *also* had drives for direct democracy and self-management, together with a senseless cult of personality and acts of unheard of violence.[745] Since the country plunged into real chaos during the Cultural Revolution, unsurprisingly foreign anarchists could find in the events political tendencies to their liking. However, they might have misinterpreted official Chinese chronicles of the events which mentioned "anarchist" activity. In fact, "anarchist" was a sort of swear word in Marxist parlance, and it could be used freely to describe any form of resistance or opposition to state socialism. Therefore, the described unrest might have really taken place, but its "anarchist" character is under doubt. Moreover, the supposed libertarian character of the Cultural Revolution was linked with world youth movements which were shaking the world at the turn of the 1970s, and the two were subsumed into the category of "antiauthoritarianism." Remarkably, however, this possibilist attitude was partial and was always linked with strong criticism of the Maoist state. In conclusion, I may say that the cautiously favourable attitude of Italian anarchists towards the Cultural Revolution was partially founded, and partially misled by inaccurate knowledge of the facts and wishful thinking.

[745] Mobo Gao, *The Battle for China's Past* (London: Pluto Press, 2008).

Two Party-less Pro-Chinese Experiments:

The *Quaderni Piacentini* and the Italian *Monthly Review*

Introduction

In his classical work, Niccolai dedicates a section to "party-less Maoist journals," which he defines "the paper tiger," probably not without a degree of irony.[746] By this, he probably meant that these journals may be defined "weaker," because of their independence from a political party. However, following Mao's dialectical meaning of the famous expression, I argue that this definition may be interpreted in two ways: these journals may in fact be deemed weaker, but also stronger, if we consider independence from a political party a point of strength.[747] In this chapter, I will look at two such "paper tigers," the *Quaderni piacentini* and the Italian *Monthly Review*.

Firstly, the *Quaderni piacentini* will be analysed. Founded in 1962, they were the first political-publishing experiment which made reference to China in Italy. However, here only the production from 1966 to 1976 will be analysed, since the production from 1962 until 1966 is analysed in the first chapter. After the breakout of the Cultural Revolution, the *Quaderni piacentini* were certainly attentive to Chinese issues. It is safe to say that the attitude of the journal towards China was one of sympathy. The journal supported China definitely more than the Soviet Union. In the analysed timespan, the *Quaderni piacentini* published China-related articles written by different authors. However, Edoarda Masi was certainly the prominent writer. Unsurprisingly, she fulfilled this role because she was a specialist of the field. However, she clearly fused the role of the specialist with

[746] "'La tigre di carta': Le riviste maoiste senza partito," in *Quando la Cina era vicina* (Pisa: BFS Edizioni, 1998), 71-101.
[747] Judith Balso, "Paper tiger," in *Afterlives of Chinese Communism: Political Concepts from Mao to Xi*, edited by Christian Sorace, Ivan Franceschini, and Nicholas Loubere (Acton-London: Australian National University Press-Verso, 2019), 161-167.

that of the militant. She often wrote profound remarks, though never hiding her sympathies for communism. As we shall see, however, the *Quaderni piacentini* were not simply a pro-Chinese publishing-political experiment, since they saw China as a part of a broader picture where revolutions in developing countries were the protagonists. As we shall also see, the *Quaderni* showed that the Chinese trend in the Italian Left was not destined to be eternal: progressing during the 1970s, delusion towards China grew more and more widespread in large parts of the Italian Left.

Secondly, the Italian edition of the *Monthly Review* will be analysed. More precisely, the *Monthly Review* originally was a US journal founded in 1949 by the American Marxists Paul Sweezy and Leo Hubermann. Its Italian edition began to be published in 1968, by the Dedalo publishing house.[748] In this work dedicated to Italian Maoism, exclusively the contents of the Italian edition of the *Monthly Review* will be analysed. Therefore, here the term "*Monthly Review*" refers exclusively to the Italian edition. Though to define the *Monthly Review* a "Maoist" journal may be a bit of an exaggeration, it undoubtedly analysed the Chinese phenomena in great detail and with a degree of sympathy. Strongly critical remarks, however, were not absent, as we shall see. Therefore, an analysis of its China-related contents is appropriate, to add one more piece to the mosaic of Italian Maoism. The *Monthly Review* was certainly a Marxist journal, with an academic tinge. That means that it often hosted articles and comments written by academics, and this possibly helped to give it an authoritative image. However, it could have also reduced the number of potential readers. Average readers may have found it difficult to read long, complex academic articles.

Chinese *Quaderni*?

Unsurprisingly, the *Quaderni piacentini* could not leave without attention the Chinese Cultural Revolution, begun in 1966. Interestingly, in January 1967 the journal published in writing a lecture given by Panzieri in Siena in March 1962, at the Youth Federation of the Italian Socialist Party, titled

[748] Ibid., 96.

"Lotte operaie nello sviluppo capitalistico."[749] Panzieri had died in 1964, and the text was preceded by a comment of the Italian Maoist Vittorio Rieser. What is remarkable in Rieser's comment is that he analyses Panzieri's text in light of the ongoing Cultural Revolution. Rieser underlined Panzieri's conviction that "revolutionary struggle in advanced capitalist countries is not a preliminary condition for revolutions in underdeveloped countries," not even for those revolutions to become socialist. But "it is a preliminary condition, *all in all*, for them to continue to develop in a socialist sense and to defeat the powerful 'degenerative' pushes coming from their objective condition." According to Reiser, this Panzieri's indication was essential to foster workers' struggle in Italy, "at a moment when the Chinese Cultural Revolution is probably enlarging beyond the so far foreseeable limits the 'capacities of socialist revolution' of an underdeveloped country."[750]

Edoarda Masi kept on analysing the Chinese events after the breakout of the Cultural Revolution, warning that strong destructive pushes were detectable.[751] Edoarda Masi collaborated with the Quaderni piacentini as a translator too, for example translating Lu Hsun's writings on revolutionary literature.[752]

Interestingly, in July 1967 the *Quaderni piacentini* published a special issue on imperialism and revolution in Latin America, in collaboration with the journals *Quaderni rossi* and *Classe e stato*. Within this monographic issue, an article whose author is unknown analysed the situations of Cuba, Vietnam and China and their relevance for worldwide revolution. According to the author, these three countries had something in common, that is they all had a revolutionary strategy alternative to that of the USSR. China was described as the first country which achieved revolution autonomously from the USSR. However, the author argued, China had a few traits in common with Vietnam and Cuba. Firstly, all these countries were for a "multiplication of revolutions," therefore they thought that

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[749] Raniero Panzieri, "Lotte operaie nello sviluppo capitalistico," *Quaderni piacentini* 29, January 1967, 45-63.
[750] Vittorio Rieser, introduction to Panzieri's article "Lotte operaie nello sviluppo capitalistico," *Quaderni piacentini* 29, January 1967, 41-44: 44.
[751] Edoarda Masi, "Notte sulla rivoluzione culturale cinese," *Quaderni piacentini* 30, April 1967, 2-22.
[752] Lu Hsun, "Due scritti di Lu Hsun," *Quaderni piacentini* 30, April 1967, 23-32.

political success could come only by fostering revolutions in as many countries as possible. In these they were radically different from the USSR, which was sclerotised in the "socialism in one country" formula. Secondly, all three countries developed a "political theory of guerrilla." Not only they saw guerrilla warfare as the only possible option in their condition, but also advocated its superiority over "power warfare."[753] Moreover, they considered guerrilla warfare a *political*, and not only a military means.[754] Thirdly, all considered class analysis important, and specially cherished mobilisation among peasants. Fourthly, they saw a crucial link between socialist revolution and anti-imperialist struggle.[755] Fifthly, they all had a new conception of the party. All in all, the *Quaderni piacentini* thought that the divergences between China and the USSR were deep and insurmountable. In this conflict, the author had not doubt: you had to be on China's side. This article is relevant because it tries to give theorical support to three evocative symbols of those years. China, Cuba, Vietnam were certainly all part of the collective imagination of the Left of the time, but theorising clear common lines among them was quite different from simply having them as unlinked points of reference.

The article on Cuba, China and Vietnam was followed by a Mao's text on revolutionary and counterrevolutionary classes in anti-imperialist struggle. The *Quaderni piacentini* interestingly implied that, though written about the Chinese situation, Mao's indications could be useful also for Latin American revolutionary struggle, in fields like armed struggle, the role of the peasantry, the relation between bourgeois-democratic and socialist revolution, and on class alliances. Clearly, the

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[753] "Cina, Cuba, Vietnam," *Quaderni piacentini* 31, July 1967, 105-119: 112.

[754] On Che Guevara's political theory of guerrilla warfare, see: Marco Gabbas, "Guerrilla War and Hegemony: Gramsci and Che," *Tensões Mundiais / World Tensions* v. 13. n. 25, (July-December 2017): 53-76.

[755] See: Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015). In this book the author argues that during the Cold War the Third World was characterised by two models of revolution, the anti-imperialist and the socialist one. Friedman seems to imply that each of these two models was adopted by one of the two communist powers: while the USSR was for socialist revolution, China was for anti-imperialist revolution. In the introduction, Friedman uses Guevara as an example of socialist revolution as incompatible with the anti-imperialist one. This view, however, is extremely problematic, since the Cuban Revolution as a process (and Guevara as a leader/ideologue) are in effect an evident example of union of the two. This is shown by an accurate exam of Guevara's works.

Quaderni showed Mao as an author relevant not only to China, but who could be exported to other countries.

In November 1968, the *Quaderni piacentini* published the famous *Renmin Ribao* communiqué which violently denounced the Soviet crackdown against Czechoslovakia, and with which the journal basically agreed. In March 1969 Edoarda Masi positively reviewed a translation of Mao's works published by the Edizioni Oriente,[756] while in July of the same year Willian Hinton further analysed the Cultural Revolution after a book on the subject[757] (positively reviewed by Edoarda Masi).[758]

In November 1969 Edoarda Masi self-reflectively analysed the influence of Maoism on the European Left. Masi was aware at the time that Chinese influence on the European Left was linked with two important facts: the students' revolt and the crisis of communist parties. Masi noted that China became influential in Europe within a framework of "Third-Worldism" which was becoming popular in those years.[759] More specifically, China "began to be not anymore the far place of on exotic socialism," and the polemic which it started seriously involved the French and the Italian communist parties.[760] But, more precisely, what linked China with unrest in Western Europe? Masi noted that in May-June 1968 the official Chinese press gave the students' revolt of capitalist countries an importance never given before to any event of international politics. Not by chance, Masi argues, the Chinese press often referred to the previous European revolutionary tradition when commenting these events – like links between the French May and the Paris Commune.[761] Therefore, this "attitude strongly contributed to weld students' revolt in Europe with the Chinese Revolution."[762]

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[756] Edoarda Masi, "Un'antologia di Mao," *Quaderni piacentini* 37, March 1969, 141-142.
[757] William Hinton, "'Fanshen' e la rivoluzione culturale," *Quaderni piacentini* 38, July 1969, 166-185.
[758] Edoarda Masi, Review of: Wlliam Hinton, *Fanshen: un villaggio cinese nella rivoluzione* (Einaudi 1969), *Quaderni piacentini* 38, July 1969, 220.
[759] Edoarda Masi, "La concezione delle classi e della lotta di classe in Mao e la sua influenza nella sinistra europea," *Quaderni piacentini* 39, November, 1969, 51-68: 57.
[760] Ibid., 59.
[761] Ibid., 64.
[762] Ibid., 64-65.

However, Masi argued that European students' revolt was characterised by its being subversive for its own sake, and here China comes into play. "It is at this point that the existence of socialist China and Mao's thought have a decisive influence among the young revolting students. Reference to China is first of all the search of a way out from the revolt for its own sake, and as such doomed to defeat, like any youth revolt" generically longing for freedom, without any precise ideas on power or on how to change existing social structures.[763] However, Masi pointed out that Maoism could take root in Europe thanks to the substratum of communist tradition. After all, Mao was the last of the Marxists, though an original one. Apart from being an instrument of political renovation, Masi admitted that Maoism also contributed to the birth of "neo-Stalinist" political movements – having the M-Ls in mind. These movements, however, could be nothing more than a "parody" of the Chinese Communist Party, and Masi argued that they could be defined a phenomenon internal to the official communist parties.[764] Notwithstanding the negative sides, Masi was convinced that Maoism could constitute a "remedy to spontaneous, populist, anarchist or pseudo-religious revolt, because it stimulates the search of an alternative line of development."[765]

In April 1970, Jack Gray wrote about Mao's economic ideas which, in Gray's opinion, could be of interest for other countries in a condition similar to China. [766]

In July 1970, the scholar Gianni Sofri – brother of the Lotta Continua leader Adriano Sofri – published an article where he tried to link China with Vietnam. Sofri argued that after an initial conviction of China being nothing more than a not too dangerous vassal of the Soviet Union, the United States had to face a different, sour reality. Not only China was not willing to be a satellite state of the USSR, but China began an active campaign of support of movements of national independence all over the world. Assessing this international role, McNamara doubted whether China may be a simple "instigator,"

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[763] Ibid., 65.
[764] Ibid., 66.
[765] Ibid., 67.
[766] Jack Gray, "Le idee economiche di Mao," *Quaderni piacentini* 40, April 1970, 67-72.

with the masses in different countries otherwise inert and unwilling to fight. However, McNamara thought that China was nothing less than a "sanctuary" of world revolution.[767] As far as Vietnam was concerned, Sofri seemed to imply that it was a rather small battlefield compared to the Chinese giant. Being China the real danger, Sofri quoted articles from the American press which openly suggested large-scale war and even "conquest" of China.[768] In conclusion, Sofri argued that, effectively, US imperialism could attack China, like a sort of dying giant. However, he also maintained that US war against China could be the trigger of a really worldwide revolution.[769]

In March 1972, a few years after 1968, Edoarda Masi wrote an article titled "Critica e autocritica della nuova sinistra," where she underlined a few negative evolutions of Italian leftist movements. According to Masi, a basic problem of the Italian New Left was that, lacking the necessary information on Chinese internal or foreign policy, many expressed opinions influenced by "emotional reactions or ideological prejudices."[770] Fundamentally, Edoarda Masi argued that the new movements were evolving precisely along the lines she feared at the end of 1969, as a generational revolt without clear goals. Masi was afraid that the young were looking for "comfort in mythology. Mao Zedong's *thought* [emphasis in the original] (out of verbal statements and slogans)" was not studied. Rather, refuge was sought in a "pantheon of saints: Lenin, Mao, Che Guevara, Ho Chi-min… Then, depending on the factions, second-category saints, or demons: Stalin, Trotsky."[771] In sum, Masi sadly noted that the novelty represented by the Chinese Revolution was not being productively digested by the Italian Left. When faced with such a great novelty, two approaches were basically possible: either ignoring it, or trying to interpret it within the old frameworks. Masi was convinced that this second solution was being adopted by the Italian Left. Not by chance, Masi noted that all who were telling

[767] Gianni Sofri, "Dal Vietnam alla Cina," *Quaderni piacentini* 41, July 1970, 16-25: 23.
[768] Ibid., 22.
[769] Ibid., 25.
[770] Edoarda Masi, "Critica e autocritica della nuova sinistra," *Quaderni piacentini* 46, March 1972, 59-73. 59.
[771] Ibid., 62.

something new about China were young Americans foreign to the Marxist tradition: Hinton, Belden, Lattimore, Wales, Smeedley, Strong, Schurmann, Snow.[772]

Masi also noted that according to a widespread belief of the time, all those standing at the left of the PCI were supporters of the Chinese Revolution. However, all this "collective pro-Chinese attitudes [*filocinesismo*]" was a "mystification." In reality, Masi critically denounced that "China has been assumed by each current of the new left as a mirror of itself and as an instrument of self-confirmation." Alternatively, some manipulated China "to counterpose or to substitute it to the USSR." What was worse, China was sometimes used as an opportunistic advertisement, since it had become "fashionable" among the young.[773] Masi sadly declared that no one really looked for a relation with China. However, she conceded that the so far best interpretative attempt had been done by the *manifesto* group.

Masi noted that the "spontaneous movement was attracted by China with the Cultural Revolution," since "the young, especially the students, saw the red guards as their own mirrored image, especially because of the anti-repression aspect of their revolt. They looked on China for a fragment of themselves." However, Masi lamented that this crucial fact had gone unnoticed. According to Masi, the lack of seriousness of the Italian Left's approach to China was demonstrated also by the "deluded lovers' attitude taken by many organised political groups following the recent developments of Chinese foreign policy." [774] Paradoxically, Masi contended that this superficial attitude was influenced by the mass media. Masi concluded her not too optimistic remarks by saying that for Italy China could be nothing "less and nothing more" than a mirror. "We are another people; even our subaltern classes belong to another people, and they cannot at all escape towards China." By saying this, however, Mas was not arguing that Chinese events should not be followed. Quite the reverse, they had to be followed with "passion," which had to be "equal to distance. It is a story which

[772] Ibid., 67.
[773] Ibid., 68.
[774] Ibid., 69.

concerns us directly but in which, at the same time, we do not take part. We will only as long as we will proceed, here, to the formation of an alternative praxis and conscience."[775]

In 1973, Franco Fortini wrote an article about his second trip to China. Similarly to Edoarda Masi, he pointed out that at the time of writing many Leftists were deluded by Chinese behaviour. To give an example of this delusion, he mentioned a wall writing he had seen in Florence. "*Cina, Cina – tu non sei più vicina – se non ci sei più tu – ritorna il buon Gesù*" ("China, China – you no longer near – if are no longer here – good Jesus comes back"). Fortini saw this kind of feelings as seeing "China as an alternative to a derided tradition; but, in reality, with identical mythical function."[776] Fortini was quite critical of the need of a "guide state," a "ghost, substitute of a reality which you want de facto escape." The alliterative slogan "La Cina è vicina" (title of a famous Marco Bellocchio's film, though in reality not centred on China) was a sort of re-edition of "Ha da venì Baffone," ("Stalin will come") said in the late 1940s. According to Fortini, these mythical visions could have various negative consequences, ranging from an urge to justify everything to the "sufferance of the betrayed lover."[777]

Conscious that it was difficult for a foreign traveller to gauge something of the Chinese reality, Fortini nonetheless gave an account of a trip he had done to China. It was possibly because of this consciousness that Fortini saw deeper than many other foreign travellers, and pointed out a few negative things. Fortini was told that in Chinese libraries more books could be found, since many had been banned during the Cultural Revolution. However, he had the impression that reading was not widespread in China. All in all, Fortini thought that forms of Chinese communication towards outside were "mediocre or incomprehensible." "Propaganda posters" were "unbearable, Soviet in the worst sense of the word."[778] However, he conceded that sometimes attempts to mesh Chinese traditional forms of art expression with modernity gave positive results.

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[775] Ibid., 73.
[776] Franco Fortini, "Ancora in Cina," *Quaderni piacentini* 48-49, 1973, 119-139: 119.
[777] Ibid., 120.
[778] Ibid., 122.

Fortini had also difficulty in understanding contradictory policies regarding ancient monuments: while the ancient Peking walls had been demolished – a choice he termed "demented" – other precious archaeological findings were advertised and cherished.[779] Overall, "the visitor" in China had the impression that there was a "prohibition ordered on an entire part of the way of being, of living of men."[780] Fortini was puzzled: what was the truth? Was there art at all in China? Possibly, there was art, but expressed in original, invisible forms? Fortini was not able to definitely answer these questions. Similarly, he had the impression that apart from Mao's work, he could not see valuable contributions in historical, economic, philosophical reflection.

Fortini thought that Lin Biao's disappearance had been "communicated to the world […] in an […] indecent way,"[781] with "magical-didactic speeches."[782] He thought that anywhere in the world there was a distance between political evaluation and direct experience: however, in China this distance was appalling. This led leftist Western visitors to different reactions: while some would try to justify everything, with arguments like "after all the world is alike," others were simply appalled by the extreme "ambiguity" of everything.[783] Fortini went as far as to say the sometimes conservative observers interpreted China more correctly.

Edoarda Masi seemingly returned to the theme of foreign visitors' trips to China in an article written in 1974[784] offering a really original view. When reading accounts of foreign travellers in socialist countries, even the accustomed historian tends to divide them into two large different groups: the naïve who believe all what they are shown – those whom Paul Hollander defined "political pilgrims" - and the sceptical who believe nothing.[785] However, in her articles Edoarda Masi breaks all schemes. Masi admits that these were basically very politicised tourist travels. However, her judgement on

[779] Ibid., 123.
[780] Ibid., 124.
[781] Ibid., 127.
[782] Ibid., 128.
[783] Ibid., 129.
[784] Edoarda Masi, "Turismo in Cina e informazione," *Quaderni piacentini* 53-54, December 1974, 141-148.
[785] Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims* (New York: University Press of America, 1990).

them was twofold. On the one hand, she pointed out that these trips were probably the best organised in the world, also because of the incredible professionalism and spirit of self-sacrifice of the involved Chinese personnel. On the other hand, she argued that this kind of travels had to be assessed on their own terms, as an experience which had to be – it could not have been otherwise – radically different from years-long study of a foreign reality, or from high-profile political contact between recognised counterparts. Problems arose, Masi, argues, when someone thought that these travels *could be considered* study-political trips, or anything more than tourist travels. Masi argued that the problem lied in Italy. Italian references of China which organised these trips tended to give them a political significance which went beyond their simply being tourist trips.

Masi sourly commented that Italian representatives of various pro-Chinese parties went to China thinking that they could discuss high politics with high-ranking Chinese officials as equals. However, she bluntly stated that this kind of dialogue was just not possible. In order for such a dialogue to develop, Masi argued, the Italian counterpart would have had to represent a hegemonic force "of the anticapitalistic movement among the working and subaltern classes."[786] Masi bluntly stated that in Italy for the time being there was no force even vaguely resembling this entity. She critically argued that various deleterious attitudes prevailed in the Italian pro-Chinese Left. There were unserious attempts of uncritical imitation of China, or a permanent state of suspicion, typical of those already deluded once and afraid of being deluded once more. However, how Masi defined the attitude of the Italian Communist Party is worth attention. She argued that, beginning with Togliatti, the PCI showed "a sort or benevolent agnosticism, allowing to consider socialist both the USSR and the satellite states and China, to classify as unpleasant episodes (to be avoided with good will and moderation) even armed conflicts" which were clear signs of a "permanent cold war." Moreover, the PCI tried hard not to discover its political "transformism hiding under supposed polycentrism (that too, after all, not declared anymore, because too compromising)." Masi's conclusion was blunt: the attempts of many

[786] Masi, "Turismo in Cina," 145.

Italian "Leftists" trying to build relations with China were just an illusion, because China considered them "leading groups enemies not only of China but of the exploited classed of every country."[787]

Masi's article prompted a response by Francesco Ciafaloni published in 1975,[788] followed again by a reply by Masi.[789] According to Ciafaloni, the problem lied in China, too, because this "folly" was encouraged by China, which accredited "as the only Italian newspaper in China a newspaper no one reads and as the only Italian workers' party a party which does not exist." Ciafaloni was talking about the PCd'I (m-l), and admitted he did not know why China considered them "leaders of the Italian workers' movement."[790] One possible reason was the Chinese may have been just not well informed about Italian politics. Another may have been that they only cared to recognise a party which acted as their mouthpiece, no matter how small, as long as it countered Italian revisionism, that is, the PCI.

Ciafaloni, however, wished that the organisation of these travels could improve, and knew that talks on the issue were ongoing between the two sides. As means of improvement, he proposed organising better trips to less sites, and providing Chinese courses. Ciafaloni disagreed with Masi in that he felt that she was claiming a sort "unknowableness" of China, whereas he felt that those who did know something about China had a sort of duty to elaborate and to spread their knowledge, though carefully and modestly. Ciafaloni claimed to be hungry of information on China, and explaining everything with the "thousand-year old tradition of isolation of China, of closure to the foreigner" did not satisfy him.[791]

Masi's reply is revealing not as much because of her disagreements with Ciafaloni – she basically reiterates the already expressed views – as because of new information she gives on the general context of the time. Masi argued that the time of writing – 1975 – the "context of the Italian 'new

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[787] Ibid., 148.
[788] Francesco Ciafaloni, "Del viaggiare in Cina," *Quaderni piacentini* 55, May 1975, 114-117.
[789] Edoarda Masi, reply to Ciafaloni, *Quaderni piacentini* 55, May 1975, 118-127.
[790] Ciafaloni, "Del viaggiare," 114.
[791] Ibid., 116.

Left' – if M.L. groups are excluded – is largely of reticent hostility, or at least of indifference, towards People's China," while the PCI was keeping on attacking it.[792] This seems to imply that by the mid-1970s much of the Italian Left had grown deluded if not hostile towards China, probably because its turn in foreign policy. Masi was convinced that the PCI attacked China not only because it disagreed with on an international level. In fact, PCI official line was to "speak about China in terms of polycentrism, saying as little evil as possible, *exactly so that what, of China, does not regard China but our positions and our choices does not come out*" (emphasis in the original). Masi was convinced that Chinese ideas could have put the PCI in serious trouble. Not knowing what to do, the PCI allegedly just waited, and were helped by the "immaturity and political ignorance of the Italian New Left."[793]

The Cultural Revolution Seen from the US

The Italian *Monthly Review* began to deal with China in its very first, January1968 issue. In the simply titled article "La rivoluzione culturale in Cina," Sweezy and Hubermann gave an introduction to the whole phenomenon, largely quoting the official Resolution of the CCP Central Committee on the Cultural Revolution, organised in 16 points.[794] They denied that the Cultural Revolution was an exacerbation of political life exclusively imputable to the factor of external threats, and clearly portrayed it with certain sympathy. They defined the Resolution of the Cultural Revolution a "rational, radical and human document, to which a real revolutionary can hardly move any founded criticism."[795] They absolutely found rational and credible that in a phase of rapid economic development a privileged social stratum may arise, and they agreed that its power had to be limited, however partially and realistically. Always realistically, they claimed that both analysis and criticism had to be used describing the Chinese events: they did not deny violence and excesses, and admitted

[792] Masi, reply, 121.
[793] Ibid., 123.
[794] Leo Hubermann, Paul M. Sweezy, "La rivoluzione culturale in Cina," *Monthly Review*, January 1968, 48-53.
[795] Ibid., 50.

that Mao's cult was sometimes brought to ridiculous extremes. However, they somewhat relativized excesses, by saying in way of example that one should not expect anything less if a similar situation arose in the US.

Sweezy and Hubermann admitted that "understanding the Cultural Revolution" was difficult. However, they claimed that many misleading interpretations arose from the simple mistake of taking the Soviet experience as the single unit of comparison. The Chinese situation should be analysed in its own terms, they argued, and by saying this they clearly expressed their cautious approval of Chinese policies. Sweezy and Hubermann went as far as comparing Mao with Lenin, and as claiming that Lenin would have probably ended up in unleashing something similar to the Cultural Revolution, had he been in a similar situation. In this way, they were somewhat "blessing" Mao with Lenin's legacy.[796]

Another author, Branko Bugonovitch, was sure that the winner in the Cultural Revolution "could not be but Mao Zedong," as the title of his article had it.[797] His opinion was founded, apart from political factors, on Mao's supposed obstinacy: "Mao would rather die than renounce to everything which is essential to his general line."[798] Bugonovitch saw Mao as an opposer rather than the majority in the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, Bugonovitch was convinced that the essence of the Cultural Revolution was to avoid Stalin's mistakes: that is, it was a political change meant to avoid confusion after the leader's death. This last observation is crucial: in fact, as we shall see, the interpretation of Mao in the Italian Left could be fundamentally divided into two parts: while some saw Mao as Stalin's legitimate and deign continuer, others underlined the differences between the two, and convincedly supported Mao in opposition to Stalin.

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[796] Leo Hubermann, Paul M. Sweezy, "Capire la rivoluzione culturale," *Monthly Review*, March 1968, 3-8.
[797] Branko Bugonovitch, "Il vincitore non può che essere Mao Tse-Tung," *Monthly Review*, March 1968, 16-18.
[798] Bugonovitch, "Il vincitore," 16.

Another writer on Chinese issues hosted by the Italian *Monthly Review* was the Polish-born K.S. Karol, who developed leftist leanings despite being the son of a rich Russian banker who had to emigrate after the October revolution. In an October 1968 he tried to summarise the past two years of Cultural Revolution, defining it a "return to an extreme form of proletarian democracy," and "new, and perhaps decisive page of the history of communism of our time."[799]

Remarkably for a China-friendly journal, the *Monthly Review* was not afraid to publish opinions critical of Mao Zedong, like Stanley Moore's article which criticised Marx's and Mao's "utopian theses."[800] Moore noted that different terms could be found in Marxian thought which referred to radically different projects of transformation. Whereas communism could have been reduced to an economic revolution changing the existing status quo, Marx often went much further than that, theorising that society (*Gesellschaft*) should ideally evolve into *Gemeinschaft*, a totally new form of human community. Quoting Marx's words, Moore wrote: "That self-confidence, that liberty which disappeared from the earth with the Greek, and that Christianity made disappear into the sky's blue fog, must me reawaken in men's hearts. Only then they will seek, as the highest goal, the passage from society (*Gesellschaft*) to a new community (*Gemeinschaft*)."[801] Moore was convinced that this concept of "new community" (*Gemeinschaft*) was the hotbed for strongly utopian visions, as opposed to mere intentions of economic revolution. More precisely, he held that Mao' "uninterrupted revolution" was an attempt to realise these extremely utopian views, and he mentioned the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution and the fight against material incentives as more precise examples. According to Moore, at "a theoretical level, these developments mark the last stages of the elimination from Marxism of its empirical and rational elements, its degeneration into a mass mysticism of rebirth in the *Gemeinschaft,*" whereas they practically meant an "unlimited and undisputed subordination of

[799] K.S. Karol, "Due anni di rivoluzione culturale," *Monthly Review*, October 1968, 18-23: 23.
[800] Stanley Moore, "Alcune tesi utopistiche in Marx e Mao," *Monthly Review*, July 1969, 12-16.
[801] Ibid., 12.

the individual to the collective will."[802] Interestingly, Moore explicitly links these utopian tendencies developed by Mao's version of Marxism to anarchism and to existentialism.[803]

The *Monthly Review* also dedicated a few contributions dedicated to the Cultural Revolution in Chinese Universities. This is a hardly surprising, since as we know schools and universities were among the main stages of this event. An entire August-September 1969 monographic issue was dedicated to the Cultural Revolution at the university of Peking.[804] The monographic issue was originally Victor Nee's thesis presented at Harvard University and the Italian *Monthly Review* published its translation. This review of the Cultural Revolution at the University of Peking followed the events beginning with their precedents at the time of the One Hundred Flowers' Campaign.

China Seen by Foreign Visitors: "Mythical" Maoism?

Though the *Monthly Review* had an academic tinge, praising, not always credible accounts written on red China by foreign visitors were not absent. This kind of accounts on red China made by foreign Maoists contributed to the growth of the myth of Maoist China. Quite aptly, Niccolai calls myth "a necessity." A myth is someone or something "able to polarise the aspirations and of a community or of an epoch, rising up as a privileged or transcendent symbol," or as an "ideal or ideological representation of reality, which, usually proposed by an intellectual or political élite, is embraced with almost mystical faith by a people or by a social group."[805] Niccolai notes that 1968 in particular had a various mythology which included characters as different as Mao, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. Mao and Maoist China occupied a not secondary place among the myths of the time, and this is partially because of positive accounts written by foreign – usually Western – visitors. The book *Dalla Cina*, published in 1971 by the Italian

[802] Ibid., 13.
[803] See the interest of Italian anarchism for Maoist China, chapter "Anarcho-Maoism." For an analysis of the differences between communism and anarchism, see: Domenico Losurdo, *Fuga dalla storia?* (Napoli: La scuola di Pitagora, 2012).

[805] Roberto Niccolai, *Quando la Cina era vicina* (Pisa: CFS Edizioni, 1998), 65.

Communist Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, is a case in point.[806] That these kinds of accounts were published also by "party-less Maoist journals" like the *Monthly Review*, and not only by the press of small Maoist groups, is certainly remarkable.

For example, the Italian *Monthly Review* published several accounts written by the American William Hinton. In one of them, Hinton described the Chinese Revolution in a Chinese village.[807] In another, he reported on the Cultural Revolution events at Tsinghua University, showing scenes of incredible violence among different students' factions and between students and workers.[808] However, he also worked personally in Chinese factories, giving largely positive accounts of working processes there, as compared to what he had seen in the United States. Perhaps not surprisingly, Hinton's accounts remind the idea of communist society as portrayed in the *German Ideology*, where a staggering development of productive forces de facto abolishes work as we know it, which allows human beings to "fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner."

Hinton describes an incredibly free factory, with no bosses and no one at all to control the workers. Workers were portrayed as completely free to did what they wanted: they took breaks as they pleased, played table tennis, began their shift late or ended it early. Hinton portrayed a strongly politicised factory, where shifts were preceded and followed by assemblies - which sometimes motivated workers' beginning their shift late or leaving work early. Moreover, he also claimed that family and gender relations were greatly democratised by the Cultural Revolution.[809]

A similar account was written by Annette T. Rubinstein on the drug problem. Rubinstein visited China in a group of fifteen foreign Marxists between December 1972 and January 1973. The title tellingly promised readers to tell how China "got rid of opium."[810] This choice for the title is

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[806] Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, *Dalla Cina. Dopo la rivoluzione culturale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1971).
[807] William Hinton, "La rivoluzione in un villaggio cinese," *Monthly Review*, December 1968, 25-28.
[808] Wllian Hinton, "La rivoluzione culturale all'Università Tsinghua," *Monthly Review*,November-December 1972, 11-20.
[809] William Hinton, "Riflessioni sulla Cina," *Monthly Review*, July-August 1973, 13-17.
[810] Annette T. Rubinstein, "Come la Cina si è liberata dell'oppio," *Monthly Review*, October 1973, 27-29.

stylistically relevant, since the Opium Wars (1839-1860) are considered to be the beginning of the "century of shame," which Mao and Chinese Communists deservedly ended.[811] However, in the article Rubinstein is telling her readers about the defeat of the drug problem in the China of the time. The narration is somewhat remindful of Hinton's. Doctors and other medical experts interviewed claimed to have never seen a drug addict, others said that they did not care about "long extinguished illnesses."[812] In fact, the author claimed that drug addiction had ceased to be a social problem in China by late 1951, and that it had been completely eliminated by 1952. However, Rubinstein told in the end about a successful campaign of eradication of the problem, based on mass mobilisation, on draconian measures against large drug bosses – up to death penalty – and on assistance to addicts and small dealers. Remarkably, Rubinstein described public initiatives in which confiscated opium was burnt down. The author explicitly linked this anti-drug campaign with the symbolic struggle against opium conducted during the Opium Wars, therefore drawing a significant line of continuity between the two phenomena, with opium seen not only as social scourge, but also as a threat to national sovereignty.

A similar article was written by the feminist Barbara Ehrenreich, who had also written many articles on the American health system. Also having been in China with a group visit in May-June 1974, she definitely considered the Cultural Revolution a democratic movement. She did not hide a degree of confusion, which in her opinion confirmed the democratic nature of the events, and underlined the importance the Cultural Revolution had for women's rights. She in fact claims to have spoken with many Chinese women, all of whom underlined the progress made in communist China and despised Confucius, whom Ehrenreich defined an "irrational antifeminist."[813] However, Ehrenreich noted the Cultural Revolution had made remarkable changes also in the health system, making the relation

[811] For an Italian ideological account on how the Chinese Revolution was the logical consequence of the Opium Wars, see: Renata Pisu, *Cina: dall'oppio al pensiero di Mao* (Milan: SEA, 1967).
[812] Rubinstein, "Come la Cina," 28.
[813] Barbara Ehrenreich, "La democrazia in Cina," *Monthly Review*, November-December 1974, 19-23: 20.

between doctors and patients more democratic. Interestingly, Ehrenreich noted that what she was describing was happening *after* the end of the Cultural Revolution, according to the 1966-69 periodisation. What, therefore, had she witnessed? Was that a second Cultural Revolution? She tended to answer in the negative. The Cultural Revolution, she claimed, had been a mass, collective event, whereas what she was witnessing seemed a sort of more introspective, individual reform – or, possibly, a sort of corrective of the excess of the Cultural Revolution.

On the same line of contributions written by foreign visitors to China, John Ehrenreich wrote in 1975 about a trip he had had in China in the spring of that year. Ehrenreich has been struck by the campaign on the dictatorship of the proletariat conducted in China at the time, which followed the campaign of criticism to Lin Piao and Confucius. Ehrenreich underlined that it was a study campaign rather than a real political movement.[814] The author carefully admitted that the expression "dictatorship of the proletariat" did not sound nice, since it smelled of "Stalinism."[815] However, he explained that the campaign was based on the basic Maoist assumption according to which class struggle does not end with the successful revolution, but continues under socialism. This was the meaning of the "dictatorship of the proletariat": it was a practice and a concept needed so that socialism could finally triumph. Ehrenreich noted that three main differences still reigned in China: between peasants and workers, between manual and intellectual labour, and between city and countryside. Many efforts were still needed to overcome these basic differences.

However, the fight against bourgeois law and conceptions, which were still alive in China, had to be gradual, due to material and ideological problems. Ehrenreich conveyed the conviction of Chinese Communists that China was not yet ready for the total elimination of bourgeois influence. Given the importance Mao gave the superstructure and human consciousness, this would have been a stage reachable only through work on ideology and consciousness. The author also underlined that the fight

[814] John Ehrenreich, "La dittatura del proletariat in Cina," *Monthly Review*, October 1975, 19-23.
[815] Ehrenreich, "La dittatura," 19.

to lessen the difference between manual and intellectual labour was being conducted through concrete steps. The president of the revolutionary committee of a factory claimed that the previous year cadres had "dedicated on average 150 days to workshop work," whereas in a commune "70-80 per cent of the cadres" performed "the same volume of physical work of the ordinary members of the commune." "All in China work in the factories or in the fields at least for a part of the year," claimed Ehrenreich, to the point that even doctors and nurses of a hospital could work in an annexed farm, breeding cows and pigs and growing vegetables - not to say students.[816] Ehrenreich was convinced that the 4th People's Congress, held in January 1975 and which was followed by this campaign, was not a victory of the "moderate and pragmatist led by Zhou Enlai" over Mao's leftists.[817] This view had in fact been spread by the Western press, but Chinese sources Ehrenreich consulted all ironically denied it: this was, they said, a sort of continuation of the Cultural Revolution.

Ideology and Academic Analysis

An in-depth analysis of the Italian *Monthly Review* shows that it was a journal "in-between," so to speak. That is, it hosted many articles and contributions of different kind. Apart from accounts written by foreign visitors to China, predominantly ideological contributions were present, together with supposedly academic analyses. It is difficult to judge here whether these analyses were based on sound scholarly work and how much they were influenced by ideological sympathy. However, their presence is remarkable, because they show the kind of editorial lined the publishers wanted to convey. It is as if they had wanted to say: we are pro-Chinese, but we can buttress our stance with sound factual arguments.

On the level of ideological analysis, George Thompson underlined the links and the lines of continuity of Lenin's - and Stalin's - and Mao's thought.[818] He went as far as to claim that Lenin was planning

[816] Ibid., 21.
[817] Ibid., 22.
[818] George Thompson, "Da Lenin a Mao Tse-tung," *Monthly* Review, June 1970, 39-43.

a sort of "cultural revolution" in the last years of his life. According to Thompson, the "Cultural Revolution in China is essentially the realisation of what Lenin had considered for the Soviet Union in the years after 1917," since it was "prepared for the same needs, designed to push away the same dangers, and based on the same theoretical foundation."[819]

John G. Gurley argued that Maoism was a specific model of economic development which was characterised by a few elements: an emphasis on the human factor, struggle, altruism, workers' active participation, and the rejection of specialisation.[820] Different positive accounts were published on different aspects of Chinese life, from the health system[821] to collectivised agriculture, which was praised describing the famous "Tachai model."[822]

The *Monthly Review* also published articles which tackled the issue of Chinese communism on philosophical grounds. An example is K.T. Fann's article on the ethics of liberation in China, following a visit of the to the country. A professor of philosophy at the York University of Ontario, Canada, Fann positively compared the Chinese experiences with the desolation of bourgeois society and moral. She underlined that the Cultural Revolution was different from the 1949 Chinese Revolution, since the former was meant to change the people's mentality from egotism to altruism, from individualism to collectivism. She thought these were the main elements of the Cultural Revolution and, interestingly, assimilated them to the importance Che Guevara gave to moral incentives.[823] Fann was convinced that the Chinese were successfully dealing with the experiment of building a new ethics.

Immanuel Wallerstein, the recently deceased theoretician of the world system theory (1930-2019), dedicated attention to China in a 1973 article. He was interested whether or not there was class

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[819] Thompson, "Da Lenin," 42.
[820] John G. Gurley, "Lo sviluppo economico capitalista e quello maoista," *Monthly Review*, March 1971, 13-20.
[821] Joshua S. Horn, "Ospedali in Cina," *Monthly Review*, May 1971, 12-18.
[822] Neile and Deirdre Huner, "L'uomo di Tachai: Chen Yung-kuei e la lotta tra le due linee in agricoltura," *Monthly Review*, June 1972, 8-11.
[823] K.T. Fann, "L'etica della liberazione: l'esempio della Cina," *Monthly Review*, July-August 1974, 23-26: 25.

struggle in China, and to this question he finally answered in the affirmative.[824] Faithful to its semi-academic nature, the *Monthly Review* also published articles written by specialists on economic matters, for example on the modernisation of Chinese agriculture. Ben Stavis claimed that the "green revolution" in China had been largely successful, especially if compared to other Asiatic countries, though there may have been serious problems in the future.[825] Paul Sweezy underlined the radical differences China had with the capitalist world,[826] whereas Harry Magdoff underlined the differences of China with the Soviet model. Magdoff claimed that China's incredible success in the development of the economy were due to the ability with which the Chinese changed and adapted the Soviet model for their own purposes, and he tried to demonstrate his claims in an academic style and with economic notions. Remarkably, the Great Leap Forward is mentioned by Magdoff as having been hindered by many difficulties, ranging from natural disaster to serious mismanagement. However, Magdoff explicitly denied that a mass famine occurred in China during the Great Leap: "One of the major achievements of China is to have been able to avoid mass famine during the years of natural calamities."[827] The Cultural Revolution was said to have loaned successfully some of the teachings of the Great Leap Forward, without sticking to its excesses and mistakes.

The *Monthly Review* tried to show China to its readers also through the publication of articles translated from the Chinese press. Chang Ge explained the principles of commercial exchange in a socialist economy.[828] The Workers' theoretical squad of a Chinese factory and the Criticism group of two Chinese universities wrote an article underlining the importance of a Marxist line in work management. This Marxist line implied that the principle of material incentives should have been strongly fought against. In a socialist country, the authors argue, workers are not only producers, but

[824] Immanuel Wallerstein, "Lotta di classe in Cina?," *Monthly Review*, October 1973, 26-27.
[825] Ben Stavis, "La rivoluzione verde in Cina," *Monthly Review*, January 1975, 21-25.
[826] Paul M. Sweezy, "Cina: contrasti con il capitalismo," *Monthly Review*, August-September 1975, 1-4.
[827] Harry Magdoff, "Cina: contrasti con il modello sovietico," *Monthly Review*, August-September 1975, 4-19: 13.
[828] Chang Ge, "Il sistema mercantile nella società socialista," *Monthly Review*, August-September 1975, 19-21.

they must actively participate in work management.[829] Moreover, Yuan Qing underlined that China, though it could be defined a socialist state, was still in a state of transition. Large parts of the organisation of society and of the economic system were still of the bourgeois type, and therefore they could evolve towards a more complete form of socialism only through the militancy of organised workers. This view followed the Maoist line according to which class struggle and contradictions do not cease with the victory of the revolution, but continue under socialism. Moreover, this view also underlined the importance of the human, subjective factor in the strengthening of socialism, as Mao had always emphasised.[830]

Conclusions

An analysis of the China-related articles of the *Quaderni piacentini* in the timespan from 1966 until 1976 allows to make a few conclusions. Firstly, the Chinese leaning of the journal is clear. In this, the *Quaderni* may have been not dissimilar from many other parts of the Italian Left. However, one has to acknowledge that the *Quaderni piacentini* honestly tried to portray the Chinese events as problematically as possible, giving space to different, sometimes disagreeing voices. Secondly, the crucial article in special issue on Latin America shows that China was not adored per se, but it was considered as a part of larger movement of Third World countries longing for revolution. The fact that the *Quaderni piacentini* tried to draw theoretical lines of connection among three important experiments of the time – China, Cuba, Vietnam – is significant. In fact, it was one thing to hold all these separate realities as symbols (possibly as a "pantheon of saints," as Edoarda Masi may have said), and well another to see connections and to try to make a coherent whole out of them. This was certainly a remarkable theoretical effort on the *Quaderni piacentini's* part. Thirdly, the last articles of the analysed timespan show that the influence of China on the Italian Left evidently experienced a high point at the turn of the 1970s, but after that it experienced a progressive decrease. Following a

[829] Workers' theoretical squad of the factory 'July 2' of Peking, Criticism group of the Peking University and of the Qing Hua Univeristy, "La linea marxista è determinante nella gestione," *Monthly Review*, August-September 1975, 21-23.
[830] Yuan Qing, "Un problema importante nell'ambito dei rapporti di produzione," August-September 1975, 23-24.

pattern detected in other parts of the Italian Left, the end of the Cultural Revolution, Lin Biao's death and Chinese turns in foreign policy took a heavy toll on the pro-Chinese sentiments of Italian Leftists.

The Italian edition of the *Monthly Review* also had points of interest regarding Maoism. Clearly, this originally US journal had an academic background and it tried to present its analyses as objective, and based on sound research. One of the main elements clearly visible from an analysis of the *Monthly Review* from 1968 until 1976 is that it was positively inclined to, if not entirely supportive of the Cultural Revolution. However, this support was not entirely without exceptions: the general positive assessment of Maoist China did not hinder the journal from publishing Stanley Moore's analysis accusing Mao of embodying a rather irrational and utopian interpretation of Marxism, therefore constituting a danger for a serious economic revolution.

Generally supporting the Cultural Revolution, the *Monthly Review* distinguished itself from other political and cultural experiments which remained more loyal to the Soviet line. Remarkably, however, the *Monthly Review* did not deal exclusively with China, but it hosted many other analyses on leftist political movements coming from all the corners of the world.

The *Monthly Review* did not host exclusively academic contributions, however, but also ideological analyses and many accounts of foreign visitors to China. Accounts of foreign visitors are especially worth commentary, since they were, so to speak, two-faced. On the one hand, first-hand witnesses of the Chinese situation could account as privileged sources on what was going on in China. On the other hand, these visitors usually spent in China short amounts of time, and they usually had no knowledge of the language. Moreover, they might have been the protagonists of staged "Potemkin visits" which were so common in socialist countries.[831] Be as it may, the China they construct is a radically different place from the capitalist countries they are coming from. Differences are so sharp

[831] For a first-hand account on staged visits tot he USSR, see: Arvo Tuominen, *The Bells of the Kremlin: An Experience in Communism* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983).

and so inclined towards the positive that the present-day reader is tempted to see in them an idealised reality, diametrically opposed to the capitalist one.

EPILOGUE/CONCLUSION

MAOISM YESTERDAY AND TODAY, IN ITALY AND ABROAD

This chapter is both an epilogue and a conclusion. It analyses the end of Italian Maoism, and draws a few conclusions both from the 1949-1976 history of Italian Maoism and from subsequent developments. This chapter also goes beyond Italian (and European) borders. What has remained of Maoism today in Italy and in the world? Why the legacy of Maoism today shows so many differences between Italy – and the West in general – and non-European countries?

This author hopes that the present work has helped to shed further light on the history of Italian Maoism. After this research, the clichés mentioned in the introduction can be reassessed. As the reader has seen, the influence of Maoism was pervasive in the extra-parliamentary Left of the 1960s and 1970s. One may argue this influence was small only looking at one or another Maoist group taken in isolation. A catholic, holistic look brings to quite different conclusions. Regarding the cliché which trivialises Italian Maoism identifying it with – and only with - Servire il Popolo, it probably serves one goal. Many remember that Aldo Brandirali, the leader of Servire il Popolo, later joined Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia[832] and the Catholic organisation Comunione e Liberazione - which is labelled "fundamentalist" and even "totalitarian" by its critics and by a vast academic literature.[833] This would confirm the view of Maoists as senseless extremists ready to switch sides. In a 1999 book, Domenico Losurdo wisely warned against the category of "betrayal" to read the history of

[832] On this Italian political party, see: Domenico Mennitti, ed., *Forza Italia: radiografia di un evento* (Rome: Ideazione, 1997); Carmen Golia, *Dentro Forza Italia: organizzazione e militanza* (Venice: Marsilio, 1997); Chiara Moroni, *Da Forza Italia al Popolo della libertà* (Rome: Carocci, 2008).

[833] For a critical book written by a non-academic, see: Enrico De Alessandri, *Comunione e Liberazione: assalto al potere in Lombardia* (Lecce: Bepress, 2010). Also see: Salvatore Abruzzese, *Comunione e liberazione: dalle aule del liceo Berchet al meeting di Rimini: storia e identità di un movimento* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2001); Enzo Pace, *Il regime della verità* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990); Dario Zadra, "Comunione e Liberazione: A Fundamentalist Idea of Power," in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, ed., *Accounting For Fundamentalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994): 124-148; Franco Ottaviano, Gli estremisti bianchi. Comunione e Liberazione: un partito nel partito, una Chiesa nella Chiesa (Rome: Datanews, 1986).

communism.[834] However, looking at the protagonists of the 1960s/1970s movements, one may find many more similar examples.

Therefore, the principled researcher cannot help sending away the suspicion that identifying Italian Maoism with Servire il Popolo is an apologetic and self-absolving myth. The truth of the matter is that "moderation" and switching sides have been very common characteristics for Italian activists coming both from the institutional and from the extra-parliamentary left. Rather than moderating their views, however, most of these people rather switched from one form of extremism to another. Metaphorically and somewhat ironically, one may rather say that they were struck by the light on the road to Damascus. The number of these veritable turncoats is immense, and making a list would be impossible as well as pointless. Note worthily, this phenomenon has had and still has profound repercussions on Italian political, cultural and academic life up to the present day. This phenomenon may be rooted in the Italian tradition of *trasformismo*, which was portrayed in literature by Tomasi di Lampedusa in his novel *Il gattopardo* and reflected upon by Antonio Gramsci in his *Notebooks*. After all, two influent French conservative intellectuals, Jeambar and Roucaut, wrote in 1988 a book titled *Éloge de la trahicion*, in praise of treason.[835] This may sound ironic, but this is the rhetorical strategy adopted by many former "revolutionaries" turned bourgeois. Their about-face is always described either as a painful necessity, or even as an act of courage.[836] This, in fact, in one part of the issue which Domenico Losurdo called "the absence of the left."[837] Needless to say, these former "revolutionaries" are quite numerous in the Italian academic world. This makes life very difficult for precarious researchers who would like to express an autonomous, independent, alternative view on

[834] Domenico Losurdo, *Fuga dalla storia? La rivoluzione russa e la rivoluzione cinese oggi* (Naples: La città del sole, 1999).
[835] Denis Jeambar and Yves Roucaute, *Éloge de la trahison. De l'art de gouverner par reniement* (Paris: Seuil, 1988).
[836] For a comical-satyrical account of one of the most incredible of these conversions, see: Ilya Kuriakin, *Il compagno Veltroni. Dossier sul più abile agente della Cia* (Roma: Stampa alternativa, 2000).
[837] Domenico Losurdo, *La sinistra assente. Crisi, società dello spettacolo, guerra* (Roma: Carocci, 2014).

the past and present of Italy. More often than not, they are censored, silenced, humiliated, discriminated, and mobbed.[838]

In their 2018 edited book, Mario Tesini and Lorenzo Zambernardi note that Maoism in the West quickly experienced its apogee and its suppression.[839] Their conclusion may seem convincing, but I argue it is simplistic and flawed. In fact, one cannot merely sanction the apparently quick defeat of a political experiment without carefully analysing its causes. Otherwise, one cannot avoid resorting to the evergreen category of "failure," so much used – and abused – in communist studies. To reach a more nuanced and balanced conclusion, Domenico Losurdo's critique of the concept of "failure" and "implosion" of the Soviet Union can be useful. Losurdo noted that the categories of "failure" and "implosion" of the USSR constitute an apologetic myth. After the end of the Cold War, the winner took great pains to demonstrate that its enemy had been doomed from the beginning. In the end, its failure was inevitable. One wonders why the Cold War took place after all. In reality, seriously looking at the peculiar characteristics of the Cold War, one sees that it was indeed a *war*, where military, economic, media and psychological attacks determined one's victory and the other's defeat.[840]

One may argue similarly about the destiny of Western – including Italian – Maoism. Firstly, I reiterate that this work has been on the *influence of Maoism and of Chinese communism* on the Italian Left, rather than on Italian Maoism per se. Italian Maoism would be a category so restricted that it would not allow us to see how strongly China acted on the Italian Left. True, Mao's popularity in Italy peaked during the *biennio rosso*, slowly decreasing through the 1970s. Why was it so? In the light of the presented research, one may formulate a few answers. The first answer may be a physiological one. Myths in general are never eternal. Though Niccolai speaks about the "necessity of myth," a

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[838] See: https://dottorato.it/content/adi-stop-mobbing. Mauren Duffy and Len Sperry, *Mobbing: Causes, Consequences, and Solutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[839] Mario Tesini and Lorenzo Zambernardi, ed., *Quel che resta di Mao: apogeo e rimozione di un mito occidentale* (Florence: Le Monnier università-Mondadori education, 2018).
[840] Losurdo, *Fuga dalla storia?*

myth is difficult to sustain for a long period of time.[841] An alternative ideological movement may either take power, therefore entering an entirely new phase, or it may slowly flow away (*riflusso*).[842] From this point of view, the decline of Italian Maoism can be read parallelly with the decline of the Italian revolutionary Left more in general. Some of its organisations, like Democrazia Proletaria (DP) – founded in 1975 including the Partito di Unità Proletaria (PdUP) per il Comunismo, Avanguardia Operaia, the Movimento Lavoratori per il Socialismo and smaller groups – tried the parliamentarian path but always with modest results (interestingly, for DP Maoism as a point of reference was completely absent). The most radical wing – also to a certain extent inspired by Maoism – took the road of *lotta armata* (armed struggle) or terrorism, being defeated in the 1980s.

A second, crucial answer is Chinese rapprochement towards the United Stated and the Lin Biao case. China had been a lighthouse of consistent anti-imperialist radicalism for the Italian Left. The USSR was no longer attractive to the New Left, and China firmly opposed both US imperialism and the betraying Soviet Union – also labelled revisionist, social imperialist, etc. Therefore, China's anti-Soviet strategy of getting close to the USA proved to be an unbearable delusion to many in the Left. This is clear especially reading the sources of Lotta Continua and Avanguardia Operaia. These two organisations tried to digest Maoism in an original way, but could not totally digest China's great power politics. If timid openings to Western leaders like De Gaulle could be forgiven, meeting the "hangman" Nixon and the "pig" Ford was another matter. The most orthodox Maoists like those of the Milan Movimento Studentesco tried to give a different reading of the turn. It was Mao who forced the USA to be recognised, and who forced Nixon to come to China. The US President was thus put "with his shoulders on the wall." Evidently, the popularity of this interpretation was not long-lived.

Similar considerations can be made about the Lin Biao affair. Part of the Italian Left believed in Mao because he was thought to be different from Stalin and other communist leaders. According to this

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[841] Roberto Niccolai, *Quando la Cina era vicina* (Pisa: BFS Edizioni, 1998): 65.
[842] Losurdo, Fuga dalla storia?

view, Stalin ruthlessly purged his enemies, while Mao conducted an open, democratic political struggle through mass mobilisation. Therefore, the Lin Biao's death and fall from grace must have been a hard blow, especially since he had been considered Mao's successor and one of the key figures of the Cultural Revolution. After all, was not the foreword to the *Little Red Book* signed by Lin Biao? After his mysterious death, he was portrayed like a perfidious traitor, in a sort of Chinese version of Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Lotta Continua and Avanguardia Operaia could not believe the official versions of the events: they were astounded by it.

A third answer can be given by comparing the Italian case with another European country – France – and with non-European countries like India, Peru, Nepal, Myanmar, the Philippines, Cambodia, Malaya, and Thailand. In France, Maoism developed with and influenced many of the main intellectuals of the time: from Foucault to Sartre, from Althusser to Simone De Beauvoir. Not by chance, Badiou (b. 1937), who was Althusser's pupil, is still an active and famous intellectual who never abandoned Maoism.[843] In Italy Maoism was widespread and pervasive in the extra-parliamentary Left, it caused intellectual ferment, it engaged many writers, journalists, intellectuals who travelled to China and later published books on their travels. Apart from Maria Antonietta Macciocchi's,[844] one must remember Edoarda Masi's[845] and Renata Pisu's works.[846] But also Alberto Moravia,[847] Goffredo Parise,[848] Franco Fortini[849] and Giorgio Manganelli[850] published books on China. Dario Fo was inspired by Maoist concepts of popular art and by Chinese theatre[851] and,

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[843] Jacques Lecercle, "Cantor, Lacan, Mao, Beckett, meme combat: The philosophy of Alain Badiou," *Radical Philosophy* 093 (January/ February 1999): 6-13; Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, *Mao. De la pratique et de la contradiction* (Paris: Éditions La Fabrique: 2008).

[844] Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, *Dalla Cina: Dopo la rivoluzione culturale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1971).

[845] Edoarda Masi, *La contestazione cinese: Note per una strategia socialista* (Turin: Einaudi, 1969); Edoarda Masi, *Lo stato di tutto il popolo e la democrazia repressiva* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976); Edoarda Masi, *Per la Cina* (Milan: Mondadori, 1978).

[846] Renata Pisu, *Cina: dall'oppio al pensiero di Mao* (Milan: SEA, 1967); Renata Pisu, *Le cause della rivoluzione cinese* (Milan: ISEDI, 1977).

[847] Alberto Moravia, La rivoluzione culturale in Cina ovvero il Convitato di pietra (Milan: Bompiani, 2013).

[848] Goffredo Parise, *Cara Cina* (Milan: Longanesi, 1966).

[849] Franco Fortini, Asia Maggiore: viaggio nella Cina e altri scritti (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2007).

[850] Giorgio Manganelli, *Cina e altri orienti* (Milan: Adelphi, 2013).

[851] Roberto Niccolai, *Parlando di rivoluzioni* (Pistoia: CDP, 1998): 197-200.

remarkably, his *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* was adapted in China.[852] However, none of these Italian intellectuals was as important, as famous or as general as their French counterparts.

However, if we do not talk about Maoism per se, but about the long-term influence of the Chinese Revolution in general, Italy did produce a pro-Chinese intellectual, the aforementioned Domenico Losurdo (1941-2018). Losurdo, by profession a historian of ideas, produced many excellent works where he carefully analysed liberalism and the concept of historical revisionism. Tracing the history of Marxism and of communist theory from the origins to the present day, he thought the market turn taken by Deng Xiaoping's China continues to embody an alternative to capitalism. In his opinion, China's rise is a fundamentally positive factor, since it defies Western imperialism and potentially strengthens post-colonial countries.[853]

Following the comparison, that between Italy and other non-European countries is even starker and more useful. Maoism was an evolution of Marxism-Leninism devised in a largely agrarian, backward country. Especially "Servire il popolo" Maoists insisted very much on famers' mobilisation. But in Italy in the 1960s and 1970s there were not as many peasants as in Asian countries, and peasant issues did not have the same weight. Then it should be no wonder that Maoism has had the longest and most pervasive legacy exactly in non-European, poor countries. It may also be worth noting that out of the list of India, Peru, Nepal, Myanmar, the Philippines, Cambodia, Malaya, and Thailand – the countries where Maoism has had or still has a strong legacy – one is in Latin America, while seven are in Asia. Therefore, it seems that Maoism has its strongest legacy in Asia, close to its birthplace. Possibly, that should not be surprising.

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[852] Rossella Ferrari, "Anarchy in the PRC: Meng Jinghui and his Adaptation of Dario Fo's 'Accidental Death ofan Anarchist'," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (FALL, 2005): 1-48.

[853] Domenico Losurdo, La sinistra, la Cina e l'imperialismo (Naples: La città del sole, 2000); Domenico Losurdo, Cinquant'anni di storia della repubblica popolare cinese. Un incontro di culture tra Oriente e Occidente (Naples: La città del sole, 2003).

In Peru, Abimael Guzmán's Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) was active until the early 1990s, and it has since evolved into human rights organisations, though a few die-hard guerrillas are still active.[854] Let's have a look at Asia. In Myanmar, a Maoist insurrection begun in 1948 was crushed only in 1989.[855] In 2009 Thomas Marks noted that in the first decade of the 21st century Maoist insurgencies had broken out in Cambodia, Malaya, and Thailand.[856] In the Philippines, a Maoist insurrection broke up in 1971, and it has been going on ever since.[857] However, India and Nepal are the two most striking examples of the relevance of Maoism in the present-day world. Today, approximately one third of India is affected by a Maoist insurgency whose roots date back to Mao's time.[858] In Nepal, a Maoist insurrection begun 1996, ultimately taking power via electoral means. Maoists are in power in Nepal up to the present day.[859] To quote Julia Lovell: "Nepali Maoists are

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[854]Jerónimo Ríos and Marté Sanchez, *Breve historia de Sendero Luminoso* (Madrid: Catarata, 2018); Santiago Roncagliolo, *La cuarta espada: La historia de Abimael Guzmán y Sendero Luminoso* (New York: Penguin Random House: 2017); James Francis Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries in Latin America: Peru, Colombia, Mexico* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003); Benedicto Jiménez Bacca, *Inicio, Desarrollo y Ocaso del Terrorismo en el Perú: el ABC de Sendero Luminoso y el MRTA apliado y comentado* (Impr. Sanki, 2000); Gustavo Gorriti, *The Shining Path: A History of the Millenarian War in Peru* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Alberto Bolivar and David Scott Palmer, "Peru's Shining Path: Recent Dynamics and Future Prospects," *Western Hemisphere Security Analysis Center* 2 (2011), https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/whemsac/2, accessed: Feb. 18, 2020; Steve J. Stern, ed., *Shining and Other Paths: War and Society in Peru, 1980-1995* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

[855] Bertil Lintner, The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) (Ithaca: SEAP, 1990).

[856] Thomas A. Marks, "Return of the Beast: Maoist Insurgency Lives," *Journal of Counterterrorism & Homeland Security International* 15, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 44-49. On Thai Maoism, see: Yuangrat Wedel, "The Communist Party of Thailand and Thai Radical Thought," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 1981, 325-39.

[857] Armando Liwanag, *Brief History of the Communist Party of the Philippines* (1988), *Banned Thought,* http://www.bannedthought.net/Philippines/CPP/1988/BriefHistoryOfCPP-AL-881226.pdf, accessed Feb. 18, 2020; George Kent, "Philippines: The New People's Army," *Harvard International Review* 8-5 (1986):26-28; Renato De Castro, "The Communist Party of the Philippines in the 1990s: The Last of the Maoist Insurgencies in the Asia-Pacific?," *Issues & Studies* 31, no. 9 (September 1995): 90-111; Matthew Galway, "Boundless Revolution: Global Maoism and Communist Movements in Southeast Asia, 1949-1979" (PhD Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2017).

[858] Arun Mukherjee, *Maoist "spring thunder": the Naxalite Movement 1967–1972* (K.P. Bagchi & Co., Calcutta, 2007); Prakash Singh, *The Naxalite Movement in India* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1999); Rahul Pandita, *Hello, Bastar : The Untold Story of India's Maoist Movement* (Chennai-Westland: Tranquebar Press, 2011); Biplab Dasgupta, "Naxalite Armed Struggles and the Annihilation Campaign in Rural Areas," *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 1973: 173–188; Alpa Shah, "The intimacy of insurgency: beyond coercion, greed or grievance in Maoist India," *Economy and Society* 42 (3): 480–506; H.S. Walia, "The Naxal Quagmire in Bihar & Jharkhand – Genesis & Sustenance," *Learning Community: An International Journal of Education and Social Development* 9 (1); Satnam, *Jangalnama: Inside the Maoist Guerrilla Zone* (New Delhi: Penguin,2010); Kristian Hoelscher, Jason Miklian and Krishna Chaitanya Vadlama, "Hearts and Mines:A District-Level Analysis of the Maoist Conflict in India," https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/md/awi/professuren/intwipol/india.pdf, accessed Feb. 18, 2020.

[859] Mahendra Lawoti and Anup Kumar Pahari, *The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Revolution in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Routledge, 2009); Michael Hutt, *Himalayan People's War: Nepal's Maoist Rebellion* (London: Hurst and Co., 2004); Arjun Karki and David Seddon, ed., *The People's War in Nepal: Left Perspectives* (New Delhi: Adroit, 2003); Deepak

the only such group outside China to have attained state power through espousing the strategies of Mao Zedong."[860]

Finally, one must not forget that the country in the world where Maoism has the strongest legacy is, of course, China. After his death CCP leaders partially disavowed Mao, but could not do so totally. To do so would have meant to infringe their very claim to political legitimacy: the founding of the People's Republic of China and the leading role of the Communist Party. Many observers rightly note that China has largely gone capitalist,[861] but it would be oversimplified and short-sighted to assume that Mao's legacy is dead in China. Actually, Maoist legacy lives in struggling Chinese workers, who do not accept to be beasts of burden on which modernity is built.[862]

In sum, Maoism slowly declined in Italy through the 1970s, but did it completely die? The answer is largely positive. In present-day Italy, only few small, marginal parities are officially inspired to Maoism. The Partito Marxista-Leninista Italiano (PMLI) was founded in 1977, coming from the PCd'I (fig. 1). The CARC (Comitati di Appoggio alla Resistenza per il Comunismo) were founded in 1992 (fig. 2). A thin link between Servire il Popolo and the CARC may consist of Giuseppe Maj. Maj used to be a UCI(m-l) member and director of *Servire il popolo* from 1969 until 1971 and later founded the CARC in 1992. The (nuovo) Partito Comunista Italiano was founded in 1999 and has its seat in L'Île St Denis (France), on rue Lénine.

Thapa and Bandita Sijapati, *A Kingdom Under Siege: Nepal's Maoist Insurgency, 1996–2003* (Kathmandu: The Printhouse, 2003).

[860] Julia Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History* (London: Bodley Head, 2019): 385.

[861] Ronald Coase and Ning Wang, *How China Became Capitalist* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[862] Mobo Gao, *The Battle for China's Past* (London: Pluto Press, 2008); Ju Li, "How It Was/Is Told, Recorded and Remembered: The Discontinued History of the Third Front Construction," *Journal of Historical Sociology* (2014): 2.



Fig. 1. PMLI flags. On the first flag, one can see Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. On the second flag, Mao's face is beside the black hammer and sickle.



Fig. 2. Image coming from the CARC website. See wall writing "Long Live Mao."

Assessing the topic of Maoist influence on the Italian Left of the 1960s and 1970s, and of its consequences on the long run, one must tackle the issue of revolutionary violence. We have seen that revolutionary violence was one the inputs which the Italian extra-parliamentary Left took from Maoism. Mao's radical message clearly went against the concept of "peaceful coexistence." Mao opposed peaceful coexistence in two senses, on an international and on a national level. On an international level, being against peaceful coexistence meant to actively fight US imperialism (and Soviet social imperialism). On a national level, it meant that the bourgeoisie and the proletariat of one given country could coexist peacefully: the proletariat had to fight the bourgeoisie arms in hand. This invitation probably contributed to the violent escalation of the *anni di piombo*.

Both Ilaria Forlini and Julia Lovell noted that the Red Brigades were inspired by Maoism (though that was not their exclusive source of inspiration).[863] Certainly, the concept of guerrilla warfare was one of the borrowed inputs, though they applied it to an urban context (similarly to the German RAF).[864] In fact, the Red Brigades considered themselves guerrillas and not terrorists. The case of the Red Brigades may also be a good example of how taking ideology as a serious historical factor can help avoid gross misinterpretations. In their recent, excellent book Marco Clementi, Paolo Persichetti and Elisa Santalena note that the history of the Red Brigades has always been daunted by a variety of conspiracy theories.[865] One of the most popular among them has it that the Red Brigades

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[863] Forlini, "Il maoismo," 111-112. Lovell, *Maoism*, 298-299.

[864] See: Alberto Franceschini, Mara Renato e io. Storia dei fondatori delle BR (Milan: Mondadori, 1988); Soccorso Rosso, Brigate rosse. Che cosa hanno fatto, che cosa hanno detto, che cosa se ne è detto (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976). On the Red Army Faction, see: Stefan Aust, The Baader-Meinhof Complex (London: Bodley Head, 1987); Giulia Bausano and Emilio Quadrelli, ed., Ulrike Meinhof una vita per la rivoluzione. R.A.F. Teoria e prassi della guerriglia urbana (Camerano: Gwynplaine, 2016); Karrin Hanshew, Terror and Democracy in West Germany (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Patricia Melzer, Death in the Shape of a Young Girl: Women's Political Violence in the Red Army Faction (New York: New York Univeristy Press, 2015); André Moncourt and J. Smith, The Red Army Faction: A Documentary History, v. 1-2 (Oakland: PM Press, 2013); Jeremy Varon, Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[865] Marco Clementi, Paolo Persichetti and Elisa Santalena, *Brigate rosse: Dalle fabbriche alla campagna di primavera, Volume I* (Rome: Derive approdi, 2018). For this kind of "conspiratorial" literature, see: Franco De Felice, "Doppia Lealtà e Doppio Stato," *Studi Storici* 30, no. 3 (Jul 01, 1989): 493-563; Paolo Cucchiarelli and Aldo Giannuli, *Lo Stato parallelo: l'Italia oscura nei documenti e nelle relazioni della Commissione stragi* (Rome: Gamberetti, 1997); Aldo Giannuli, *Il Noto servizio, Giulio Andreotti e il caso Moro* (Milan: Tropea, 2011).

were a product of the Soviet Union and/or of its European satellites. Did not the Red Brigades train in Czechoslovakia, according to certain never proved allegations? Yet, it would be enough to browse the Red Brigades' own documents to see that they labelled the Soviet Union social imperialist, Mao's definition.[866] Their decision to take up arms was also motivated by the fact that, in their opinion, the USSR had betrayed revolution. Therefore, Italians had to count on their own forces – but inspired by China.

However, another input can help us understand while between the 1990s and the 2000s – after the so called "end of history" – Italy experienced a comeback of the Red Brigades ("new Red Brigades"). This small group officially called itself Brigate Rosse-Partito Comunista Combattente (BR-PCC), while it was more popularly called "Nuove BR" (New Red Brigades). It was composed of a handful of people, to the point that the Italian police official Ansoino Andreassi defined them a "desperate cenacle" ("*cenacolo di disperati"*). However, it managed to carry out several explosive attacks, and to kill two men: Massimo D'Antona in 1999 and Marco Biagi in 2002. In his extremely well researched book Antonio Petrillo underlines the staggering characteristics of this handful of people.[867] A few lived underground and with a false identity for years, trying to launch a revolution against the Italian state. But what were the motivations which pushed these few men and women to endeavor in this seemingly hopeless, desperate struggle? There were certainly many causes, but relevantly to Maoism, the concept of protracted struggle ("*lotta di lunga durata*") must be mentioned. The New Red Brigades used this term quite often in their documents (Petrillo's book is in reality a commented collection of primary sources).

[866] Lorenzo Ruggiero, ed., Dossier Brigate rosse, 1969-1975. La lotta armata nei documenti e nei comunicati delle prime Br (Milan: Kaos, 2007); Soccorso Rosso Internazionale, ed., Fedeli alla linea. Dalla nascita al PCC: la storia delle Brigate Rosse raccontata attraverso i documenti dell'Organizzazione (Rome: Red Star Press, 2015).
[867] Antonio Petrillo, Dentro le BR-PCC. La storia delle "nuove" Brigate rosse raccontata con le parole dei terroristi (Roma: Laurus, 2013).

The New Red Brigades thought they were the soldiers of a long-lasting war, which would be continued by their children, grandchildren, and so forth. What is staggering is that, though the concept is clearly Maoist, Mao or China are not mentioned even once. On the base of the available evidence, one can suggest only two hypotheses. The first is that the New Red Brigades knew the Chinese-Maoist origin of the term, but just did not feel the need to spell it out in their documents (possibly because the Chinese political situation had changed radically, and Mao - and Maoism – were no longer in power?). The second is that the New BR members might have absorbed this term through Italian extreme-leftist culture without being themselves aware of its provenance. Though this remains a hypothesis and cannot be ultimately confirmed, it would be a remarkable example of the karstic influence certain political *topoi* can exert on armed groups, even across years and decades.



Fig. 3. Nadia Desdemona Lioce and Mario Galesi, the two main members of the "new" Red Brigades. Galesi was killed in a shoot-out with the police in 2003, Lioce is currently serving a life sentence.

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