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IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD



# Italy and the 'Shock of the Global' during the 1970s

*Edited by*

**GUIDO FORMIGONI**

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# Security, Conflict and Cooperation in the Contemporary World

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Guido Formigoni  
Editor

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# Introductory Remarks

*Giovanni Mario Ceci, Marco De Nicolò, Guido Formigoni,  
and Giovanni Scirocco*

*Translated by Emma Mandley*

In periodizing terms, recent historiography has focused with ever-increasing clarity on the systemic crisis of the 1970s, seeing it as a decisive turning point for our understanding of modern times (in some ways even more radical and significant than the powerfully symbolic year of 1989). It was during this transitional time that the essential features of a

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consolidated political-economic-territorial equilibrium, fruit of the great hiatus of the second post-war period, began to erode. One can also recognize a multiform parallel process consisting of a confused reaction to the crisis and the construction of a distinctly different overall order. Simultaneously, a series of fundamental elements of earlier history were changing profoundly, in terms of collective identities and prevailing cultures, production models, the social role of work, relations between individuals and social groups and political forms.

## 1 THE END OF AN ERA

The starting point must therefore be to understand, in a global sense, those features of the 1970s crisis that were structural rather than cyclical.<sup>1</sup> In this respect, it is essential to look closely at the decline of the model of political-economic equilibrium which had become established after the crisis of the 1930s—a model which had been deployed particularly successfully during the second post-war period, ushering in an era of economic growth and the expansion of international capitalism, assisted by the innovative and effective American ‘imperial’ project<sup>2</sup> and also supported to some extent by the aggressive and threatening isolation of the Soviet bloc during the Cold War.<sup>3</sup>

Today, the key points of this order, which survived for several decades, are easy to identify: a Fordist production system rolled out nationally, with growing access to consumer goods for the middle as well as the working class; national markets that were relatively well integrated at a supranational level with extensive exchange of goods and inexpensive access to raw materials, but protected from the turbulence of rapidly circulating capital; the stabilizing role of Keynesian regulation by the state and the

<sup>1</sup> The essential reference is of course Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, Daniel J. Sargent (eds), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010); but see also Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Philippe Chassaing, *Les années 70. Un décennie révolutionnaire*, (Paris: Armand Colin, 2018, 3rd ed.); Duco Hellema, *The Global 1970s. Radicalism, Reform, and Crisis*, (London-New York: Routledge, 2019); Andreas Wirsching (ed), ‘The 1970s and 1980s as a Turning Point in European History’, an issue of *Journal of Modern European History*, 1, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and its Predecessors*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 191 ff.

<sup>3</sup> A long-term view in Ian Clark, *Globalization and Fragmentation: International Relations in the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

growth of the welfare state as a complement to horizontal societal integration; and finally moderate reformism, safeguarded by the stability of poly-cratic democracies managed by political systems based on modern mass parties. This durable and solid model has famously been defined in different ways: ‘embedded liberalism’,<sup>4</sup> a ‘compromise between democracy and capitalism’, ‘*Keynes at home, Smith abroad*’,<sup>5</sup> ‘*trente glorieuses*’<sup>6</sup> and the ‘golden age’ of global capitalism.<sup>7</sup> According to one convincing interpretation, it was precisely at this time that the nation state reached the peak of its influence and its ability to control and homogenize its own territory.<sup>8</sup>

The crisis that struck this key model began to unfold at the beginning of the 1970s. There is no space here for a lengthy description of these changes. But to be brief, it should be noted that the initial shock of the decade was certainly felt as the gradual failure of a familiar order which had generally been regarded optimistically as long term and expanding: ‘the crisis consists in the fact that the past is dying but the future is not yet born’.<sup>9</sup>

Just as certainly, this crisis was complicated by several different factors. The first consisted of systemic interconnections between the issues at stake. Above all, global monetary structures were in turmoil: instability was clearly created by the dollar crisis and the consequent end of the monetary stability negotiated at Bretton Woods, resulting in volatility and exchange uncertainty during the impossible search for new multilateral

<sup>4</sup> John G. Ruggie, ‘International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Post-War Economic Order’, in Stephen Krasner (ed), *International Regimes*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 195 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations*, Princeton, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 355.

<sup>6</sup> Jean Fourastié, *Les trente glorieuses, ou la révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975*, (Paris: Fayard, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*, Part 2, (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Charles S. Maier, ‘Leviathan 2.0: Inventing Modern Statehood’, in Emily S. Rosenberg (ed), *A World Connecting: 1870–1945*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2012), 272–276.

<sup>9</sup> Charles S. Maier, ‘Malaise: The Crisis of Capitalism in the 1970s’, in Ferguson, Maier, Manela, Sargent (eds), *The Shock of the Global*, 26. These words recall Antonio Gramsci’s well-known aphorism: *La crisi consiste appunto nel fatto che il vecchio muore e il nuovo non può nascere: in questo interregno si verificano i fenomeni morbosi più svariati* [‘The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear’], in Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, vol. I, ed. by Valentino Gerratana, (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), 311.



arrangements.<sup>10</sup> The second crucial factor concerned the ecology-energy issue: the increase in the price of oil (and other raw materials), which resulted from political decisions made by Arabic producer countries after the 1973 Arab-Israeli war,<sup>11</sup> had a marked recessive impact on industrial societies (in the USA, but especially in Europe and Japan).<sup>12</sup> In conjunction with awakening awareness of the environmental issue, this shock led initially to some rethinking of a production system based on indefinite and apparently limitless growth, ultimately prompting the first reflections on the end of industry's centrality and the incoming 'post-industrial' age.<sup>13</sup> In the third place, crucial socio-economic factors weighed heavily: social unrest was intensifying in all advanced societies, centred especially on the growth of trade union power in relation to the obtaining of wage increases, which the employer class saw as a dramatic erosion of profits—this was becoming a power struggle in factories. In the fourth place, the increased cost of money, energy and labour coupled with persistently high public spending on welfare in the larger democracies. The combination of these trends favoured a widespread and prolonged inflationary climate which was hard to manage with the tools of Keynesian economic policy.<sup>14</sup> This was especially true as the response to the crisis began to focus on the rapid expansion of a new global financial sphere, partly stimulated by a massive flux of 'petrodollars'<sup>15</sup> taking on a new centrality and introducing huge flows that escaped state control. In the fifth place, socio-cultural factors,

<sup>10</sup> Barry Eichengreen, *Globalizing Capital: A History of the International Monetary System*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, 2nd ed.), 123 ff.; Duccio Basosi, *Il governo del dollaro. Interdipendenza economica e potere statunitense negli anni di Richard Nixon (1969–1973)*, (Florence: Polistampa, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Giuliano Garavini, *The Rise and Fall of OPEC in the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Domenico Preti, 'La cesura degli anni Settanta', in Luca Baldissara (ed), *Le radici della crisi. L'Italia fra gli anni Sessanta e Settanta*, (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2001), 115–120.

<sup>13</sup> John R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the 20th Century World*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 325 ff. See contributions written contemporaneously such as Alain Touraine, *La società post-industriale*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 1970), originally published in French as *La société post industrielle*, (Paris: Denöel, 1969); Daniel Bell, 'The Post-Industrial Society: The Evolution of an Idea', *Survey*, 79, Spring 1971.

<sup>14</sup> Simon Reid-Henry, *Empire of Democracy: The Remaking of the West Since the Cold War 1971–2017*, (London: John Murray, 2019), 65–69.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel J. Sargent, 'The United States and Globalization in the '70s', in Ferguson, Maier, Manela, Sargent (eds), *The Shock of the Global*, 53–56; David M. Wight, *Oil Money: Middle East Petrodollars and the Transformation of US Empire*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021).

linked to the rapid change of collective attitudes at a micro level, were becoming important: they included explosive new expressions of self-determination among young people and women, with the far-reaching wave of protest in 1968;<sup>16</sup> disruption to the old dynamics of gender and family; the growth of identity issues and related rights movements; an unprecedented focus on socio-cultural correlations with distant realities outside Europe (including affirmations of identity by new peoples and countries of the so-called Third World); and the impact of technological changes in production and media systems,<sup>17</sup> accompanied by growing criticism of the 'integrated' society typical of the culture of modernization. Additionally, a new feeling of disenchantment was emerging in contrast to the hopes of the previous decade and a sense of detachment from any certainty or deeply held conviction.<sup>18</sup>

The second complex feature seems to have been the nature of the crisis which made government control of problems difficult at a local and state territorial level: issues were expanding in an increasingly global matrix. This undoubtedly resulted from the deep extent to which the various changes described above were interwoven. But it also stemmed from the fact that the crisis appeared to be not solely and not so much a straightforward failure or ageing of the old rules, overthrow of a now clearly obsolete order, but rather the effect of many 'virtuous' processes reaching maturity after developing over a thirty-year post-war period. The outcomes were now almost impossible to control, in some ways undermining the order's very foundations (consider, for instance, the social citizenship of work, which was the lynchpin of the Fordist compromise, but which was now becoming, in the eyes of the employment system, an intolerable and growing burden on production costs; or the spread of literacy and education, which led to self-determination and criticism of traditional social authority).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: The Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958–c. 1974*, (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976*, (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Marcello Flores, Giovanni Gozzini, 1968. *Un anno spartiacque*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Here too, for various references to the debate at the time, see Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Between Two Ages: America's Role in the Technetronic Era*, (New York: Viking Press, 1970); Jürgen Habermas, *Teoria e prassi nella società tecnologica*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1971), originally published in German as *Theorie und Praxis*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971).

<sup>18</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, (London: Pimlico, 2007), 453 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Riccardo Bellofiore, 'I lunghi anni Settanta. Crisi sociale e integrazione economica internazionale', in Baldissara (ed), *Le radici della crisi*, esp. 71–78; Jeffry A. Frieden, *Global*

This contradiction made it harder to take control and respond effectively to the crisis. Democracies were wrong-footed, finding themselves thrust from the previous decade's reassuring rhetoric of linear modernization into a landscape of increasing disarray: the instability of mature democracies was leading some authoritative observers to speak of 'excessive demand' (e.g. in the studies of the Trilateral Commission)<sup>20</sup> and to express a hope for new top-down simplifications in the political leadership of modern polyarchic systems.

Finally, the third element was the lack of a specific international political hegemony capable of managing the crisis (unlike in 1945, when the USA's 'Great Design' was at the height of its efficacy alongside the—albeit incomparably weaker—consolidation of the Soviet alternative in the socialist world). Both superpowers were at that time grappling with a similar inability to control global as well as subsystemic dynamics in the two opposing camps of the Cold War. The failure to bring the Vietnam War to a positive conclusion had led to the perception that the USA had over-extended her role as mainstay of the 'Free World'.<sup>21</sup> Brezhnev's USSR was basking in her own recently recognized role as a superpower, but the break with China and the Czechoslovak crisis showed her limitations in terms of controlling the traditional 'socialist community', the global 'anti-imperialist' camp.<sup>22</sup> A complex redefinition of North-South relations was also developing, within and beyond the contexts of the Cold War and post-colonial dynamics. After the contradictory experience of the 'decade of development', the UN system was struggling to manage these new dynamics in North-South and South-South relations.<sup>23</sup> International détente here appeared to be taking a defensive turn, showing a clear intention to preserve the status quo, precisely because of the understanding

*Capitalism: Its Fall and Rise in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 366–369.

<sup>20</sup> Michel J. Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy*, (New York: New York University Press, 1975).

<sup>21</sup> George P. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002, 4th ed.).

<sup>22</sup> Svetlana Savranskaya, William Taubman, 'Soviet Foreign Policy, 1962–1975', in Melwyn Leffler, Odd Arne Westad (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. II, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 146–154.

<sup>23</sup> John Loxley, 'The 1970s: Shocks, Stagflation, and the Second UN Decade of Development', in José Antonio Ocampo, Anis Chowdhury, Diana Alarcón (eds), *The World Economy through the Lens of the United Nations*, (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 86–117.

between Moscow and Washington designed to stabilize bipolarity.<sup>24</sup> However, bipolarity was ineluctably weakening in various parts of the world. The superpowers were unable to exert significant control over changes in European structures specifically linked to transcending the bipolar facedown,<sup>25</sup> much less over the confused and troubled growth of the so-called Third World and the new international roles of China, India and Japan.<sup>26</sup> The growing complexity of these issues and the global dimension that they were assuming sharpened the sense of a political crisis in the system's management, opening the way for experiments with new attempts at control (such as convening the first summit of the world's top industrialized countries).<sup>27</sup>

It was no coincidence, in this changing landscape, that in ideological terms a slow shift and internal transformation was affecting the very concepts of communism, social democracy, liberalism and conservatism. In the West, the 'Cold War consensus' was weakening, with a gradual radicalization of left-right opposition; added to this, however, were early signs of a certain downsizing of politics' role in society.<sup>28</sup> In the communist world, a reassessment was underway which would lead to incidents (the USSR's repression of the Prague Spring) but also to clearly epoch-making innovations (e.g. the death of Mao and its consequences in China).<sup>29</sup> But fragmentation was also growing in the so-called Third World after the end of decolonization, bringing revolutionary experiments and new prospects for inclusion in the loop of market globalization.

<sup>24</sup>Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War*, (Washington: Potomac Books, 2013); Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>25</sup>Wilfried Loth, *Overcoming the Cold War: A History of Détente, 1950–1991*, (Basingstoke-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 102 ff.

<sup>26</sup>A broad picture in Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, (New York: Basic Book, 2017), 553–578.

<sup>27</sup>Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol, Federico Romero (eds), *International Summitry and Global Governance: The Rise of the G7 and the European Council, 1974–1991*, (London: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>28</sup>Gary Gerstle, *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order: America and the World in the Free Market Era*, (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2022); Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Ch. V, (Yale: Yale University Press, 2011).

<sup>29</sup>Silvio Pons, *The Global Revolution: A History of International Communism 1917–1991*, (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 265 ff.

## 2 ITALY IN THE 1970s AMID CONTINUING CHANGE

The essential theme of this research is an attempt to give better focus to perceptions, interpretations and cultural analyses of the multifaceted global crisis in the Italian context. In relation to national history, the decade has now received considerable attention by historians as regards both domestic aspects<sup>30</sup> and links between circumstances in Italy and the international or newly dawning transnational contexts.<sup>31</sup>

In socio-economic terms, the crisis affecting the Western system was experienced as a distinct crisis in Italy, betraying the limits of the extraordinary journey of transformation that had been the country's golden age of modernization.<sup>32</sup> Although Italy had seen the rapid establishment of a predominantly industrial economic system of a modern Fordist character, it was so fragile that the impact of the period of post-1971 crisis triggered instant mayhem (growing inflation, heavy pressure on public finances, heightened conflict in the work environment, problems for large industry, both public and private). At the time the country's prospects were viewed most pessimistically, though there was no real collapse of the production system, quite the reverse: in comparison with other countries which tried policies of greater austerity, the true economic crisis was largely restricted to a contained phase of recession in 1975.<sup>33</sup> The cracks in the earlier

<sup>30</sup> Comitato Italia anni Settanta, *L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni Settanta*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003): vol. I, Agostino Giovagnoli, Silvio Pons (eds), *Tra guerra fredda e distensione*; Vol. II, Gabriele De Rosa, Giancarlo Monina (eds), *Sistema politico e istituzioni*; Vol. III, Francesco Malgeri, Leonardo Paggi (eds), *Partiti e organizzazioni di massa*; vol. IV, Fiamma Lussana, Giacomo Marramao (eds), *Culture, nuovi soggetti, identità*. More recently, Balestracci, Papa (eds), *L'Italia degli anni Settanta. Narrazioni e interpretazioni a confronto*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2019); Miguel Gotor, *Generazione Settanta. Storia del decennio più lungo del secolo breve 1966–1982*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2022).

<sup>31</sup> Umberto Gentiloni Silveri, *L'Italia sospesa. La crisi degli anni Settanta vista da Washington*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2009), Valerio Bosco, *L'Amministrazione Nixon e l'Italia. Tra distensione europea e crisi mediterranee (1968–1975)*, (Rome: Eurilink, 2009); Lucrezia Cominelli, *L'Italia sotto tutela. Stati Uniti, Europa e crisi italiana degli anni Settanta*, (Florence-Milan: Le Monnier-Mondadori, 2014); Luigi Guarna, *Richard Nixon e i partiti politici italiani (1969–1972)*, (Milan: Mondadori, 2015); Giovanni Mario Ceci, 'Alle origini del crollo: l'Italia, lo Shock of the Global e la crisi degli anni Settanta', *Mondo contemporaneo*, 2, 2019, 150–166.

<sup>32</sup> Guido Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano. Culture, identità, trasformazioni fra anni Cinquanta e Sessanta*, (Rome: Donzelli, 1996); see more recently the summary by Emanuele Felice, *Ascesa e declino. Storia economica d'Italia*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2015), 229 ff.

<sup>33</sup> Francesco Petrini, 'L'Italia nella trasformazione globale. Appunti per una lettura non eccezionalista della crisi', in Balestracci, Papa (eds), *L'Italia degli anni Settanta*, 20 ff.

economic equilibrium and in optimistic future predictions were nevertheless accompanied by other completely unprecedented factors: a demographic downturn; greater equality in relations between the sexes; young people becoming more assertive both socially and within the family; modernization of industrial relations with the introduction of the 1970 Workers' Statute; expansion of communication means such as private radio and later television, at least at a local level; improved average levels of health; and marked increases in private consumption.<sup>34</sup> Many of these widespread innovations were connected to an upturn in transnational contacts and reciprocal influences with other global contexts.

In political terms, there were initially patent difficulties in the centre-left alliance among the Christian Democrats (DC), Socialists (PSI), Social Democrats (PSDI) and Republicans (PRI), in the face of the 1968 elections and the acceleration of social change manifested in student protests and continuing unrest among workers. The reformist alliance, born a decade earlier with ambitious plans to transform the country, did not collapse—in fact it bounced back, after a temporary return to centrism in 1972–1973, but internally its members became polarized and distanced from each other, making management of the socio-economic turbulence difficult.<sup>35</sup> The impression is that it was the new problems themselves that intensified the clash between two unstable but fundamental groups of forces which were a legacy of the reconstruction era: on the one hand, the pluralistic 'development party' system, which had become established within the post-war pro-Western coalition and brought together supporters of a radical revision of the country's social structures, with a view to the constitutional model for a democratic and social state; on the other hand, a cluster of forces and tendencies which can loosely be defined as a 'party of immobilism', that is to say a milieu which thought that traditional socio-economic structures should be touched as little as possible and even intended using the Cold War dynamics to embed them more firmly in stone.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup>For these changes, see, for example, Thomas Großbölting, Massimiliano Livi, Carlo Spagnolo (eds), *L'avvio della società liquida? Il passaggio degli anni Settanta come tema per la storiografia tedesca e italiana*, (Bologna-Trento: il Mulino-Fbk, 2014); Balestracci, Papa (eds), *L'Italia degli anni Settanta*, esp. 125 ff.

<sup>35</sup>The key reference for these events remains Piero Craveri, *La Repubblica dal 1958 al 1992*, (Turin: Utet, 1995), 345 ff.

<sup>36</sup>The two definitions come from Guido Formigoni, *Storia d'Italia nella guerra fredda (1943–1978)*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2016), 106–107, 140–141 and *passim*.

It is no coincidence that this systemic difficulty affecting the country's government led to a period of renewed political violence. This initially flared among small groups of Neo-fascists who launched a series of attacks connected with a sophisticated form of conservatism known as the 'strategy of tension', cultivated not only by extremist minorities but also by various segments of institutional agencies and public structures, seeking to resist to the threats of change carried by the new social movements. A few years later, conversely, saw the rise of left-wing terrorism, inspired by revolutionary radicalization of the clash with neo-capitalism. This was highly aggressive and capable of disrupting the country, albeit perpetrated by a minority in the student and worker movements.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, with the speeding up of electoral changes in 1975–1976 (producing a consensus that shifted significantly to the communist Left), the Italian transition was marked by the experiment of 'national solidarity', seen as the ticklish last phase of an accommodation with a view to reforming party democracy to meet the challenge of new times. Despite its many limitations, it temporarily rose above the systemic Cold War rift: the Communist Party came out of opposition and—without fully entering into government—engaged with the Christian Democrats in an attempt to manage the crisis, cooperating on reform and stabilization.<sup>38</sup> The experiment lasted less than three years, though it had some success in crisis management, despite the challenge of mounting terrorist violence. This last culminated when DC leader Aldo Moro was kidnapped and assassinated by the Red Brigades (BR) in the spring of 1978. This dramatic event coincided with various international changes that created a crisis in détente (Euromissiles, EMS in Europe), leading ultimately to the end of governments of 'national solidarity'.

After 1979 the country thus entered a sort of precarious, faux-centrist political stability, running parallel with a specific kind of economic rationalization. This last was based primarily on the growth of production in a

<sup>37</sup> The complex research on these matters is described in Richard Drake, *The Revolutionary Mystique and Terrorism in Contemporary Italy*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021, 2nd ed.).

<sup>38</sup> Franco De Felice, 'Nazione e crisi: le linee di frattura', in Francesco Barbagallo (ed), *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, vol. II, part 1, (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), 48 ff.; Guido Formigoni, *Aldo Moro. Lo statista e il suo dramma*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2016), 283 ff.; summary in Silvio Pons, 'Cold War Republic: the "External Constraint" in Italy during the 1970s', in Antonio Varsori, Benedetto Zaccaria (eds), *Italy in the International System from Détente to the End of the Cold War: The Underrated Ally*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 48 ff.

‘Third Italy’ (in other words a geographical area separate from the old dualism between the industrial north and the backward south), with connections to the international scene and capable of assimilating new services and small- to medium-sized industry. In second place, such stabilization also coincided with monetary stabilization, as it was described,<sup>39</sup> which aimed to shrink inflation by curbing union power, with a promise to control public spending. This last objective was never achieved: the reduction in inflation was accompanied by an explosion of the public debt and (in parallel) of savings and private consumption. However, these were the frenzied throes of a system struggling to adapt to systemic global changes heralding the end of crisis.

The difficulty in adapting to these new factors was also related to the specific ways in which the global system was evolving. The Western system emerged from the crisis of the 1970s without any ‘Great Design’ comparable to the earlier version and with no clear hegemony (the USA’s problems were not resolved by Ronald Reagan’s election to the presidency). It was rather the impetus of unilateral choices made by the stronger countries that gradually created the new set of circumstances, which from the early 1980s began to be described with the neologism ‘globalization’.<sup>40</sup> The USA and the UK embarked on courses reflecting their readiness to shake off the national Fordist model and go for a recovery based on a marked financialization and tertiarization of their economies. They were therefore inevitably inclined to put their faith in a new phase of interconnected markets and economic interdependency, favourable to their own interests. It was no accident that a series of political choices were made between 1979 and 1981 (higher interest rates, anti-inflationary measures and the liberalizing movement of capital) designed to centre the system more around finance and services, combined with industrial relocation and encouraged by the trade union movement’s loss of momentum.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Roberto Gualtieri, *L’Italia dal 1943 al 1992. Dc e Pci nella storia della Repubblica*, (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2006), 205–222.

<sup>40</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel, Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Brian Turner, Robert Holton (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Globalization Studies*, (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>41</sup> Bellofiore, *I lunghi anni Settanta*, 83–87; Guido Formigoni, *La globalizzazione dall’ideologia alla storia: l’impatto italiano della crisi sistemica degli anni ‘70*, in Guido Formigoni, Mauro Ceruti (ed), *S-confinamenti. Esperienze e rappresentazioni della globalizzazione*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2020), 67–91.



These choices chimed with a series of technological developments (revolution in IT, communications and automated production processes) as well as with accelerating social change and individualistic/libertarian/self-determining trends in society. It was no coincidence that the political-ideological tension that had still run high in the 1970s tapered rapidly in all democratic countries. The opening-up of industrialization processes beyond the developed world (with East Asia gaining momentum and the beginning of reforms in China) was the essential counterpart to this shifting of the system centre. In a few years' time a new circuit of global flows and exchanges would emerge, in which every country system had to make national adjustments, no doubt pluralistic but to some extent conditioned.

### 3 UNDERSTANDING GLOBAL INNOVATION

The integrated research project that produced this publication, centring on four university research teams,<sup>42</sup> stemmed from the conviction that the decade could be more deeply understood if the analysis focused on the particular form the 'shock of the global' took in 1970s Italy. We determined to delve deeper into perceptions and cultural or ideological analyses of these complex changes in order to assess how the country adapted and reacted to the new circumstances.

Certainly, the initial working hypothesis was that in Italy, as elsewhere, the crisis in post-war structures must have been keenly felt.<sup>43</sup> It seemed to us that one way to verify this was to monitor the impact on public opinion of a few selected 'global' events (reflected in the titles of the articles assembled in this publication). These symbolic events have been interpreted not only in their own right, but because they indicate and reveal wider processes, in other words as symptoms of the crisis affecting traditional structures as well as interesting signs of evolution towards new equilibriums. Naturally, our choice of events is only indicative, a starting point: many others could have been added. Our first goal was to develop a fairly

<sup>42</sup> Participating researchers were from the IULM University, Milan, the University of Roma Tre, the University of Bergamo and the University of Cassino.

<sup>43</sup> This is corroborated by well-known collective projects such as the two-volume Fabio Luca Cavazza, Stephen Graubard (eds), *Il caso italiano*, (Milan: Garzanti, 1974), (with contributions by, among others, Juan Linz, Charles Kindleberger, Stanley Hoffmann).

extensive collection of sources indicating the ways in which such events were considered and presented in Italy, and therefore how the crisis was understood and absorbed by public opinion, so that we could then investigate what attempts were made to react or at least adapt to such changes. We took a systematic and concerted look at a broad spectrum of the daily and periodical Italian press (and to some extent other media systems). This database of information resources and specific sources was fundamental for the in-depth studies into specific sectors undertaken by each of the authors.<sup>44</sup>

In particular, we asked ourselves to what extent the global changes underway were known and covered in the press, how they were understood and absorbed and in what terms they were framed according to the ideology and mindsets of different sections of public opinion, civil society (ranging from social and collective bodies to religious entities) and, of course, political forces. We tried to consider how events and choices that indicated crunch points were understood and what the response to them was, or perhaps how a new prospect for coming out of the crisis was formulated and announced.

All the authors obviously voice the particular thoughts that emerge from their studies. In this introduction it is impossible to gather together the entire research conclusions. However, a few brief observations come to mind from reading the various contributions and these are grouped under some basic headings.

### *Social Changes*

A first set of researches focused on events indicative of the social changes that were underway.

Elisabetta Colombo's work tackled the new centrality of the world of young people (in relation to the question of bringing forward the voting age): paradoxically, she pointed out that the decision to lower the age of majority to 18 (and therefore expand the right to vote) was taken by Italian politicians, in 1975, following the model of other democratic countries and inspired by a global trend that was evident at the time, but without any obvious social mobilization around the issue and

<sup>44</sup>It was created by Michele Cento, Michele, Alexander Höbel, Enrico Palumbo, Jacopo Perazzoli and Chiara Zampieri.

(furthermore) without incorporating the legislation into a new framework of youth policies.

The case of the supersonic aircraft Concorde, examined by Tiziano Torresi, stirred great interest in modern means of transport, amid a rhetoric of progress and technology bringing the world closer together which clearly had a great appeal. But it also shows how the Italy of that time recognized the many contradictions and limitations of the enterprise: how it represented a challenge to the USA, albeit in the form of a bilateral Anglo-French project more than a European one—but chiefly, how it would turn out to be economically unsustainable, as the facts showed, with commercial flights permanently halted twenty years after the launch.

Renato Moro captured the first hints of a still partial entry into the digital age with the spread of the first computers, uncovering a surprising series of quite deep reflections on the meaning and future of this new technology. There were still uncertainties as to how the ‘discovery of information technology’ could be applied: it aroused expectations among the more optimistic but equally criticism and scepticism about a ‘technological society’ which many found worrying (in its gaming side as well as the nightmare standardization of power). Moro’s essay notes that contestation and suspicion were not only found in extremist cultural spheres, but often in conservative and moderate milieus. Meanwhile, Italy’s solid competence and industrial infrastructure in the IT field failed to consolidate as the new era of widespread computerization approached.

The collective imagination was captured—as Maurizio Zinni explains—by the extraordinary success of a completely innovative and unconventional film: the first chapter in what would become the endless saga of *Star Wars*. Yet the film was judged in Italy in largely dismissive and trivializing terms. There was no real grasp of Hollywood’s ability to attract a public that was this time definitively transnational and perhaps global, nor was there any particular exploration of the alleged mythical and cultural premises enshrined in the science fiction fable (except to some extent through the jaundiced eye of the left-wing press).

### *The Dynamics of Energy and the Economy*

Widening the perspective to global economic and energy dynamics, the approach became still more interesting. The macroscopic question of the crisis that hit the Bretton Woods system in 1971 was bound to be felt, given its exceptional destabilizing impact. In Italy—as Michele Cento

demonstrates—the decisions made by the USA were interpreted in a predominantly critical, somewhat rhetorical and largely European tone; some Italian officials even attempted an innovative—if inconclusive—proposal for the new era of international monetary relationships. However, the lira was destined to slip rapidly out of the European ‘monetary snake’, betraying the country’s limitations and the feebleness of the European response to the crisis.

This theme would be revisited during a completely different political situation in Italy, when the government of ‘national solidarity’ was in office and had to address the 1978 Jenkins proposal, relaunched by the French-German axis, to create a true common monetary system in the EEC. Giovanni Scirocco shows how, in this case, adherence to the EMS was not accompanied by a wide debate but was accepted by the government principally out of a general pro-European reflex, despite the evident perplexities of the Banca d’Italia and at the cost of the majority’s break with the PCI (as well as uncertainty on the part of the Socialists). However, the small nucleus of political actors who supported the choice had a certain clear-eyed vision of it as the necessary accompaniment to a monetarist turn.

Meanwhile, the 1973 oil crisis completed the array of external shocks: the increase to the price of oil, added to pre-existing economic difficulties, caused an inflationary and recessionary reaction which the government tackled with ‘austerity’ measures largely limited to private activity, as we hear from Marco De Nicolò and Federico Mazzei, who describe a fairly heated debate on the subject. However, the attempt to avoid affecting investments and industrial productivity was not particularly successful, while accelerated growth in public spending, designed to respond to the problems in the economic system, would set off a spiral of debt that had substantial effects.

In addition, while early discussions were taking place about alternatives to the traditional energy model, the debate centred on the question of nuclear energy. In 1975, the government quickly put together a civil nuclear development plan, overriding the effects of the 1960s setback which had interrupted Italy’s premature first experiments in the sector. Lucia Bonfreschi examines the heated debate that was sparked by this choice, rekindled as it was by the Three Mile Island accident in the USA in 1979. While supporters of nuclear energy included most of the centrist, moderate and conservative spectrum, the Left was split between a supportive, modernizing tendency and an opposing faction. The anti-nuclear

position was two-sided (on the one hand radical/anti-authoritarian, on the other linked to criticism of capitalism that was typical of the New Left): it had some influence and gained a certain traction within the parties (although more so in the PSI than in the PCI).

The question was related to the broader debate about ecological balance which opened up in those years in response to public opinion. As Chiara Zampieri has illustrated, the debate was growing appreciably in Italy too, spurred by *Limits to Growth*, published by the Club of Rome-MIT, as well as by the UN conference in Stockholm. While a relatively radical ecological viewpoint emerged, the approach taken by the major political and cultural powers tended to support a vision of economic development linked to employment and social needs, or in some cases to anthropocentric assumptions. The subsequent global debate on sustainable development was not trivial, but in Italy it did not translate effectively into legislative planning, partly because of the emergency climate created by the shocks affecting energy and the economy.

### *Encounters with Distant Worlds*

One issue that was certainly important was the broadening of public opinion's horizons during the decade. Above all, this concerned a new regard, not always appropriate but at least suggestive of awareness, for events affecting geographical areas or human environments that had previously been considered remote.

Massimiliano Vaghi reflects on the impact of various events in Asia, such as the war of independence in Bangladesh in 1971. The prevailing interpretation of such events was in general closely dependent on traditional patterns of alignment typical of the Cold War. It also seems to have been characterized by an 'Orientalist' perspective which reduced the analysis of local events to the old prevailing stereotypes of Eastern despotism or of an Asian tendency towards endemic violence.

The way in which African matters were addressed in Italy was not so very different. In response to the reverberation of local conflicts and the last vicissitudes of colonialism, or to the question of apartheid in Rhodesia and South Africa, Italy paid increasing attention to such issues, as Andrea Argenio elucidates, often—except on the extreme Right—with sympathy for the African peoples' new demands for status. However, this new overall picture did not always manage to supplant past stereotypes. Government foreign policy also took a line that was supportive of change, yet generally

continued to fall within Cold War boundaries and Western alliance requirements.

Reaction to events in Chile, here addressed by Benedetta Calandra, was even more politically marked. There was widespread criticism of Pinochet's coup in 1973 and the harsh repression that went with it: solidarity with the Chilean population was expressed in various social and trade union initiatives. Some discussion also developed around the ultraliberal models of economic policy imposed by the regime. It was often pointed out—primarily on the Left but also in the Catholic world—that the costs of economic recovery, applauded on the Right, were borne by the poorer classes.

In the case of the pivotal Chinese events, Alexander Höbel found that the post-Mao volte-face and the new approach taken by Deng Xiaoping received fairly detailed coverage in the Italian press. The change in bipolar relations triggered by the new relationship between Beijing and Washington was appropriately registered and accompanied by a description of the content and effects of the 'four modernizations' which seemed relatively compelling, although the comparative criteria used to interpret the change were still often flimsy (citing Yugoslavia as a model showed a failure to recognize the originality of the Asian giant's prospects).

Another noteworthy instance of growing interest regarded indigenous peoples, subjected as they were in various parts of the world to coercion or isolation that sometimes threatened them with disappearance. Various indications pointed to a change in the collective attitude towards the native peoples of North America—as Massimo De Giuseppe has been able to demonstrate—and some minority groups even appropriated 'Indian' symbolism to evoke their struggle against marginalization in the modern capitalist setting.

The case of European ethno-national movements also had a certain resonance in Italian public opinion. In particular—as Paolo Barcella's essay clarifies—the new cultural surge of support and protection for linguistic minorities. This spread during the decade on the fringe of a political bid for administrative autonomy in some regions, as well as more radical movements seeking independence. The phenomenon grafted onto the situation of some Italian regions which, though experiencing more favourable economic dynamics than in the past, were beginning to feel vulnerable and lacking in protection from the state, for example those in the north-east of the country. This would provide the basis for significant local political changes.

The situation was more complex when struggles for independence outside Europe led to outbursts of violence affecting the international context, as in the case of Palestinian terrorism, which became entangled with endemic terrorist violence in Italy. Enrico Palumbo shows how the debate plainly grew heated, given the shocking impact of many episodes. Although there was general condemnation of violent methods such as those of the commando group Black September at the 1972 Munich Olympics, the debate did reveal a gap between those who interpreted the violence partly as the product of earlier conflict and those who merely argued in terms of defence in the face of threat, adopting the reasoning of Israel and the West.

### *The New International System*

Developing the analysis, we can see how some of the events studied here give a good indication of Italy's reactions to changes in the international system. The circumstances of global détente were given a boost by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which concluded in Helsinki in 1975. Guido Formigoni's research seeks to show how the positive assessment of that event linked up with the view that détente might gradually resolve the inflexible Cold War bloc division (even at a domestic level), while polemical judgements (from both Right and Left) interpreted the event as yielding to the USSR's demands to legitimize its Eastern European empire, or conversely as a simple enshrining of the poorly tolerated bipolarity.

Coming to the impact of the first meeting of the West's top industrialized countries (G6) at Rambouillet, Giovanni Mario Ceci's analysis highlights how it tended to be seen as an attempt to save Western capitalism from its own crisis and divisions. As a result, it was much criticized on the Left, while even among the moderate and conservative sectors who had applauded its original intentions very few dared hope that any good would come of it. Nor was it widely regarded as an attempt at least to find a new global governance model in the face of complex problems.

In the case of the European Community, the significant step of the first direct elections to the European Parliament took place in a climate of persistently high and widespread confidence in the community project (85.6% of those eligible voted in the 1979 elections). Additionally, as Paolo Acanfora explains in his essay, all Italian political spheres were competing to show that they were pro-European, albeit naturally with different nuances of language and showing the abiding influence of their different

cultural models. There was still a relative readiness to put faith in the project, even though this was not always strictly connected to the real political issues unfolding in the country.

### *Shifts in Political and Religious Culture*

Finally, we turn our attention to the period's cultural changes, how the coexistence of 'social' and 'political' was interpreted and how far religion exerted an influence. As regards European socialism, an important symbolic step occurred in Germany at the end of the Brandt era, when Helmut Schmidt took over at the helm of the SDP and as chancellor of the FRG. As Jacopo Perazzoli shows (after a first historical overview centring on the background of a spying incident that caused the man who inspired the *Ostpolitik* to resign), the change of style and method was by no means underestimated by Italian public opinion. The moderate leanings of the new leader, as regards issues such as curbing inflation, budget balancing and Atlantic solidarity, were also quite evident to contemporary Italian eyes.

Donatello Aramini's essay on the election of Pope John Paul II in 1978 shows how Italy reacted to the symbolic novelty of the event (the first non-Italian Pope for four and a half centuries) and the awareness that the Church herself appeared to be encountering difficulties with her traditional image. The step was hailed by many as the beginning of a break with the past, departing not only from the Italo-centric strictures of the Roman curia but also from the conventions of a traditional religious world. There was focus, too, on some of the newly elected Pope's attitudes, which were certainly not entirely representative, much less fully comprehensive of what would gradually become his original pastoral government of the Catholic church.

On another important front, the rise of Margaret Thatcher through the British Conservative Party (becoming party leader in 1975 and winning the general election in 1979 which took her to Downing Street) was also seen as a ground-breaking factor. As Laura Cigliani reports, the strongly ideological character of the new prime minister struck many observers who spoke (either in hope or with concern) of a 'neo-liberal wave' which might not only affect an economically floundering UK but also sweep across the whole of Europe. In just a few months, the actions of the new government in London seemed to provide ample proof of the radical nature of the turn, as viewed from contemporary Italy.



#### 4 A SUMMARY OF SOME GENERAL QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

In essence, did Italy feel herself to be in a world that was radically changing? We can try to draw some brief, albeit preliminary, conclusions. In the first place, this collection of chapters seems to suggest a widespread perception of the crisis affecting the old equilibriums; intuition of new structures developing was more limited, although not completely absent. Our observation is that this imbalance seems fairly usual in the short period in which the events were considered. It is of course a crucial role of historiography to return to the past to show how, in the context of a crisis, there were already signs of trends and tendencies that prefigured the new: in terms of research, this operation has been carried out in great detail, for example, in relation to the history of the USA in the 1970s.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps such systematic studies relating to Italy do not yet exist. But it is clear that at the time people were naturally slow to recognize the early signs of more original trends: this does not seem to be particularly restricted to the Italian context.

In the second place, we observed a notable appetite for information and a propensity to consider the significance of international events, including the way they reflected on the home front. In short, the question of interdependencies, or at least connections between external issues and national experiences, was now very clear to public opinion. And this went beyond the fact that there was a wide range of abilities and expertise able to decode the potential meaning of these issues, in ways that were either more generic or more appropriate and convincing. It seems that during this decade Italy did not feel herself to be an isolated provincial country, as may still have been the case in previous decades.

In the third place, Italy comes across as a country still divided along clear political-ideological lines, which in some ways dominated the interpretation of reality and the new events taking place in the surrounding global environment. Albeit with nuances that were sometimes more realistic and sometimes more strictly aprioristic, it often seems clear that the symbolic events discussed here were interpreted in the light of entrenched perceptions of the world, inherited from the past, which consequently tried to bring every new international factor back to people's own expectations concerning political parties, the environment and sub-culture. Many

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society and Politics*, (New York: The Free Press, 2001).

of these tools for analysing reality would soon show their limitations, but in the 1970s they still seemed to be fairly robust.

As a fourth and final point in the overall interpretation, these collected studies have nevertheless gathered and highlighted many signs of bewilderment and uncertainty and hence increasing expectations of change or redefinition of old structures, present in unfolding world reality and talked up by observers within the country. It could be said that this awareness of discontinuity was most clearly apparent when there were primary political factors, or elements of political culture, at stake, as well as global economic questions. It was naturally more difficult to make sense of historic fractures affecting cultural and social phenomena, which would only later be re-interpreted as a sort of litmus test of far-reaching changes to the mind-sets and practices of advanced societies. The approaching change, therefore, did not seem to be underestimated in Italy: expectations, hopes, concerns and fears were closely interwoven in the analysis of this new reality.

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# Right to Vote at Age 18. 1 July 1971. From the USA to Italy

*Elisabetta Colombo*

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## I INTRODUCTION

In 1965 rock-folk singer Barry McGuire recorded one of his most famous protest songs, *Eve of Destruction*. The single quickly climbed the US music chart, the Billboard Hot 100, reaching Number One. ‘You’re old enough to kill, but not for votin’ was one of the best-known lyrics aimed at young people between the ages of 18 and 21. They were indeed old enough to be drafted and fight in Vietnam, as the minimum age for conscription was 18, but until the age of 21, they were disenfranchised. The fear of enlistment would drive more and more of those young men to burn their draft cards and fuel a campaign to lower the voting age to 18. At the time, the voting age was 21 in most democracies, apart from few countries such as Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, and Japan, where people as young as 20 were allowed to vote.

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News of the US protest quickly spread to Europe. In the years that followed, demonstrations, marches against the war in Vietnam, university occupations and strikes mobilized young people against a society that while offering greater social welfare than in the past, was still considered too unequal, authoritarian and conformist. The criticism of political power translated into questioning representative government as the foundation of democratic institutions and demanding a renewal of politics that would open the way for participatory grassroots democracy. The mobilization helped to spread awareness of the disparity criticized in McGuire's single.

In fact, albeit timidly, European institutions showed a certain openness to the demands of the youth-oriented 'counterculture' and sought to include young people in the political process by passing specific amendments to their constitutions in the 1960s and 1970s that gave 18-year-olds the right to vote. Although the extension of that right was not always linked directly to street protests and public pressure, that was quite evidently the case in the United States, where the 26th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified on 1 March 1971. It ran: 'The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age'.

So far this widespread global trend to establish the minimum voting age at 18 has rarely attracted the attention of historians, who have only sporadically studied nation-by-nation cases. Yet, the right to vote is a central pillar of any democracy. The 'shock of the global' in the 1970s, which is the subject of this volume, will be investigated in this chapter precisely from the perspective of lowering the voting age to 18 and will show how these reforms were an institutional response to societal rather than political changes.

## 2 SECOND WORLD WAR PRECEDENTS

The ratification of the 26th Amendment to the US Constitution was seen as the culmination of a three decades' long legislative endeavour. In 1942 Congress had reduced the draft age to 18, down from 21, and the reform had given rise to the paradox that McGuire points out, and the campaign summed up in the slogan 'Old Enough to Fight, Old Enough to Vote'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rebecca de Schweinitz, "'The Proper Age for Suffrage': Vote 18 and the Politics of Age from World War II to the Age of Aquarius", in Corinne T. Field, Nicholas L. Syrett (eds), *Age*

Half-hearted attempts had been made to remedy the inconsistency. In 1943, Georgia became the first state to lower the voting age for state and local elections from 21 to 18, followed in 1955 by Kentucky. And as early as 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower in his State of the Union address had urged Congress to propose a US constitutional amendment allowing citizens to vote at 18. However, it would take several years and thousands of youths under 21 killed in Vietnam before it would happen.

As in the USA, the issue of granting 18-year-olds the right to vote was raised in Italy in the 1940s, but not until the end of the Second World War, and hence without any intentional link between military age and voting age. In 1945, when Italy was still a Kingdom, the Ministerial Commission for drafting the national election law considered granting 18-year-olds the right to vote. The proposal was submitted by the Italian Youth Front, in which the youth elements of the anti-fascist parties of the National Liberation Committee had converged. The intention was to recognize the role played by young people in fighting Nazi-Fascism. The Communist Umberto Terracini, future President of the Constituent Assembly, tabled the motion, provoking dissent even among large sections of the Left. The fear was that the electorate, which for the first time included women, was not yet ready. The proposal to give the vote to all those under 21 who had fought for freedom also met the same fate. Indeed, there was concern that the need to check that qualification could delay the elections.

Granting 18-year-olds the right to vote was again debated by the Constituent Assembly, the elected legislative body responsible for drafting the Constitution. However, there was no agreement on the voting age to be included in the Charter, leading the Chamber of Deputies to accept the solution put forward by the Republican Tommaso Perassi, as stated in Article 48, paragraph 1: ‘all citizens, men and women, who have reached the age of majority are voters’. In essence, political maturity was

*in America: The Colonial Era to the Present*, (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 209–236, disputes the overemphasis on the link between combat age and voting age. On the heterogeneous bipartisan coalition that supported lowering the voting age and the debt to the campaign for civil and voting rights of African Americans, see Jennifer Frost, “Let Us Vote!”: *Youth Voting Rights and the 26th Amendment*, (New York: University Press, 2021). For a long-term history of the voting age, see Wendell W. Cultice, *Youth’s Battle for the Ballot: A History of Voting Age in America*, (New York: Praeger, 1992).

connected to civil maturity, which the Civil Code of 1942 had set at 21 years.<sup>2</sup> On the whole, the political forces of the Constituent Assembly considered it inappropriate to give the right to vote to young people who had just emerged from the war and had been indoctrinated with fascist ideology.<sup>3</sup> However, the age of majority criterion was waived for Senate elections, where an exception was made to the principle of universal suffrage by restricting the minimum voting age to 25 (art. 58, c. 1). This difference from the voting age for the Chamber of Deputies left blatant the failure to differentiate representation in the two Chambers.<sup>4</sup>

Likewise, in France in 1946, the first draft of the Constitution of the Fourth Republic provided for a voting age of 20, but the issue would not be resolved until several decades later. Hence, the 1940s were a pivotal historical decade not only in the US but across the entire West. However, Eastern European countries were the first to adopt voting for 18-year-olds and over, with Russia in 1917, Hungary in 1919, Albania and Yugoslavia in 1945, and Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia in 1946.<sup>5</sup> A few years later, in 1949, the 18-year limit was written into the Constitution of the German Democratic Republic.

### 3 THE 1960S REVIVAL OF THE DEBATE ON LOWERING THE VOTING AGE

Voting age reform did not return to the US political agenda until the mid-1960s, when by 1964 the voting for 18-year-olds had been enshrined in the constitutions of the Republic of Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo,<sup>6</sup> to name two new post-colonial countries. To follow that route in the US, initiatives ‘from above’ and mobilization ‘from

<sup>2</sup> For these profiles see Ernesto Bettinelli, *All'origine della democrazia dei partiti*, (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1982), 113 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Christian Democrat Senator Fabiano De Zan recalled this, as reported in the *Proceedings of the Senate of the Republic, VI Legislatura*—henceforth *Atti Senato* (Senate Proceedings), *seduta del 12 febbraio 1975*, 18747, 18749.

<sup>4</sup> On the subject of the differentiation of the two Chambers, Piero Aimo, *Bicameralismo e regioni*, (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1977), 113 ff.

<sup>5</sup> See Stephen White, ‘Russia/USSR’, Florian Grotz, László Hubai, ‘Hungary’, Dorothée de Nève, ‘Albania’, Antony Todorov, ‘Bulgaria’ and Tomáš Lebeda, ‘Czech Republic’, in Dieter Nohlen, Philip Stöver (eds), *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook*, (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010), respectively 1629, 886, 128, 360, 464.

<sup>6</sup> I would like to thank Pierluigi Valsecchi, Professor of the History of African Institutions at the University of Pavia, for this information.



below' converged on integrating the 1965 Voting Rights Act. The law revoked some discriminatory clauses of the Jim Crow Laws restricting electoral participation by African-American citizens. The new civil rights battle pushed Congress to approve lowering the voting age for federal, state and local elections by the Voting Rights Act Amendments of 1970.

The battle was not over, since the constitutionality of the rule passed by Congress was challenged at the Supreme Court level. In *Oregon versus Mitchell*, the Court ruled, not without internal divisions, that the 18-year voting age provisions adopted by Congress were constitutional but applicable only to federal elections since Congress could not legislate for state and local elections. Thus, the lowering of the voting age would only apply to elections to the House of Representatives and the Senate. At this point in clear contradiction of the Supreme Court's directive, Congress passed the 26th Constitutional Amendment in March 1971. As we have seen, this amendment prohibited states from excluding citizens aged 18 and over from voting on the grounds of age. The expected ratification by three-quarters of the states was achieved as early as 1 July. It was in absolute the most rapid approval of a constitutional amendment, attesting to the confidence of a bipartisan majority in the responsibility of the young and their respect for the political system.

In the meantime, in 1969 the passage of the British Representation of the People Act lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 for national, regional and local elections. The introduction of the right to vote at the age of 18 was linked to a package of broader reforms intended to align the voting age with what society perceived to be the new threshold to adulthood, i.e. 18 years of age.<sup>7</sup> A majority report, presented in July 1967 by a commission chaired by Justice John Latey, had recommended that adult status be conferred precisely at 18 years of age.<sup>8</sup> The commission had been set up two years earlier to examine the age of majority in civil law, and its report reflected social changes. In the 1960s, young people were more literate and educated than in the past, as well as more financially independent at

<sup>7</sup>Thomas Loughran, Andrew Mycock, Jonathan Tonge, 'A coming of age: how and why the UK became the first democracy to allow votes for 18-year-olds', *Contemporary British History*, 35:2, 2021, 284–313. For a long-term reading of the connections between legal age (civil and criminal), capacity to act, age threshold for entry into the armed forces, the world of work and marriage, see Michael Mitterauer, *I giovani in Europa dal Medioevo a oggi*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1991), 63 ff.

<sup>8</sup>Adrian Bingham, "'The last milestone" on the journey to full adult suffrage? 50 years of debates about the voting age', *History & Policy*, 25 June 2019.

an earlier age. What the Latey report did not contain was an explicit opinion on the voting age, which the Committee considered to be outside its remit. The matter was in fact within the remit of the Speaker's Conference on Electoral Law. Amid some disagreement, that Conference did recommend a reduction in the voting age, but to 20 instead of 18 as Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson wished.

Even in Parliament there was no shortage of voices against lowering the voting age and polls showed that public opinion did not support the measure either. Increasingly radical street protests during 1968 may well have helped to polarize positions. But it was precisely the desire to channel the radicalism of young people into standard forms of political activity that drove the Wilson-led Cabinet to push through the reform. Of course, the propensity of that generation of youth to vote against the Conservatives was an incentive for the Labour majority.<sup>9</sup> The Representation of the People Act became law in 1969.<sup>10</sup> It reduced the voting age for the House of Commons from 21 to 18 years of age and was immediately followed by a similar reduction in the age of majority, recommended by the Latey Commission and adopted in the Family Reform Act. Although the UK was not the first country to grant the vote to 18-year-olds, it was certainly 'a proactive international pioneer'.<sup>11</sup> Within a few years, many of the great Western democracies would follow suit.

#### 4 THE IMPETUS FOR REFORM IN ITALY: PARTIES, VOTING IN EUROPEAN FORUMS, AND EXAMPLES FROM NEIGHBOURING DEMOCRACIES

Back to Italy. On 20 September 1967, when the vote for 18-year-olds had not yet been granted either in the USA or in the United Kingdom, Social Democrat MP Michele Pellicani presented a bill to the Chamber of Deputies to amend Article 48 of the Constitution and set the voting age at 18. In November of the following year, Socialist deputy Bruno Lepre

<sup>9</sup> He considers the vote for 18-year-olds a gerrymandering operation, based on an alleged propensity of the young to vote Labour: Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, (London: Macmillan, 1997), 176.

<sup>10</sup> The following year, in June, 18-year-olds would vote for the first time in the general election, which, contrary to predictions, was won by the conservatives led by Edward Heath. However, the minimum age for electoral candidates would only be lowered to 18 in 2006 with the Election Administration Act.

<sup>11</sup> Loughran, Mycock, Tonge, 'A coming of age', 285.

put forward a bill to amend Article 2 of the Civil Code, lowering the age of majority from 21 to 18.<sup>12</sup> If carried, this second bill would have meant giving the vote to 18-year-olds, without amending the Constitution, whose Article 48 recognized this right at the age of majority, as we have seen. However, no action was to be taken, in regard to the Senate.

Likewise, an international trend was confirmed by votes cast in European forums to push for lowering the age limit to act in private law. In June 1968, in London, the Fifth Conference of Justice Ministers registered a consensus on the need to harmonize national legislation concerning the age of majority, which ranged in various countries between 18 and 21. However, divergences of opinion prevented reaching any agreement on an age threshold.<sup>13</sup>

Nor did international pressure speed up the approval of the Lepre bill. It obtained the endorsement of the Constitutional Affairs Commission in 1969 and was unanimously approved by the Justice Commission in 1971, but before it reached the Chamber of Deputies, it lapsed due to the early dissolution of the Chambers in February 1972. The legislative process had become complicated for reasons relating to both the general situation in the country and the parliamentary workload.

In contrast to the situation in other countries, in the early 1970s, the wave of Italian youth protest had not yet died down and had merged with trade union struggles among large-scale industries.<sup>14</sup> In the meantime, on 12 December 1969, the Piazza Fontana massacre in Milan marked the beginning of the 'strategy of tension' and the so-called anni di piombo (years of violence), fraught with bloody massacres by subversive right-wing forces with the support of sectors of the secret services, but also by the clandestine armed struggle of the extra-parliamentary Left. The situation was aggravated by a recessionary cycle and marked governmental instability. The period for the approval process of the Lepre bill, from November 1968 to March 1975, coincided with a turnover of ten governments.

As for the legislative process, in the meantime other proposals had been submitted to amend articles of the Civil Code relating to the age of

<sup>12</sup> Bill n. 670, presented on 14 November 1968.

<sup>13</sup> The Minister of Justice, Republican Oronzo Reale, recalled this in his speech at the morning sitting on 18 February 1975. Published in *Atti Senato* (Senate Proceedings), 18875.

<sup>14</sup> On young people and representation at that time, see Patrizia Dogliani, *Storia dei giovani*, (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2003), 183–188.

majority and articles of the Constitution relating to the eligible voting age. These were proposals put forward by deputies and Senators of different political orientations. Above all, the conviction that the youth vote would favour the Left (as well as, to some extent, the extreme Right) made the moderate parties cautious, first and foremost the Christian Democratic Party, which at least initially adopted the reservations of part of public opinion.<sup>15</sup> Be that as it may, on 25 May 1972, the inaugural day of the 6th legislature, newly elected Senator Lepre re-proposed to the Senate the text presented years earlier in the Chamber of Deputies. Progress of the bill was conditioned by Parliament's need to simultaneously examine other bills concerning the lowering age of the active and passive electorate in both Chambers. During that time, family law reform was also being discussed to unify the age required to marry, to enter into employment contracts and, in general, to attain the capacity to act under private law.<sup>16</sup>

In the meantime, the Federal Republic of Germany had also changed the minimum voting age to 18 years. In the autumn of 1969, Chancellor Willy Brandt, at the head of a social-liberal coalition, announced the tabling of a bill to lower the voting age from 21 to 18 and the age to run for Bundestag from 25 to 21. The issue was divisive. It was well known that a few years earlier the former Christian Democrat Chancellor Konrad Adenauer had remarked sharply: *'Den Heranwachsenden fehlt eine gewisse Reife des Staatsbürgers'* (Adolescents lack appropriate maturity as citizens).<sup>17</sup> Those who argued for the political involvement and empowerment of citizens between the ages of 18 and 21 observed that many young people were responsibly engaged in professional life and were both interested and informed. They had also shown this in '68 with street demonstrations against the emergency laws adopted on 30 May of that year against the Vietnam War and—echoing the polemic popularized by McGuire's single—against conscription at the age of 18 without the right to vote.

Before the election law could be changed, it was necessary to amend the Basic Law, whose Article 38 set the voting age at 21 and the age of electoral candidates at 25, lowering them, respectively, to 18 and the age

<sup>15</sup> Thus Senator De Zan in his above-mentioned speech, *Atti Senato* (Senate Proceedings), 18747, 18754.

<sup>16</sup> Preceded by the 1974 divorce referendum, family law reform would be enacted by Law n. 151 of 19 May 1975.

<sup>17</sup> This was reported by Benjamin Stahl, 'Junge an die Urne', *Das Parlament*, 15 June 2015.

of majority, which was 21 at the time. This took place on 31 July 1970, when the amendment approved the previous 18 June by the Bundestag with ten abstentions and no votes against, thus with the required two-thirds majority, came into force. The Conservatives accused the SPD of wanting to improve its electoral chances by extending the vote to young people, whose approval rating for the Social Democrats was considered higher than for the CDU/CSU, something that would be confirmed by the results of the elections on 19 November 1972, in which almost five million young people between the ages of 18 and 20 were now eligible to vote.<sup>18</sup>

Shortly before, on 19 September 1972, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe had approved a recommendation to member countries to lower the age of majority, preferably to 18.

## 5 THE LINK BETWEEN MAJORITY AND VOTING AGE IN FRANCE AND ITALY

Several months after the Council of Europe's recommendation, France also changed the voting age, linking it to the age of majority and lowering both to 18. The age of majority had been set at 21 on 20 September 1792 and had remained unchanged ever since. Conversely, the voting age had been constantly amended, up and down, with every change in political circumstances, going from 25 in the Constitution of 1791 to 21 in the Jacobin Constitution of 1793, back up to 25 in the Year III Constitution, to 21 in the Year VIII Constitution, to 30 in the Charter of 4 June 1814, then set at 25 in the Constitution of 1830 and finally at 21 in the Constitution of 1848. In the wake of the changes in neighbouring democracies, in 1974 the newly elected President of the Republic Valéry Giscard d'Estaing had the Parliament vote to lower the age of majority, and thus the right to vote, to 18. Although many on the Right feared that the measure would electorally favour the Left, the bill presented by the government gained cross-party support. The measure was voted in the National Assembly on 25 June 1974 and in the Senate on the 28, and made into law on 5 July.

<sup>18</sup> Adaptation of the federal electoral law following the changed constitutional diktat took place in June 1972, and in 1975 18-year-olds were also granted the right of electoral candidacy.

In the same weeks, a climate of renewed commitment to civil rights saw all of Italy's parliamentary groups give their unanimous consent to the Lepre bill, supplemented by a proposal presented on 27 July 1974, by the Communist Senator Generoso Petrella together with other Senators from the same party. The latter proposal provided for an extension of the right to vote to 18-year-olds not only in elections to the Chamber of Deputies but also in local government elections to choose representatives at the regional, provincial and municipal levels. The government led by Aldo Moro unconditionally endorsed the unanimous consent of all the political parties.

The long and tortuous process by which the reform was to be achieved, as well as some accusations of obstructionism, pointed to a number of persisting reservations and perplexities surrounding these innovations. Yet 18-year-olds in the 1970s were better prepared by their longer period of education (three years of 'middle school' following five years at primary school) and better informed by the spread of the mass media. In addition, the legal system already attached certain important rights and responsibilities to reaching the age of 18. That threshold was accepted, for example, by the Civil Code (in regulating employment contracts, copyrights and testamentary capacity), by the Criminal Code (with full responsibility for crimes committed) and in the area of public-sector employment. In short, the provision connected the voting age to a socio-cultural reality that had already reached this point, even under private law.

The parliamentary debate provided a damning analysis of the ethical shortcomings and the fragility of values in the opulent society of the economic miracle, a society capable of presenting the young with the dream of a car, yet was only able to offer an imperfect democracy. The debate also recognized the contribution made by young people to the campaign against authoritarianism, from the family to the state,<sup>19</sup> and to achieving a pluralist society based on participation. The public sphere had indeed been enriched by groups, grassroots committees and youth associations, even though the parties' youth components were experiencing a collapse in membership and an unedifying party life.<sup>20</sup> One example of this

<sup>19</sup> Thus in the Signorile bill and others on setting the age limit for majority at 18, presented to the Chamber of Deputies on 31 July 1974.

<sup>20</sup> Consider, for example, the 14th national congress of the Young Christian Democrats, held in July 1974 at the Politeama Theatre in Palermo, in a hall that remained deserted several times, so that it was necessary to interrupt the debate because the young recruits of the DC were in the wings of the theatre competing for posts in the party, local authorities and

mobilization was the mimeograph document that the Radical Party and some civil rights movements signed on 10 August 1974. In support of the hunger strike undertaken by radical leader Marco Pannella, it called on the Presidents of the two houses of Parliament to set dates for the debate and vote on the laws for extending the franchise to 18-year-olds, and for reforming family law and legislation regarding abortion. Citizens were invited to join the request by phoning Parliament to ask for information or by quietly protesting outside the two Chambers.

In short, giving the vote to 18-year-olds was an invitation to young people to enter early adulthood, with its rules and duties. It was an invitation to take responsibility, to participate in an orderly fashion that would eliminate extreme reactions and violent protests, and to undertake joint efforts to strengthen democracy.<sup>21</sup>

Awareness of the pressing need to adapt the age of majority and the voting age to social changes became more acute after the enactment of the law in France. It is no surprise, then, that Italian parliamentary debates repeatedly voiced the need to catch up to the 46 countries in the world that had already granted civil and political rights to citizens when they turned 18. It must be said that time and again references in the parliamentary sessions are to France, the United Kingdom, the US, and the Federal Republic of Germany, with only rare references to the socialist countries behind the Iron Curtain and to the developing countries, which had been among the first to grant the vote to 18-year-olds.<sup>22</sup> All references are quick and general, with no in-depth analysis of the different solutions adopted or how to adapt them to Italian institutions and society.<sup>23</sup> Precise information is the exception. Mainly, reference is made to the English situation

the public sector. Thus Paolo Mieli, 'Però anche loro non scherzano', *L'Espresso*, 9 March 1975. For the membership figures, see Pierpaolo Benedetti (ed), *I giovani e la politica*, (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1974), 99 ff.

<sup>21</sup> See the report of the IV Permanent Commission (Justice), rapporteur Maria Luisa Cassanmagnago Cerretti, which was submitted to the Presidency of the Chamber of Deputies on 3 March 1975.

<sup>22</sup> The reference is by the Senator of the Independent Left, Giuseppe Branca. See *Atti Senato* (Senate Proceedings), *seduta del 12 febbraio 1975*, 18771.

<sup>23</sup> On the legal transposition of institutional models, see Fabio Rugge (ed), *Il trasferimento internazionale dei modelli istituzionali*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2012). On the connection of Western European administrative experiences and the eclectic Italian reception of foreign models, see, by the same author, 'Administrative Legacies in Western Europe', in B. Guy Peters, Jon Pierre (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration*, (London: Sage, 2012), 228–240.

and the Latey Commission report, which is often cited for having summarized studies, surveys, hearings, debates and impact assessments, all lacking in the case of Italy.<sup>24</sup>

In Italy the vote for 18-year-olds was thus the result of the political parties' decision to align themselves with an international trend that in turn had resulted from a global societal change, rather than the pressure of public opinion. Eloquently, Christian Democrat Senator Fabiano De Zan emphasized in a speech to the Senate not only the lack of enthusiasm among young people for a reform that came too late but also the disparate positions of public opinion on granting the vote to 18-year-olds: from rational support to indifference, from uncertainty fuelled by fear and even explicit revulsion. It is indicative that not even the most convinced were particularly enthusiastic, but simply aware of a natural and inevitable innovation, and somewhat apprehensive because of the violent clashes occurring during youth protests.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the commitment of the political parties, on 18 February 1975, in the same session the Senate failed to pass both the Pellicani constitutional bill<sup>26</sup> and the unified text of the Lepre and Petrella bills, in that order. The first bill lowered the ages of both first-time voters and electoral candidates for the two Chambers and had already been approved by the Chamber of Deputies on 21 January. The second confirmed the age of majority at 18. Having obtained the reversal of the agenda, the ordinary bill was voted on first. Once approved, the Constitutional Bill was referred back to the committee. The ordinary bill alone then passed to the Chamber of Deputies, which approved it on 6 March 1975, with 366 votes in favour and 82 opposed. 'An official said that Italy was the 47th nation to pass such a law,' wrote *The New York Times* the day after the law passed.<sup>27</sup>

By lowering the age of majority from 21 to 18, 18-year-olds became eligible to vote in elections to the Chamber of Deputies, but not to the

<sup>24</sup> See the intervention of Liberal MP Alberto Giomo in *Atti Camera* (Lower Chamber Proceedings), *seduta del 6 marzo 1975*, 20642.

<sup>25</sup> See *Atti Senato* (Senate Proceedings), *seduta del 12 febbraio 1975*, 18747.

<sup>26</sup> Constitutional Bill n. 1885 supplemented the text on the initiative of MP Michele Pellicani, with those presented by Fracanzani and others, Ingrao and others, Almirante and others, Tocco and others, Belluscio and Bosco and others.

<sup>27</sup> 'Voting Age Is Lowered in Italy to 18 from 21', *The New York Times*, 9 March 1975. The law is dated 8 March 1975, n. 39, *Attribution of the age of majority to citizens who have reached the age of eighteen and modification of other norms relative to the capacity to act and the right to elect*.



Senate, since the Constitution—as seen—set them, respectively, at the age of majority and at the age of 25. Thus, not only was the parity of a simultaneous voting age reduction for the two Chambers ignored, but the inequality between the voting thresholds of the Chambers was itself exacerbated. On the other hand, the different ages for electoral candidates remained unchanged: 25 and 40, respectively, for the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. It was only with Constitutional Law n. 1 of 18 October 2021, that the minimum age limit of 25 years for eligibility to vote in the elections to the Senate would be annulled, aligning the voting age for the Senate and Chamber of Deputies elections at 18.

In 1975, the press gave limited coverage to the reform, concentrating instead on the electoral issue, albeit with some exceptions. *L'Espresso*, an important left-wing weekly, dedicated its cover to the youth vote and illustrated the results of the polls, which attributed 38% of the youth vote to the Italian Communist Party, almost 11 points more than the 'adult' vote in the previous 1972 elections, and only 16% to the Christian Democratic Party, who had received almost 40% in the previous elections. The weekly also broadened the discourse to the demise of the protest movements of the late 1960s and the newfound willingness of young people to participate in re-founding the system.<sup>28</sup>

However, the decision not to change the high age thresholds for electoral candidates (25 and 40, respectively, for the offices of deputy and Senator) made it clear that the call during the parliamentary debate to legislate not only *for* young people but *with* young people would not translate into more young people actually being present in the parliamentary Chambers. And, as confirmation of the parties' lack of interest in the subject, it was noted that this appeal had not even been taken up by the parties' youth movements at meetings organized with them in the Senate.<sup>29</sup>

## 6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The law that brought Italian 18-year-olds to the ballot box was passed with cross-party consensus, in line with the demands expressed in European international forums and in the wake of the examples provided by the great Western democracies. Unlike the US, the reform was achieved

<sup>28</sup> Gabriele Invernizzi, 'E adesso votano anche loro', *L'Espresso*, 16 March 1975.

<sup>29</sup> See the speech by Republican Senator Claudio Venzetti in *Atti Senato* (Senate Proceedings), *seduta del 12 febbraio 1975*, 18778.

without strong public pressure from below and aroused little public interest, even though the gains of 18-year-olds were not limited to the right to vote. Lowering the age of majority would in fact sweep away other age-related restrictions, from obtaining a driver's license to watching films banned for minors.

Rather, the reform was the work of a political class that had taken note of the changes that had occurred, thanks to a better educated, better informed and more mature youth. As noted above, even before the reform, the legal system, while maintaining the age of majority at 21, had already legislated such that at a younger age one could contract marriage, recognize children, work, perform military service, be employed in the public sector, make a will or be criminally liable for one's actions. The extension of the vote to 18-year-olds thus boiled down to an institutional adaptation to societal changes in Italy as in other countries.

Nevertheless, this further step offered an albeit small contribution to the renewal of democracy. Young protestors, as was the hope of the Minister of Grace and Justice Oronzo Reale, were to be transformed into participants in renewing society. To encourage that renewal, there was no lack of calls in Parliament to make sure that the law on lowering the age of majority did not remain an isolated measure. The hope was that it would instead lead to a greater commitment to youth-oriented policies on schooling, military service and work.<sup>30</sup> But that was not to be. Even in terms of the extension in Italy of the right to vote to 18-year-olds, one can speak of a purely symbolic policy, one that did not translate into a set of specific public policies or an intergenerational contract in favour of the young.<sup>31</sup>

Since the 1970s the right to vote at 18 years of age has become the rule rather than the exception. In many cases, but not always, that age has been made to coincide with the age of majority, which, by the way, is not 18 everywhere in the world. In Scotland one comes of age at 16, in Iran at 15 for men and 9 for women, while in the US it is 19 in Alabama and Nebraska but 21 in Mississippi. Each country gives the age of majority a different legal weight.

<sup>30</sup> For Lepre's call for a youth policy, see *Atti Senato* (Senate Proceedings), *seduta pomeridiana del 18 febbraio 1975*, 18905. Similarly expressed by the Socialist Silvano Signori; *ibid.*, *seduta del 12 febbraio 1975*, 18743.

<sup>31</sup> Ingo Richter, 'Frühe Rechte - Späte Chancen: Die Absenkung des Wahlalters als symbolische Politik', *Soziale Welt*, 48:2, 1997, 171-185.

The debate on extending suffrage to younger people remains topical. A process of further lowering the voting age seems to have begun in the late twentieth century. Several countries already guarantee under 18s the opportunity to vote. Cuba reduced the voting age to 16 with the constitution it adopted in 1976. In 1984 Nicaragua lowered the minimum age from 21 to 16. Brazil moved the limit from 18 to 16 with the promulgation of its 1988 constitution, differentiating, however, between voluntary voting (for young people between 16 and 18 years of age, the over 70s and the illiterate) and compulsory voting (between 18 and 70 years of age).<sup>32</sup> Only 20 years later, in 2007, Austria became the first EU country to extend the right to vote to 16-year-olds. Today in Bosnia and Serbia 16-year-olds can vote if they work, and in Hungary if they are married.<sup>33</sup> Nor is there today any shortage of supporters for extending the right to vote to children or even abolishing the voting age.<sup>34</sup> But that really is another story.

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<sup>32</sup> Constanza Sanhueza Petrarca, ‘Does Voting at a Younger Age Have an Effect on Satisfaction with Democracy and Political Trust? Evidence from Latin America’, in Jan Eichhorn, Johannes Bergh (eds), *Lowering the Voting Age to 16: Learning from Real Experiences Worldwide*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 103 ff.

<sup>33</sup> So reports the CIA *World Factbook*. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/suffrage> [accessed 10 October 2023].

<sup>34</sup> Considers that, if age is used to circumscribe the electorate, over-inclusion rather than under-inclusion should be preferred, Claudio López-Guerra, *Democracy and Disenfranchisement: The Morality of Electoral Exclusions*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). On this topic, see also Maura Priest, ‘Why children should be allowed to vote’, *Public Affairs Quarterly*, 30:3, July 2016, 215–238.

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# The End of Dollar Convertibility. 15 August 1971. The ‘Italian Proposal’ for a New Bretton Woods

*Michele Cento*

*Translated by Mariangela Palazzi-Williams*

On the morning of 16 August 1971, the Director General of the Bank of Italy Paolo Baffi instructed the foreign exchange offices throughout the country to suspend all currency market operations. The day before, US President Richard Nixon had decreed the end of the convertibility of the dollar into gold, the gold standard on which the Bretton Woods system had been based since the end of the Second World War. With the currency conversion parameter gone, US tourists visiting Italy found themselves short of money due to the impossibility of exchanging ‘greenbacks’. But Nixon’s decision clearly had ramifications that went far beyond unpleasant summer mishaps. It ended the era of fixed exchange rates and began that of floating rates, while the dollars accumulated as reserve currency over the previous twenty-five years became the vehicle for an unstoppable

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financialisation of the economy. This decision marked not just the symbolic end of Bretton Woods but also its physical demise.<sup>1</sup> Nor did the implications escape the notice of the Italian political and monetary authorities, who were forced to abruptly cut short their summer break in order to try to keep the tiller straight in what promised to be a ‘storm of global proportions’.<sup>2</sup>

Baffi’s decision was actually taken together with Bankitalia Governor Guido Carli, while the palaces of political power in Rome were still empty following *Ferragosto*, the 15 August national holiday. On the evening of 16 August, however, an emergency meeting was called at Palazzo Chigi, attended by Prime Minister Emilio Colombo, Treasury Minister Mario Ferrari Aggradi and Governor Carli. Weighing heavily on their minds were not just concerns regarding the potential impact on the Italian lira following the announced end of Bretton Woods, but additional fears of a contraction of exports to the US market. In fact, Nixon’s measure went hand in hand with a 10% surtax on manufactured goods imported from abroad and a series of tax concessions at home to promote domestic investment.<sup>3</sup> For an economy such as Italy’s, which had grown at an impetuous pace, thanks to the free trade regime established after the Second World War,<sup>4</sup> this was clearly not a negligible factor. What the Italian press considered a protectionist move, a replay of suspension of the gold exchange standard sanctioned by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, turned out to be an ‘economic bomb’ dropped by Washington on the world economy.<sup>5</sup> However much Nixon tried to present the measure in tones both populist—stop the great financial speculation—and nationalistic—*buy American*—his objective was clear; it was a harbinger of tensions: to force the European partners and Japan, which had grown in the shadow of the gold-dollar to the point of posing a challenge to US economic supremacy, to revalue

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Duccio Basosi, *Il governo del dollaro. Interdipendenza economica e potere statunitense negli anni di Richard Nixon (1969–1973)*, (Florence: Polistampa, 2006); Eric Helleiner, *States and the Reemergence of Global Finance: From Bretton Woods to the 1990s*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 8 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Luigi Bianchi, ‘Messaggio di Nixon a Colombo’, *Corriere della Sera*, 17 August 1971, 2; ‘Corsa al cambio dei turisti’, *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> A.C., ‘Colpite le nostre esportazioni. L’Italia per un’ “iniziativa europea”’, *Corriere della Sera*, 17 August 1971, 1–2; ‘Domani le decisioni italiane’, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 17 August 1971, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Emanuele Felice, *Ascesa e declino. Storia economica d’Italia*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2018), 231 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Ugo Stille, ‘Rialzo record a Wall Street’, *Corriere della Sera*, 17 August 1971, 1–2.

their currencies.<sup>6</sup> The Europeans had hitherto always resisted revaluation, but it was a step which the United States thought it could now no longer postpone if it was to rebalance the trade deficit.<sup>7</sup>

The fact that US Treasury Undersecretary Paul Volcker was due to fly to London on 16 August to explain the rationale of the measure to delegates from the European central banks<sup>8</sup> was proof—if any were needed—that the effects of Nixon's measure were felt far beyond US borders. Or at least that is what Volcker stated at the press conference held at the US Embassy in the British capital, during which he told reporters that he had met with a favourable reception for the US move. However, indiscretions reported in the press suggested otherwise and spoke openly of a 'stormy summit': Volcker was said to have put on the table the request for a revaluation of the European and Japanese currencies as a quid pro quo for early withdrawal of a tax on imports.<sup>9</sup> For the time being, a new Bretton Woods seemed to be ruled out, but the message to the European partners was clear: the dollar would no longer bear the burden of a monetary order now considered unsustainable for the US economy. The end of dollar convertibility thus enshrined the impossibility, inscribed in Bretton Woods, of serving two opposing goals: guaranteeing the value of the currency—and thus of capital and investment—by regulating the creation of new liquidity, and legitimising through expansionary and ultimately inflationary policies the public control of increasingly fragmented societies suffering from an 'excess of demand'.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Mario Del Pero, 'Dollari, armi, parole', in Mauro Ceruti, Guido Formigoni (eds), (*S*) *confinamenti. Esperienze e rappresentazioni della globalizzazione*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2020), 52.

<sup>7</sup> Charles S. Maier, "Malaise". The Crisis of Capitalism in the 1970s', in Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, Daniel J. Sargent (eds), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011); Charles S. Maier, 'Due grandi crisi del XX secolo. Alcuni cenni su anni Trenta e Settanta' in Luca Baldissara (ed), *Le radici della crisi. L'Italia tra gli anni Sessanta e Settanta*, (Rome: Carocci Editore 2001); Riccardo Bellofiore, 'I lunghi anni Settanta', *ibid*, 77–78.

<sup>8</sup> 'Vertice a Londra con presenza americana', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 17 August 1971, 1.

<sup>9</sup> R.C., 'Tempestoso vertice con l'inviato di Nixon', *Corriere della Sera*, 17 August 1971, 1–2.

<sup>10</sup> Stefano Battilossi, 'La politica monetaria americana e il mercato dell'eurodollaro', in Baldissara, *Le radici della crisi*, 176; Guido Formigoni, 'La globalizzazione dall'ideologia alla storia: l'impatto italiano della crisi sistemica degli anni Settanta', in Ceruti, Formigoni (eds), (*S*) *confinamenti*, 72–75; on the subject of excess demand see Michel Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy*, (New York: New York University Press, 1975). In those same years, James O'Connor would shed light on how, squeezed by

A monetary system based on free currency fluctuations—with the dollar ‘subject to the laws of the market’, as the financial daily *Il Sole 24 Ore* termed it—and the revaluation of European currencies seemed to Volcker at the time to be the only viable solution. The European delegations, however, didn’t agree, especially the representatives of Italy and the Federal Republic of Germany. Rinaldo Ossola, the Number 2 at Via Nazionale and Carli’s trusted right-hand man, went to the London meeting to represent Bankitalia. Ossola made no pronouncements at the end of the summit, apart from a joke about the mildness of the London weather that summer.<sup>11</sup> On the morning of the 17, he was in Carli’s office to report on the outcome of the meeting. The strategy to be followed, at least in the immediate future, had however been decided the evening before, at the aforementioned summit between Carli, Colombo and Ferrari Aggradi. What emerged in the communiqué issued by Ferrari Aggradi was a strategy that paved the way for an ‘acceleration of the process of monetary unification in Europe, with the formation of a common financial market that would alleviate the pressure to import capital from the United States, which had been one important cause in recent years of that country’s balance of payments deficit’.<sup>12</sup> The strategy suggested by Rome thus leveraged the process of EU consolidation, and in 1970 it was the Werner Plan that offered scope for creating an Economic and Monetary Union.<sup>13</sup> It was this firmly pro-European stance which the Italian government was to take to Brussels on 19 August for the Council of Ministers of the European Economic Community, rotating presidency of which had that year fallen to Ferrari Aggradi.

The very fact that Europe was the political horizon within which the Italian political and monetary authorities were moving clearly shows the global implications of Nixon’s decision. But what needs pointing out is not so much the extent of those implications, which is obvious

the dual and contradictory need to serve the ends of capitalist accumulation and democratic legitimacy, the states of the West were spiralling into a fiscal crisis that jeopardised their ability to respond to the overload of demands for social protection on the part of societies in turmoil. See James O’Connor, *La crisi fiscale dello Stato* (1973), (Turin: Einaudi, 1979).

<sup>11</sup> R.C., ‘Tempestoso vertice con l’inviato di Nixon’.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Auspicato da Ferrari Aggradi un nuovo sistema monetario’, *Il Popolo*, 17 August 1971, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Mark Gilbert, *Storia politica dell’integrazione europea*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2005), 96 ff.; Daniele Caviglia, *La diplomazia della lira. L’Italia e la crisi del sistema di Bretton Woods (1958–1973)*, (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2013), 179 ff.



considering the dual nature of the dollar as a national and international currency.<sup>14</sup> Rather, the global shock of this should be sought elsewhere: more precisely, in the political response of the Italian authorities and their effort to contain the destabilising effect of Bretton Woods collapsing. Precisely in its being projected onto a European dimension, that response confirms the inadequacy of the national scale to restore a monetary order that had been shaken on several occasions by speculative attacks from big international capital. The national dimension was evidently inadequate to govern capital flows which, as early as 1966, had proved to be beyond state control or regulation through the Eurodollar market: a veritable channel for the 'international transmission of monetary tensions' that then led to Nixon's decision.<sup>15</sup> It was the new space-time of the global that challenged the regulatory capacities of the state and, at the same time, forced it to reconfigure itself to avoid being swept away by a fast new time-frame that had unified global space without, however, rendering it uniform.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the 'shock of the global' confirmed the need for the Italian state to adjust to operating on a transnational scale, i.e. to accelerate and deepen a process of European integration that implied a reconfiguration of the now no longer sovereign form of the nation-state. At the same time, it rendered inadequate a model of international governance of economic relations based on agreements between sovereign states, as had occurred at Bretton Woods some thirty years earlier. That model, 'matured in national markets, protected by a general control of capital movements but integrated mutually by an ever more extensive and free external exchange of goods',<sup>17</sup> was no longer replicable due to the aggressive presence of transnational capital against which consultation between individual nation-states was no longer able to produce a stable order. In other words, the end of Bretton Woods effectively heralded the end of the state's monetary sovereignty: a fate that patently not only concerned a medium-sized power such as Italy, but globally undermined the exclusive link between state and sovereignty that had been established at the dawn of modernity. This did not entail the disappearance of the state among politically significant global players, but its redevelopment and reconfiguration in new forms

<sup>14</sup> Riccardo Bellofiore, 'I lunghi anni Settanta. Crisi sociale e integrazione economica internazionale', in Baldissara (ed), *Le radici della crisi*, 191.

<sup>15</sup> Battilossi, 'La politica monetaria americana', 177.

<sup>16</sup> Ceruti, Formigoni, 'Introduzione', in *(S)confinamenti*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Formigoni, 'La globalizzazione dall'ideologia alla storia', 71–72.

that strained its traditional boundaries. A readjustment that therefore had to take account of the inadequacies and contradictions in which the 'global state' had operated over the previous fifty years: it had been forced to come to terms with a sovereignty that was no longer exclusive monopoly on the part of the old Leviathan state, but had become 'a widespread practice of a series of social structures' spread across the world.<sup>18</sup> The aim of this essay is therefore to measure how far public opinion and the Italian political class were aware of the 'shock of the global' produced by the end of dollar convertibility and, at the same time, to shed light on whether and how this awareness was translated into political action capable of transcending the national level or, at least, of imagining a way out of it.

## 1 THE END OF AN ERA: FROM ATLANTICISM TO EUROPEANISM?

On 17 August 1971<sup>19</sup> the front pages of all the Italian papers carried the news of the end of the convertibility of the dollar into gold. The verdict was unanimous: Nixon's decision 'practically marks the end of the world monetary system set up at Bretton Woods on 27 December 1945'.<sup>20</sup> No less unanimous was the realisation that this US decision was unilateral: it seemed to set the stage for a protectionist entrenchment by Washington, calling into question the Euro-American cooperation on which the extraordinary economic growth of the previous twenty years had been based. Both *Il Sole 24 Ore* and *Corriere della Sera* did recognise the responsibilities of European countries, in particular France and Germany, in having shrugged off Washington's calls for a revaluation of their national currencies.<sup>21</sup> The recipes for coping with the changed monetary scenario naturally differed. *Corriere della Sera* advocated 'within the European Economic Community [...] a unitary monetary policy'. This would translate into maintaining parity among the European currencies, though they would still be free to 'swing together against the dollar'.<sup>22</sup> *Il Sole 24 Ore*

<sup>18</sup> Maurizio Ricciardi, 'Dallo Stato moderno allo Stato globale', *Scienza & Politica*, 48, 2013, 83.

<sup>19</sup> Because of the August bank holiday, newspapers didn't go to press on 16 August. 17 August is therefore the earliest date for reporting reactions to Nixon's decision.

<sup>20</sup> 'Drastiche misure di Nixon', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 17 August 1971, 1.

<sup>21</sup> 'Incognite', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 17 August 1971, 1; Libero Lenti, 'Due prospettive', *Corriere della Sera*, 17 August 1971, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Lenti, 'Due prospettive'.

proposed much the same, while also recommending a more cautious incomes policy and a 'trade union truce', to avoid burdening an already ailing lira with inflationary pressures brought about by allegedly irresponsible wage hikes.<sup>23</sup>

If we look at the party press, *Il Popolo* also seemed to adopt a pro-European stance: as the organ of the Christian Democratic party, it repeated the words of the Ferrari Aggradi communiqué, according to which 'the American decision makes a European initiative inevitable in favour of an international monetary system'.<sup>24</sup> A 'lesson of autonomy for Europe' was the conclusion drawn by *Avanti!*, which saw this epilogue to Bretton Woods as the collapse of a system subject 'to the hegemonic and imperialistic will of a single country'; it offered the opportunity to rebuild the world economy around a principle of authentic 'international cooperation'.<sup>25</sup> Without any nostalgia for the end of a system it judged to be 'at the service of the world's financial groups', *l'Unità* nonetheless deplored Washington's stance in blithely offloading the cost of the US crisis onto its European partners. In its editorial by Eugenio Peggio, the Communist Party newspaper urged people to be wary of the Italian government's 'proposal' to remedy the end of Bretton Woods by 'cooperation among the six countries of the European Economic Community', precisely because that would only replicate, on a different scale, the basic flaws of a monetary system that was in any case anchored to the logic of intra-capitalist competition.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, quoting a lengthy statement by Luciano Barca, *l'Unità* opened the door to a European initiative, provided that Europe broke away from Atlanticism and found new areas of cooperation in dialogue with Eastern European and Third World countries.

In the aftermath of 15 August 1971, fears and uncertainty prevailed in Italian public opinion and political circles about a future whose outline was unclear but certainly not reassuring. However, such was the magnitude of the event that, at every political latitude, the conviction was widespread that closing ranks within national borders would have little chance of withstanding the impact of the impending global storm. The paths suggested thus oscillated between Europeanism and internationalism,

<sup>23</sup> 'Incognite'.

<sup>24</sup> 'Auspicato da Ferrari Aggradi un nuovo sistema monetario'.

<sup>25</sup> Antonio Landolfi, 'Una lezione di autonomia per l'Europa', *Avanti!*, 17 August 1971, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Eugenio Peggio, 'Crollo di un mito e di un sistema', *l'Unità*, 17 August 1971, 1; 'Duri colpi all'economia italiana', *ibid.*, 1, 4; R. Stefanelli, 'Un sistema monetario a servizio dei gruppi finanziari mondiali', *ibid.*, 2.

discarding both nationalist/protectionist solutions and the revival of a rigidly Atlanticist option based on the idea—or myth—of a *special relationship* between Washington and Rome, if for no other reason than the manifest intractability of the US ally, firmly entrenched in some kind of holy monetary egoism. From the blind alley of Atlanticism there thus emerged a European way forward, but far from evolving within the process of community integration, it proved a Hobson's choice, dictated by an outside agency. That such Europeanism stemmed from global shock is clear if one looks into the changes that occurred in Italian monetary policy as the Bretton Woods system began to crumble and then collapse on 15 August 1971.

## 2 THE ITALIAN PROPOSAL: A BRETTON WOODS 2.0?

Since the Second World War, Italy had adopted an anti-revisionist approach to the monetary system established at Bretton Woods. As Carli confided to the then Finance Minister Tremelloni in 1962, 'by contributing to the defence of a valid and, for the time being, irreplaceable international monetary system, one is not performing a work of generosity and altruism, but following a policy of enlightened self-interest'.<sup>27</sup> It was within this system that the lira acquired such solidity that it earned the 'Oscar' for reliability from an international jury appointed by the *Financial Times*.<sup>28</sup> a hitherto unthinkable result for a country that only fifteen years earlier was still struggling beneath the rubble left by a lost war.

Come the autumn of 1969, however, the lira's position became perilous. It was hit by a wave of speculation coinciding with overheating of the wage dynamics and all amid a social crisis in which student and worker protest united to the chant of 'we want everything'. Added to this was the usual flight of capital afflicting the balance of payments. In that phase, thanks to mediation by Carli, the United States was prevailed on to cooperate and let the lira contain the damage, so that the Italian economy closed its 1970 balance of payments on a plus sign, albeit small and mostly loans and massive funding to bail out the lira. This naturally inclined Italy to strengthen ties and favour relations with the USA. It was at that point that Carli began to think about tweaking the Bretton Woods system by a

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Daniele Caviglia, 'Un sistema, due visioni. Le relazioni monetarie tra Italia e Francia nell'età di De Gaulle', *Cahiers d'études italiennes*, 22, 2016, 183.

<sup>28</sup> Emilio Gentile, 'Fu miracolo, ma umano', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 23 October 2011.

limited exchange rate fluctuation designed to benefit both the United States and Italy. At that point Via Nazionale was not concentrating much on the European Community, but things were about to change yet again and the European Community would swing back into play after Nixon's sudden decision in summer 1971.<sup>29</sup>

Since these were monetary issues, it is clear that the Governor of the Bank of Italy exerted a decisive influence on the direction taken by the government. But that does not mean that Carli's monetary policies enjoyed unconditional support among the entire governmental structure. The executive led by Colombo, in office since August 1970, was indeed a re-hash of the centre-left formula, but the Socialist Party now claimed greater autonomy from the Christian Democrats. This came from the new line by Giacomo Mancini as secretary and Francesco De Martino as Vice-President of the governing Council: by shifting the party's centre of gravity to the left, it also opened up a specific socialist way to the 'strategy of attention' towards the Communist Party.<sup>30</sup> Another example of this leftward shift transpires from accusations by *Avanti!* in the days following Nixon's decision, not only targeting Washington's imperialist designs, but also Carli's own monetary policies. Reporting some statements made by Antonio Landolfi, head of the economic section of the PSI and close to secretary Mancini, the socialist daily *Avanti!* commented that 'the sensitivity of the monetary authorities, "so alive and ready to shine forth over problems of the productive crisis when it comes to labour conflicts and the danger of rising costs", blurs "to the point of self-annihilation when the errors of our monetary policy are in question", to wit the excessive accumulation of American currency now in the throes of devaluation'.<sup>31</sup> Against the position of *Avanti!*, *La Voce Repubblicana* took sides, pointing a finger at 'the singular shallowness' of Landolfi and the socialists, who were seemingly unaware—argued the newspaper of Ugo La Malfa's party—that Italy was one of the countries least exposed to the dollar crisis and that, on the contrary, the devaluation of the US currency would lighten Rome's position over the two billion dollar debt contracted with

<sup>29</sup> Elena Cavalieri, 'Between Transatlantic Cooperation and European Integration: The Bank of Italy in the Breakdown of the Bretton Woods System (1969–1971)', in Olivier Feiertag, Michel Maragairaz (eds), *Les banques centrales à l'échelle du monde*, (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2015), 103 ff.

<sup>30</sup> See Simona Colarizi, *Storia politica della Repubblica. 1943–2006*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2007), 99–102, 110–112.

<sup>31</sup> 'Capire la lezione', *Avanti!*, 18 August 1971, 1–2.

Washington.<sup>32</sup> For *La Voce Repubblicana*, rather than taking the line of an anti-imperialist crusade and accusations of subservience to Washington, the focus should be on a solution that could accelerate the process of European monetary integration in cooperation with the United States, a country which, despite the dollar's difficulties, remained the world's leading economy. Commenting in *il manifesto* on the internal tensions within the majority, Luigi Pintor wondered how the 'Italian and European ruling classes' could be espousing the '*Avanti!* tone of rebuke and claims of independence'.<sup>33</sup> In fact, the stance of the Republicans, and the Social Democrats, reflected the position expressed by Ferrari Aggradi immediately after the meeting with Colombo and Carli: to seek a European solution and take advantage of the crisis to accelerate the process of monetary unification, while simultaneously strengthening ties with Washington.<sup>34</sup>

At Palazzo Chigi as well as in Via Nazionale, all eyes were on the meeting of the EEC Council of Ministers in Brussels on 19 August. What Ferrari Aggradi brought to the European forum was actually a compromise proposal which, in the immediate term, had the support of the Benelux countries. It advocated proceeding with a controlled and concerted fluctuation between currencies, which left room for revaluation of the mark and yen, as the Americans demanded. This, however, was determinedly opposed by the then French Finance Minister Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who was convinced that the monetary system could only be rebalanced through a devaluation of the dollar.<sup>35</sup> The European partners continued to be at loggerheads and, after a mammoth session that was only brought to a close at three o'clock in the morning, the meeting ended in stalemate.<sup>36</sup> The representatives of the Six, together with British Chancellor of the Exchequer Barber, decided to reconvene on 13 September. It was on this occasion that the gaps were bridged and a common European position developed which Ferrari Aggradi, as President-in-Office of the European Council of Ministers, would present on 15

<sup>32</sup> 'In giornata le comunicazioni del governo sulla posizione ufficiale italiana', *La Voce Repubblicana*, 19 August 1971, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Luigi Pintor, 'L'agosto di Nixon', *il manifesto*, 18 August 1971, 1.

<sup>34</sup> P.B., 'Nel progresso e nelle crisi', *La Voce Repubblicana*, 19 August 1971, 1, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Daniele Caviglia, 'La diplomazia della lira', 232; <https://www.cvce.eu/en/collections/unit-content/-/unit/56d70f17-5054-49fc-bb9b-5d90735167d0/81eb1248-502f-45ed-af0d-cef256056022#sdendnote16anc> [accessed December 2022].

<sup>36</sup> Mario Cervi, 'Mancato accordo dei Sei a Bruxelles', *Corriere della Sera*, 20 August 1971, 1.

September in London during the meeting of the Group of Ten (G-10), the organisation founded in 1962, which brought together the ten largest capitalist economies of the day.

Across the political spectrum, from *Financial Times* to *The Daily Telegraph*, the English press would rename his plan the 'Italian Proposal', not only because it was allegedly put forward in London by Ferrari Aggradi.<sup>37</sup> In fact, it had been anticipated by him in Brussels during the European Council of Ministers on 13 September, but actually took on board the recommendations made by the European Commission on 9 September.<sup>38</sup> While it was a concerted solution at the European level, Ferrari Aggradi's proposal nevertheless reflected the multilateral approach the Italian authorities had been advocating since 15 August:<sup>39</sup> it was an approach that was intended to strengthen Community cooperation, i.e. to achieve a supranational plane of political action, in the evident conviction that only by doing so was it really possible to keep the unregulated movements of international capital under control and thus safeguard the lira from speculative attacks.

At the G-10 summit in London, Ferrari Aggradi therefore presented the Italian proposal, strongly supported by the five European partners and Great Britain. It consisted, firstly, in a realignment of the exchange rates, which had to be cyclically readjusted to accurately reflect the relationship between the various currencies, a relationship which in the last phase of Bretton Woods had been compromised by an unrealistic valuation of the exchange-rate between dollar and gold. At the same time, Ferrari Aggradi broached the possibility of slightly widening the margins of exchange rate fluctuation in the hope that this might counter speculative movements by international capital, a move that would, however, require yet greater international cooperation and, therefore, a more incisive role for supranational institutions such as the International Monetary Fund. While upholding the principle of fixed exchange rates as a guarantee of free trade, however, such realignment would have to meet a number of US demands:

<sup>37</sup> See Ian Davidson, 'The Text of Italian Proposal', *Financial Times*, 16 September 1971; 'Recipe for Fixed Parities Italian Style', *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 September 1971.

<sup>38</sup> See *Posizione italiana sui cosiddetti problemi esterni*, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero del Bilancio e della Programmazione Economica, b. 92, f. 1; Commission des Communautés Européennes, *Communication de la Commission au Conseil sur les problèmes posés par la situation monétaire actuelle*, Brussels, 9 September 1971, *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> See, in particular, Aldo Moro's readiness for dialogue, in Guido Formigoni, *Storia d'Italia nella guerra fredda (1943–1978)*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2016).

firstly, revaluation of the mark and yen, while leaving the door open for some moderate devaluation of the lira and pound sterling, as well as of the dollar itself. In this way, the United States could recalibrate the balance of payments. Specifically, the Italian proposal was intended to challenge one of the cornerstones of the new Nixon plan, namely to bring the US balance of payments into surplus by two billion dollars in 1972. Ferrari Aggradi deemed this demand excessive, because it risked endangering the economies of other industrialised countries and, specifically, affecting the level of employment and welfare achieved by European societies. Turning to his US counterpart Connally, the Italian Minister argued that American concerns could be taken into account even while keeping the US balance of payments at parity. At the same time, the role of national currencies—first and foremost the dollar and pound sterling—as reserve instruments had to be scaled back: pending the creation of a conventional currency for international trade, gold and special drawing rights (SDR) should be relied on. Finally, the US 10% import surcharge and the US administration's facilitation of domestic investment should be revoked as soon as possible because they structurally compromised any chance of re-establishing a regular international monetary order.<sup>40</sup>

The press welcomed the proposal as 'a first step' towards restoration of fiscal order. In reality, US Treasury Secretary Connally replied to his Italian counterpart with a series of, at times scathing, remarks reiterating the non-negotiability of the US demand to bring the balance of payments back into surplus. According to Connally, over the past twenty-five years the USA had sustained 'sacrifices' that were not comparable with those of European countries: the country had fed the growth of the European and Japanese economies with its own dollars, just as it had taken it upon itself to finance the military defence of the 'free world', leaving military expenditure to absorb a disproportionate share of the federal budget. A share which, moreover, ended up in the form of dollars as US military investments in the NATO area, thus negatively affecting the US balance of payments.<sup>41</sup>

As is well known, the tug-of-war between Europe and the United States would only be momentarily resolved in December 1971 with the

<sup>40</sup> *Texte de la declaration du Ministre Italien du Tresor, Monsieur Ferrari-Aggradi, à la conference ministerielle des Dix (Londres, 15 September 1971)*, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero del Bilancio e della Programmazione Economica, b. 92, f. 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Secretary Connally's Statement at G-10 Meeting*, ibid.



Smithsonian Agreement, which, unlike the Italian proposal, provided for the overcoming of fixed parities and a modest fluctuation of exchange rates. The point here, however, is not to measure the success of the 'Italian proposal', but rather to indicate how the new monetary (dis)order produced by the end of dollar convertibility confronted Italy with a reality that could not be controlled on a national level but required, first and foremost, to be addressed on a European scale.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, concern was expressed in the Council of European Communities debates that this monetary disorder might impair the process of European economic unification, for example, with regard to the Common Agricultural Policy, since failing any regularity of exchange rates, it was much more difficult to establish common parameters. Moreover, although Italy's approach remained substantially 'conservative' with respect to the Bretton Woods order (one might call it an update of Bretton Woods, a Bretton Woods 2.0, rather than any substantial revision), it definitely changed the context. The main Italian concern was no longer just that expressed by Carli in 1962—Bretton Woods corresponded to the interest of the national economy based on exports—but lay in the fact that in a system of floating exchange rates the mounting circulation of capital risked getting out of control. Which is exactly what would actually happen. The very snake in the tunnel adopted by the European countries in 1972 to limit fluctuations by pegging all EEC currencies together turned out to be only a means of patching up an order in crisis, a form of European 'weak cooperation' that would soon fail and hand the monetary order over to the iron laws of the world market.<sup>43</sup> In conclusion, we may say that the Italian proposal aimed to contain the 'shock of the global' but, at the same time, acknowledged its irreversibility.

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<sup>42</sup> Caviglia, 'La diplomazia della lira', 231–235.

<sup>43</sup> Formigoni, *Storia d'Italia nella guerra fredda (1943–1978)*, 415.

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# The Launch of the First Microprocessor. 15 November 1971. Perceptions of the Digital Revolution

*Renato Moro*

*Translated by Emma Mandley*

On 15 November 1971, production of the first microprocessor was announced, the invention that paved the way for the personal computer.<sup>1</sup> Although it was an American product, the Italian contribution to its development was significant, as the engineer Federico Faggin was in the research team.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the event was not recorded by the Italian media; nor

<sup>1</sup>Gabriele Balbi, Paolo Magaudda, *Storia dei media digitali. Rivoluzione e continuità*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2014), 25.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

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were other key dates in the ‘digital revolution’ of the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> This certainly did not mean, however, that the great scientific and technological transformations of those years went unnoticed.

## I THE SHADOW OF HAL

On 21 August 1970 RAI broadcast a documentary for the *Sestante* series with the title *Doctor Computer* which both fascinated and appalled Italians. It emphasised that the ‘computer’ had ‘already’ become a ‘*doctor*’, but equally that it would not take long for it to ‘get out of hand’ and impose its dictatorship.<sup>4</sup> This ambivalent view of new technologies coincided with many people’s perceptions. Their worst nightmares had been stirred by HAL 9000, the rebel super-computer and protagonist of Stanley Kubrick’s film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In any case, Italians thought of the ‘electronic computer as an object that belonged more to the realms of science fiction than to everyday life’, wrapping it in ‘an aura of mystery and incredulity’.<sup>5</sup>

Yet in Italy at the beginning of the 1970s the ‘electronic computer’ had already ‘muscled its way into the whole scientific, technical and economic world’,<sup>6</sup> in the form of both large main-frame computers dominated by the US company IBM and the new small to medium computers in which the Italian firm Olivetti now specialised.<sup>7</sup> Between 1970 and 1971, the computer appeared widely in the media, with book publications, dedicated presentations, demonstrations, conferences and articles in newspapers. *Corriere della Sera* announced to its readers ‘the emergence and vertiginous progress of the “electronic age”’.<sup>8</sup> It was noted that computers were now penetrating many key aspects of society: from science and technology (archaeology, architecture, anthropology) to daily life (medicine, the justice system, traffic management, education, psychology, music,

<sup>3</sup> Paul E. Ceruzzi, *Computing: A Concise History*, (Cambridge, MA - London: MIT Press, 2012), 138.

<sup>4</sup> Mino Doletti, ‘“Prigionieri” del computer: l’elaboratore elettronico in scena ieri sul video’, *Il Tempo*, 22 August 1970; Gabriele Gherardi, ‘La dittatura dei calcolatori elettronici’, *Il Regno*, 15 September 1970, 411–413.

<sup>5</sup> p.m., ‘L’evoluzione dell’informatica’, *Civiltà delle macchine*, May–August 1971, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Marcello Zane, *Storia e memoria del personal computer. Il caso italiano*, (Milan: Jaca Book, 2008), 23, 25–27, 60–61.

<sup>8</sup> Giancarlo Masini, ‘I miracoli dell’elettronica a Torino. Al Salone Internazionale della Tecnica ‘71’, *Corriere della Sera*, 4 September 1971.

local public services, even war). Computers were becoming regular protagonists in crime fiction,<sup>9</sup> science fiction<sup>10</sup> and graphic fiction.<sup>11</sup>

In educated circles there was much discussion about ‘the sociological and philosophical consequences of the use of electronic computers’—as the weekly newspaper of the Communist Party (PCI) observed.<sup>12</sup> In fact, behind the ‘shadow of HAL’ lay the vexed issue of what line to take not only on the innovation itself but also on the unprecedented technological era that accompanied it. 1969 had been the year of the ‘Moon landing’: Italians had been enthralled by its ‘very advanced technology’.<sup>13</sup> However, 1969 had also been the year when workers’ protests made their mark, following the explosion of student protests, which had firmly put an end to ‘the myth of development’.<sup>14</sup> A lively debate had arisen around the technological society and its implications, partly stimulated by international literature which was swiftly translated into Italian. In particular, there were some US authors who stressed the impact of the new technologies.<sup>15</sup> Others were beginning to talk about the birth of a new society, defined

<sup>9</sup> John Lange (pseud. of Michael Crichton), *Non previsto dal computer*, (Milan: Garzanti, 1972); originally published in English as *Odds On*, (New York: Signet, 1966). See also Leonard Gribble, *Assassinio al calcolatore*, (Milan: Mondadori, 1974); originally published in English as *Programmed for Death*, (London: Robert Hale, 1973).

<sup>10</sup> Donald A. Wollheim, Terry Carr (eds), *Il computer sotto il mondo. Antologia di racconti di fantascienza*, (Piacenza: La Tribuna, 1972); originally published in English as *World's Best Science Fiction*, (London: Gollancz, 1969); Gordon R. Dickson, ‘Col computer non si discute’, in *Robot*, July 1976, originally published in English as ‘Computers don’t argue’ *Analogue Science Fiction and Fact*, September 1965; ‘Conversazione con un computer’, *Verso le stelle*, June 1979, with stories by Erich Von Daniken, Walter Ernsting, Herbert W. Franke, Ronald M. Hahn, Kurt Lasswitz, William Voltz, Ernst Vlcek, Alberto Nigi, Mara Suziati.

<sup>11</sup> In ‘Albi dell’avventura’, in the Italian translation of the Jeff Hawke series originally published in the *Daily Express*: see for example Sidney Jordan, *Jeff Hawke. Computer in sciopero*, Strisce da H 3897 a H 3951; 41<sup>a</sup> *Avventura*, (Rome: ANAF, 1977).

<sup>12</sup> Ugo De Angelis, ‘Tanti cervelloni ma poche idee chiare’, *Rinascita*, 9 March 1973, 20.

<sup>13</sup> p.m., ‘Scienza e Tecnica ‘70’, *Civiltà delle macchine*, March–April 1970, 5.

<sup>14</sup> So described in the CENSIS 1971 report CENSIS, *Gli anni del cambiamento. Il rapporto sulla situazione sociale del Paese dal 1976 al 1982*, (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1982), 123–124.

<sup>15</sup> Herman Kahn, Anthony J. Wiener, *L’anno 2000. La scienza di oggi presenta il mondo di domani*, (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1968); originally published in English as *The Year 2000: A framework for speculation on the next 33 years*, (New York: Macmillan, 1967); also *Il mondo tra 50 anni*, Milan, Etas Kompass, 1969, reviewed in *Civiltà delle macchine*, XVIII, 4, July–August 1970, 74.

variously as 'post-industrial' (because it was 'technocratic'),<sup>16</sup> as 'technetronic' (because of the role of electronics),<sup>17</sup> or as a '*technopolis*'.<sup>18</sup> Every positive evaluation of this change, however, came up against the culture of opposition. The French Marxist philosopher Roger Garaudy, despite emphasising the potential of a technological society, criticised its manipulative characteristics.<sup>19</sup> Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas took an even more negative view: 'science and technology', in their opinion, were now taking on the 'role of legitimizing control'.<sup>20</sup> Spurred by the foreign debate, discussions in Italy likewise ended in favourable judgements alternating with widespread criticism of progress. Scientists and technology experts generally viewed the innovations with confidence,<sup>21</sup> as did secular culture, whether moderate or progressive.<sup>22</sup> However, on the Right, a technological civilisation was seen as a dehumanising spectre.<sup>23</sup> Many Catholics, if not openly scenting catastrophe or the devil,<sup>24</sup> adopted a broadly negative attitude; while they stopped short of seeing technology

<sup>16</sup> Alain Touraine, *La società post-industriale*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 1970); originally published in French as *La société post industrielle*, (Paris: Denoël, 1969); Daniel Bell, 'The Post-Industrial Society: The Evolution of an Idea', *Survey*, 79, Spring 1971; Daniel Bell, 'The Post-Industrial Society: Technocracy and Politics', *Survey*, 78, Winter 1971.

<sup>17</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Between Two Ages: America's Rome in the Technetronic Era*, (New York: Viking Press, 1970).

<sup>18</sup> Nigel Calder, *Technopolis. Il controllo sociale degli usi della scienza*, (Milan: Garzanti, 1971); originally published in English as *Technopolis: Social Control of the Uses of Science*, (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1969). See the review by g.j. [Gian Piero Jacobelli], *Civiltà delle macchine*, January–April 1971, 87.

<sup>19</sup> Roger Garaudy, *La grande svolta del Socialismo*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1970); originally published in French as *Le grand tournant du socialisme*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

<sup>20</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Teoria e prassi nella società tecnologica*, (Bari: Laterza, 1971), 214; originally published in German as *Theorie und Praxis*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971).

<sup>21</sup> Luigi Morandi, *Le difficili intese. Politica e tecnologia a confronto*, (Milan: ETAS Kompass, 1969); Vittorio Somenzi's contribution in 'La fantasia nell'età tecnologica', *Civiltà delle macchine*, July–August 1970, 25; Valerio Tonini, *Scienza dell'informazione, cibernetica, epistemologia*, (Rome: Bulzoni, 1971).

<sup>22</sup> Vittorio Frosini, *Cibernetica, diritto e società*, (Milan: Comunità, 1973), 125–126. But see the speech by the Liberal Agostino Bignardi, in *Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, V Legislatura – Discussioni, seduta del 18 gennaio 1971*, 24482.

<sup>23</sup> Speech by Alfredo Covelli of the Partito Democratico Italiano di Unità Monarchica, in *Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, V Legislatura – Discussioni, seduta del 13 novembre 1970*, 21770; speech by Orazio Santagati of the Italian Social Movement (MSI), *ibid.*, *seduta del 25 febbraio 1974*, 13440.

<sup>24</sup> Diego Fabbri's contribution in 'La fantasia nell'età tecnologica', *Civiltà delle macchine*, July–August 1970, 25.

itself as ‘the cause of deviation’, the danger they saw lay in man’s indiscriminate use of it.<sup>25</sup> The Catholic party consequently took up a prudent position: the approach, they insisted, must remain centred on human beings<sup>26</sup> and on commitment to ‘an orderly development of technological society’.<sup>27</sup> For different reasons, criticism of the technological society also came from the Left, from the Socialists to the Communists and the extra-parliamentary Left. In this cultural milieu there were numerous attacks on the ‘myth of technology’.<sup>28</sup> The computer was seen as emblematic of a rationalising and manipulative technological tool in the service of capitalism (naturally associated with the USA).<sup>29</sup> It is true that the progressive press recognised that the Soviet Union had itself ventured onto the ‘new path’ of the ‘electronics’ myth;<sup>30</sup> it is also true that the ‘meliorist’ element in the Italian Communist Party (PCI) was—as Giorgio Napolitano informed the Chamber of Deputies—aware of the ‘new problems posed by the “explosion of knowledge” and by the scientific and technological revolution’.<sup>31</sup> However, what dominated left-wing culture was rather the image of war now becoming ‘electronic’, that is to say the sinister use of computers being used in the Vietnam conflict.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Bartolomeo Sorge, ‘Per una critica cristiana alla società tecnologica’, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 18 July 1970, 117; Augusto Del Noce, *L’epoca della secolarizzazione*, (Milan: Giuffrè, 1970), 77 ff.

<sup>26</sup> Giovanni Spagnolli, ‘La tecnologia favorisce lo sviluppo del paese’, *La Discussione*, 18 April 1971, 9; Vittorio Amoroso, ‘L’uomo dietro il computer’, *La Discussione*, 20 June 1971, 41.

<sup>27</sup> Giuseppe Togni, *La difesa dell’ambiente naturale in un ordinato sviluppo della società tecnologica. Discorso pronunciato al Senato della Repubblica nella seduta del 27 maggio 1971*, (Rome: Bardi, 1971).

<sup>28</sup> Ugo De Angelis, ‘Tanti cervelloni ma poche idee chiare’, *Rinascita*, 9 March 1973, 20.

<sup>29</sup> A typical cartoon appeared *Rinascita*, 8 December 1972, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Gianni Corbi, ‘Tutto il potere al computer’, *L’Espresso; Economia/Finanza*, 21 November 1971. See also B. Fantini, ‘La scienza all’interno della produzione: appunti di un viaggio di informazione culturale in Urss’, *Rinascita*, 19 April 1974, 18–19.

<sup>31</sup> *Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, VI Legislatura – Discussioni, seduta del 12 dicembre 1972*, p. 3406.

<sup>32</sup> John H.R. Fried, ‘La resistibile ascesa della guerra elettronica’, *Il Ponte*, 21 March 1972, 411–437.



## 2 THE DISCOVERY OF 'COMPUTER SCIENCE'

In the early 1970s expert observers noticed that computer science, 'which had started as a technology for producing information', was now on its way to 'becoming an autonomous science'.<sup>33</sup> Scientists, specialists and scholars involved in the process of change were fully aware that progress was accelerating at a significant rate.<sup>34</sup> 'Information'—said one legal expert—had become 'a resource comparable to energy and raw materials, resources that are processed and distributed'.<sup>35</sup> The scientific community was soon anticipating that computers, which had been 'tools used by a few experts', would become 'machines serving the wider community, in a form that would become more familiar even to non-specialists';<sup>36</sup> that it would be possible for written texts to be 'read on the video display terminal'; and that it would also be possible 'to access the mainframe even from a telephone booth' (in which case the terminal would become 'the size of a briefcase').<sup>37</sup> However, the revolutionary and autonomous reality of information technology still escaped many people.<sup>38</sup> There was no perception that it would be possible to use computers as communication tools, still less that digital communication would enter the lives of ordinary people.

A broad sense of disenchantment prevailed in many sectors of society. The abundant 'hopes and expectations' that the industrial world had placed in the 'results of an information system "with global reach"' had been followed by bitter 'disappointments'.<sup>39</sup> In popular culture too, there was still an attitude which, if not actually negative, was at least sceptical towards what one reasonably popular literary publication called '*tecnologia*

<sup>33</sup>I.r., 'L'informatica e la società italiana', *Civiltà delle macchine*, November–December 1970, 9.

<sup>34</sup>Daniel Garric, *L'informatica rivoluzione totale*, (Milan: Bompiani, 1970); originally published in French as *L'informatique. Révolution totale*, (Paris: Denoël, 1969).

<sup>35</sup>In the view of the constitutionalist Alberto Predieri, quoted in Vittorio Frosini, 'Un dittatore chiamato "robot"', *Corriere della Sera*, 5 September 1971.

<sup>36</sup>p.m., 'L'evoluzione dell'informatica', *Civiltà delle macchine*, May–August 1971, 9.

<sup>37</sup>Mario G. Losano, 'Introduzione all'informatica giuridica', *Civiltà delle macchine*, November–December 1970, 28.

<sup>38</sup>I.r., 'L'informatica e la società italiana', 9.

<sup>39</sup>Carlo Santacroce, 'La sistemistica e i problemi gestionali', *Civiltà delle macchine*, November–December 1970, 58.

*ridens*'.<sup>40</sup> The papers scoffed at the idea that the computer would be able to replace human beings.<sup>41</sup> A conference at the Rotary Club examined the topic: 'But don't these computers ever make a mistake?'<sup>42</sup> while a widely circulating Catholic paper referred to the 'revenge of the bookkeepers' after computers made blunders.<sup>43</sup> Following controversies linked to tax registry delays and refinancing,<sup>44</sup> the fallibility of the computer became one of the *topoi* of the political Right, which repeatedly underlined its unreliability, going so far as to compare its results with 'the responses of the Cumaean sybil'.<sup>45</sup>

In public debate and political and government circles, the perception of the role of 'computer science' was vague and ill-defined but nonetheless present.<sup>46</sup> Editorials in *Corriere della Sera* began to mention it in relation to the 'modern and advanced sectors' of the industrial economy and to emphasise the importance of investment in the sector.<sup>47</sup> The Christian Democracy (DC) declared it would support such investment, especially regarding development of the South, but its commitment was ultimately lukewarm.<sup>48</sup> The press with DC connections spoke of 'faster justice with computers'<sup>49</sup> and highlighted the increasingly positive role that computers

<sup>40</sup> Marcello Ravoni (ed), *Almanacco letterario Bompiani 1970. Tecnologia ridens*, (Milan: Bompiani, 1969).

<sup>41</sup> Gianfranco Lenzi, *Sei x per sei quanto sei? Computer di una vita*, (Milan: CUMI, 1977).

<sup>42</sup> Angelo Pistoia, *Ma questi calcolatori non sbagliano proprio mai? Relazione al Rotary club di Vigevano-Mortara del 9-11-1971*, Anno accademico 1971-1972, Pavia, Succ. Fusi, 1972.

<sup>43</sup> f.c., 'Da "cervellone" a costoso "cretino". Il computer che sbaglia i conti', *Famiglia Cristiana*, 1 July 1973, 14.

<sup>44</sup> See especially *Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, VI Legislatura - Discussioni, seduta pomeridiana del 9 marzo 1976*, 26528-26538.

<sup>45</sup> A view also expressed by Orazio Santagati, in *Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, VI Legislatura - Discussioni, seduta del 25 febbraio 1974*, 13438.

<sup>46</sup> See A. Col., 'L'arte del dirigere', *Corriere della Sera*, 20 November 1971.

<sup>47</sup> Cesare Zappulli, 'Assurdità. Il deficit delle ferrovie', *Corriere della Sera*, 28 October 1971. See also Cesare Zappulli, 'I conti non tornano: il punto sull'economia', *Corriere della Sera*, 18 October 1971.

<sup>48</sup> Giovanni Spagnoli, 'La tecnologia favorisce lo sviluppo del paese', *La Discussione*, 18 April 1971, 8.

<sup>49</sup> Bruno Ghibaudi, 'Giustizia più rapida con il computer', *Famiglia Cristiana*, 11 March 1973, 14.

were playing in public administration<sup>50</sup> and schools;<sup>51</sup> however, the party never succeeded in developing a clear policy on the subject, essentially leaving information technology on the fringes of industrial policy.<sup>52</sup>

The Left remained deeply perplexed in the face of computer science. For the 'New Left' it belonged quite simply to the world of multinationals.<sup>53</sup> The communist position was more complicated, but was also basically twofold and vacillating. The PCI's publishing house brought out a French book in Italian translation that denounced 'capitalist use of information technology', 'the privileged terrain of the class struggle', setting it against a socialism consisting of 'the power of the people plus computerization of the country'.<sup>54</sup> In the PCI this hostile interpretation was nevertheless accompanied by a different appraisal of the issue, connected to the governing culture in 'red' regions such as Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany. In the government of these two regions, the Communists had introduced pilot schemes<sup>55</sup> and declared their belief that democratic use of the computer was possible.<sup>56</sup> The conflict between an ideological approach and 'meliorist' trends would cause a profound split in the party between the critics<sup>57</sup> and the 'possibilists';<sup>58</sup> for a long time this impeded the development of any clear position.<sup>59</sup> In the end the party laboriously arrived at a position of compromise that reiterated the 'immense possibilities' of

<sup>50</sup> Giovanni Mammuccari, 'Il computer con le mezze maniche', *La Discussione*, 15 July 1974.

<sup>51</sup> Giovanni Gozzer, 'Il calcolatore nell'insegnamento', *Settegiorni in Italia e nel mondo*, 18 October 1970, 39.

<sup>52</sup> 'Alcune riflessioni sul Convegno di Perugia del 1972', ed. by some close to the A.R.E.L. (Agenzia di Ricerche e Legislazione), in *Attualità delle idee di Perugia? Analisi, contributi, proposte sulle conclusioni del Convegno della DC sui problemi dell'economia italiana (Perugia 9-12 dicembre 1972)*, (Rome: Edizioni Cinque Lune, 1980), 21-22.

<sup>53</sup> 'Le multinazionali dell'informatica. Un'analisi e una proposta', *Praxis*, August-September 1976, 39.

<sup>54</sup> Jean-Claude Quiniou, *Marxismo e informatica*, ed. by C. Pezzoli, P.C. Maggiolini, (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1973); originally published in French as *Marxisme et Informatique*, (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1971).

<sup>55</sup> Giuliano Bianchi, 'I computers nella gestione aziendale', *Rinascita*, 30 June 1972, 33.

<sup>56</sup> Giuliano Bianchi, 'È possibile un "uso democratico" dei calcolatori?', *Rinascita*, 16 February 1973, 24.

<sup>57</sup> Ugo De Angelis, 'Burocrati e computers', *l'Unità*, 15 July 1972; De Angelis, 'Tanti cervelloni ma poche idee chiare', *Rinascita*, XXX:10, 9 March 1973, 20-21.

<sup>58</sup> Alessandro Natta, 'A proposito di "Burocrati e computers"', *l'Unità*, 18 July 1972; Giuliano Bianchi, 'È possibile un "uso democratico" dei calcolatori?'.

<sup>59</sup> Ugo De Angelis, 'Una politica del computer', *l'Unità*, 2 August 1972.

information technology ‘for human progress’<sup>60</sup> (for planning, social services, education), but condemned the concept of a ‘new technological utopia’ as well as Italy’s dramatic ‘economic and scientific dependence’ on US domination.<sup>61</sup> The party’s struggle was thus to be conducted on two fronts: ‘against the mythicizing of technology and the computer’ on the part of the establishment, as well as ‘against the sentimental and petit bourgeois opposition to mechanization espoused by the New Left’.<sup>62</sup>

The uncertainties, pessimism and divisions ended by affecting the ability to push forward effectively with technological and scientific change. According to the 1974 report by the Centro Studi Investimenti Sociali (CENSIS) ‘a policy of innovation’ was lacking.<sup>63</sup> In 1973, one of the key figures in the Italian electronics industry admitted: ‘We are very weak in electronics and therefore are ill-equipped for automation’.<sup>64</sup>

### 3 HOMO LUDENS INFORMATICUS

As we know, one of the most firmly established uses of the new digital technologies was gaming. And it was this leisure-related aspect that made an immediate impression on the Italians’ collective awareness. From the early 1970s, especially at Christmas, news began to appear ‘about dice games with a built-in computer’ which cost ‘barely \$40’,<sup>65</sup> computers for automatically calculating bowling scores and finally the first electronic games which could be used with a television set.<sup>66</sup> Before long these caught on with children as well as adults: now, alongside toy trains and dolls, electronic games were also ‘selling well’<sup>67</sup> and soon even ‘flying off the shelves’.<sup>68</sup> Newspapers also reported that ‘hundreds of electronic games, from naval battles to missile combat’ had appeared in amusement

<sup>60</sup> Giovanni Berlinguer, ‘Informatica, economia, democrazia. Nota introduttiva’, *Rinascita*, 26 October 1973, 13.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> CENSIS, *Gli anni del cambiamento*, 169.

<sup>64</sup> Luigi Morandi, ‘La qualità: obiettivo per l’industria’, *Il Giorno*, 12 August 1973.

<sup>65</sup> Pia Soli, ‘I regali-idee per chi “ha tutto”’, *Il Tempo*, 21 November 1971.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Fra i regali di Natale vasca da bagno d’oro coi rubinetti in platino’, *Corriere d’Informazione*, 21 December 1973.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Macché Natale austero. Bruciati 108 miliardi’, *Corriere d’Informazione*, 27 December 1973.

<sup>68</sup> ‘La tredicesima col contagocce’, *Corriere d’Informazione*, 8 January 1976.

parks<sup>69</sup> and that simulated driving races were a big hit in home exhibitions.<sup>70</sup> In the second half of the 1970s, it became clear that the phenomenon was gaining ground even in Italy, as demonstrated by the emergence of the games Merlin, Simon and Master Mind.<sup>71</sup> It was now responsible for extraordinarily high consumer spending<sup>72</sup> and influenced children's preferences<sup>73</sup> until microcomputers themselves landed 'on the planet of toys'.<sup>74</sup> Some even began to fear that machines would replace playmates,<sup>75</sup> resulting in children's psychological isolation.<sup>76</sup> At the end of the decade, Italians learned that the television set itself was becoming a game, given the popularity of video-games among adults;<sup>77</sup> that they would be able to decide which channel to watch from the comfort of their armchair;<sup>78</sup> that once it had 'reached maturity' it would have a built-in memory;<sup>79</sup> that automatic tuning control would allow access to a hundred channels;<sup>80</sup> while in the car, a brain lodged in the dashboard would be able to indicate what time the driver would arrive home at the press of a button.<sup>81</sup>

The launching of new media linked to information technology was heavily criticised by the Communist Party. *L'Unità* branded the world of computer games as a 'set-up' and decried as absurd the enormous

<sup>69</sup> 'Come passare in città una serata diversa: Luna Park', *Corriere d'Informazione*, 3 August 1974.

<sup>70</sup> 'Dal mosaico di Guttuso ai mobili della Brianza', *Corriere d'Informazione*, 12 October 1977.

<sup>71</sup> Ivana Borghini, 'I giochi dell'estate', *Corriere d'Informazione*, 21 July 1979.

<sup>72</sup> 'Per i video-giochi spesi in un anno 27 miliardi', *Corriere della Sera*, 3 October 1978.

<sup>73</sup> Cristina Berretta, 'La legge ferma i giocattoli "pericolosi"', *Corriere d'Informazione*, 13 September 1978.

<sup>74</sup> Anna Bartolini, 'Mostri spaziali e microcalcolatori sbarcano sul pianeta del giocattolo', *Corriere della Sera*, 21 November 1979.

<sup>75</sup> Giulia Borgese, 'Il computer al posto del compagno di giochi', *Corriere della Sera*, 28 January 1979.

<sup>76</sup> Viviana Kasam, 'Troppi giochi per bambini scienziati (ma soli)', *Corriere della Sera*, 18 December 1979.

<sup>77</sup> Giancarlo Ghisi, 'Il televisore diventa un gioco', *Corriere della Sera*, 10 January 1978.

<sup>78</sup> Franco Cianflone, 'In poltrona ordineremo al televisore quale trasmissione vogliamo seguire', *Corriere della Sera*, 8 September 1978.

<sup>79</sup> Giovanni Caprara, 'Il computer diventa adulto. Avrà la "memoria" incorporata', *Corriere della Sera*, 30 June 1979.

<sup>80</sup> Franco Cianflone, 'Con il controllo automatico della sintonia cento stazioni captate dai nuovi televisori', *Corriere della Sera*, 8 September 1979.

<sup>81</sup> 'Un cervello nel cruscotto', *Corriere d'Informazione*, 9 May 1978.

expenditure involved.<sup>82</sup> There was more interest in cable television, but the Communists saw its potential as educational and social,<sup>83</sup> not as entertainment. What continued to worry them was the advent of mass media and its role in shaping consensus.<sup>84</sup> Despite these fears, and an approach to the issue that was on the whole distinctly sombre, the Communists were among the few to grasp the momentous nature of the changes taking place.<sup>85</sup>

#### 4 CAPITALISM'S COMPUTER

From the mid-1970s, general feelings about the technological revolution changed still further. The oil crisis and the end of détente, the 'strategy of tension' and terrorism had a deep impact on the country's mood. The consequence of the new climate of uncertainty was that attitudes towards progress were comprehensively being overturned: while people were drastically distancing themselves from the world of technology, even 'the attitude of the most discerning strata of society' seemed dominated by disenchantment and doubts 'about technology's ability to deal with coming events'.<sup>86</sup> Observers even identified 'a growing tendency towards anti-scientific and anti-technological ideologies',<sup>87</sup> which were probably most emblematically embodied in the writer Pier Paolo Pasolini and his insistent diatribe against 'affluence, neo-laicism, technology', 'Americanization', and 'modernist' ideology.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>82</sup> David Gricce, 'Il flipper, quale macchinazione', *l'Unità*, 7 October 1979.

<sup>83</sup> Ivano Cipriani, 'Prospettive dei nuovi mezzi audiovisivi', *Rinascita*, 24 March 1972, 28. See also Ivano Cipriani, 'TV via cavo. Colpi di mano e colpi di mannaia', *Rinascita*, 1 June 1973, 4–5.

<sup>84</sup> Celestino E. Spada, 'Arriverà via cavo il cavallo vincente?', *Rinascita*, 9 May 1975, 24–25; Ivano Cipriani, '"Grande villaggio" o grande gulag?', *Rinascita*, 4 November 1977, 42–43.

<sup>85</sup> Vincenzo Comito, 'L'era della televisione mondiale', *Rinascita*, 15 December 1978, 44–45; and 'L'universo iperreale. Intervista con il sociologo Paolo Fabbri (a cura di Bruno Ristuccia)', *Rinascita*, 2 February 1979, 29.

<sup>86</sup> Gino Martinoli, 'Tecnologia, scienze sociali e sviluppo della ricerca', in CENSIS and FAST, *La qualità dello sviluppo. Scritti per Luigi Morandi 1978*, (Milan: Electa, 1980), 50–51.

<sup>87</sup> CENSIS, *Gli anni del cambiamento. Il rapporto sulla situazione sociale del Paese dal 1976 al 1982*, (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1982), 173.

<sup>88</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Prologo. E.M.', *Nuovi Argomenti*, January–February 1973, now also in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*, (Milan: Mondadori, 1990), 242–256.

Just when a radical new culture was launching a head-on attack on progress and science, the PCI, matching the turning point of the ‘historic compromise’ and in disagreement with the French Communists,<sup>89</sup> came to take up a more positive stance towards science.<sup>90</sup> This paved the way for a long and bitter debate on the Left. Voices associated with the extra-parliamentary Left argued vehemently against the neutrality of science in any form,<sup>91</sup> denouncing ‘left-wing Popperism’<sup>92</sup> and accusing the Communists of now being nothing other than a manifestation of capitalist reasoning.<sup>93</sup> Thus, while the PCI was becoming the principal protagonist among those criticising the lack of any national policy for information technology,<sup>94</sup> the positions of the extreme Left were becoming ever more radical. The formula ‘capitalism’s computer’<sup>95</sup> summarised this collective notion, and looked like becoming a cultural alibi for even extreme and violent reactions.

On 19 December 1976, the Unità Comuniste Combattenti struck at Montedison’s Datamont computer centre in Milan. On 15 April 1977, they claimed responsibility for another attack causing massive damage to the electronic control room of the *Liquichimica Biosintesi* factory at Saline Joniche.<sup>96</sup> On the following 10 June, a command unit of the Combattenti per il Comunismo destroyed the Univac interfaculty computer facility at the University of Rome. In the flyer claiming responsibility they declared that they had aimed to ‘materially destroy the tools that the capitalist

<sup>89</sup> Bernardino Fantini, ‘Contro la scienza: perché?’, *Rinascita*, 6 December 1974, 26.

<sup>90</sup> See the insert ‘Il Contemporaneo’ dedicated to ‘I conti con la scienza’, *Rinascita*, 4 April 1965, 11–30; Rita Caccamo De Luca, ‘La fiducia nella scienza’, *Rinascita*, 9 July 1976, 25–26; Bernardino Fantini, ‘Che cos’è la razionalità scientifica?’, *ibid.*, 10 September 1976, 39–40; Enrico Bellone, ‘Dentro e fuori la storia della scienza’, *ibid.*, 15 October 1976, 22–23.

<sup>91</sup> Giovanni Ciccotti, Michelangelo De Maria, Giovanni Jona Lasinio, *L’ape e l’architetto. Paradigmi scientifici e materialismo storico*, Introduction by Marcello Cini, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976); Marcello Lelli, ‘Marxismo, scienza, compromesso storico (Ovvero: il ronzo fastidioso di un’ape)’, *La Critica Sociologica*, 38, 1976, 23–40.

<sup>92</sup> Alberto Gioannini, ‘Popperismo di sinistra’, *Praxis*, 26, April 1978, 20.

<sup>93</sup> Arturo Russo, ‘Lettera. (Auto)critica della scienza’, *Praxis*, June 1976, 28.

<sup>94</sup> Lucio Libertini, ‘Le possibili e necessarie scelte per il futuro’, *Rinascita*, 23 May 1975, 12–13.

<sup>95</sup> Paola M. Manacorda, *Il calcolatore del Capitale. Un’analisi marxista dell’informatica*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976). In fact, the book took a more complex and dialectical approach than the title suggests.

<sup>96</sup> <https://www.ugomariatassinari.it/liquichimica-di-saline-joniche/> (accessed 10 February 2023).

system' used 'to centralize, organize and plan its means of control'.<sup>97</sup> Further attacks followed. In the Red Brigades' (BR) strategic resolution of February 1978, a clear instruction was given to the 'armed party': 'destroy computers because they are part of the system of control, documentation and repression of the revolutionary proletariat' by the USA and multinationals.<sup>98</sup> On 2 February the Cassa di Risparmio Calabrese was hit. On 28 May the Red Brigades themselves attacked the army's computer statistics centre in Rome. On 3 December, the Ministry of Transport's electronic archives were targeted.<sup>99</sup>

## 5 THE DAWN OF PERSONAL COMPUTERS

Awareness of the transition to personal computing and of its Californian cultural backdrop<sup>100</sup> came late to Italy and the response was muted. Not everyone realised that this would be the true future trend.<sup>101</sup> The late 1970s was a time of notable 'commercial success for minicomputers' but not yet for microcomputers.<sup>102</sup> As a result, the second half of the 1970s was dominated by the idea that a leap in quality in the development of a national minicomputer industry could not be delayed. The technological-industrial community was insistent about this,<sup>103</sup> proposing 'a plan for electronics'.<sup>104</sup> Faced with Olivetti's difficulties, which were now obvious,<sup>105</sup> even the Communists asked first for an Italian

<sup>97</sup> '10 giugno. Il computer nemico di classe', *Civiltà delle macchine*, May–August 1977, 6.

<sup>98</sup> p.g., 'Terrorismo sui computer', *Rinascita*, 8 December 1978, 10.

<sup>99</sup> See the questioning of the Communist deputies Alessandro Natta, Bruno Fracchia, Mario Pochetti, Franco Coccia, Sergio Flamigni and Mario Pani, in *Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, VII Legislatura – Discussioni, seduta del 4 dicembre 1978*, 24440–24441.

<sup>100</sup> Balbi, Magaouda, *Storia dei media digitali*, 28–30.

<sup>101</sup> Zane, *Storia e memoria del personal computer*, 50.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>103</sup> Livio Colasanti, 'L'informatica fattore di sviluppo', *Il Tempo*, 31 July 1975; 'Partecipazioni statali: massimo controllo pubblico. Intervista con Pasquale Saraceno (a cura di Paolo Forcellini)', *Rinascita*, 19 December 1975, 14–15; Girolamo Colavitti, 'Un salto culturale è necessario per affrontare il rapporto tra l'uomo e la macchina', in CENSIS and FAST, *La qualità dello sviluppo*, 38–39.

<sup>104</sup> Giorgio Quazza, 'Riflessioni sull'evoluzione dell'attività industriale italiana per l'automazione nell'ultimo decennio', in CENSIS and FAST, *La qualità dello sviluppo*, 124–125.

<sup>105</sup> Lucio Libertini, 'Il futuro incerto dell'elettronica', *Rinascita*, 2 February 1973, 6.



'computerization plan' with links to Europe,<sup>106</sup> then for a national plan for electronics<sup>107</sup> and finally for a more specific plan for information technology.<sup>108</sup> The moderate wing of the DC, which continued to view the technological future with scepticism,<sup>109</sup> nevertheless declared that it shared the idea of a centralised sector, but not the great need for urgency.<sup>110</sup> So no real plan emerged,<sup>111</sup> and there was no change in the conviction that a significant 'technological gap' between Italy and other countries remained unfilled.<sup>112</sup> Only on 25 January 1979 would the Inter-ministerial Committee for Economic Planning (CIPE) ultimately approve the 'finalized plan for information technology' set out by the National Research Council (CNR). This envisaged expenditure of 25 billion lire to be distributed over the following five years,<sup>113</sup> but complaints about the government's lack of serious industrial planning in the IT sector remained persistent.<sup>114</sup>

Despite all this, technology experts naturally realised that a new revolution in the world of computers was approaching. They lost no time in pointing out that new microcomputers, costing the same as a television set, were widely available in the USA and were being put to use in new

<sup>106</sup> Napoleone Colajanni, 'Proposte politiche per un "piano calcolo" italiano', *Rinascita*, 26 October 1973, 16–17.

<sup>107</sup> Proposed by the Communist Roberto Baldassari, in *Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, VII Legislatura – 70 – Bollettino delle Commissioni, X Commissione Permanente (Trasporti e Aviazione Civile, Marina Mercantile, Poste e Telecomunicazioni)*, 24 November 1976, 25.

<sup>108</sup> Marco De Marco, 'Informatica. Perché occorre un piano di settore', *Rinascita*, 22 July 1977, 14; Piero Brezzi, 'Il piano elettronico nazionale', *Rinascita*, 23 September 1977, 35; Marco De Marco, 'Elettronica. Su cosa puntare per produrre di più', *ibid.*, 2 December 1977, 9; Paolo Forcellini, 'Dove va l'industria italiana? La palla al piede è l'indebitamento', in *ibid.*, 9 December 1977, 9–10.

<sup>109</sup> g.b., 'Premessa', in *Attualità delle idee di Perugia?*, 5.

<sup>110</sup> Speech by the Budget Minister Giulio Andreotti, in *Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, VI Legislatura – Discussioni, seduta del 28 aprile 1976*, 17697.

<sup>111</sup> *Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, VII Legislatura – 405 – Bollettino delle Commissioni, XII Commissione Permanente (Industria)*, Wednesday 19 July 1978, 45–46.

<sup>112</sup> As expressed by Antonio Caldoro of the PSI, in *Atti Parlamentari Camera dei Deputati, VII Legislatura – 455 – Bollettino delle Commissioni, X Commissione Permanente (Trasporti)*, Wednesday 8 November 1978, 81.

<sup>113</sup> Ugo Borsari, 'Rassegna di politica economica', *Civitas*, February 1979, 124–125.

<sup>114</sup> *Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, VIII Legislatura – Discussioni, seduta del 20 novembre 1979*, 4411.

ways by professionals and students.<sup>115</sup> The dean of Milan Polytechnic spoke of a historic turning point that would have ‘a much greater influence on culture than printing technology’:<sup>116</sup> ‘information systems’ would inevitably evolve ‘into a real new “nervous system” for society’.<sup>117</sup> In the autumn of 1978, the first Italian computer shop opened at Cinisello Balsamo.<sup>118</sup> By 1981 there would be twenty such shops.<sup>119</sup> Apple personal computers, which were sold in Italy from the late spring of 1979,<sup>120</sup> swiftly took the main share of the market, with 3000 models already sold by 1980.<sup>121</sup> For some people the success of the new minicomputers and reports coming in from the USA prompted dreams of ‘distributed computing’: this seemed ‘democratic and progressive’, whereas the ‘big computer’ was ‘bureaucratic and automatic’.<sup>122</sup>

The Italian Left, committed as it was to the need for public to prevail over private, did not share these hopes. Criticism came not only from the New Left, who argued against ‘private computerization’ and ‘computers in homes’,<sup>123</sup> but also from the Communists. Although they were among the first to draw attention to the innovations coming from the USA, the Communists thought that the spread of ‘a trend for 2 to 5 million computers built on a do-it-yourself system’ was anything but positive: either these devices—they commented—were ‘a pointless game, another expensive waste of money’ or they increased ‘the memory, intelligence and information of their owners’ and therefore reinforced ‘the culture and power discrepancies between classes and peoples’.<sup>124</sup> In fact, with the crisis

<sup>115</sup> Federazione delle Associazioni Scientifiche e Tecniche, *Condizioni e proposte per lo sviluppo dell'industria elettronica nazionale. Libro bianco sull'elettronica italiana*, (Milan: FAST, 1976).

<sup>116</sup> Luigi Dadda, ‘Dieci anni di informatica’, in CENSIS and FAST, *La qualità dello sviluppo*, 118.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>118</sup> Zane, *Storia e memoria del personal computer*, 89.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>120</sup> ‘I microprocessori nel commercio al dettaglio’, *Corriere della Sera*, 24 June 1979.

<sup>121</sup> Zane, *Storia e memoria del personal computer*, 98.

<sup>122</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 63.

<sup>123</sup> Quoted in Giovanni Berlinguer, ‘La rivoluzione degli oggetti’, *Rinascita*, 30 September 1977, 11.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

of 'national solidarity', not only the New Left<sup>125</sup> but also the PCI<sup>126</sup> returned to an anti-technological campaign.

Italians had clearly recognised the unprecedented nature of the digital revolution. They had discussed the innovations sometimes with hope, often with fear. They were split in their attitudes to it along precise ideological and cultural lines, on the one hand appreciating the potential of computers, on the other hand hating them (and sometimes destroying them). In the end, their divisions and uncertainties meant that information technology became 'a lost opportunity'.<sup>127</sup> With very few exceptions,<sup>128</sup> however, there was no clear understanding of how new technologies were 'capable of penetrating, very fast, deep into people's lives'.<sup>129</sup> But perhaps this was inevitable. The Internet had not yet been born. It was not until the 1980s that the first digital cameras appeared on the market (at a very high price).<sup>130</sup> Only in the mid-1990s did the personal computer 'begin to become a permanent fixture in the home'.<sup>131</sup> And likewise it was not until the 1990s that mobile telephony began to spread.<sup>132</sup> The fact is, as the DC politician and businessman Piero Bassetti observed, in 'the sector of electronic information and telecommunications' the country had lost the race for modernity.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Paola Manacorda, 'Scienza. L'informatica distribuita è davvero più democratica? Quando il costo di un microcalcolatore crolla a 15 dollari e tende a zero, si creano le premesse per una radicale trasformazione del lavoro. E di un controllo sociale più flessibile e sicuro', *il manifesto*, 21 June 1979.

<sup>126</sup> Mario Bolognani, 'Si può programmare la produzione di innovazione? Il messaggio di Carter sulla politica della scienza e della tecnologia', *Rinascita*, 8 June 1979, 31–32; Maurizio Bono, 'Torna il sogno tecnologico. La moda sotto il segno dei minicalcolatori', *ibid.*, 15 June 1979, 45.

<sup>127</sup> *Informatica: un'occasione perduta. La divisione elettronica dell'Olivetti nei primi anni del centro-sinistra*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1979).

<sup>128</sup> Giovanni Sartori, 'Politica e previsione tecnologica: un codicillo a Bell', *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, I:2, 1971, 387–391; Massimo Negrotti, *Uomini e calcolatori: introduzione allo studio dei mutamenti culturali connessi alla rivoluzione informatica*, (Rome: Città nuova, 1979).

<sup>129</sup> Peppino Ortoleva, Preface, in Balbi, Magaudo, *Storia dei media digitali*, IX.

<sup>130</sup> Balbi, Magaudo, *Storia dei media digitali*, 125.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>133</sup> Piero Bassetti, 'Il Convegno di Perugia. Contributi', in *Attualità delle idee di Perugia?*, 78.

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# The End of the Third Indo-Pakistani War. 16 December 1971. The Italian Press and the Birth of Bangladesh

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## I INTRODUCTION

As recent historiography suggests, following the Second World War successive Italian governments failed to attribute much importance to South Asia.<sup>1</sup> According to Giuseppe Spagnulo:

<sup>1</sup>See, also for bibliographical references, the interesting and well-documented work by Giuseppe Spagnulo, *Il Risorgimento dell'Asia. India e Pakistan nella politica estera dell'Italia repubblicana (1946–1980)*, (Milan: Le Monnier Università, 2020). Spagnulo reiterates (ibid., 10) that the line of equidistance wisely held by the various Italian governments in the Indo-Pakistani conflict of December 1971 'reflected Italy's low political clout in the Indian subcontinent and her focus on economic relations in this geopolitical area, which was quite far from the priority sector of Italian foreign policy, i.e. the Euro-Mediterranean axis'. See also Giuseppe Spagnulo, 'Aldo Moro e le relazioni italo-pakistane (1963–1973)', in Federico Imperato, Rosario Milano, Luciano Monzali (eds), *Fra diplomazia e petrolio. Aldo Moro e la*

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Italy's prevalent interest in India and Pakistan was mainly economic. Both countries comprised large markets and were a rich source of raw materials much needed to supply Italian factories. Both countries were also heavily dependent on the assistance of their industrially advanced counterparts for their infrastructural and economic modernisation plans. At this level, Italy worked [...] to pave the way for access by her own national companies.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter, based on reports and comments published in some of Italy's leading newspapers of the day (such as *Corriere della Sera*, *Avvenire*, *Avanti!* and *l'Unità*), seeks to highlight how press coverage of the lead-up to East Pakistan secession and the Indo-Pakistani conflict<sup>3</sup> reflected the then Italian government's dismissive attitude to the region; in addition it attempts to show how in describing the end of the Third Indo-Pakistani War and the birth of Bangladesh the press took the standard 'orientalist'

*politica italiana in Medio Oriente (1963–1978)*, (Bari: Cacucci, 2018), 199–238. For the previous years, see Marzia Casolari, *L'Asia agli asiatici. La politica 'indiana' del regime fascista e i rapporti con il nazionalismo radicale*, (Milan: Le Monnier Università, 2023); Marzia Casolari, *In the Shadow of the Swastika: The Relationships Between Indian Radical Nationalism, Italian Fascism and Nazism*, (London-New York: Routledge, 2020); Giuseppe Spagnulo, 'Lontani ma non troppo: le relazioni tra Italia e India dall'Unità d'Italia alla fine del fascismo (1861–1945)', *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 104:3, September–December 2020, 1109–1160; and Marcello Minelli, *Le relazioni fra Italia e India nel secondo dopoguerra (1945–1950)*, (Lecce: Youcanprint, 2019).

<sup>2</sup>Spagnulo, *Il Risorgimento dell'Asia*, 8. It can safely be argued that the attention paid by Italian academe to modern and contemporary South Asia has also been equally slight. In this regard see Michelguglielmo Torri, 'Studies in Italy on Modern and Contemporary India', *Storia della Storiografia/History of Historiography*, 34, 1998, 119–151; Michelguglielmo Torri, 'L'indianistica italiana dagli anni Quaranta ad oggi', in Agostino Giovagnoli, Giorgio del Zanna (eds), *Il mondo visto dall'Italia*, (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2004), 247–263. More recently: Elisabetta Basile, Michelguglielmo Torri (eds), *Italian Scholars on India*, Vol. II: *History, Economy, Society*, (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 2022); and Massimiliano Vaghi, 'Great Mutiny e "orientalismo". Il subcontinente indiano nella *Storia del mondo moderno* Cambridge-Garzanti', *Tradurre. Pratiche teorie strumenti*, 20, Spring 2021, 1–16, <https://rivistatradurre.it/great-mutiny-e-orientalismo/> [accessed 20 September 2024].

<sup>3</sup>There is an abundance of literature on the Indo-Pakistani wars and the birth of Bangladesh; I mention here only the 'classic' text: Sumit Ganguly, *The Origins of War in South Asia: Indo-Pakistani Conflicts since 1947*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986). More recent books include Srinath Raghavan, *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); and Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021).

line prevailing in Europe down to the mid-Twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> These events, in essence, were presented to readers as ‘minor episodes’ within the context of USSR-US world rivalry and not as a historic crisis or ‘break’ in the history of South Asia, a place considered immutable in time—as the well-known orientalist Alessandro Bausani wrote in 1968<sup>5</sup>—and whose history *depended* on that of the West: that of Europe and Britain during the colonial era, then that of the Superpowers after the Second World War.<sup>6</sup>

## 2 THE ITALIAN PRESS AND THE BIRTH OF BANGLADESH

Since its creation in August 1947, Pakistan had been plagued by the problem of being divided territorially into two parts: West Pakistan and the huge Bengali province of East Pakistan, separated by 1600 kilometres of Indian territory. First proposed in 1940 under the ‘Lahore Resolution’, this geo-politically complex set-up was intended to mediate between the—at times starkly opposed—interests of the main leaders of the Muslim League, among them the Bengali Abul Kasem Fazlul Huq and President Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the latter becoming Pakistan’s first Governor-General in 1947.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> In Italian, also for bibliographical references, see Massimiliano Vaghi, *L’idea dell’India nell’Europa moderna (secoli XVII-XX)*, (Milan-Udine: Mimesis, 2012). In English, among others, see the classic work Roland Inden, *Imagining India*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Alessandro Bausani, ‘Un viaggio nel Pakistan’, in *Il Pakistan*, (Rome: Edizioni Nazionali, 1968, 2nd ed.) 146–162 (quotation on 148).

<sup>6</sup> According to this orientalist view, in short, nothing or very little has changed in India since time immemorial. As Michelguglielmo Torri writes, the few ‘changes that have occurred began to manifest themselves following the impact of European domination or even after independence [...]. This is a view that entails a corollary: namely that, if Indian society is always the same, it is possible to take a picture of it: whatever era the photograph dates from, it remains essentially identical to that taken at a different time. In fact, according to the Orientalists, this photograph is represented by the *Dharma Shashtra*’ (Michelguglielmo Torri, ‘La visione orientalistica “classica” dell’India: origini, caratteristiche e persistenza di un’ideologia eurocentrica’, in Elisabetta Basile, Michelguglielmo Torri (eds), *Il subcontinente indiano verso il terzo millennio. Tensioni politiche, trasformazioni sociali ed economiche, mutamento culturale*, Centro Studi per i popoli extraeuropei Cesare Bonacossa dell’Università di Pavia, (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2002), 25–47).

<sup>7</sup> As Vito Salerno rightly recalled in the 1960s in *Pakistan*, (Milan: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1961), 15: ‘Which part should constitute Pakistan, the *Muslim League* did not specify for a long time. Only in 1940 did it begin to talk of *North Western and Eastern Zones of India*. These zones were to form independent states in which the con-

Relations between Pakistan's two regions were already strained due to their cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences, which contributed to making East Pakistan a substantially neglected province, largely overlooked by central government.<sup>8</sup> The situation was further exacerbated after the December 1970 elections, which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Bangladesh Awami League, won by an overwhelming majority in the East Pakistan constituencies.<sup>9</sup> His political programme called for the de facto independence of the eastern provinces with central government retaining control solely of military and diplomatic affairs, while all other matters were to be devolved to local governments—which undermined the authority of the military junta ruling Pakistan at the time.<sup>10</sup> Following his electoral success, Mujibur Rahman should therefore have become Prime Minister of Pakistan. However, among the leaders of the western areas, neither President Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan nor Zulfikar Ali Bhutto could bear to hand over the entire country to a Bengali politician.

After the collapse of talks between the Bangladesh Awami League on the one hand, and the army and the Pakistan People's Party (founded in 1968 by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) on the other, the situation became explosive. Discontent grew among the population of East Pakistan, and various acts of anti-government sabotage were carried out: tripartite talks were interrupted, and troops stationed in East Pakistan began large-scale repression against the Bengalis (25 March 1971). The Bangladesh Awami League was outlawed and Rahman arrested.

The Bengali crisis had another effect: it undermined the fragile peace between Pakistan and India.

India and Pakistan had a long history of conflict, as is well known.<sup>11</sup> What triggered the latest round of hostilities was probably the large number of Bengali refugees who fled to India following Pakistani repression,

stituent elements would be autonomous and sovereign'. More generally, in Italian, Elisa Giunchi, *Pakistan. Islam, potere e democratizzazione*, (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> See Taj Hashmi, *Fifty Years of Bangladesh, 1971–2021. Crises of Culture, Development, Governance, and Identity*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), esp. 50–69.

<sup>9</sup> See 'East Pakistan Provincial Assembly Election Results', in Ministry of External Affairs–New Delhi, *Bangladesh Documents*, (Madras: B.N.K. Press Private Limited, [1971]), 130. See also Kazi Ahmed Kamal, *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and birth of Bangladesh*, (Dhaka: Academic Press and Publishers Library, 2013, 3rd ed.).

<sup>10</sup> 'Mujib's Call for Emancipation of Bengalees. Talk with Pressmen after the Parliamentary Party Meeting at the Hotel Purbani, on March 1, 1971', *Bangladesh Documents*, 189–191.

<sup>11</sup> Among the many works see Sumit Ganguly, *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions since 1947*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).



an influx that had serious economic consequences and caused social unrest in the host country. Relations between India and Pakistan deteriorated further when Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi decided to openly support the self-proclaimed government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh—formed by Bengali leaders in exile in India on 17 April 1971—by providing them with weapons and military training.

Intense Bengali guerrilla activity resumed in November 1971, at the end of the rainy season: on the 21 of that month, the Indian-supported Bengali liberation forces launched a heavy attack along the entire length of the border with East Pakistan. To counter this offensive, the Pakistani air force bombed several Indian air force bases, while to the west, Pakistani troops advanced into India across the disputed border in Kashmir.<sup>12</sup>

On 3 December, Bangladeshi guerrillas proclaimed a general insurrection and, as *Corriere della Sera* in Italy wrote, India and Pakistan thus entered into a state of total conflict, 'the 14-day war'.<sup>13</sup> After the failure of mediation attempts by the United Nations and a few other countries (including Italy and Japan, as reported by *Avvenire* and *Corriere della Sera*),<sup>14</sup> the Indians' superior resources in terms of men and weaponry quickly put Pakistan in serious difficulty. The government's military units stationed in East Pakistan were unable to offer any real resistance to the overwhelming Indian forces and surrendered unconditionally on 16 December. Shortly afterwards, hostilities also ceased in West Pakistan: on 17 December an armistice between India and Pakistan came into force and the war ended with Pakistan's decisive defeat and the birth of independent Bangladesh.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Herbert Feldman, *The End and the Beginning: Pakistan 1969–1971*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).

<sup>13</sup> 'La guerra dei 14 giorni', *Corriere della Sera*, 19 December 1971.

<sup>14</sup> 'L'azione della Farnesina volta a riportare la pace', *Corriere della Sera*, 5 December 1971; 'Al Consiglio di Sicurezza. Mozione italo-nipponica all'ONU', *Avvenire*, 15 December 1971.

<sup>15</sup> 'Anche Yahya Khan accetta la fine dei combattimenti. Termina così la guerra dei quattordici giorni', *Corriere della Sera*; 'La guerra dei 14 giorni'. In general, Willem van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020<sup>2</sup>).

### 3 BANGLADESH AND THE 'ETERNAL' PROBLEMS OF SOUTH ASIA

By any reckoning, the Italian press was not indifferent to these events; however, it often looked at them from a markedly Eurocentric perspective, sometimes with the addition of the most common orientalist stereotypes: for example, the ancient *topos* of so-called Oriental despotism<sup>16</sup> frequently resounds in the words of journalists of the day. Perhaps the most telling example in this regard is an article published by *Corriere della Sera* in which special correspondent Egisto Corradi, commenting on the death toll from the conflict, falls into the commonplace of presenting an Indian subcontinent that has *always* been characterised by immense carnage and is basically unable to solve its *eternal* problems:

It may be said that in countries like these, where there are numerical units such as *lakh* (i.e. one hundred thousand) and *crore* (i.e. ten million), and where floods, cyclones and military repression wipe out half a million at a time, a death toll of two or ten thousand people in a war is insignificant. But the fact remains that this blood shed on both sides is completely in vain. This war won't solve any of the political and economic problems of the Indian sub-continent. On the contrary, it will exacerbate them.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>On this subject, which cannot be addressed even briefly here, I would mention only the classic work that probably opened the European debate on the subject: Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 6 Vols., (London: W. Strahan, 1777–1788). As far as publications in Italian are concerned, see one of the leading historians of the Twentieth century: Federico Chabod, *Storia dell'idea d'Europa*, (Bari: Laterza, 1961). In the case of the various governments of the Indian subcontinent, in every era, the term bears the pejorative meaning of violent 'totalitarianism', and sometimes the opposite: the quintessence of disorder and anarchy. As Michelguglielmo Torri rightly points out, 'there are totally opposing ideas of what constituted "Oriental despotism"'. According to some authors, it was a sort of totalitarian regime, where all power was concentrated in the hands of the monarch; for others, it was a regime where the monarch actually had very little power, since it was formally limited by custom and effectively parcelled out and distributed among the various components of the ruling class. In other words, we are dealing with mutually contradictory visions, whose only common element is the adverse judgement, i.e. the insistence that "Oriental despotism", whatever that word meant, was something profoundly negative and antithetical to progress' (Torri, 'La visione orientalistica "classica" dell'India: origini, caratteristiche e persistenza di un'ideologia eurocentrica', footnote 9). On the relationship between Oriental despotism and the Indian world, see Inden, *Imagining India*, 49–84.

<sup>17</sup>Egisto Corradi, 'La capitale del Bengala sotto il fuoco indiano. Dacca: scontro decisivo', *Corriere della Sera*, 15 December 1971. Along the same lines were the views expressed by Henry Bradsher (*The New York Times-Corriere della Sera* a few days later), in which the

The problem of the inescapable acts of violence and deaths caused and suffered by the Indians features not only in the pages of the 'bourgeois' *Corriere della Sera*, but also in those of the Catholic *Avvenire*<sup>18</sup> and the socialist *Avanti!*:

A particularly serious episode took place [...] in the streets of Dhaka where, at the end of a social gathering, one of the Bengali rebel fighters [...] incited his men to summarily execute four prisoners who had been dragged to the scene. The unfortunates were first barbarously tortured and finally bayoneted to death. In the streets of Dhaka, a not infrequent sight is the spectacle of bodies ripped apart by bullets or pierced by stab wounds but still alive and writhing in agony under the eyes of hundreds of people, who do not lift a finger.<sup>19</sup>

Among the newspapers that form the focus of our analysis, only the official paper of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), *l'Unità*, avoids the topic of 'traditional violence' in the subcontinent and concentrates mainly on the international perspectives of the conflict.<sup>20</sup> It is a topic that this also features in the other newspapers, showing how the question of the emergence of Bangladesh and the Indo-Pakistani War would automatically be included within the global context of the Cold War. In short, South Asian countries tend to be presented as essentially incapable of conducting fully autonomous and even rational policies: non-Western actors, first and foremost India and Pakistan, and in a certain sense even China, can at best play only supporting roles. As *Corriere della Sera*'s Hong Kong correspondent Pietro Sormani writes, the Chinese supported Pakistan only in an *apparent* manner, i.e. without ever thinking of really challenging the Soviet Union:

Indians come across as traditionally violent and irrational ('Atroci uccisioni nella capitale bengalese. L'ora delle vendette a Dacca', *Corriere della Sera*, 21 December 1971).

<sup>18</sup> On the *irrational* mutual violence among the Bengalis: 'Il Pakistan ha accettato la tregua proposta da Indira. La guerra è finita', *Avvenire*, 18 December 1971.

<sup>19</sup> 'Ali Bhutto presidente del Pakistan. Ondata di atroci vendette a Dacca' *Avanti!*, 21 December 1971. See also 'Sintomi di crisi in Pakistan per il regime di Yahya Khan', *Avanti!*, 19 December 1971: the *fierce* Bengali guerrillas 'won't forgive the enemy they have defeated'.

<sup>20</sup> For example: 'Verso la battaglia decisiva per Dacca? Discordi versioni sugli scontri presso la capitale del Bengala', *l'Unità*, 13 December 1971; 'Si sono arresi i pakistani a Dacca', *l'Unità*, 17 December 1971.

China, in short, ‘was careful not to allow herself to be drawn into the conflict [,] which [...] would have exposed her to Soviet reprisals’.<sup>21</sup>

Alongside articles that resembled simple chronicles or reportage—prevalent in all the newspapers analysed here—*Avvenire*, as one might well imagine, devotes ample space to the humanitarian aspect of the conflict and to the complex matter of Christian minorities in Bengal, while presenting a reconstruction of events in which the debates within the Catholic hierarchy and at the United Nations play a key role.<sup>22</sup>

For its part *Avanti!*, which essentially neglects the local dynamics<sup>23</sup> in favour of an analysis of the positions of the Superpowers, rightly emphasises the success of the Soviet Union in supporting India (albeit a success *limited* by their acceptance of ‘the game imposed by Indira Gandhi’) and, consequently, the fruitless and sterile US support for Pakistan.<sup>24</sup>

Writing in *Corriere della Sera* and confirming the broadsheet’s pro-American stance, Egisto Corradi on the one hand presents the birth of Bangladesh as an all-India victory,<sup>25</sup> while on the other blaming Gandhi’s government for ‘having defied world public opinion by rejecting the General Assembly resolution voted on 7 December and accepted by Pakistan’.<sup>26</sup> Curiously in tune with the contemporary point of view of the People’s Republic of China, *Corriere della Sera* openly accuses India of adopting neo-colonialist policies and of being under the heel of the USSR.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Pietro Sormani, ‘Le conseguenze della sconfitta pakistana: scosso il prestigio di Pechino’, *Corriere della Sera*, 18 December 1971.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example: ‘Assalto decisivo a Dacca. Furiosi scontri’, *Avvenire*, 15 December 1971; ‘Ultimatum per Dacca che chiede una tregua’, *Avvenire*, 16 December 1971; ‘Appello del Bangla Desh alla Chiesa Italiana’, *Avvenire*, 12 March 1972.

<sup>23</sup> There is only passing mention of the fact that the ‘socialist movements’ in the new Bangladesh prove incapable of coordinating their policies and are therefore ineffective: ‘Ali Bhutto incontra lo sceicco Rahman’, *Avanti!*, 28 December 1971.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Cessati i combattimenti fra India e Pakistan’, *Avanti!*, 18 December 1971.

<sup>25</sup> Egisto Corradi, ‘Le ultime ore del Pakistan orientale’, *Corriere della Sera*, 10 December 1971.

<sup>26</sup> Egisto Corradi, ‘Duro richiamo di Nixon a Indira Gandhi. Washington vuole fermare l’India’, *Corriere della Sera*, 13 December 1971. See also Egisto Corradi, ‘L’India vuole imporre la resa a Dacca. Movimenti di navi americane e russe’, *Corriere della Sera*, 16 December 1971.

<sup>27</sup> Egisto Corradi, ‘La fine della guerra non risolve i problemi. Pace amara per India e Pakistan’, *Corriere della Sera*, 19 December 1971; Egisto Corradi, ‘Oltranzismo in India. Pressioni sul governo per imporre dure condizioni agli sconfitti’, *Corriere della Sera*, 20 December 1971.

As can easily be imagined, openly pro-Soviet *l'Unità* provides a completely different perspective on the international dynamics surrounding the birth of Bangladesh: from its point of view, it is obvious that the United States and China are *imperialists*<sup>28</sup> while India—with USSR support—is fighting alongside the Bengali *partisans* ('partigiani').<sup>29</sup> In spite of its very Eurocentric use of historical-political categories applied in a context far removed from the one in which they were first devised (e.g. the words *partisan* and *imperialism*), the report given by *l'Unità* has the merit of highlighting the different positions within the western alliance, underlining in particular the independence of the British government from its powerful and cumbersome ally across the pond.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4 SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite the clear Eurocentric approach and the traditional orientalist stereotypes often evident in the reconstructions of events, did the readers of the Italian newspapers considered here actually have the tools with which to form a realistic picture of the tragic events that took place in Bengal in December 1971?

In the first place we note that the space the newspapers allotted to the issue was on the whole modest (albeit more than nothing) and consonant with the attention devoted to it by the government of the day, a 'symptom of clear Italian interest in the situation, given an objectively limited involvement in the area in question'.<sup>31</sup>

Although from the pages of *Avvenire* and *Avanti!* readers could certainly form a sufficiently accurate idea of the events of the war in Bengal, at least from a chronological point of view, it was *Corriere della Sera* that provided a good, reasoned overview of events through Ugo Stille's articles. While effectively neglecting the internal political dynamics of the

<sup>28</sup> China 'uses slogans against the superpowers to divide the international communist movement' and 'the Chinese leaders [...] found themselves side by side with American imperialism' ('Critiche di Stella Rossa alla politica cinese', *l'Unità*, 15 December 1971).

<sup>29</sup> 'Entusiasmo nel Bangla Desh per le vittorie partigiane', *l'Unità*, 12 December 1971. Note that in occupied Italy 'partigiani' were members of the armed Resistance fighting against the Nazi-Fascist regime.

<sup>30</sup> 'Londra continuerà a vendere armi all'India', *l'Unità*, 14 December 1971. On this subject, Angela L. Debnath, 'Britain at the birth of Bangladesh', PH.D. Dissertation, (London: University College, 2012), esp. 117–160.

<sup>31</sup> Spagnulo, *Il Risorgimento dell'Asia*, 199.

subcontinent—probably perceived as ‘exotic’ and difficult for the average Italian reader to understand—Stille at least shed light on the international alignments that supported one side or the other and outlined the implications.<sup>32</sup>

In a context in which the actors of the subcontinent are seen as playing mere supporting roles on the global stage, a certain attention and focus on the local context can only be seen in *l'Unità*, thanks to the contribution of Renzo Foa. While not concealing his pro-Indian and pro-Soviet stance or that of the newspaper for which he worked, Foa correctly identified the ‘internal’ causes of the conflict, attributing them to *Islamabad dictatorship* and the enormous socio-economic inequalities that had marked Pakistan since its inception:

This was not a war between ‘wretches’ as many have called it with blindness and cynicism, but a conflict that the ‘rich’ have unleashed against the ‘poor’. And by ‘rich’ we mean the dictatorship in Islamabad, the expression of an agrarian and military oligarchy that has lost its colonial dominion over East Pakistan, where five years ago the per capita income was twenty times lower than in the western province.<sup>33</sup>

In short, for those with an interest in Asian history, the reports published by the Italian newspapers of the time are reminiscent of the somewhat bitter reflections of one of the greatest Italian Twentieth century scholars of Asia, Giorgio Borsa,<sup>34</sup> who lamented the total absence of a ‘Copernican’ view point in observing and studying the society and politics of East and South Asia.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Ugo Stille, ‘Mosca solidale con Nuova Delhi’, *Corriere della Sera*, 6 December 1971; Ugo Stille, ‘Rovente scambio d’accuse fra cinesi e russi all’Onu’, *Corriere della Sera*, 7 December 1971; Ugo Stille, ‘Pieno appoggio di Mosca a Nuova Delhi’, *Corriere della Sera*, 8 December 1971.

<sup>33</sup> Renzo Foa, ‘Piena crisi del regime pakistano. Manifestazioni contro Yahya Khan’, *l'Unità*, 19 December 1971.

<sup>34</sup> On the importance of Borsa see: Guido Abbattista, ‘Gli orizzonti di Borsa’, *Contemporanea*, 11:1, January 2008, 123–132; Michelguglielmo Torri, Premessa I: ‘I primi vent’anni di “Asia Maior”: l’eredità politico-culturale di Giorgio Borsa’, in Michelguglielmo Torri, Nicola Mocchi (eds), *Asia Maior. Osservatorio italiano sull’Asia 2010. Ripresa economica, conflitti sociali e tensioni geopolitiche in Asia*, (Bologna: I libri di Emil, 2011), 13–25.

<sup>35</sup> Giorgio Borsa, ‘L’Estremo Oriente: nuovi orientamenti storiografici’, *Nuove questioni di storia contemporanea*, Vol. II, (Milan: Marzorati, 1977), 1617–1679. See also, Giorgio Borsa, ‘Recent Trends in India Ocean Historiography, 1500–1800’, *Il Politico*, 53:4 (148), 1988, 679–690; and his *magnum opus*, Giorgio Borsa, *La nascita del mondo moderno in Asia Orientale*, (Milan: Rizzoli, 1977).

According to Borsa, only a radically new approach to the uncritical repetition of Twentieth century orientalist stereotypes—a new ‘Copernican’ vision, as he called it—would have allowed for a true understanding, in depth and without prejudice, of the complexity of Asian socio-political systems: such a vision would have transcended both the analyses stemming from former colonial historiography, mainly of British origin, and those influenced by the then new nationalist historiography, which had emerged after the Indian subcontinent gained independence and unfolded according to a methodology deriving from a more or less critical rethinking of Marxism.<sup>36</sup> However, Borsa’s wishful ‘Copernican’ vision, as we have seen here with regard to the events that led to the birth of Bangladesh, is very far from the Eurocentric point of view adopted by the Italian newspapers of the time, which, without grasping the great changes in international relations brought about by recent globalisation, appear conditioned by the stock idea—a direct derivation from colonialism<sup>37</sup>—of a subcontinent that is ‘frozen’ in time and traditionally characterised by successive ‘despotic’ and never fully ‘rational’ governments.

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<sup>36</sup> See Giorgio Borsa, ‘La modernizzazione: problemi di metodo e di contenuto’, *Il Politico*, 55:2 (154), 1990, 193–208; and Giorgio Borsa, ‘Modernization and the End of History’, *Il Politico*, 59:1 (168), 1994, 5–19.

<sup>37</sup> Among the many works (far too many for a bibliographical note) see my Massimiliano Vaghi, ‘India di Toynbee. Un paradigma eurocentrico rivisitato?’, in Federico Leonardi, Luca Maggioni (eds), *Arnold J. Toynbee. Il mondo oltre le civiltà*, (Milan: Unicopli, 2016), 175–188.

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# The UN's First Global Conference on International Environmental Issues. 5–6 June 1972. The Emergence of Ecological Awareness in Italian Politics?

*Chiara Zampieri*

*Translated by Daniel Newton*

The Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in June 1972 was the first UN-sponsored ‘mega-conference’ to address the issue. Its impact on international politics and the global debate was so strong as to be considered a watershed moment, marking the birth of a new global environmentalism<sup>1</sup> and ushering in a sea change in the way the question was approached. From an issue previously championed by a handful of scientists, the environment became a matter of concern for the international community and public opinion alike. A ‘new environmentalism’

<sup>1</sup>John McCormick, *Reclaiming Paradise. The Global Environmental Movement*, (Bloomington, IN: University Press, 1989), X.

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emerged, focusing on the relationship between humans and the environment (hence the concept of the ‘human environment’), which, rather than approaching the issue from a purely conservationist point of view (i.e., the need to protect the natural world), instead saw conservation of nature as one key aspect in ensuring quality of human life. There was a change, too, in the scale of the approach adopted, as the issue—hitherto tackled in a fragmentary, localized manner—grew into one of global dimensions, henceforth linked inextricably to the theme of development and future development models. In a short time, the environment became a priority for international (and, gradually, European) politics, spurred on, in part, by the interest of Richard Nixon, who was convinced that the environment should be the central issue of the international political agenda and wanted the US to become the ‘the locomotive of global environmentalism’.<sup>2</sup> Many of the key questions posed by the Stockholm Conference were also central to one of the most influential ‘future studies’ in vogue at the time—the report published by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, *The Limits to Growth*, issued some months earlier. The report—commissioned by the Club of Rome, a group of international economists, politicians, business people and figures from the worlds of science and culture, founded in 1968 in Rome by Aurelio Peccei, and financed by Volkswagen, Fiat and the Ford Foundation—concluded that, if the global population, industrial production and pollution were to continue increasing at the current rate, available food resources would eventually begin to fall, health conditions would worsen and essential raw materials would decline significantly, leading in the twenty-first century to wars, social disruption and epidemics that would cause millions of deaths. In response, calls were made for ‘limits to growth’ in the population and industrial production. The ensuing debate, engaging with concepts emerging in environmental studies, led to a rethinking of the notions of growth and progress, with a greater emphasis on environmental and social considerations and from an inherently global perspective. *The Limits* report and the Stockholm

<sup>2</sup> Nixon’s interest in environmental matters went beyond merely calling attention to the problem and in fact gave rise to a broad range of legislative and administrative measures and international agreements on environmental issues. See Russel E. Train, ‘The Environmental Record of the Nixon Administration’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 26:1, Winter 1996, 185–196. On the reasons for Nixon’s environmental engagement, see Sara Lorenzini, *Global Development. A Cold War History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 131.

Conference thus played a key role in forming the concept of 'sustainable development' that would emerge in the years that followed.<sup>3</sup>

But what of the situation in Italy, as the country's delegation prepared to represent it at the Stockholm Conference? Just how did its principle political forces respond to the new environmental challenge emerging within the broader context of what has been dubbed the 'Shock of the Global' and what sort of role was played by the country in the nascent international debate on sustainability? While studies on Italian environmentalism in all its various manifestations, from conservationism to political ecologism, are rich and varied,<sup>4</sup> the same cannot be said of the body of existing research dedicated to the country's political actors—that is, how and to what extent the country's principal political cultures perceived and addressed issues related to the environment in the early 1970s, and how, in response to 'future studies', those political cultures envisaged the relationship between the environment and development.<sup>5</sup> That is precisely what this chapter sets out to do, outlining the principal approaches and responses offered by the country's key political actors, through an analysis of the political debate that unfolded as the issue burst into public prominence.

## I ITALY'S ENVIRONMENTAL AWAKENING

Pre-Stockholm, the issue of the environment was not completely absent from the Italian political debate and legislation and indeed, from the beginning of the twentieth century, the country was home to a flourishing network of conservationist groups and associations.<sup>6</sup> As in the rest of the

<sup>3</sup>Elke Seefried, 'Rethinking Progress. On the origin of the Modern Sustainability Discourse, 1970–2000', *Journal of Modern European History*, 13:3, 2015, 377 ff.

<sup>4</sup>An overview of the historical, sociological and political literature regarding the environment, environmentalism and the Italian Green party, as well as of the demonstrations held on certain specific issues, is provided in Giorgio Grimaldi, *I Verdi italiani tra politica nazionale e protezione europea*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2020); Roberta Biasillo, Giacomo Bonan, 'Storia ambientale e storia d'Italia: specificità e percorsi comuni', *Italia contemporanea*, 297 (3), 2021, 67–75; Michele Citoni, Catia Papa, 'Sinistra ed ecologia in Italia 1968–1974', *I quaderni di Altrionovecento*, 8, 2017, 66–84.

<sup>5</sup>The exception is the indispensable work done by Sara Lorenzini, who has examined the impact of the Stockholm Conference on Italy and the role played by the Italian delegation.

<sup>6</sup>Simone Neri Serneri, 'Culture e politiche del movimento ambientalista', in Fiamma Lussana, Giacomo Marramao (eds), *L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni Settanta. Culture nuovi soggetti, identità*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003), 367–368.

Western world, however, it was during the 1960s that the issue gradually gained momentum. Due, in part, to the debate prompted by the uncontrolled urban development that took place in the 1950s,<sup>7</sup> in the 1960s the question began to be closely tied to issues of urban planning and management under the centre-left governments formed by an alliance between the Christian Democrats (DC) and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI). This tendency carried echoes of a new concept of welfare emerging within the public debate in the US, as well as more broadly across the Western world,<sup>8</sup> according to which, in an age of prosperity, governments had not only to ensure material well-being but also to improve quality of life—for example, in terms of social equity, individual happiness and environmental well-being.<sup>9</sup> The focus of documentation produced by the Italian government of the day, however, continued to be on the protection of natural resources, rather than on the human environment taken as a whole,<sup>10</sup> reflecting a vision that remained sectorial and an approach that was largely conservationist. Italian environmental legislation on the topic was also fragmented, generally antiquated or, in many areas related to conservation of the natural world, absent,<sup>11</sup> while there were no specific bodies responsible for dealing with issues related to nature, the environment and natural resources. Each aspect was the responsibility of one or more separate ministerial portfolios.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup>See Wilko Graf von Hardenberg, Paolo Pelizzari, 'The Environmental Question, Employment, and Development in Italy's Left, 1945–1990', *Left History*, 13:1, 2008, 83; Salvatore Romeo, *L'altra faccia del benessere. Una storia ambientale nell'Italia contemporanea (1950-1979)*, (Roma: Carocci, 2024).

<sup>8</sup>For example, the attention paid by John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson to such issues and the influence exerted on US Democrats by intellectuals such as Arthur M. Schlesinger and John K. Galbraith. See Adam Rome, "'Give Earth a Chance": The Environmental Movement and the Sixties', *Journal of American History*, 90:2, 2003, 531–534.

<sup>9</sup>Seefried, 'Rethinking Progress', 380.

<sup>10</sup>See il Progetto 80 del 1969 redatto dal ministero del Bilancio e della programmazione economica in Cristina Renzoni, *Il Progetto 80. Un'idea di Paese nell'Italia degli anni Sessanta*, (Florence: Alinea, 2012) e il Documento preliminare del programma economico nazionale 1971–1975 del 1971, in 'Il documento preliminare al piano economico 1971–1975', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 24 August 1971.

<sup>11</sup>A first preliminary measure concerning water pollution was only approved in 1965 and followed in 1966 by the first law on air pollution.

<sup>12</sup>For the period up until the mid-1960s, see Wilko Graf von Hardenberg, 'An Unguided Boom Environmental Policies of Cold War Italy', in Astrid Mignon Kirchhof, John R. McNeill (eds), *Nature and the Iron Curtain. Environmental Policy and Social Movements*

The first political discussions of environmental matters took place the year before the Stockholm Conference, on the initiative of certain DC exponents, especially the then president of the Senate, Amintore Fanfani. While perhaps not yet addressing the issue as a global whole, the debates did, nonetheless, explore many of its key aspects. Prior to that, in 1969, another leading member of the DC—the then Foreign Minister, Aldo Moro—also gave an influential speech on the subject. Speaking at the UN General Assembly, Moro described the question of the environment as requiring international attention, highlighting the connection with development issues and emphasizing the importance of the forthcoming Stockholm Conference.<sup>13</sup> In subsequent years, Moro frequently indicated the environment as one of the key issues facing the international community, contributing to ‘the substrate of tensions and crises threatening peaceful coexistence’<sup>14</sup> and a ‘vital question for all peoples, whose importance knows no political boundaries’.<sup>15</sup>

As we have already noted, a key role in Italy’s ecological awakening was played, unexpectedly, by Amintore Fanfani. Personal factors may have had a bearing on Fanfani’s engagement, since his son was at the time studying entomology at the University of Pavia,<sup>16</sup> though pressure from areas of the scientific community, which in 1970 organized three important national conferences devoted to environmental issues, no doubt also played a part.<sup>17</sup> Fanfani’s contemporary critics came up with the label *fanfecologismo* to describe the politician’s interest in ecological matters, ascribing it

*in Communist and Capitalist Countries 1945–1990*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019), 102–115.

<sup>13</sup> Aldo Moro, ‘Discorso alla XXIV sessione dell’Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite’, in Aldo Moro, *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Aldo Moro*, s. 1: *Scritti e Discorsi*, vol. 4: *Al ministero degli Esteri e all’opposizione nel partito (giugno 1968–maggio 1973)*, ed. by Guido Formigoni, Agostino Giovagnoli, with a historical-critical note by Enrico Palumbo, Bologna, University of Bologna, 2021. doi: <https://doi.org/10.48678/unibo/aldomoro1.4.1.050> [accessed 22 May 2024].

<sup>14</sup> Aldo Moro, ‘Discorso in Senato in risposta alle interpellanze sulla politica estera’, *ibid.* doi: <https://doi.org/10.48678/unibo/aldomoro1.4.1.157> [accessed 22 May 2024].

<sup>15</sup> Aldo Moro, ‘Intervento al consiglio del Comitato sui problemi della società moderna di Lisbona’, *ibid.* doi: <https://doi.org/10.48678/unibo/aldomoro1.4.1.187> [accessed 22 May 2024].

<sup>16</sup> Sara Lorenzini, ‘The emergence of global environmentalism: a challenge for Italian foreign policy?’, in Antonio Varsori, Benedetto Zaccaria (eds), *Italy in the International System from Détente to the End of the Cold War*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 216.

<sup>17</sup> Luigi Piccioni, ‘Chiesa ed ecologia 1970–1972: un dialogo interrotto’, *I quaderni di Altronovecento*, 10, 2018, 8.

to the influence of Nixon's policies, but one should also bear in mind the role played by Pope Paul VI when assessing the involvement of Fanfani and Moro in such questions. The theme of development had been on the Second Vatican Council agenda, but it was in 1970 that the Pope began to draw attention to key environmental issues, stressing the global dimension of the problem and warning that the continuous growth of industrialized society might potentially bring 'ecological catastrophe'.<sup>18</sup> Although the central focus of his remarks was primarily on humankind (rather than on nature and its interaction with humankind) in a vision that has been defined as 'anthropocentric', the Pope nonetheless recognized the crucial importance of a number of the challenges presented by progress and increasing global interdependency. Meanwhile in 1971 Fanfani was instrumental in creating a parliamentary steering committee on the environment, which worked for a number of months on a report to the Senate examining the issues involved, outlining the state of current legislation and including a motion for resolution.<sup>19</sup> However, in spite of the early start made and efforts to obtain cross-party support, for a number of years the initiative produced no concrete impact in terms of new environmental legislation or institutional recognition of the issue.

As far as the parties and movements of the left were concerned, the 1960s saw a gradual emergence of interest in environmental issues. However, for some time, with the trade unions involved in struggles for better working conditions in factories, the focus tended to be on the dangers of the workplace.<sup>20</sup> The parties of the traditional Left tended to view environmentalism as a bourgeois concern, perceiving it as an anti-industrial, anti-modern and essentially reactionary position that posed a threat to jobs.<sup>21</sup> The protest movements of 1968 and the early 1970s, however, forced the Communists and Socialists to take stock of such positions, as a number of areas of the emerging environmentalist movement

<sup>18</sup> See in particular the speech given by Paul VI for the 25th anniversary of the FAO, on 16 November 1970, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1970/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19701116\\_xxv-istituzione-fao.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1970/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19701116_xxv-istituzione-fao.html) or the Apostolic Letter *Octogesima adveniens*, of 14 May 1971, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_apl\\_19710514\\_octogesima-adveniens.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html) [accessed 22 May 2024].

<sup>19</sup> *Atti Parlamentari* (AP), *Senato della Repubblica* (SdR), *V Legislatura*, 487<sup>a</sup> seduta del 27 maggio 1971, 24635. On the work of this committee and the ensuing debate, see Chiara Zampieri, 'Ambiente, sviluppo e sostenibilità nelle culture politiche italiane degli anni Settanta', *Mondo contemporaneo*, 2-3, 2022, 215–239.

<sup>20</sup> See Graf von Hardenberg, Pelizzari, 'The Environmental Question', 77–105.

<sup>21</sup> Paolo Pelizzari, 'Sviluppo e ambiente nel dibattito della sinistra', *Italia contemporanea*, 247, 2007, 260.

close to students and workers developed a political approach to the issue, which they viewed as an aspect of class conflict, giving it a strongly anti-capitalist and radically anti-institutional slant.<sup>22</sup> This reading was embraced in part by the PSI and PCI, who argued, as we shall see, that pollution and environmental damage were the consequences of capitalist resource appropriation and production methods.

## 2 THE STOCKHOLM CONFERENCE

As in the rest of the Western world, it was only with the Stockholm Conference that the environment fully emerged into the public arena in Italy. The conference itself can be seen as part of a progressive dawning of global environmental awareness: the first doubts about the economic growth model that had set in following the Second World War began to circulate, fuelled in part by publication of several studies containing forecasts (on the whole, pessimistic) of trends in the human environment, demographic growth and the environmental effects of technical and scientific progress (of which *The Limits* report was without doubt the most influential example).<sup>23</sup> The 1968 protest movement here had a major impact with its critique of the assumption of a rational basis for technological progress and consumerism and its focus on issues such as disarmament, underdevelopment and protection of the natural world.<sup>24</sup> It was thus that the idea came about of a first mega-conference on the ‘human environment’, bringing together countries from the East, West, North and South of the globe. Although most of the countries from the East (the USSR, first and foremost) did not participate, the Conference—and indeed the broader emergence of a global ecological consciousness—transcended the borders of the Cold War, aided by the climate of détente, helping to foster a growing awareness of the universality and urgency of

<sup>22</sup> See Catia Papa, ‘Alle origini dell’ecologia politica in Italia. Il diritto alla salute e all’ambiente nel movimento studentesco’, in Lussana, Marramao (eds), *L’Italia repubblicana*, 401–431.

<sup>23</sup> For a summary of the debate prompted by these publications and a detailed bibliography, see Stefano Cavazza, ‘Politica e ambiente in prospettiva storica: riflessioni introduttive’, *Ricerche di Storia Politica*, 1, 2018, 3–17; Elke Seefried, ‘Globalized Science. The 1970s Futures Field’, *Centaurus*, 59, 2017, 40–57.

<sup>24</sup> On this question, see Citoni, Papa, *Sinistra ed ecologia*, 13–16.



the environmental question.<sup>25</sup> However, the link between the environment and development examined by the Stockholm Conference (and forming one of the key points in *The Limits* report) became the terrain for a confrontation between two sets of opposing interests—those of the advanced industrial countries, increasingly aware of the environmental challenges lying ahead, and those of a global South for which abandoning development and industrialization was out of the question.

Concerning the preparatory work for the conference carried out by the Italian delegation and its role during the conference itself, previous studies have generally concluded that the group contributed little of any significance.<sup>26</sup> However, the conference also provided a stimulus for public debate in Italy around a number of major issues that had emerged in parliamentary debates some months earlier; a variety of sometimes contrasting visions emerged, which would shape the debate on the nascent concept of sustainability in years to come.

The primary issue tackled in the Swedish capital—conservation of natural resources and the question of pollution—was also the subject of debate in Italy in the months that preceded and followed the conference. These two closely connected issues were addressed in the opening articles of the conference's final report, which called on all governments to introduce environmental legislation and cooperate in the common interest, both among themselves and through international organizations. As we have already seen, the theme of conservation was not an unfamiliar one in Italy. Discussion of the final motion presented by the aforementioned environmental steering committee revealed a general consensus among the political parties on the most common forms of pollution—air, water and soil quality (this last degraded by excessive consumption) being singled out as the most crucial problems—and, above all, showed there was full agreement regarding the complete inadequacy of Italian legislation and the absence of institutional bodies (departments, ministries, agencies etc.) with specific responsibilities for the environment. In comparison with the international debate, where concepts such as 'human environment' and 'quality of life' were gaining currency, the Italian political forces of the

<sup>25</sup> John R. McNeill, 'The Environment, Environmentalism, and International Society in the Long 1970s', in Niall Ferguson, Charles Maier, Erez Manela, Daniel J. Sargent (eds), *The Shock of the Global. The 1970s in Perspective*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010), 274–278.

<sup>26</sup> See Lorenzini, 'The Emergence of Global Environmentalism', 207–225.

Centre and Left displayed a mainly conservationist approach, which continued to predominate in the debate on Stockholm. The most significant divergences between the parties emerged in relation to the causes of environmental degradation. Although this question was addressed during the course of the conference, it was omitted from the final declaration as it would have been difficult to reach agreement. In Italy, it lay at the centre of a debate that rapidly assumed strong political connotations, highlighting positions that would remain on the whole unvaried for some years. According to the communist analysis, formulated in the course of a 1971 conference held at the Istituto Gramsci<sup>27</sup> and strongly rooted in the Marxist theory of capitalist crisis, pollution was caused by the capitalist methods of production and consumption, which aimed always to realize maximum profits and, as a consequence, neglected to defend the natural environment.<sup>28</sup> At that precise moment, pollution was also caused by the imperialist war waged by the US against Vietnam, the environmental damage of which by this stage was proving to be considerable.<sup>29</sup> In the view of the PCI, science and technological progress were not to blame in themselves for environmental decline. Rather, the fault lay with the economic decisions taken by the ruling class (for which, read the DC) out of pure speculation, leading them to harness technology and scientific research for the purposes of consumerism and unbridled pursuit of profit<sup>30</sup> (a view that was largely shared by the PSI).<sup>31</sup> The DC, on the other hand, did not blame the development model for the situation of environmental degradation in Italy and the world (although there was no shortage of criticism of the excesses of consumerism). Instead, it argued that an excess of technological development was backfiring against humanity. While displaying a certain degree of faith in technology's capacity to develop non-pollutant (what today we might call 'eco-friendly') production equipment and

<sup>27</sup>The proceedings of the conference were published in *Uomo natura società: ecologia e rapporti sociali. Atti del convegno tenuto a Frattocchie (Roma) dal 5 al 7 novembre 1971*, (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1972).

<sup>28</sup>Cino Sighiboldi, 'Compromesso a Stoccolma per la "dichiarazione sull'ecologia"', *l'Unità*, 16 June 1972.

<sup>29</sup>'La guerra prima nemica dell'uomo e della natura', *l'Unità*, June 1972.

<sup>30</sup>See *Uomo natura società. Il massacro capitalista*, 1973, conserved in Fondazione Gramsci (FG), Archivio del Partito Comunista Italiano (APCI), Fondo Giovanni Berlinguer, b. 46, f. 202.

<sup>31</sup>'Pechino chiede la condanna "ecologica" degli USA', *Avanti!*, 11 June 1972; 'Cina e India attaccano le grandi potenze alla Conferenza di Stoccolma', *Avanti!*, 15 June 1972.

processes, its excesses largely blamed by the DC for environmental deterioration. With regard to pollution, Mario Pedini, undersecretary to the Foreign Ministry and deputy head of the Italian delegation to Stockholm, urged governments to consider that production costs would rise with the adoption of new non-pollutant processes and that industry would incur massive costs to convert dirty plants into clean ones.<sup>32</sup> Pedini's comments were far from random: one of the key concerns being voiced by the more radical traditional and non-traditional left was that the whole of society—and not just the 'polluters' themselves—would be forced to bear the cost of a technological overhaul carried out to protect private profits, while creating new markets for 'ecological' products would generate more business for those same polluters to exploit.<sup>33</sup>

Another of the key issues to emerge at Stockholm—one tied closely to the issue of resources and their finite nature—was demographics. With the Conference refraining from making any specific indications to governments in this regard, other than recommending the adoption of demographic policies deemed adequate for purpose and respectful of fundamental human rights, the official line continued to be that population growth and environmental protection were not incompatible—what amounted to a de facto rejection of any neo-Malthusian position.<sup>34</sup> The question was, however, much debated, both nationally and internationally, not least because it was the subject of a number of widely divergent publications that achieved a huge impact, among the best known of which, in addition to the aforementioned *The Limits to Growth*, were Paul Ehrlich's *Population Bomb* (1968) and Barry Commoner's essay *The Closing Circle* (1971). In Italy, the Catholic world and the Left found themselves in agreement on this point, too—albeit from different viewpoints—rejecting the 'catastrophist' hypothesis of a limit on births. For Catholics, the notion of limiting births was, for obvious reasons, a difficult one to accept. Notwithstanding the Pope's stance and the receptiveness shown in certain areas of the Catholic world (including the Jesuits) to the ideas of such studies as *The Limits to Growth*—suggesting the possibility of a convergence with the positions of the Club of Rome—in reality, the demographic question proved an insurmountable barrier that hindered any movement or

<sup>32</sup> 'Rivedere le priorità per salvare la terra', *Il Popolo*, 6 June 1972.

<sup>33</sup> On this question, see Citoni, Papa, *Sinistra ed ecologia*, 25.

<sup>34</sup> Sara Lorenzini, 'Ecologia a parole? L'Italia, l'ambientalismo globale e il rapporto ambiente-sviluppo intorno alla conferenza di Stoccolma', *Contemporanea*, 3, 2016, 409.

dialogue on all related issues.<sup>35</sup> Unsurprisingly, the DC did not openly address the question at all, while the PCI and PSI were both firms in their opposition to any proposals in terms of demographics or technology that could be accused of 'neo-Malthusianism'. The Communists and most of the Socialists both responded negatively to the MIT report, finding greater affinity with the position expressed by Commoner, a scientist who owed his popularity to a series of studies suggesting that the key factors in the environmental crisis were not overpopulation but, rather, a rise in wasteful consumption, the choices made by the richest nations in terms of technology and production, as dictated by capitalist market logic, and an unequal distribution of resources—an analysis that was decidedly more in line with the Communists and the 'green left'.<sup>36</sup> According to Commoner (and to the PCI and PSI), it was thus not anti-natalist policies that were needed, but greater regulation over consumption and waste.<sup>37</sup> The PCI did not totally reject attempts to regulate human populations. What it was opposed to, however, was rich countries seeking to impose such controls on poor nations, presuming to act in their best interests. Instead, the party argued, the countries themselves should introduce rational population growth policies as part of their own pursuit of economic growth and prosperity.<sup>38</sup>

The third key issue discussed in Stockholm (and the subject of lively debate in Italy, too) was the connection between the environment and development. Lying at the very heart of the conference, the question was also central to its most significant outcome, since compromise prevailed between the world's richest nations, who accepted the right to development and, indeed, the right to financing for development, demanding in return that the Third World agree to protect the environment. There was no support for theories of 'zero growth'. Instead, the concept of 'quality of life' proved to reconcile the various interests at stake,<sup>39</sup> thus laying down the foundations for what would eventually become sustainable development.

<sup>35</sup> While the Jesuits showed a degree of openness, at least in terms of exploring the risks of a population explosion, the Pope was firm in his rejection of any form of compromise, see Piccioni, *Chiesa ed ecologia*, 30–32.

<sup>36</sup> Cino Sighiboldi, 'I teorici della "crescita zero"', *l'Unità*, 24 June 1972.

<sup>37</sup> Giovanni Berlinguer, 'Ecologia e politica', *Rinascita*, 23 June 1972, 20–21. See also Cino Sighiboldi, 'Energia e ambiente naturale', *l'Unità*, 22 giugno 1972.

<sup>38</sup> 'Intervento di Giovanni Berlinguer al Seminario FAST sulla popolazione', 14 December 1973, conserved in Fondazione Gramsci (FG), Archivio del Partito Comunista Italiano (APCI), Fondo Giovanni Berlinguer, b. 75, f. 360.

<sup>39</sup> Seefried, 'Rethinking Progress', 384.

As Sara Lorenzini has noted, the Italian delegation at the Conference lent its support to the claims advanced by poorer nations to the right to development, according such claims priority over environmental concerns (although the attention was more rhetorical than real).<sup>40</sup> The same tendency could be seen within the domestic debate, at least as far as the country's political forces were concerned: the parties agreed in supporting the claims of developing nations and the implicit need for environmental issues to take second place to development—albeit for very different reasons. According to the Communists and Socialists, capitalism had widened the inequalities between the global North and South, so the priority was to address the needs of the Third World by proposing an alternative model of development—a position that, with Enrico Berlinguer, would take on an ethical dimension. Both the PCI and PSI were absolutely opposed to the zero growth movement in all of its manifestations (as well as to the idea underlying it of progress in crisis), because it excluded any other possible progress on the part of humanity through the organized will of the masses and implied an immutable status quo of social relations and, thus, the impossibility of building a different (read, socialist) society.<sup>41</sup> For the Communists and Socialists, the struggle for improved living standards and quantitative growth thus had to take precedence over the pursuit of quality of life and qualitative development implicit in the ecologist stance.<sup>42</sup> With regard to the Socialists, it is worth noting that, although European social democracy was still tied to the industrial development model (as, indeed, were the PSI and PCI), with all the ensuing environmental consequences, in many areas there was an emerging degree of openness towards themes of sustainability.<sup>43</sup> As far as the PCI was concerned, assigning responsibility for environmental decline solely to the capitalist model of production, on the grounds that the situation in socialist countries was not comparable to that found in capitalist countries,<sup>44</sup> allowed the party to avoid criticism (but also idealization) of the Soviet model of production, which by this stage was proving to be at least as

<sup>40</sup> Lorenzini, 'Ecologia a parole?', 411.

<sup>41</sup> Giovanni Berlinguer, 'L'ecologia alla Conferenza di Stoccolma', *Politica ed economia*, III:4, August 1972, 52–69.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> See Seefried, 'Rethinking Progress', 384–385.

<sup>44</sup> See the Report 'Ecologia in Urss' prepared by the delegation of the PCI sent to the USSR in September 1973, conserved in Fondazione Gramsci (FG), Archivio del Partito Comunista Italiano (APCI), Fondo Giovanni Berlinguer, b. 73, f. 346.

pollutant. The Communists were convinced that a stable solution to the environmental question could only be arrived at through the universal, common ownership of natural resources, used to satisfy the primary needs of all humanity.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the superiority of the socialist countries, they argued, stemmed from the fact that the natural world was already public property.<sup>46</sup>

The Catholic world, too, rejected the 'zero growth' model and lent its de facto support to the claims of the Third World. The underlying rationale was not, however, a radical critique of capitalism, but rather a persistently 'anthropocentric' vision of the human environment.<sup>47</sup> Reiterating this vision in his message to the Stockholm Conference, Paul VI deplored the decline of the natural world and condemned the use of scientific discoveries to produce nuclear, bacteriological and chemical weapons but noted that, if it was to be seen as a common project in the interest of the entire family of man, the struggle for a better environment should not deny the world's younger nations the opportunity to escape from poverty.<sup>48</sup> Expressing a similar message, the head of the Italian delegation to Stockholm, the Christian Democrat, Fiorentino Sullo, remarked that the struggle to save the environment required the solidarity of all and ought to place humanity at its centre. In words that expressed clear support for the world's poorer countries and prioritization of their needs over environmental concerns, Sullo claimed that Italy was both an industrialized region (with regards to its North) and a developing region (with regards to its South), and hence offered proof that selfishness on the part of the rich nations was a dangerous and ineffective policy.<sup>49</sup> Although the harm done by industrialization, consumerism and urbanization was an objective reality, he said, the 'real pollution of underdevelopment' were famine, disease and death.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> The vision was shared by the New Left, albeit in a decidedly more radical form. For Dario Paccino, ecology was a capitalist ideology: 'the umpteenth deceit by the bosses to gain acceptance for the degradation imposed by profit and to earn from the anti-pollution industry'. Only the abolition of private property, Paccino argued, could create the conditions for a genuine environmental policy. See Dario Paccino, *L'imbroglio ecologico. L'ideologia della natura*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1972), 220.

<sup>46</sup> See the speech by Giovanni Berlinguer at the Italo-Soviet conference held in Bologna in January 1972, in *Il rapporto tra l'uomo e la natura in Italia e in Unione sovietica. Atti convegno italo-sovietico. Bologna, 13-15 gennaio 1972*, (Rome: Edizioni Italia URSS, 1972), 243-244.

<sup>47</sup> 'Rivedere le priorità per salvare la terra'.

<sup>48</sup> 'Una lotta a beneficio di tutta l'umanità', *Il Popolo*, 7 June 1972.

<sup>49</sup> 'Sullo sollecita l'Onu a una energica difesa dell'ambiente naturale', *Il Popolo*, 8 June 1972.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

### 3 CONCLUSIONS

In Italy, as in the rest of the Western world, the 1970s saw the emergence of a public debate around environmental issues and the development of mass environmental awareness. After an initial wave of interest at the beginning of the decade, prior to the Stockholm Conference, enthusiasm for the topic waned in the mid-1970s, only to flare up again some years later. Over the same period, the environmentalist movement in Italy increasingly found itself in the public eye, thanks in no small part to the coverage given to discussion of environmental issues in the country's largest newspapers and periodicals.<sup>51</sup> However, as Sara Lorenzini has noted, as far as the country's political parties were concerned, 'ecology was in word only' for a number of years. This was partly owing to a lack of interest in the work of international organizations and in the topics crowding the multilateral agenda,<sup>52</sup> but other factors may have been behind such lack of interest, including political and cultural ones. The country's traditional political forces appeared largely unreceptive to many of the changes introduced by the 'Shock of the Global' and, with the exception of a handful of particularly astute operators, the parties appeared not to possess the analytical or cultural tools needed to interpret the new sensibilities emerging within postmodern society—such as environmentalism—and embrace them as their own. Accordingly, it was the parties that were culturally the most dynamic, such as the Radical Party, that were swiftest to recognize the emergence of such sensibilities, particularly in the second half of the decade.<sup>53</sup> A traditional tendency towards concentrating on an exclusively domestic agenda may also have contributed to the tardy recognition of the global relevance of the environment and development as issues. It was, in fact, the diverse world of post-Second Vatican Council Catholicism, in particular, that showed the greatest capacity to grasp the global dimension of the challenges presented by the environmental question and above all the need to address them through new models of development. Above and beyond the media attention prompted by the Stockholm Conference

<sup>51</sup> Publications that stood out for their coverage of environmental issues included the daily newspapers *Corriere della Sera*, *La Stampa*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, *Il Giorno* and *Avvenire* and the periodicals *L'Espresso*, *Panorama* and *Epoca*.

<sup>52</sup> Lorenzini, 'Ecologia a parole?', 418.

<sup>53</sup> See Lucia Bonfreschi, 'The Green is the New Red? A Libertarian Challenge: The Radicals and the Friends of the Earth Italy, 1976–1983', *European History Quarterly*, 52, 2022, 373–400.

and the publication of the MIT report *The Limits to Growth*, *Avvenire* and *La Civiltà Cattolica*, but also *Famiglia Cristiana*,<sup>54</sup> *Aggiornamenti Sociali*,<sup>55</sup> *Settegiorni*<sup>56</sup> and *Studium*<sup>57</sup> all constantly focused on these issues and explored the problems posed by the concept of 'sustainable development'. In spite of the insurmountable barrier represented by the demographic issue, the Catholic world thus proved alert to such issues, though its brand of 'sustainability' tended always to prioritize development and the human factor over environmental concerns. This receptiveness was unquestionably a legacy of the Second Vatican Council and the changes it ushered in—a global outlook, ecumenism and the capacity to recognize and formulate responses to emerging global questions, including those related to the environmental crisis.<sup>58</sup> Within the DC, however, the debate as to the interaction between humanity and nature and the need to rethink models of development along sustainable lines appears not to have generated much in the way of impact or serious intellectual analysis. With the exception of a number of individual party members, the same was true of the Left, too. The PCI as an organization did not tackle the question other than in very generic terms until the 1980s,<sup>59</sup> while, within the PSI, the kind of debates that characterized Germany's SPD were conspicuous by their absence.

A final factor contributing to the feebleness of political action on these issues was a contingent one which, as Elke Seefried has noted, also affected the other members of the European Community. The change in economic conditions and economic policies in the industrialized West—and in Italy, too—following the 1973 crisis<sup>60</sup> effectively paralysed discussion of environmental questions. In truth, the energy crisis made it even more urgent to formulate a new model of development recognizing the environment as integral to quality of life. The issues the crisis raised—uncertainty of

<sup>54</sup> *Famiglia Cristiana* even published an interview with Aurelio Peccei, see Franca Zambonini, 'Dieci anni per salvare la terra', *Famiglia Cristiana*, 11 June 1972.

<sup>55</sup> See n. 9–10 from 1972.

<sup>56</sup> See issue n. 262 of 18 June 1972.

<sup>57</sup> Piero Grassini, 'La protezione dell'ambiente umano esigenza tecnica di tutti i paesi', *Studium*, 7–8, 1972, 590–597.

<sup>58</sup> On this question, see Piccioni, *Chiesa ed ecologia*.

<sup>59</sup> On the 1980s, see Grazia Pagnotta, 'Il rapporto con la cultura ecologista e con gli ambientalisti', in Silvio Pons (ed), *Il comunismo italiano nella storia del Novecento*, (Rome: Viella, 2021), 547–554.

<sup>60</sup> Seefried, 'Rethinking Progress', 386.



natural resource availability, new models of consumption (and the connected issue of austerity) and the need to develop and invest in alternative energy sources (first and foremost, civil nuclear power, whose inclusion in the National Energy Plan would lead to a wave of debate and protest in the second half of the decade)—were very closely related to the environment and, indeed, would be the subject of debate in the Italian political arena, too.<sup>61</sup> However, at the time, the attention of the government and the political forces was catalysed by the economic and social effects of the crisis and the need to curb them, overshadowing the ecological dimension. As a result, for a number of years, the Italian political class (unlike large numbers of Italian scientists and technicians who played an active role in the global debate) was absent from international dialogue on the topic and the nascent concept of ‘sustainability’. Meanwhile, laws in this regard would only be introduced some years later—and with no little difficulty.<sup>62</sup> As suggested in a 1974 report by the diplomat Carlo Calenda, charged by Aldo Moro with coordinating the country’s participation in the Stockholm event, this inaction was exacerbated by an obsolete administrative and legislative system, hamstrung by a complex web of laws that were completely unsuited to the challenges presented by developing modern society.<sup>63</sup> The debate on development and sustainability, meanwhile, was heavily conditioned by the ideological divisions of the Cold War. Although there were significant points of convergence between the rival camps (e.g., the similarities between Enrico Berlinguer’s views and those emerging within the Catholic world with regard to the Third World), the

<sup>61</sup> On the energy question, See Catia Papa, ‘Energia, democrazia, sviluppo: il movimento antinucleare in Italia (1976–86)’, *Meridiana*, 98, 2020, 241–254; Elisabetta Bini, ‘Energia e ambiente. La lunga stagione dei Piani energetici nazionali (1975–88)’, *Meridiana*, 108, 2023, 129–150; Giordana Pulicini, ‘Rilanciare l’atomo? Il nucleare italiano e la crisi petrolifera del 1973’, in Massimo Bucarelli, Daniele De Luca, Silvio Labbate (eds.), *Gli shock petroliferi degli anni Settanta Crisi globali, sfide regionali, scenari nazionali*, (Milan, Franco Angeli, 2025), 195–212.

<sup>62</sup> The years 1976 and 1979 saw approval of the ‘Merli’ and ‘Merli-bis’ laws on water pollution. A law on soil and sea pollution was only introduced in 1982. Finally, the Galasso decree on landscape plan implementation was introduced in 1984.

<sup>63</sup> ‘Attività del ministero degli Affari Esteri in materia ambientale nel quadriennio 1971–1974’, 31 December 1974, ACS, Archivio Aldo Moro, b. 126 (my thanks go to Giovanni Mario Ceci for drawing my attention to this document). Originally established in 1973, the Ministry for Culture and the Environment was subsequently reorganized in 1974 under the fourth Moro government. It was not, however, assigned a ministerial portfolio and was principally involved in managing the country’s cultural heritage. The introduction of a Minister for the Environment did not occur until 1983.

clash between the champions of the capitalist model—which was partly criticized by the centrists and moderates, but not genuinely reconceptualized so as to render it more environmentally sustainable—and the supporters of the Marxist model—to which the PCI (and the PSI, at least in this phase) remained inextricably tied—heavily conditioned the debate. Environment and sustainability, instead, were transcending the divisive Cold War dynamics and required both sides to rethink their position, playing down the ideological barrier.

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# The Munich Massacre. 5–6 September 1972. Terrorism as an International Issue

*Enrico Palumbo*

*Translated by Emma Mandley*

## 1 THE PALESTINIANS, ITALY AND THE CHALLENGES OF TERRORISM

As the 1960s drew to a close, the Arab-Israeli conflict underwent profound changes. After Israel's success in the war of June 1967, the superiority of Israeli forces became apparent to all Arab leaders.<sup>1</sup> While proclaiming that the struggle against Israel would continue and keeping border tensions high with the so-called war of attrition, some Arab capitals such as Cairo and Amman began to adopt a more pragmatic approach based on national interest, taking into account existing power relations. This

<sup>1</sup> Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–2001*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 302–346; Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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approach ended by clashing with the interests of the Palestinians: the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which had acquired greater autonomy after the Egyptian defeat and from 1969 was led by the head of al-Fatah, Yasser Arafat, became a problem even in the eyes of some Arab leaders. On the other hand, some countries, such as Syria and Iraq, entered into relations with the most radical elements of the Palestinian movement, encouraging the development of a number of different factions, often with conflicting strategies: consider, for example, the opposing visions of George Habash, leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), who thought that the struggle for Palestinian rights should be resolved through the overthrow of conservative Arab regimes; and Arafat, on the other hand, who was committed to seeking alliances with Arab governments. The PFLP, as well as the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP) led by Naif Hawatmeh, and Fatah itself adopted guerrilla methods that soon impacted on all the countries bordering Israel. Jordan in particular became the territory from where Palestinian militant operations were directed against Israeli targets: as a result, Jordan was particularly exposed to Israeli reprisals and consequently in a state of permanent vulnerability and weakness. The PFLP, however, chose another path as well, later followed by other Palestinian groups: international terrorism ('external operations'), primarily as an instrument of internal competition within the PLO and then for attracting new militants, inspired by the impact of such operations, not least in terms of the media reaction.<sup>2</sup>

The Jordanian repression of Palestinian resistance, in September 1970, resulted in a bloodbath and the PLO's expulsion from the country, an event that Palestinians would remember as 'Black September' (*aylul al-aswad*).<sup>3</sup> It did not take long for the homonymous Black September

<sup>2</sup> Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 195–216; Samih K. Farsoun, Christine E. Zacharia, *Palestine and the Palestinians*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 180–187; Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 2nd ed.), 191–194. For the different Palestinian political elements, cf. Michael Bröning, *Political Parties in Palestine: Leadership and Thought*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). For this 'third wave' of international terrorism, cf. also David C. Rapoport, 'The Four Waves of Modern Terror: International Dimensions and Consequences', in Jussi M. Hanhimäki, Bernhard Blumenau (eds), *An International History of Terrorism: Western and Non-Western Experiences*, (London-New York: Routledge, 2013), 282–310.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 373–375; Nigel J. Ashton, 'Pulling the Strings: King Hussein's Role During the Crisis of 1970 in Jordan', *The International History Review*, XXVIII:1,

organization to spring up from a branch of Fatah. In the following years, this group would be responsible for high-profile actions such as the assassination of the Jordanian Prime Minister Wasfi al-Tall in November 1971.<sup>4</sup>

The new Middle East crisis was observed by Italy, which at that time was experiencing a complex moment in its republican history. The social and generational demands of 1968–1969 were interwoven with the financial crisis of the early 1970s, while in political terms the country seemed to be shifting to the right, especially after the 1972 elections and the formation of a centre-right government led by Giulio Andreotti. Italy was also suffering from a period of unprecedented political violence, with various instances linked to right-wing extremism—for instance the ‘strategy of tension’ which began with the Piazza Fontana massacre in December 1969, followed by the failed Borghese Coup in 1970 and the local revolts in Reggio Calabria in 1970–1971—as well as to the Left, with the birth of the Red Brigades (BR) in late 1970.<sup>5</sup> In a few years, the Italian view of the conflict had gradually become more pro-Palestinian.<sup>6</sup> Italy had begun to

2006, 94–118; Joseph Nevo, ‘September 1970 in Jordan: A Civil War?’, *Civil Wars*, X:3, 2008, 217–230; Philip Robins, *A History of Jordan*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019, 2nd ed.), 136–139; cf. also David Raab’s account, *Terror in Black September: The First Eyewitness Account of the Infamous 1970 Hijackings*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan), 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Asher Susser, *On Both Banks of the Jordan: A Political Biography of Wasfi al-Tall*, (New York: Routledge, 2017), 141–171.

<sup>5</sup> Aurelio Lepre, *Storia della Prima repubblica. L’Italia dal 1943 al 2003*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2019), 223–249; Agostino Giovagnoli, *La Repubblica degli italiani (1946–2016)*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2020), 74 ff.; Guido Formigoni, *Storia essenziale dell’Italia repubblicana*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2021), 91–107; Miguel Gotor, *Generazione Settanta. Storia del decennio più lungo del secolo breve (1966–1982)*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2022), 80–89; on terrorism, cf. Giovanni Mario Ceci, *Il terrorismo italiano. Storia di un dibattito*, (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2013); Angelo Ventrone, *La strategia della paura. Eversione e stragismo nell’Italia del Novecento*, (Milan: Mondadori, 2019), 159 ff.; Riccardo Brizzi, Giovanni Mario Ceci, Michele Marchi, Guido Panvini, Ermanno Taviani (eds), *L’Italia del terrorismo: partiti, istituzioni e società*, (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Daniele Caviglia, Massimiliano Cricco, *La diplomazia italiana e gli equilibri mediterranei. La politica mediorientale dell’Italia dalla guerra dei Sei Giorni al conflitto dello Yom Kippur (1967–1973)*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2006); Luca Riccardi, *Il ‘problema Israele’. Diplomazia italiana e PCI di fronte allo Stato ebraico (1948–1973)*, (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2006), 389–439; Alessandra Tarquini, *La sinistra italiana e gli ebrei. Socialismo, sionismo e antisemitismo dal 1892 al 1992*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2019), 207–215; Enrico Palumbo, *Cultura cattolica, ebraismo e Israele in Italia. Gli anni del Concilio e post-Concilio*, (Brescia: Editrice Morcelliana, 2020), 261–290; Luca Riccardi, ‘Italy’s Foreign Policy and the Palestinian Question’, in Luciano Monzali, Paolo Soave (eds), *Italy and the Middle East:*

play host to small groups of Palestinians, while organizations had sprung up whose aim was to strengthen bilateral political and cultural relations.<sup>7</sup> On the Left, alongside the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (PSIUP), who were noted for their allegiance to the Palestinian cause but did not sever ties with the Israelis, even the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), which had been markedly pro-Israeli at the time of the 1967 war, had begun to change its tone, seeking a greater balance between the two sides, with mixed results:<sup>8</sup> for example, one sign of the sentiments now existing within the party was that some PSI representatives were included among the list of participants in the meeting which took place in Rome in April 1971 to prepare for a ‘conference for peace and justice in the Middle East’.<sup>9</sup>

Middle East issues had also burst onto the national landscape in the matter of public safety: on 4 August 1972 Italy experienced a minor act of terrorism claimed by Black September, when an explosion badly damaged several oil tanks connected with the Transalpine Pipeline at Trieste.<sup>10</sup> Predictably, the intertwining of national and international politics also involved the Middle East.<sup>11</sup>

*Geopolitics, Dialogue and Power during the Cold War*, (London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 2021), 93–107; Enrico Palumbo, ‘Italian Catholics and the June 1967 War: A Turning Point’, *Israel Studies*, XXVIII:3, 2023, 50–75.

<sup>7</sup> Luca Falcicola, ‘Studenti senza terra: la diaspora palestinese in Italia, tra solidarietà, politica e violenza’, *Mediterranea - ricerche storiche*, XIX:1, 2022, 69–103.

<sup>8</sup> Claudio Brillanti, *Le sinistre italiane e il conflitto arabo-israelo-palestinese (1948–1973)*, (Rome, Sapienza Università Editrice, 2018), 256–261. Cf. also Arturo Marzano, Guri Schwarz, *Attentato alla sinagoga, Roma, 9 ottobre 1982. Il conflitto israelo-palestinese e l’Italia*, (Rome: Viella, 2013), 47–85.

<sup>9</sup> Archivio Centrale dello Stato, MI, Gab., AG, 1971–1975, f. Medio Oriente—Avvenimenti vari—Ripercussioni in Italia, s. 2, Conferenza mondiale per il Medio Oriente, *Lista provvisoria dei partecipanti alla riunione preparatoria per la conferenza per la pace e la giustizia nel Medio Oriente*, 5 May 1971. Among those listed as PSI representatives are Luciano De Pascalis, Guido Fubini, Pierlombardo Vigorelli and Alberto Benzioni.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Sabotaggio a Trieste. Brucia l’oleodotto’, *Corriere della Sera*, 5 August 1972; ‘I terroristi palestinesi annunciano d’aver compiuto il sabotaggio a Trieste’, *Corriere della Sera*, 6 August 1972; Mimmo Franzinelli, *La sottile linea nera. Neofascismo e servizi segreti da Piazza Fontana a Piazza della Loggia*, (Milan: Rizzoli, 2008), 207; Giuliano Sadar, *Il grande fuoco, 4 agosto 1972: l’attentato all’oleodotto di Trieste*, (Trieste: Mgs Press, 2015); Ariel Merari, Shlomi Elad, *International Dimension of Palestinian Terrorism*, (London-New York: Routledge, 2019), 30.

<sup>11</sup> Guido Formigoni, *Storia d’Italia nella guerra fredda (1943–1978)*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2016), 392–399.



The 1972 Olympic Games in Munich attracted the attention of the international press because of their associated political implications. During the Cold War the Olympics represented a very important symbolic and political battleground, influencing public opinion through the thousands of journalists present and the associated media coverage. Since the Games organized by Hitler in 1936, these were the first to take place in West Germany, defeated in the Second World War but now reintegrated into the community of democracies. The slogan chosen for the Games, *Die heiteren Spiele* ('The Joyous Games'), sought to underline this further. It was also the second time that East Germany was taking part, at a moment when it was engaged in dialogue with Bonn, in the wake of Chancellor Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*. Apart from the established tensions between East and West, the 1972 Games were also the focus of a political controversy surrounding the Rhodesian athletes. Their participation had met with protest from African nations, supported by the Socialist bloc and part of Western public opinion, threatening a boycott in protest against Ian Smith's racist apartheid government. In the end, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) decided to ban the Rhodesian athletes from participating.<sup>12</sup> In Italy even Aldo Moro, former Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister for Christian Democracy (DC), commented on the IOC's decision in an approving article: 'At least when it comes to fundamental human rights, states are not sovereign and must recognize a superior entity, even in the most jealously guarded sphere of their own internal affairs'.<sup>13</sup>

However, the debate about this important moment in the international affirmation of human rights was soon silenced when the Games were rocked by Black September's attack on the Israeli athletes. Once again,

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Young, 'Munich 1972: Re-presenting the Nation', in Alan Tomlinson, Christopher Young, *National Identity and Global Sports Events: Culture, Politics, and Spectacle in the Olympics and the Football World Cup*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 117–132; Kay Schiller, Christopher Young, *The 1972 Munich Olympics and the Making of Modern Germany*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); David Kenrick, *Decolonisation, Identity and Nation in Rhodesia, 1964–1979: A Race Against Time*, (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 120.

<sup>13</sup> Aldo Moro, 'La coscienza parla più forte dello Stato', *Il Giorno*, 6 September 1972, now in Aldo Moro, *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Aldo Moro*, s. 1: *Scritti e Discorsi*, Vol. 4: *L'Ultima fase (1968-1978)*, t. 1: *Al ministero degli Esteri e all'opposizione nel partito (giugno 1968-maggio 1973)*, ed. by Guido Formigoni, Agostino Giovagnoli, edition and historical-critical note by Enrico Palumbo, (Bologna: University of Bologna, 2021). <https://doi.org/10.48678/unibo/aldomoro1.4.1.279>.

this one event combined many subtexts: for some years, Israel had proposed taking upon itself the legacy of international Judaism and the tragedy of the Shoah suffered in Europe before the birth of the Jewish state;<sup>14</sup> now here it was, taking part in Games being held in the country where the project to destroy the Jews had been conceived and carried out.<sup>15</sup>

The terrorist act took place on 5 and 6 September, when eight Palestinian Black September militants burst in on the Israeli athletes' lodgings and took them hostage, after killing two of them. The terrorists demanded the release of over 200 Palestinians detained in Israel and the 2 leaders of the German terrorist group Red Army Faction (Rote Armee Fraktion, also known as the Baader-Meinhof Gang). When the Israelis refused to negotiate, the German authorities agreed to Black September's request to transfer the hostages to Egypt and continue the negotiations there. However, the German plan to strike at the terrorists during the transfer failed, ending in a bloodbath. The overall toll of those killed was eleven Israeli athletes, five terrorists and a policeman; a further three terrorists were arrested. Besides receiving the huge media attention that Black September had hoped for, the incident sparked controversy and criticism of the poor quality of the security measures put in place by the German authorities, their failure to free the hostages and the IOC's decision to continue with the Games despite the circumstances. Afterwards Israel mounted a wide-ranging operation to target those allegedly responsible for initiating and organizing the Munich massacre, which led to sustained attacks on PLO bases in Lebanon and Syria, with disastrous consequences for Palestinian civilians.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>15</sup>Carole Fink, *West Germany and Israel: Foreign Relations, Domestic Politics, and the Cold War, 1965–1974*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 185–201.

<sup>16</sup>Schiller, Young, *The 1972 Munich Olympics and the Making of Modern Germany*, 187–220; Simon Reeve, *One Day in September: The Full Story of the 1972 Munich Olympics Massacre and the Israeli Revenge Operation 'Wrath of God'*, (New York: Arcade, 2011); David C. Large, *Munich 1972: Tragedy, Terror and Triumph at the Olympic Games*, (New York: Rowan & Littlefield, 2012); Fink, *West Germany and Israel*, 203–213. For the Israeli response, cf., among others, Ian Black, Benny Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars: A History of Israel's Intelligence Service*, (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), 269–277.

## 2 LEFT-WING AND PROGRESSIVE CATHOLIC ATTEMPTS AT AN EXPLANATION

In interpreting the Munich massacre the Italian media broadly interwove both its international and its domestic aspects. The attempt to position the event on a long-term trajectory, taking account of the complexity of the ongoing Middle East conflict, sprang from Italy's close attention to that situation, to the point of outweighing most other international issues: thus politics and the press had settled into a kind of interpretative pattern that appears not to have changed over time: in the ensuing weeks all the newspapers maintained the position they had adopted the day after the massacre, convinced they already had at their disposal all the means with which to make sense of the event. This was reflected in thorough historical reconstructions to aid the public's understanding, stretching back as far as the Nakba of 1948 and the rise of the Zionist movement at the beginning of the century.<sup>17</sup> On an international level there were two dominant views: some, especially on the Left and in the most progressive Catholic circles, saw the event in terms of a global north-south axis, in line with an interpretation that had emerged in the late 1960s, which viewed the Palestinians as a subaltern people clashing with an Israel that represented First-World colonialism;<sup>18</sup> in other quarters, especially on the Right and in more pro-West circles, the conflict centred on the confrontation between East and West, in which Israel represented a bastion of the West in the Middle East.

The left-wing media basically condemned Black September's terrorist act because it ultimately damaged the Palestinian cause. They also criticized the Israeli government's retaliatory response and sought to place the accent on the global inequalities and injustices that fed the violence. In *Avanti!*, the PSI daily paper, Alberto Ninotti wrote that Black September's terrorist act was not a struggle for freedom: Vietnam showed that guerrilla warfare could only succeed by combining both nationalist and social struggle. Black September was the product of heavy-handed tactics, having arisen from the actions of the 'terrorist and murderer Hussein [king of Jordan]', who had blocked the emergence of a genuine Palestinian

<sup>17</sup>Tito De Stefano, 'Le ragioni dell'odio e dei crimini terroristici', *Il Giorno*, 6 September 1972; 'Un popolo che non vuole soccombere', *l'Unità*, 7 September 1972. Cf. also Enrico Palumbo, 'Tra guerra d'indipendenza israeliana e Nakba palestinese. La storiografia sul 1948', *Ricerche di Storia Politica*, XXIII:2, 2020, 165–182.

<sup>18</sup>Starting with Maxime Rodinson, 'Israël, fait colonial?', *Les Temps Modernes*, XXII:253 bis, 1967, 17–88.

guerrilla movement, just as all Arab regimes had always prevented their peoples' emancipation,<sup>19</sup> a stance that was in fact not very far from that of Habash's PFLP. The PCI paper, *l'Unità*, compared Black September's action with the 'noble battle' of the Vietnamese, adding that 'not even desperation can in any way explain, much less justify acts such as this, which above all backfire against Palestine's nationalist cause and against the broader cause of emancipation and progress for the Arab people'.<sup>20</sup> On 10 September Enrico Berlinguer, leader of the PCI, condemned not only the violence of terrorism but also the enthusiasm for reprisals in certain quarters. In Berlinguer's view these problems needed to be addressed at their roots, firstly by listening to the demands of the 'new peoples' who were beginning to exert pressure, and secondly by acknowledging the decline of capitalist societies, which were increasingly inclined to pursue 'inhuman' ends.<sup>21</sup> It was only on 13 September that *l'Unità* published an official communiqué from the PCI leadership on the situations in the Middle East and Vietnam, in which Black September's terrorist act was condemned but Israel's conduct was also criticized.<sup>22</sup> In exchanges among the party leaders, Jewish Senator Umberto Terracini asked for a change to the proposed wording, from 'the Israeli government fuels an endless spiral of hate and violence' to 'contributes to fuelling'. 'It could give the impression that the spiral is fuelled only by Israel', Terracini explained at the time. Luciano Barca also asked that communist condemnation of the attack be emphasized.<sup>23</sup> In *Rinascita*, the PCI magazine, Alessandro Natta underlined the fact that Black September's terrorist act, reflecting the aims of a very narrow elite, was incompatible with a popular revolution, citing Marx and Lenin and their opposition 'to the failure and error of corporatism and sectarian putschism, of direct and violent action, whether nihilist or anarchist'. Condemnation apart, it was important to reflect on the hasty remedies that had ended in aligning Israel with 'the cause of humanity and the West', legitimizing 'new race fanaticism, new crusades against the "spirit of evil" within the Arab world'. Instead, it was necessary to address

<sup>19</sup> Alberto Ninotti, 'Il Vietnam dà loro torto', *Avanti!*, 6 September 1972.

<sup>20</sup> 'Aberrazione', *l'Unità*, 6 September 1972.

<sup>21</sup> Enrico Berlinguer, 'Alle radici del male', *l'Unità*, 10 September 1972.

<sup>22</sup> 'Lottare perché l'Italia contribuisca ad una giusta pace nel Vietnam e nel M.O.', *l'Unità*, 13 September 1972.

<sup>23</sup> Fondazione Gramsci, Archivio Partito Comunista Italiano, Direzione 1972, f. 7, mf. 032, 12 September 1972. On Terracini's long-term position, cf. Marta Nicolo, *Un impegno controcorrente. Umberto Terracini e gli ebrei (1945-1983)*, (Turin: Zamorani, 2018).

the root cause of the problem, which concerned ‘the conditions of backwardness, underdevelopment and hunger faced by so much of humanity’.<sup>24</sup>

Within the Left, the communist paper *il manifesto*—expressing the views of a radical faction outside the PCI—took a different position, writing in an initial editorial that ‘this was not an act of revenge or blind violence. It was an act of war which did not seek to harm innocent victims but to force, without the need for bloodshed, a negotiation for the release of two hundred of the thousands of Arab prisoners in Israeli jails; everyone knows why they are there and how they are treated’. *Il manifesto* emphasized that the Palestinians had been forced into the shocking act to make the world aware of the reasons for their struggle.<sup>25</sup> It later reasserted that it had been ‘a political act, although in the context of a war, whose goal was the exchange of prisoners, which to succeed required a peaceful, negotiated solution’.<sup>26</sup>

In *Settegiorni*, a Catholic left-wing weekly paper, Ruggero Orfei maintained that the isolation of the Palestinians, who had ‘become serfs in their own lands, or exiles shunned elsewhere, may not justify all they do, but explains some of the deep reasons for their actions’.<sup>27</sup> More cautiously, *Avvenire*, the daily paper of the Italian Episcopal Conference, described the actions of the ‘Arab guerrillas’ as a criminal act, which removed ‘that semblance of legality and veneer of false heroism that could also be conveyed by a struggle for freedom and for the lofty ideals of defending one’s own lands’. But the finger of blame was pointed at all those who were silent in the face of the many daily acts of violence around the world: from oppression in the socialist world and in Latin-American dictatorships to the ongoing war in Vietnam.<sup>28</sup> The concern was that Israel would use the Munich events to justify harsh military action against Palestinian targets in neighbouring Arab countries.<sup>29</sup> And when that happened, *Avvenire* had no hesitation in making the point strongly: ‘Today it is the Palestinians who are weeping for their dead. The world can only be aghast at this new tragedy’.<sup>30</sup> There was also an attempt to put the issue into perspective, citing the ‘reasons of a million Palestinians who have lost their homes’. In

<sup>24</sup> Alessandro Natta, ‘Il perché delle violenze’, *Rinascita*, 15 September 1972.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Una guerra terribile’, *il manifesto*, 6 September 1972.

<sup>26</sup> ‘I disperati, i cinici, gli ipocriti’, *il manifesto*, 7 September 1972.

<sup>27</sup> Ruggero Orfei, ‘La guerra arriva a Monaco’, *Settegiorni*, 10 September 1972.

<sup>28</sup> Giorgio Basadonna, ‘Nessuno si senta innocente’, *Avvenire*, 7 September 1972.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Pace più lontana’, *Avvenire*, 9 September 1972.

<sup>30</sup> Massimo Ranghieri, ‘I giorni del terrore’, *Avvenire*, 10 September 1972.

the face of these problems, the newspaper levelled its accusations at the Arab governments (such as Jordan and Egypt) who had used the Palestinians for their own ends, abandoning them when it suited them.<sup>31</sup> It went further: 'To kill is a crime, whether it is in Munich or Lebanon or Syria, whether the victims are young athletes caught up in the interminable Six Days' War or Palestinian refugees fed up with so many years of homelessness. To kill is always a crime, even when the killing is done by someone giving orders from afar or dropping bombs on poor folk in built-up areas'.<sup>32</sup> The Catholic weekly paper *Famiglia Cristiana* came to similar conclusions: 'The civilized world cannot be party to the elimination of a people because "no one knows where to put them". The Munich massacre [...] is the offspring of other massacres'.<sup>33</sup> Pope Paul VI himself gave his support to the views expressed in the Catholic community: in the Angelus Address of 10 September he stated that neither terrorism nor revenge were paths to follow and that every response to violence should also bear justice in mind.<sup>34</sup> This was basically an echo of his 1967 encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio*.<sup>35</sup>

In fact, these analyses were also presented by Guido Valabrega, in more measured tones but with conclusions that were not dissimilar, in *Relazioni Internazionali*, the magazine of the Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI) in Milan. Attempting to explain Israel's actions, Valabrega's view was that the Tel Aviv government had profited from the situation to carry forward a plan which was not linked to the events in Munich and to strengthen the 'home front' at a time of great economic and social difficulties. What is more, the reprisals in Lebanon and Syria had given Israel another opportunity to demonstrate the superiority of its military might. Conversely, the terrorist act had weakened the Palestinian position, triggering further divisions within the Arab world.<sup>36</sup>

The public broadcaster RAI-TV also contributed an in-depth analysis, aired on the national channel on 9 September: 'Olimpiade nera' (Black Olympics), produced by Servizi Speciali del Telegiornale (Special News

<sup>31</sup> 'La fine delle Olimpiadi', *Avvenire*, 12 September 1972.

<sup>32</sup> 'Soltanto giustizia', *Avvenire*, 13 September 1972.

<sup>33</sup> 'Non verrà dalle rappresentazioni la soluzione per il Medio Oriente', *Famiglia Cristiana*, 1 October 1972.

<sup>34</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Angelus Domini*, 10 September 1972.

<sup>35</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 26 March 1967.

<sup>36</sup> 'Il Medio Oriente dopo la strage di Monaco', *Relazioni Internazionali*, 16 September 1972.

Services). The introductory documentary presented a historical reconstruction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, giving the condition of Palestinian refugees as the main reason for the emergence of various elements of the liberation movement and describing the refugee camps as ‘ghettos in the desert’. Several contributions from Italian and international journalists supported this view. However, among the interviewees was the conservative journalist Indro Montanelli, who distanced himself from the principal line taken by the programme and said: ‘I do not believe that we have a duty to understand when we are faced with murder on this scale—so heinous, so bestial—but above all I reject the implication of such understanding. The implication is that Israel must be accused for keeping the fedayeen, the Palestinians, in the state in which they are said to be held. [...] The responsibility does not lie at all with Israel’.<sup>37</sup> This stance echoed the views he had expressed in *Corriere della Sera*, Italy’s leading daily newspaper, which at that very time was in the midst of a period of editorial change, although some of the most conservative voices were retained.<sup>38</sup> Montanelli had challenged the use of the word ‘guerrillas’ for those he described as ‘gangsters’ and had called for repressive measures by Western governments, adding: ‘[W]e have to ask questions about the nature and extent of underground collusion between [Arab terrorism] and the gangsterism which is already undermining and bloodying our society, or at least to what extent its example is contagious’.<sup>39</sup> *Avanti!* accused Montanelli of racism and pointed out that there was no argument about condemning the terrorists’ act: ‘Nothing justifies terrorism, *any* kind of terrorism, whether it be ideological, social or political. It must therefore be condemned in all its forms: from the kind that involves hijacking aircraft, or sending dissident writers to mental institutions, or driving tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees to despair, to the kind that is dressed up as being in the national interest’. Montanelli’s words, in the view of the newspaper, encouraged ‘the hounding of Arabs that is happening, sadly, more or less everywhere’.<sup>40</sup> The reference was to a series of police operations and instances of racism targeting communities of Arab origin in Europe; the newspaper *Il Giorno*, taking a progressive stance, denounced forms of ‘lynching’.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> ‘Olimpiade nera’, Rai Teche, 9 September 1972.

<sup>38</sup> Pierluigi Allotti, Raffaele Liucci, *Il ‘Corriere della Sera’*. *Biografia di un quotidiano*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2021), 323–325.

<sup>39</sup> Indro Montanelli, ‘Sostituzione d’imputato’, *Corriere della Sera*, 7 September 1972.

<sup>40</sup> Aldo Lualdi, ‘Il terrorismo del *Corriere*’, *Avanti!*, 8 September 1972; ‘Caccia ai terroristi (ma anche agli arabi)’, *Avanti!*, 9 September 1972.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Tentativi di linciaggio contro “stranieri dalla pelle scura”’, *Il Giorno*, 7 September 1972.

### 3 ACCUSATIONS FROM THE RIGHT AND THE REDEFINING OF ANTI-JEWISH CLICHÉS

In Italy the ‘hounding of Arabs’ had its epicentre in the city of Perugia, home to numerous communities because of its international university (Università per gli Stranieri). *Avanti!* reported that the youth branch of the Italian Republican Party (PRI) had warned that ‘one of the headquarters of Palestinian terrorism in Europe’ was based in Umbria’s capital,<sup>42</sup> while the Umbrian edition of *Il Messaggero* likened the students to fedayeen. This was the line that was taken by the more conservative press. In a long article in the right-wing Roman paper *Il Tempo*, Francobaldo Chiocci decried Perugia’s infiltration by ‘fedayeen, camouflaged as university students’.<sup>43</sup> The magazine *Epoca* described Perugia as ‘a real marshalling centre for Arab terrorist groups operating in Europe’. Furthermore, the reasons for the university town’s popularity among Arabs could clearly be laid at the door of the left-wing Umbrian government, ‘just as most of the Arab states bordering the Mediterranean tend to be left-wing’.<sup>44</sup> In the conservative news magazine *Gente*, Piero Poggio published an investigation into the Palestinians’ Italian contacts, beginning with their special relationship with one of the theorists of armed struggle, the publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli,<sup>45</sup> described as the main inspiration behind the spread of the Palestinian struggle into Europe. The magazine associated Black September firmly with the extreme Left, citing an anonymous informant who had reported that the organization had bases in Italy and received financing from Libya and countries in the Soviet bloc. As for the students in Perugia, the journalist wrote that ‘at least 60% of the entire Arab group support the Palestinian idea, fanatically and fervently’. However, the investigation made it clear that nothing had emerged to suggest their involvement in operations supporting terrorism.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Marco Renzini, ‘Gli universitari arabi contro il terrorismo’, *Avanti!*, 8 September 1972.

<sup>43</sup> Francobaldo Chiocci, ‘Gli “studenti” arabi abbandonano Perugia’, *Il Tempo*, 12 September 1972.

<sup>44</sup> Marzio Bellacci, ‘La Palestina di Perugia’, *Epoca*, 24 September 1972.

<sup>45</sup> Giorgio Galli, *Piombo rosso. La storia completa della lotta armata in Italia dal 1970 a oggi*, (Milan: Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2013), 19–33.

<sup>46</sup> Piero Poggio, ‘Terroristi arabi in Italia: come vivono e chi li finanzia’, *Gente*, 23 September 1972.



The accusation that the Left was not only complicit but had in some cases fomented the massacre was fairly widespread on the Right. *Secolo d'Italia*, the newspaper of the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI), made the right's views clear straight away: 'Communist hatred has torn Olympic tranquillity apart and violated the peaceful harmony, real and unchanging, that has been perpetuated in the world for three thousand years'. The terrorists had been seen wearing red shirts.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, responsibility for the rise in terrorist activity in Germany was linked to the Social Democratic Party's arrival in government.<sup>48</sup> Franz Maria D'Asaro's editorial decried 'the rage and impotence of Marxist theories [which] continue to destroy man as a creature of God and to plunge the world into the darkest inhumanity of a new and certainly more ungodly Middle Ages. It had to happen in Munich, where the inspiring human values that sport represents had already suffered the insult of odious discrimination against the Rhodesian athletes, to smug and vulgar applause from an increasingly racist communism, exemplified by the Soviet Union's abject "state larceny" and trials persecuting the Jewish minority'. The massacre was of the same stamp as the Calabresi assassination in Italy<sup>49</sup> and the solution, according to the author, was to bring back the death penalty.<sup>50</sup> Lumping together different (and sometimes opposing) regimes, he decried 'a

<sup>47</sup> 'Insanguinate dall'odio comunista le bianche bandiere di Olimpia', *Secolo d'Italia*, 6 September 1972.

<sup>48</sup> Italicus, 'La matrice rossa di "Settembre nero"', *Secolo d'Italia*, 6 September 1972. The pseudonym 'Italicus' probably concealed a very well-known figure, with a direct connection to the editor, Nino Tripodi: according to sources within the newspaper, it could even have been Guido Giannettini, an agent for the Italian secret services, implicated in the trial for the Piazza Fontana bombing. I am grateful to Alessandra Cavaterra (Fondazione Ugo Spirito e Renzo De Felice) for her research.

<sup>49</sup> This reference was to the murder of police commissioner Luigi Calabresi on 17 May, which was later attributed, in a ruling that was the subject of wide political debate, to persons associated with the extra-parliamentary left-wing group Lotta Continua. Cf. Galli, *Piombo rosso*, 34–36. It seems significant that among the examples of terrorism to be deplored there was no mention of the murder of three Carabinieri in Peteano (Gorizia) on 31 May, whose perpetrators were not yet known; later investigations attributed responsibility to Ordine Nuovo fascists. Cf. Paolo Morando, *L'ergastolano. La strage di Peteano e l'enigma Vinciguerra*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2022).

<sup>50</sup> Franz Maria D'Asaro, 'Fermare la barbarie', *Secolo d'Italia*, 6 September 1972.

blueprint of death and terror which extends from Moscow to Havana, Beijing and Santiago de Chile, but most significantly is spreading and developing in Rome, Milan and Genoa'. He blamed 'Italy, lurching to the left as the result of a government policy that has always protected the Left's irresponsible extremism, as the recent revelation of socialist complicity with Greek subversives has amply demonstrated'.<sup>51</sup> In the view of the neo-fascist weekly magazine *Il Borghese*, the 'moral accomplices' of the terrorists were 'all those who sought to bring an element of violence and overbearing abuse of power to this sporting event'. It was therefore the expulsion of the Rhodesian athletes, demanded by the 'African tribes present in Munich', which opened the way for the Black September terrorists, here too defined as 'Communists'.<sup>52</sup> Terrorism was thus equated with the Italian Resistance's struggle against Nazi-fascism.<sup>53</sup>

In *La Nazione*, the conservative paper of Florence, Domenico Bartoli noted, as a piece of important news, the twelve-hour delay before the Soviet news agency Tass reported the Munich tragedy. He accused 'the mindless lapdogs of communism and lovers of the Third World (who are blind, like all lovers)' of mythologizing the Palestinian fedayeen.<sup>54</sup> *Il Tempo* maintained that 'for the Communists, whoever wields a weapon against the West and what the West represents, is a friend who must be defended and applauded'.<sup>55</sup> Even *La Voce Repubblicana*, the PRI's mouthpiece, which was not on the right but promoted the most fervent Italian Atlanticism, criticized the Communists and Soviet support for the Arab world.<sup>56</sup>

In many of these articles, the expression of the newspaper's own views was accompanied by debates with other publications, often heated, their arguments being batted backwards and forwards. Opinions also varied over Black September's underlying ideology—the Left saw it as right-wing and the Right saw it as left-wing<sup>57</sup>—and encompassed references to the

<sup>51</sup> 'Contro il terrorismo insorge il mondo civile', *Secolo d'Italia*, 7 September 1972.

<sup>52</sup> 'Monaco 1972: Olimpiadi della viltà', *Il Borghese*, 10 September 1972.

<sup>53</sup> 'I padri (rossi) del terrorismo', *Il Borghese*, 24 September 1972.

<sup>54</sup> Domenico Bartoli, 'Le radici del dramma', *La Nazione*, 6 September 1972.

<sup>55</sup> 'I gesuiti moderni', *Il Tempo*, 7 September 1972.

<sup>56</sup> 'L'escalation del massacro', *La Voce Repubblicana*, 7 December 1972.

<sup>57</sup> For example: 'Che cos'è "Settembre nero"', *Avanti!*, 6 September 1972; F.M.D. [Franz Maria D'Asaro], 'Sciacalli', *Secolo d'Italia*, 7 September 1972; Domenico Bartoli, 'C'è da noi chi vorrebbe una pista nera anche a Monaco', *Epoca*, 17 September 1972. Black September was considered to have an 'unclear ideology' by Bernardo Valli, 'I terroristi di "Settembre nero"', *Il Giorno*, 6 September 1972.

history of the Jewish people and past persecutions. *Il Giorno* published a comment by Jesse Owens, the Olympic hero of Berlin 1936, who claimed that he saw the same hatred for Jews in Munich that he had seen in Hitler's Games.<sup>58</sup> The most significant element was a semantic shift: after 1967, turns of phrase used to describe traditional European antisemitism were increasingly applied to the Palestinians and were also used on this occasion, especially on the left and in Catholic spheres, in accordance with the well-established principle of 'Holocaust inversion'.<sup>59</sup> After the Israeli reprisals, a report in *Avvenire* stated: 'The world can only be horrified by this new tragedy. For every Israeli killed on that nightmare night in Munich, more than ten "fedayeen" have lost their lives to the bombs of Israel's Phantom jets'.<sup>60</sup> This was perceived as an allusion to the ratios—well known to the Italian public—used by the Nazis in their wartime reprisals against partisans.<sup>61</sup> The author added that the Israeli response might have aggravated the situation by making peace a more distant prospect: 'An eye for an eye: the "slogan" of a cheap rhetoric, recalling the false vigour of years that are thankfully in the past'.<sup>62</sup> In *Paese Sera*, the *Giuristi Democratici* association, representing the legal professions, likened the Israeli reprisals to Nazi retaliations.<sup>63</sup>

The socialist magazine *ABC* published an article with the title 'Il palestinese errante'—the Wandering Palestinian, referencing the figure of the 'Wandering Jew'<sup>64</sup>—while the 'hounding of Arabs' in Germany recalled 'other times', a clear allusion to Nazism.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, the Socialists of the magazine *Critica Sociale* pointed out the contradiction inherent in the fact that many fascists were defending Israel, 'some of whom were dragging Jews out of their homes and delivering them to their murderers thirty years ago'.<sup>66</sup> In *Settegiorni*, Ruggero Orfei looked back at Israel's origins

<sup>58</sup> Jesse Owens, 'I tremendi fantasmi di allora', *Il Giorno*, 7 September 1972.

<sup>59</sup> Lesley Klaff, 'Holocaust Inversion', *Israel Studies*, XXIV:2, 2019, 73–90.

<sup>60</sup> Massimo Ranghieri, 'I giorni del terrore', *Avvenire*, 10 September 1972.

<sup>61</sup> Giancarlo Monina, 'Fosse Ardeatine', in Enzo Collotti, Renato Sandri, Frediano Sessi (eds), *Dizionario della Resistenza*, Vol. II: *Luoghi, formazioni, protagonisti*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), 380–383.

<sup>62</sup> Ranghieri, 'I giorni del terrore'.

<sup>63</sup> 'La rappresaglia di Israele come quelle dei nazisti', *Paese Sera*, 14 September 1972.

<sup>64</sup> George K. Anderson, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew*, (Providence: Brown University Press, 1965).

<sup>65</sup> Carlo Rovere, 'Il palestinese errante', *ABC*, 20 October 1972.

<sup>66</sup> 'La strage di Monaco', *Critica Sociale*, 20 September 1972.

and emphasized that ‘the Palestinians today are experiencing the same conditions that the Zionists experienced before the creation of the state of Israel. There is no denying that the Palestinians are without their “Arab home”.<sup>67</sup> [...]. There is no denying that they were abruptly driven out by a war [...]. There is no denying that they have been placed in desperate circumstances with nothing left to lose’. He compared the terrorist acts of Palestinian groups to those of Zionist organizations, the Irgun and the so-called Stern Gang. Orfei warned about the spread of a rationale assuming ‘might always ends in being right’, reflecting the disparity in the way the massacres in Munich and those in Lebanon and Syria were judged. This was further confirmed by the position Italian fascists adopted after Munich.<sup>68</sup> In this case too, these positions were heavily loaded with political controversy, but demonstrated the perception that the histories of the two peoples were intertwined even in their founding tragedies, as the most recent historiography has revealed.<sup>69</sup>

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

In the copious journalistic output of that time the Italian press displayed a consistent tendency to foster debate between newspapers, led by critics from within the world of journalism: alongside attempts to understand the event and to set it in a broader context, the Munich tragedy became the subject of self-referential discussion for a press which tended to focus on itself and on questions of the most topical political interest. However, although we cannot tell to what extent this was conscious on the part of the media, the debates between journalists and political parties, while provincial and short term in their nature, also informed the thinking of the Italian authorities, who were discreetly determined to protect the country from the risks of international terrorism: a process which was hastened by Italy’s involvement in the bloodshed that followed the Munich massacre. On 16 October, the poet Wael Abdel Zwaiter, a Palestinian resident in Italy and spokesperson for al-Fatah, was assassinated in Rome in the first

<sup>67</sup> The reference is to the expression ‘National home for the Jewish people’ in the 1917 Balfour Declaration.

<sup>68</sup> Ruggero Orfei, ‘Il terrorismo dei più forti’, *Settegiorni*, 24 September 1972.

<sup>69</sup> Bashir Bashir, Amos Goldberg (eds), *The Holocaust and the Nakba: A New Grammar of Trauma and History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019); Grace Wermenbol, *A Tale of Two Narratives: The Holocaust, the Nakba, and the Israeli-Palestinian Battle of Memories*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

of a series of murders by the Israeli secret services, targeting individuals thought to have been involved with Black September. In this case, there are many doubts as to whether Zwaiter, who was committed to forging closer cultural connections between Italy and Palestine, had played the role that Israel ascribed to him.<sup>70</sup> Other incidents took place subsequently on Italian soil and before long a scheme was put in place which later became known as the ‘Moro deal’—the ‘lodo Moro’—because Aldo Moro was apparently one of those who had inspired it: this was an agreement made with the Palestinian organizations, allowing them to move militants and arms across Italy in exchange for excluding the country from their terrorist activities.<sup>71</sup>

At the same time, while exhibiting a degree of opportunism when used to criticize political adversaries, the many references in the press to other instances of international terrorism—including Italian terrorism—were evidence of a certain awareness of the transnational aspect of a phenomenon that united different countries and peoples. The commentary that recognized this reality seemed to coincide with the moment when European governments fully acknowledged the problem.<sup>72</sup> Attempts to understand terrorism—and sometimes to justify it—by denouncing the injustices at its root were matched by contrary observations about how to quash it as a passing criminal phenomenon. It is possible to glimpse, in the press commentary of September 1972, not only the demands for progress made by subordinate classes or peoples but also the seeds of reaction against threats to the status quo, which would feature regularly throughout the decade in Italy as in many other parts of the world.

<sup>70</sup> Janet Venn-Brown, *Per un palestinese. Dediche a più voci a Wael Zwaiter*, (Milan: Mazzotta, 1979).

<sup>71</sup> Valentine Lomellini, *Il ‘lodo Moro’. Terrorismo e ragion di Stato (1969–1986)*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2022). Aldo Moro apparently wrote about it in a letter to Flaminio Piccoli in April 1978, during his imprisonment following his abduction at the hands of the Red Brigades. Cf. Aldo Moro, *Lettere dalla prigionia*, ed. by Miguel Gotor, (Turin: Einaudi, 2008), 103–107.

<sup>72</sup> Valentine Lomellini, *La diplomazia del terrore (1967–1989)*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2023), 27 ff.

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# Return to Wounded Knee. 27 February 1973. Italy and the Native Americans

*Massimo De Giuseppe*

*Translated by Daniel Newton*

## I INTRODUCTION: THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE NATIVE AMERICANS

During the ‘long decade’ that was the 1970s, the mobilization of the native peoples of the United States coincided (and interwoven) with a reactivation of the collective imagination worldwide. This is related to two main areas in particular. First is the question of indigenous peoples: attitudes to human rights acquired an increasingly transnational dimension, under the long ripple effect of the worldwide 1968 protest movements, coinciding with war in Vietnam and revolutions in Latin America.<sup>1</sup> As Stefan Aune has recently written, from the late 1960s into the 1970s,

<sup>1</sup>James McAdams, Anthony Motha (eds), *Global 1968: Cultural Revolutions in Europe and Latin America* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2021).

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‘Indian wars [were] everywhere’;<sup>2</sup> in a kind of ‘transmigration’ the American West was transposed to postcolonial contexts, the historical massacres and asymmetric conflicts of the ‘Indian wars’ found an echo in the ‘small wars’ and regional conflicts of a Cold War undergoing transformation. Reviving anti-imperialist attitudes, and a certain kind of anti-Americanism rekindled by the Vietnam War, seemed to draw on such memories, thronging the collective imagination on an increasingly global scale. The trend even crossed the Iron Curtain, where condemnation of the United States blended with tacit anti-Soviet criticism.<sup>3</sup>

As recent studies by Belgrad have shown, the second area to which increasingly globalized American Indian protest was linked was ecologism and, in particular, the growing interest in environmental protection, eco-feminism, and new forms of spirituality.<sup>4</sup> Riding on the success of a new literary genre exploring themes related to native peoples, the turn of the decade saw the emergence of a new philosophy that challenged notions of progress and development. In Italy, as the 1968 protest reached its peak, Adelphi published the memoirs of Black Elk collected by John G. Neihardt.<sup>5</sup> Although published long after the original 1932 English edition, the book made a great impact, paving the way for publication in Italian of a whole series of other Native American Indian titles. Black Elk was soon followed by the memoirs of ‘Wooden Leg’, a young Cheyenne warrior,<sup>6</sup> while Mondadori brought out a translation of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by the historian Dee Brown—a 1971 bestseller in the United States which was reprinted no less than five times in Italy over the course of the decade.<sup>7</sup> A characteristic feature of these works was their combining critique of the

<sup>2</sup>Stephen Aune, *Indian Wars Everywhere: Colonial Violence and the Shadow Doctrines of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023).

<sup>3</sup>Gyrgy Ferenc Tóth, *From Wounded Knee to Checkpoint Charlie: The Alliance for Sovereignty between American Indians and Central Europeans in the Late Cold War* (New York: State University of New York, 2016); Eva Novicka, *The Polish Movement Friends of the American Indians*, in Christian F. Feest (ed), *Indians and Europe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 599–609.

<sup>4</sup>Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Feedback. Ecological Thinking in ‘70s America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

<sup>5</sup>John G. Neihardt (ed), *Alce nero parla* (Milan: Adelphi, 1968. 1st ed. New York 1932).

<sup>6</sup>Gambe di Legno [Kum-Mok-Quiv-Vi-Ok-Ta], *La lunga marcia verso l’esilio. Memorie di un guerriero cheyenne*, ed. by Thomas B. Marquis (Milan: Rusconi, 1970. 1st ed. New York 1931).

<sup>7</sup>Dee Brown [Doris Alexander Brown], *Seppellite il mio cuore a Wounded Knee* (Milan: Mondadori, 1972. 1st ed. New York 1970).

American national epic with details of daily life among the natives of the Great Plains.<sup>8</sup> The revisionist Westerns of the new Hollywood era likewise blended criticism of the frontier myth with reflections on contemporary issues.<sup>9</sup> In 1970, in the space of just a few months, three symbolic films were released (and distributed immediately in Italy): *A Man Called Horse* by Elliot Silverstein, *Soldier Blue* by Ralph Nelson, and *Little Big Man* by Arthur Penn—the last of which was screened out of competition at the Moscow film festival and won a supporting actor Oscar for Chief Dan George, a member of the Tsleil-Waututh nation.<sup>10</sup>

## 2 WOUNDED KNEE, 1973

On 27 February 1973, at around 8 pm, a group of approximately 200 Native Americans, mainly Oglala-Lakota (Sioux)<sup>11</sup> from the American Indian Movement (AIM), occupied the site of Wounded Knee, in the Pine Ridge reservation of South Dakota.<sup>12</sup> The rebels seized the reservation's trading post and sought sanctuary in the Sacred Heart of Mary church, where they took 11 people hostage, including the Jesuit priest Paul Manhart. The occupation would last 71 days and involved mobilization of more than a thousand FBI agents, National Guardsmen, US Marshals, and Bureau of Indian Affairs police. It was not the first high-impact action the movement had organized.<sup>13</sup> Founded in July 1968, four months prior to the presidential elections won by Richard Nixon, AIM pursued some ambitious objectives: honouring the 1868 treaties, an end to repressive

<sup>8</sup> Sue-Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas, Sabine Lang (eds), *Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Stefano Rosso (ed), *Le frontiere del Far West. Forme di rappresentazione del grande mito americano* (Milan: Shake Edizioni, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Bob Herzberg, *Savages and Saints: The Changing Image of American Indians in Westerns* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> The Sioux family comprises three major ethno-linguistic groups: Lakota, Santee, and Yankton. The Lakota tribe (literally, 'friend') can be further divided into seven sub-tribes: Hunkpapa, Itazipcho, Minneconju, Oglala, Oohjenonpa, Sisasapa, and Sichangu.

<sup>12</sup> The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 with the Lakota and Arapaho established the Great Sioux Reservation in South Dakota, Nebraska, and Wyoming. In 1889—a year and a half before the Wounded Knee massacre—this area was divided into five parts, one of which was Pine Ridge. Guy E. Gibbon, *The Sioux: The Dakota and Lakota Nations* (Blackwell: Hoboken, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Antoniette Nora Claypoole (ed), *Ghost Rider Roads: American Indian Movement. 1971-Present* (Taos, NM: Wild Embers Press, 2012).

violence in the reservations, and defence of Navajo lands against the opening of new uranium mines. Another key grievance concerned the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), a federal agency within the Department of the Interior created in 1824 and seen as both ineffectual and deeply corrupt.

Previously, the most notable action by the Native American movement had been when the California-based Red Power Movement (RPM), led by Mohawk activist Richard Oakes, occupied Alcatraz Island from 20 November 1969 to 11 June 1971—Alcatraz, the abandoned former federal prison. The Alcatraz occupation attracted major media attention, in America and abroad. Oakes, shot dead in autumn 1972, was also involved in the occupations of a Nike missile site in the hills of El Cerrito and that of Pit River.<sup>14</sup> AIM had previously organized another series of symbolic occupations. In June 1971, a group of Lakota scaled the Mount Rushmore presidents sculpture, renaming it Crazy Horse Mountain, while in October 1972, in an action dubbed *Trail of Broken Treaties*, four automobile caravans converged on Washington, where hundreds of activists led by the Lakota Dennis Banks occupied the BIA headquarters for a number of days.<sup>15</sup>

Three and a half months later it was the turn of Wounded Knee. The choice of the site was symbolic. At Wounded Knee Creek, on 29 December 1890, just two weeks after the murder of Sitting Bull, the Seventh US Cavalry led by Colonel James W. Forsythe fired upon a group of Lakota heading towards the Red Cloud Indian agency at Pine Ridge: 290 were killed; only 51 survived. Nineteen medals of honour were subsequently awarded to those responsible for the massacre. The occupation of the site by AIM activists 83 years later thus held a special global significance, that went beyond the rebels' request for the removal of Pine Ridge reservation tribal president, Richard 'Dick' Wilson, accused by the traditional tribal chiefs of corruption and violence, as well as their (much more ambitious) demand to review the Indian treaties directly with the White House.

The reaction to the occupation in Italy was surprising. At its outset, *Corriere della Sera* dedicated an entire page to the uprising, accompanying it with an agency photo showing two Sioux armed with rifles.<sup>16</sup> The coverage comprised two articles by Enzo Passanisi and US affairs expert Claudio

<sup>14</sup> Kent Blansett, *A Journey to Freedom: Richard Oakes, Alcatraz and the Red Power Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Dennis Banks, Richard Erdoes, *Ojibwa Warrior: Dennis Banks and the Rise of the American Indian Movement* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> 'Risuona il grido dei Sioux nell'America della contestazione. Cosa c'è dietro al gesto plateale di Wounded Knee?', *Corriere della Sera*, 5 March 1973, 5.

Gorlier. Passanisi's article recalled the 1890 massacre, describing it as 'a barbaric action that still today weighs heavily on America's conscience'. Referring to the emergence of resurgent Native American pride, Passanisi remarked that 'just as for the Black population, so for the Indians, too, the seeds of their redemption were sown during the Second World War'. The theme of a debt of recognition to the Native American peoples was a recurrent one in the Italian press. The militants of AIM, however, had taken to holding the Stars and Stripes flag upside down in a sign of protest. While this gesture proved unpopular with Native American WWII veterans, the same was not true of those who had fought in the Vietnam War.<sup>17</sup> *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno* journalist, Stelio Tomei, noted the split: 'The new generation of Native Americans opposes the older chieftains, too, for being conservative and too close to the government'.<sup>18</sup> Similarities between these 'new Indians' and Afro-American movements featured again in the article by Gorlier who explored comparisons<sup>19</sup> and made an attempt to explain AIM's objectives. However, he failed not only to recognize what the group was asking for but to identify its leaders properly, omitting any mention of the protest's principal organizers, David Banks and Russell Means, while at the same time referencing a figure from outside AIM—the theologist Vine Deloria Jr, whose 1969 manifesto had just been published by Jaca Book in Italy.<sup>20</sup>

The mainstream press reported on the rebels' political radicalization in tones sometimes bordering on alarmism and voicing concern that the Red Power Movement might make the leap from ethnic movement to political activism. On 9 March, Franco Occhiuzzi in *Corriere della Sera* speculated on what might occur when the ultimatum set by the federal authorities expired; might Wounded Knee witness an escalation that would end in a massacre?<sup>21</sup> Only six months had passed since the terrorist attack in Munich by Palestinian militants from the Black September group and Italian public

<sup>17</sup> Paul Chaat Smith, Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: The New Press, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Stelio Tomei, 'Perché i Sioux hanno issato la bandiera di "Potere rosso"', *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 11 March 1973, 3–4.

<sup>19</sup> Claudio Gorlier, 'Il momento del "Red Power". Analogie dei "nuovi indiani" con i movimenti neri', *Corriere della Sera*, 5 March 1973, 5; Claudio Gorlier, *Storia dei neri negli Stati Uniti* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1963); *Motivazioni religiose nella rivolta negra negli Stati Uniti* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1968).

<sup>20</sup> Vine V. Deloria Jr., *Custer è morto per i vostri peccati* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1972. 1st ed. 1969).

<sup>21</sup> Franco Occhiuzzi, 'L'ultima battaglia dei Sioux', *Corriere della Sera*, 9 March 1973, 21.

opinion was thus particularly sensitive to the theme of hostage-taking. Concern focused on the fortifications erected by the rebels.<sup>22</sup> The Lakota militants had built not only a series of small defensive bunkers, but also created a route (nicknamed the 'Ho Chi Minh Trail') for smuggling weapons, medicines, and food into the town.<sup>23</sup>

*La Stampa* published an editorial by its US correspondent Ennio Caretto, who placed his hopes in mediation by two Democrat senators—George S. McGovern, the recently defeated candidate in the 1972 presidential elections won by Nixon, and James Abourezk.<sup>24</sup> Caretto noted that the protest had radicalized: 'The young warriors and their demands are not open to compromise'.<sup>25</sup> The article also provided a series of statistics regarding the conditions of Native Americans in the United States, whose number it estimated at approximately 800,000–500,000 of whom segregated in reservations and the remainder in the suburbs of the major cities. Unemployment ran at 45%, income was only 40% of the national average, the average life expectancy was 47, and there was a high rate of suicide. In an article that appeared some days later, Caretto commented that 'what was initially looked upon as a quaint protest by an exasperated minority has turned into a crisis of the national conscience'.<sup>26</sup>

In the conservative press, *Il Tempo* was openly critical of the protest, adopting a strongly pro-government position.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, in an editorial, the former monarchist party deputy Alberto Consiglio angrily commented: 'Bison, buffalos and Indians are in reservations. What a disgrace! Men treated like bears and ibexes: in reservations, national parks. And yet, fifty or sixty years ago, the myth of the Indian as the "bad guy" was prevalent across the whole of the white world'.<sup>28</sup> The conservative right-wing largely dismissed the uprising as infantile and anachronistic, relegating the Indian people to the past, while at the same time describing them as among 'the most noble of the human species'.

<sup>22</sup> Father Manhart, author in 1970 of a Lakota dictionary, gave his own version of events in Wilbur A. Riegert, *Quest for the Pipe of the Sioux* (Rapid City: Privately Printed, 1975).

<sup>23</sup> Franco Occhiazzi, 'I Sioux depongono l'ascia', *Corriere della Sera*, 10 March 1973, 19.

<sup>24</sup> James G. Abourezk, *Wounded Knee*, 1973 Series, University of South Dakota Special Collections, <https://archives.usd.edu/repositories/2/> [accessed 16 October 2023].

<sup>25</sup> Ennio Caretto, 'Disotterrata l'ascia di guerra', *La Stampa*, 1 March 1973, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ennio Caretto, 'I Sioux senza pace. La vertenza è ancora aperta', *La Stampa*, 12 March, 13.

<sup>27</sup> 'McGovern accorre nel Sud Dakota per placare i Sioux in rivolta', *Il Tempo*, 2 March 1973, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Alberto Consiglio, 'I pellirosse di Ginocchio ferito liberano gli 11 ostaggi', *Il Tempo*, 3 March 1973, 73.

### 3 PEACE OR WAR: CATHOLICS AND THE LEFT

The Catholic world, too, followed events in South Dakota with interest. *Avvenire* provided detailed coverage, publishing a series of editorials, including one by Virginio Bettini, who expressed the hope that the authorities would allow food supplies to be brought through to the rebels.<sup>29</sup> Roberto Margotta, meanwhile, called the protesters' demands 'reasonable' and pointed a finger at the 'false respectability of the US'.<sup>30</sup> The greatest level of interest was shown, however, by *Settegiorni in Italia e nel Mondo*—a periodical published in Rome from 1969 to 1974 and directed by Ruggero Orfei and Piero Pratesi.<sup>31</sup> One notable piece of reportage contained a statement by one of AIM's leaders, the Ojibwa WaBun-Inini, also known as Vernon Bellecourt.<sup>32</sup> Showing familiarity with Franz Fanon's theories on hunger (which Giovanni Pirelli helped disseminate in Italy in the late 1960s and early 1970s), Bellecourt stressed how the organization originated in the Indian ghetto of Minneapolis.<sup>33</sup> His assessment of the situation was trenchant: 'Today we are receiving expressions of sympathy from Black, Chicano, feminist, and pacifist movements, but we have not yet obtained the political support we need. We are living in a war with the United States, a war that is undeclared but that has been unleashed'. Although the revolt had a clear political dimension, Bellecourt was determined that it should not be exploited for political ends: 'Our relationships with the political parties are difficult: they want us to completely embrace their ideology. Our ideology however is our spirituality. The relationship between man and nature'.<sup>34</sup> If one thinks back to the history of

<sup>29</sup> Virginio Bettini, 'Gli Indiani ribelli di Wounded Knee vogliono trattare con Kissinger', *Avvenire*, 7 March 1973, 6.

<sup>30</sup> Roberto Margotta, 'Hanno dissotterrato la vecchia ascia di guerra', *Avvenire*, 11 March 1973, 6–7.

<sup>31</sup> Daniela Saresella, *Dal Concilio alla contestazione. Riviste cattoliche negli anni del cambiamento (1958–1968)* (Brescia: Editrice Morcelliana, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> Robert Olive Little Jackson, *The Performativity of Indigenous Protest: Vernon Bellecourt and the First Encounters Exhibition* (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin, 2020).

<sup>33</sup> W. Nwe-Wi Nini [WaBun-Inini/Vernon Bellecourt], 'Una voce dal ghetto. La lotta degli indiani nella viva voce di un suo protagonista. Cacciati dalle riserve, soffocati nelle città, l'ultima trappola', *Settegiorni*, VII:314, 8 July 1973, 39.

<sup>34</sup> Omer C. Stewart (ed), *Forgotten Fires: Native Americans and the Transient Wilderness* (Norton: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002).

environmentalism in Italy, the experience of the Native American peoples would turn out to be anything but trivial.<sup>35</sup>

Re-examining these events also reveals the heavy weather the traditional left made in engaging with a world whose relationship with concepts such as statehood, nation, and revolution was singular, differing even from the diverse experiences of Third World activism. The Italian Communist Party (PCI), for example, which had always disdainfully dismissed the Western as imperialist propaganda,<sup>36</sup> demonstrated a certain coolness. Then again, even the cinema of the new Hollywood era had failed to attract any great interest from communist critics, notwithstanding the climate of growing openness towards the claims of non-European peoples, an area that Silvio Pons has recently investigated.<sup>37</sup> The most detailed of the articles appearing in *l'Unità*, written by Renato Gaita, called the 1890 massacre 'a genocide', but made no reference to AIM's political struggle.<sup>38</sup>

Rather more nuanced coverage of the events unfolding at Wounded Knee was provided by *il manifesto*—the newspaper of the radical Left, whose leaders had for some months been engaged in dialogue with Vittorio Foa's newly formed Proletarian Unity Party (PDUP). In an article published on 4 March an interesting analysis of events focused its attention on a series of more overtly political questions,<sup>39</sup> noting that, with more than 1500 Indians on the march towards Wounded Knee, the FBI had failed to rule out the use of force. Rather than being on the defensive, *il manifesto* suggested, the Sioux appeared to be waiting for the rebellion to escalate. The newspaper's interest in the potential of the uprising to trigger an international reaction emerged most clearly in these lines: 'This demonstration, which closely recalls the epic narrative of the American West (its flip side, as it were), will inevitably attract widespread public attention, including from outside the United States'. The newspaper also carried a declaration by Bellecourt in front of the United Nations building

<sup>35</sup> In 1977, in the Marche region of Italy, Gino and Tullia Girolomoni founded the Alce Nero agricultural cooperative. Gino Girolomoni, *Ritorna la vita sulle colline. L'esperienza della cooperativa Alce Nero* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1981).

<sup>36</sup> Benedetta Calandra (ed), *La guerra fredda culturale. Esportazione e ricezione dell'American way of life in America Latina* (Rome: Ombre corte, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri. Visioni e legami internazionali nel mondo del Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 2021).

<sup>38</sup> Renato Gaita, 'Dalla parte dei Sioux. Drammatica requisitoria contro la conquista del West', *l'Unità*, 5 March 1973, 3.

<sup>39</sup> 'Altri 1.500 indiani si uniscono ai Sioux', *il manifesto*, 4 March 1973, 4.

in New York, to the effect that independence was the only possible option and hoping for representation at the UN—hopes defined by *il manifesto* as pure ‘utopia’ (an opinion shared by *Relazioni Internazionali*).<sup>40</sup> However, the article did compare AIM’s agenda to the Palestinian, Basque, Northern Irish, Sahrawi, and Kurdish struggles, raising the possibility of new perspectives within the Italian radical Left’s approach to the indigenous question.<sup>41</sup> The interest of *il manifesto* rapidly fizzled out, however, once the anticipated escalation failed to materialize.

#### 4 SACHEEN LITTLEFEATHER AND REACTIONS IN OTHER MEDIA

A number of illustrated periodicals devoted coverage to Wounded Knee. Among these was *L’Europeo*, the magazine owned by Angelo Rizzoli, which printed a series of articles accompanied by an extensive selection of colour images. The magazine was at the time at the height of its popularity, with a circulation of more than 220,000 copies. The day after the occupation began, it published a story by the photojournalist Duilio Pallottelli (who had previously contributed to a report on psychiatric hospitals)<sup>42</sup> which began: ‘At the Indian outpost of Wounded Knee two hundred Sioux are asking for justice, armed with weapons. Only this time, there are FBI agents and television cameras’.<sup>43</sup> Pallottelli noted the protesters’ awareness of the media and public opinion, citing protest leader Russell Means’s repeated use of Crazy Horse’s famous war cry at Little Big Horn, ‘Today is a good day to die’.<sup>44</sup> At the end of March *L’Europeo* published two in-depth articles examining Native American history by the ethnomusicologist Roberto Leydi, a professor at the recently founded

<sup>40</sup> ‘Presa di coscienza degli indiani USA?’, *Relazioni Internazionali*, XXXVII:1010, March 1973, 18.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Tentativi di mediazione con i Sioux che occupano Wounded Knee’ and ‘Come in un campo di rifugiati palestinesi si discute dell’operazione di Settembre nero’, *il manifesto*, 6 March 1973, 4.

<sup>42</sup> *La violenza istituzionalizzata*, text by Franco Basaglia, Erving Goffman, photos by Carla Cerati, Gianni Berengo Gardin, Duilio Pallottelli (Ferrara: Associazione per la lotta contro le malattie mentali, 1968).

<sup>43</sup> Duilio Pallottelli, ‘L’ultima guerra indiana’, *L’Europeo*, XXIX:12 (1413), 22 March 1973, 28–33.

<sup>44</sup> See the 2010 documentary by David Mueller and Lynn Salt, *A Good Day to Die*, dedicated to Banks and AIM.



DAMS arts, music, and performance school at Bologna University.<sup>45</sup> A key figure in the Italian folk revival,<sup>46</sup> Leydi focused on the Native American's place in the European imagination: 'No other "primitive" people occupies as much space in our imagination and our adventure. Children play at being "Indians", not "Zulus" or "Bedouins" [...] as central figures in the only epic of the modern world, the epic of the West, the Indians seem to belong to us. But do we know who they are?' The ethnomusicologist encouraged his readers to overcome their Eurocentrism, reminding them that the history of the 'pellerossa' was much older than the United States itself.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, on 28 March 1973, at the 45th Academy Awards ceremony, Marlon Brando refused to accept the award for Best Actor for his role as Don Vito Corleone in *The Godfather*, sending in his place a young activist, Sacheen Littlefeather (Maria Louise Cruz), to denounce the treatment of Native Americans in the film industry and in the life of the country.<sup>48</sup> The opening lines of the speech pulled no punches: 'We lied to them. We cheated them out of their lands [...] But there is one thing which is beyond the reach of this perversity and that is the tremendous verdict of history. And history will surely judge us. But do we care?'<sup>49</sup> The gesture made a strong media impact, in Italy as well, helping to turn the spotlight back on Wounded Knee. In *Corriere della Sera*, a long article by Occhiuzzi, entitled 'Brando Said No for His Sioux Friends', adopted a decidedly sentimental angle, expressing sympathy for the star's attempt to challenge the self-narration of the American Dream, while also noting that three Italian film directors—Francesco Maselli, Gillo Pontecorvo, and Damiano Damiani—had also expressed their unconditional support for the protest.<sup>50</sup>

Even prior to Brando's award refusal, the current affairs and gossip magazine *Gente*, published by Edilio Rusconi, had focused on US

<sup>45</sup> Roberto Leydi, 'Storia degli indiani', *L'Europeo*, XXIX:13 (1414), 29 March 1973, 71–79.

<sup>46</sup> Roberto Leydi, *La musica dei primitivi: manuale di etnologia musicale* (Milan: il Saggiatore, 1961).

<sup>47</sup> Roberto Leydi, 'Storia degli indiani, seconda parte', *L'Europeo*, XXIX:15 (1416), 12 April 1973, 63–73.

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QUacU0I4yU> [accessed 16 October 2023].

<sup>49</sup> 'That Unfinished Oscar Speech by Marlon Brando', *The New York Times*, 30 March 1973, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Franco Occhiuzzi, 'Per gli amici Sioux Brando ha detto no', *Corriere della Sera*, 29 March 1973, 13.

accusations that celebrity activists only showed an interest in the Native Americans cause to enhance their own public profiles, noting that similar allegations had been made against Jane Fonda following her arrest at the Fort Lewis military base.<sup>51</sup> The periodical's subsequent coverage of the star's Oscars gesture centred around accusations that Brando had orchestrated a 'publicity stunt'.<sup>52</sup> In *L'Espresso*, meanwhile, Romano Giachetti concurred, wondering aloud whether the actor had 'become a radical or even a communist', provocatively surmising that the gesture would not cause 'the Indians barricaded up at Wounded Knee for a month now to dance any victory dances or send up triumphant smoke signals'.<sup>53</sup> The magazine dismissed interest in the Sioux cause as infantile, reflecting a sort of collective, transactional immaturity. In *il manifesto*, an article by Barry Rubin, who would later author studies into anti-Americanism, suggested that the occupation was presenting serious problems for Republicans and Democrats alike, encouraging a feeling of 'natural sympathy' for the rebels outside the United States.<sup>54</sup>

In the meantime, coverage from Wounded Knee began to wane, as events entered a negotiations phase. Another month would go by, however, before a solution to the crisis could be found. In the meantime, the end of April saw renewed episodes of violence as, during an exchange of gunfire, two protesters, the Apache Frank Clearwater and the Oglala Lawrence Lamont, were shot dead by federal forces.<sup>55</sup> The Afro-American activist Ray Robinson also went missing, the suspicion being that he had been killed by the rebels as a potential spy.<sup>56</sup> An agreement was finally signed on the evening of 5 May, under which the federal government undertook to discuss the treaties and enter into dialogue with the Native communities, while the occupiers turned over their weapons to the

<sup>51</sup>Anthony Kitty, 'Per i miei amici indiani tornerai in galera', *Gente*, XIV, 23 March 1970, 70–73.

<sup>52</sup>Mary Holmes, 'Per gli indiani Brando ha ballato da solo un tango', *Gente*, XVII, 13 April 1973, 20–22.

<sup>53</sup>Romano Giachetti, 'Penna rossa festeggia mezzo secolo', *L'Espresso*, XIX:14, 8 April 1973, 14–15.

<sup>54</sup>Barry Rubin, 'Con la rivolta degli indiani anche gli americani hanno scoperto che Custer era un massacratore', *il manifesto*, 7 April 1973, 4.

<sup>55</sup>Ward L. Churchill, Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression* (Boston: South End Press, 1988).

<sup>56</sup>The question is examined in the 2009 PBS documentary, *We Shall Remain: Wounded Knee*.

authorities.<sup>57</sup> The hundred or so activists for whom arrest warrants had been issued handed themselves in, while the remainder had their details taken. The site was evacuated between 8 and 9 May. As the occupation came to an end, another militant, Lance Yellow Hand, declared: 'We have created a problem that the US can't hide. It's like a big black cloud over them. Everybody sees this cloud'.<sup>58</sup>

## 5 THE ITALIAN INDIANS

The globalization of Wounded Knee and the reappropriation of the Native Americans as enemies of US imperialism, opponents of consumerism, and defenders of the natural world took a distinctive turn in Italy during the 'anni di piombo' (the leaden years) and the 'strategia della tensione' (the strategy of tension): it enshrined a widespread, transversal cultural phenomenon and also provided a template for radicalization.<sup>59</sup> Iaccarella has suggested that 'it is perhaps no accident that the first appearance of the Italian Indians occurred in 1973',<sup>60</sup> referring to a protest that broke out in Fiat's Mirafiori plant, described by Mino Monicelli in the following terms: 'In an action that was entirely independent of the union, they occupied the departments and, to convey their anger, tied red bands around to their heads, sounded horns, beat drums and, rather than shouting slogans, emitted a long sound that went something like this: *ehahelahaho*'.<sup>61</sup>

Transfiguration of the Wounded Knee uprising can also be seen in director Marco Ferreri's film *Non toccare la donna bianca* (Don't Touch the White Woman), which transposes the battle of Little Big Horn to the

<sup>57</sup> A version of events provided by the BIA superintendent at Pine Ridge can be found in Stanley David Lyman, *Wounded Knee 1973: A Personal Account*, ed. by Floyd A. O'Neil, June K. Lyman, Susan McKay (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

<sup>58</sup> *Voices from Wounded Knee 1973 in the Words of the Participants* (Roosevelt, NY: Akwesasne Notes, 1976), 222. This volume, containing an extensive collection of interviews with AIM activists, is now freely available on the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/voicesfromwounded00akwe/page/n5/mode/2up> [accessed 16 October 2023].

<sup>59</sup> Simone Neri Serneri (ed.), *Verso la lotta armata. La politica della violenza nella sinistra radicale degli anni Settanta* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2012); Riccardo Brizzi, Giovanni Mario Ceci, Michele Marchi, Guido Panvini, Ermanno Taviani (eds), *L'Italia del terrorismo: partiti, istituzioni e società* (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2021).

<sup>60</sup> Andrea Iaccarella, *Indiani metropolitani. Politica, cultura e rivoluzione nel '77* (Rome: Redstar Press, 2018), 156.

<sup>61</sup> Mino Monicelli, *L'ultrasinistra in Italia* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1979), 100.

site of the demolished Les Halles market in Paris.<sup>62</sup> Filmed in early 1974, the film re-cast the protest in the emotional aftermath of the Chilean coup, opening with a message from Ferreri: 'The funny thing in this film, in this story, is that those who believe themselves strong, rather than speaking of genocide like we do, speak of the "right of conquest". And this becomes truly comic when the conquerors are crushed, because the conquered themselves speak of the right to resistance and to victory. It's this that happened at Little Big Horn and that will happen, I hope, everywhere tomorrow'.<sup>63</sup> In 1975, Umberto Eco, a newly appointed Professor of Semiotics at the University of Bologna, wrote a short essay entitled 'Come fare l'indiano' (How to Play Indians), juxtaposing the turbulent youth movements and the reconfiguration of the Native American within the collective imagination. The opening of the essay is emblematic: 'Since the future of Native American culture at present seems dire, the sole possibility for the young brave bent on improving his social position is to appear in a Western movie'.<sup>64</sup> There follows a list of 28 'commandments', including suggestions on how to attack a stagecoach, a farm, and a circle of wagons.

The year 1976 saw the publication of a short volume by Angelo Quattrocchi entitled *Wounded Knee—Gli indiani alla riscossa*.<sup>65</sup> Its author, a key figure within various movements that drew on a strongly globalized underground culture, had taken part in the May 1968 protests in France and frequented Swinging Sixties London,<sup>66</sup> before moving to California where he moved in counterculture circles. Borrowing the idea and title from Jerry Rubin's *Do It!* magazine, he launched an Italian version entitled *Fallo!* After returning to Italy, in 1972 Quattrocchi tried unsuccessfully—together with the founder of the Stampa Alternativa publishing house, Marcello Baraghini—to employ agitprop techniques to get the Partito Ippi (Hippy Party) elected to the Italian Parliament. In the book, dedicated to Beverly Axelrod (his former partner, a lawyer who

<sup>62</sup> Original title: *Touche pas à la femme blanche* (France-Italy 1974).

<sup>63</sup> Marco Ferreri, Rafael Azcona, *Non toccare la donna bianca* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), 2.

<sup>64</sup> Umberto Eco, 'Come fare l'indiano', now in Umberto Eco, *Come viaggiare con un salmone* (Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2016).

<sup>65</sup> Angelo Quattrocchi, *Wounded Knee. Gli indiani alla riscossa* (Milan: Celuc, 1976).

<sup>66</sup> Angelo Quattrocchi, Tom Nairn, *The Beginning of the End. France, May 1968: What Happened, Why It Happened* (London: Panther Books, 1968).

represented both Angela Davis and AIM),<sup>67</sup> Quattrocchi claims to have been present at Wounded Knee. In his account of events, the Native American Indian activists are compared with ‘Mao’s fish in the sea’.<sup>68</sup> On 21 April, following the death of Clearwater, besieged and with no running water or electricity, Quattrocchi notes: ‘The great initial enthusiasm has by now been burnt out by cold, hunger and bullets. An ancient, unshakeable determination has taken its place [...] the decision is made to seek help from all our friends on the outside’.<sup>69</sup>

In a disorderly and turbulent manner, amidst myths, reinterpretations, and no small amount of trivialization, the cause of the Native American Indians thus entered the fluid, marginal, and yet dynamic world characterized by a blend of libertarian ideals and political engagement and made up of university groups and worker circles, especially in large cities such as Milan, Bologna, and Rome.<sup>70</sup> Separate entities drawing on a blend of hybrid cultural elements without party filters.<sup>71</sup> In that climate there arose collectives such as Milan’s *Nuvola Rossa*, led by Jacopo Fo, which in June 1975 issued a one-off pamphlet proclaiming the ‘fumetto’ (or comic strip) ‘a weapon of war’.<sup>72</sup> Another one-off pamphlet published in June 1976 by the Apache-Rho collective bore the tagline: *Apache. Periodical Against the Bosses and the State*. At the final edition of the ‘Re Nudo’ festival, held in Milan’s Parco Lambro, a manifesto produced by the Proletarian Youth Circles of Milan’s State University went the rounds bearing the slogan ‘We have unburied the hatchet’. In Bologna, the magazine *A/traverso*, established in 1976 by figures connected with Radio Alice (a contemporary of Milan’s Radio Popolare), was among the prime movers of the 1977 underground movement in Bologna, which was marked by political activism, communes, punk culture, and highly creative cartoon art, as well as by the use of hard drugs.

<sup>67</sup> Walter Bruno Toscano, *Pantere nere, America bianca. Storia e politica del Black Panther Party* (Rome: Ombre corte, 2023).

<sup>68</sup> Quattrocchi, *Wounded Knee. Gli indiani alla riscossa*, 129.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 176–177.

<sup>70</sup> Marica Tolomelli, *L’Italia dei movimenti. Politica e società nell’Italia della prima repubblica* (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2019); Irene Piazzoni (ed.), *Non solo piombo. Politica e cultura nella Milano degli anni Settanta* (Milan: Mimesis, 2017).

<sup>71</sup> Barbara Armani, ‘Italia anni Settanta. Movimenti, violenza politica e lotta armata tra memoria e rappresentazione storiografica’, in *Storica*, XI:32, 41–82. Luca Falcicola, *Il movimento del ‘77 in Italia* (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2015); Alessio Gagliardi, *Il ‘77 tra storia e memoria* (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2017).

<sup>72</sup> *Nuvola rossa: fumetti e altre cose* (Milan: Edizioni Ottaviano, 1975).

Rome fanzine *Oask?!*, meanwhile, stood out for its situationist approach. Its March 1977 edition contained a manifesto of the ‘Indiani metropolitani in dis/aggregazione’, which invited readers to abandon Berlinguer’s PCI, declaring: ‘We have slowly witnessed your decomposition... WE’RE NOT PLAYING ALONG.... UACHIUARUARIUA’.<sup>73</sup> *Oask*’s contributors included Pablo Echaurren,<sup>74</sup> who had been invited by Adriano Sofri to draw cartoons for the newly founded Lotta Continua, and Olivier Turquet who, under the name Gandalf the Purple, was one of the driving forces of the small Geronimo group, which became famous at demonstrations in Rome for its slogan: ‘Apaches, cheyennes, sioux, moicani, siamo gli Indiani metropolitani’.<sup>75</sup>

Rome’s Metropolitan Indians were also at the forefront of protests during the occupation of La Sapienza University, in reaction to a visit by the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL) general secretary Luciano Lama, which culminated in a battle between autonomists and the left-wing trade union leader’s bodyguards. A number of situationists with ties to Marco Pannella’s Radical Party also participated, including Mario Appignani (known as Cavallo Pazzo) and Marco Erler (Nuvola Rossa—a prominent voice on the ‘free’ radio station Onda Radio 101). The protests against Lama later inspired Fabrizio De André and Massimo Bubola to write the song ‘Coda di Lupo’, jumbling their geography (‘we returned to Brianza for the start of bison-hunting season [...] close to Rome and Little Big Horn’) as they recounted the demise of global student revolts.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

We have thus seen how emerging figures in 1970s Italian society found echoes of their own experiences in the American Far West, whose frontier narratives they subverted and reconfigured. Precisely this reconfiguration of time and place was central to the extraordinary capacity of the new Indian question to mobilize collective image stores, traversing countries, languages, and cultural contexts (university research, legal mobilization, social activism, pop culture). The cultural impact of this phenomenon

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.anarcopedia.org/index.php/OASK%3F!#/media/File:OASK?!.jpg> [accessed 16 October 2023].

<sup>74</sup> Pablo Echaurren (ed), *La casa del desiderio. '77: indiani metropolitani e altri strani* (Cesario: Manni, 2005).

<sup>75</sup> Claudia Salaris, *Il movimento del Settantasette. Linguaggi e scritture dell’ala creativa* (Bertiolo: AAA editore, 1997), 65.

proved significant for a variety of radical activist groups from the new Left, but it was also influential for groups on the new Right, which, amid a mass of contradictions, fused a rereading of narratives about the defence of indigenous peoples with a curious political take on J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy sagas and a re-emerging interest in notions of racial identity and a 'return to nature'.<sup>76</sup>

The Metropolitan Indian movement was, however, merely a final, marginal, noisy, and, in part, self-destructive, micro-fragment of a broader, multi-faceted landscape of youth movements. The real impact of the Indian question went far deeper, penetrating the collective imagination more broadly, transversally, and intergenerationally, through music, cartoons, cinema, writing, and artefacts. Its influence can also be detected in a growing interest in exploring ancient forms of spirituality from outside Europe which, under the influence of a rising culture of individualism during the closing years of the decade, were assimilated and amalgamated into Westernized 'potpourris', occupying a space somewhere between 'return to nature' and new forms of consumerism.

The Wounded Knee uprising tapped into a series of universal questions, removing the Native American peoples from the cinematic landscape and restoring them to fully rounded humanity. At the beginning of the 1970s, the 'pellerossa' were a long-standing fixture—albeit an essentially infantile one—within the Italian collective imagination. Wounded Knee ushered them into a turbulent adolescence. As the Reagan era approached, the dream seemed to fade away; activist energies burned out against the backdrop of the 1978 tragedies and the emergence of new, neo-liberal principles that had begun to deal body blows to Moro's 'third phase' paradigm.

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<sup>76</sup> Gregorio Sorgonà, *La scoperta della destra. Il Movimento Sociale Italiano e gli Stati Uniti* (Rome: Viella, 2019); Guido Panvini, *Ordine nero, guerriglia rossa. La violenza politica nell'Italia degli anni Sessanta e Settanta (1966–1975)* (Turin: Einaudi, 2021); Robert Stuart, *Tolkien, Race, and Racism in Middle-earth* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

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# The Military Coup in Chile. 11 September 1973. Italian Civil Society and the Economic Policies of the Pinochet Regime

*Benedetta Calandra*

*Translated by Mariangela Palazzi-Williams*

## 1 1973: ITALY'S REACTION TO THE COUP D'ÉTAT

Italian historiography has extensively reconstructed the diverse reactions in the country to the Chilean military coup of 11 September 1973, an internationally recognised political symbol of what Niall Ferguson, Charles Maier, Erez Manela and Daniel J. Sargent have described as a 'bad decade for democracy'.<sup>1</sup>

In particular, there is an enormous body of research—constantly updated, especially after the 50th anniversary in 2023—on the attitude of the various political forces and parties. Among the numerous authors, one

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<sup>1</sup> Niall Ferguson, Charles Maier, Erez Manela, Daniel J. Sargent, *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011), 5.

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should perhaps single out the work by Andrea Mulas *Allende e Berlinguer*,<sup>2</sup> a comparative analysis of the Chilean experience of the Unidad Popular and the Italian experience of the historic compromise focusing on how our institutional reality fitted into the international context, both Euro-Atlantic and Latin American. Alessandro Santoni's contribution also forms an indispensable work of reference on the role played by the South American country in the imagination of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the ideological similarities which that party had been observing overseas since the mid-1960s, hence well before the military coup.<sup>3</sup> For his part, Raffaele Nocera (and, more recently, also Luigi Giorgi, although just in reference to the coup) long pondered the points of *encuentros y desencuentros* between two widely compared actors in terms of strategy and policy on either side of the ocean: the respective Christian Democratic parties. He analysed the two parties' changing patterns of relationship, their affinities, synergies, but also tensions in the aftermath of the authoritarian political change, both as regards bilateral Italy-Chile relations<sup>4</sup> and in the context of a more general Christian Democratic internationalism.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, a new generation of young scholars (including Alessandro Guida and Marco Morra) have recently studied in depth the stance of various parliamentary and extra-parliamentary left-wing groups in regard to the coup, as well as the attitude adopted by national armed groups, including the Red Brigades (BR).

The present chapter does not intend to add to this perspective, but rather to offer some new elements. The first concerns the scope of the investigation: it does not focus on the immediate reaction to the institutional break-up and subsequent repression of dissidents. Instead, sharing the basic assumption that 'in no field was the shock of the global more palpable than in the economic realm',<sup>6</sup> the focus here is on the dramatic, epochal changes in Chile's *economic* trajectory once the military regime took over. Under the banner of total dismantling of the previous socialist

<sup>2</sup> Andrea Mulas, *Allende e Berlinguer. Il Cile dell'Unidad Popular e il compromesso storico italiano* (San Cesario di Lecce: Manni Editori, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Alessandro Santoni, *Il PCI e i giorni del Cile. Alle origini di un mito politico* (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Raffaele Nocera, *Acuerdos y desacuerdos. La DC italiana y el PDC chileno: 1962–1973* (Santiago de Chile: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Raffaele Nocera, *Il sogno infranto. DC, l'Internazionale democristiana e l'America Latina (1960–1980)* (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Ferguson, Maier, Manela, Sargent, *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s*, 16.

economic orientation, the regime drastically reduced the input of the state and public spending, opened up the national market to foreign trade without instituting any protection for the home market, liberalised the financial market, deregulated the labour market, suppressed trade union activity and collective bargaining, and drove wages down to a historic low.

In what follows, after drawing on recent historiography to contextualise the so-called Chicago Boys—a well-known group of young Chilean economists trained in their doctoral studies through an exchange with the United States dating back to well before the coup (from the mid-1950s)<sup>7</sup>—I will provide an initial overview of how the Italian press reported on the measures adopted by the group. More than in any other political situation of the period, their work was an ‘extreme’ example of ideological convergence between anti-communism and neo-liberalism<sup>8</sup> which highlighted the high social costs of a regime that experimented to the letter with the new economic system, totally irrespective of democratic institutions.<sup>9</sup>

In the concluding section, mention will be made of social actors outside the party system and institutional politics<sup>10</sup> who reacted to the disastrous effects that Pinochet’s new macroeconomic orientation produced on a large part of the Chilean population: poverty, unemployment, childhood malnutrition, imprisonment or exile for the most prominent leaders among organised workers. From there I will allude to solidarity initiatives undertaken by trade unions and Catholic, secular and women’s associations, my intent being to do justice to certain active members of Italian civil society and their record, a topic much less studied by national historiography.

<sup>7</sup>Paul E. Sigmund, ‘The Rise and Fall of the Chicago Boys in Chile’, *SAIS Review* (1956–1989), 3:2, 1983, 41–58. Valerie Brender, ‘Economic Transformations in Chile: The Formation of The Chicago Boys’, *The American Economist*, 55:1, 2010, 11–122.

<sup>8</sup>Alessandro Santoni, ‘Los “amigos de Chile”: el régimen de Pinochet y la Gran Bretaña de Thatcher (1979–1988)’, *Revista de historia*, 1:29, April 2022, 401–428.

<sup>9</sup>‘In fact the overwhelming majority of governments that adopted policies such as monetarism, privatisation, and financial deregulation did so while retaining—and in many cases actually acquiring—democratic institutions’. In Ferguson, Maier, Manela, Sargent, *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s*, 19.

<sup>10</sup>The symbolic association is the Italy-Chile Salvador Allende committee and the group Chile democrático, whose work is briefly mentioned in Maria Rosaria Stabili, ‘Exiled Citizens: Chilean Political Leaders in Italy’, in Mario Sznajder, Luis Roniger, Carlos Forment (eds), *Shifting Frontiers of Citizenship: The Latin American Experience* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 376 ff.

## 2 BOTH LOCAL AND GLOBAL: NEO-LIBERAL POLICIES IN CHILE AND THEIR RECEPTION IN THE ITALIAN PRESS

The work of the Chicago Boys is undergoing a partial historiographical revision, in Italy and elsewhere. One example is Maria Rosaria Stabili's analysis, centred on two innovative aspects: firstly, the complexity of this multifaceted group, an aspect often overlooked in favour of a simplistic representation of it as a compact political bloc aligned with Pinochetist directives; secondly, the domestic dynamics, which manifested in the warm local welcome given to the Chicago Boys in Chile and the modernising, non-ideological role they played well before the coup and ensuing polarisation.<sup>11</sup> Likewise in Chile, perhaps as a result of the social upheaval prompted by the 2019 protests, the issue is now again one of public interest, as evinced by the recent translation of Gabriel Valdés's text,<sup>12</sup> or by the documentary and book by journalist Carola Fuentes, which trace the group's life and the international interest it attracted from the outset.<sup>13</sup> The need to delve into the roots of social inequalities of such magnitude, which are still evident today regionally and elsewhere, has clearly acted as a driving force.

The radical turn in economic policy with respect to that of the Unidad Popular government, enacted especially since 1975, has been studied from many angles internationally. One field already widely investigated by historians, on which new research is also emerging, is that of the high degree of economic-ideological affinity with Britain under Thatcher.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Maria Rosaria Stabili, 'I "Chicago Boys" e le origini delle politiche neoliberiste in Cile', *Ricerche di storia politica. Quadrimestrale dell'Associazione per le ricerche di storia politica*, 1, 2021.

Also 'La modernización de los estudios económicos en Chile. Dinámicas internas y cooperación académica estadounidense (1956–1964)', in Francisco Jiménez, Lorenzo Delgado, Benedetta Calandra (eds), *El Americano imposible. Estados Unidos y América Latina entre modernización y contrainsurgencia* (Madrid: Silex Ultramar, 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Gabriel Valdés, *Los Economistas de Pinochet. La Escuela de Chicago en Chile* (Santiago de Chile: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2020).

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gamba.cl/2018/05/chicago-boys-vean-aca-el-documental-que-tvn-emitio-a-la-hora-de-la-corneta/> [accessed 2 February 2023] and <https://www.lafeltrinelli.it/chicago-boys-ebook-inglese-carola-fuentes/e/9789566042617> [accessed 18 February 2023].

<sup>14</sup> Recent publications include Grace Livingstone, *Britain and the Dictatorships of Argentina and Chile, 1973–82. Foreign Policy, Corporations and Social Movement* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

As was to be expected, the economic turn imparted by the group from the Friedman School met with a mixed reception in the Italian press, sometimes marked by emotionalism, not only in newspapers with an overt political allegiance. A year after the coup, the weekly *Panorama* bluntly defined Chile as ‘the great Lager’, reporting, in addition to the political violence, the exorbitant increase in the price of basic necessities, by then being imported from abroad: ‘[...] a kilo of bread a year ago cost 13 escudos; today 134. A kilo of sugar has gone from 12 to 290 escudos. A litre of oil from 36 to 550’.<sup>15</sup> The magazine also denounced the fierce repression of trade unions:

Collective agreements have been abolished. Of 137 unions that existed at the time of Allende, 107 have been dissolved. In no organisation, club, association, even sporting or artistic ones, can offices be elective. The dockers at the port of Valparaíso dared to protest against this imposition: the leaders of the protest were arrested and shot on the spot, under the eyes of their comrades.<sup>16</sup>

In equally stark terms, the socialist daily *Avanti!* denounced the high social costs of the regime, evident not only from price trends but also from the inflation rate of around 200%, despite declarations of ‘unexpected successes’ in the official Chilean press.<sup>17</sup> The following year, it laid bare Chile’s heavy dependence on the International Monetary Fund, to the tune of some 79 million dollars. The paper also emphasised ‘the two classic conditions on which primitive capitalism has developed: totally available labour (thanks to the destruction of trade unions) and undemocratic, centralised political power’.<sup>18</sup>

In the years that followed, *Avanti!* sought to *completely* refute the credibility of the current economic model, which did not enjoy popularity—it *claimed*—‘even in imperialist circles’.<sup>19</sup> It criticised Finance Minister Sergio de Castro, who advertised his country as ‘the best place to invest in South America’, and ordered all limits to be lifted on direct benefits to

<sup>15</sup> ‘Affari Esteri: Cile. Il grande Lager’, *Panorama*, 19 September 1974.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> ‘L’economia cilena in piena crisi. Prezzi alle stelle’, *Avanti!*, 6 October 1974.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Pinochet vive di ossigeno USA’, *Avanti!*, 28 March 1975.

<sup>19</sup> Pierre Rieben, ‘È fallito il “modello economico” dei militari golpisti cileni’, *Avanti!*, 5 April 1977.

foreign capital<sup>20</sup>—a measure reported as ‘disloyal’ to the Andean Pact, to which Chile was a signatory and which bound participants to apply similar conditions on foreign investment.<sup>21</sup>

Likewise, just over a year after the coup, the weekly *L'Espresso* reported dissatisfaction within the country's business community (Carlos Vial, Banca Ipotecaria). It also featured a highly symbolic voice, that of Leo Vilarín, president of the Chilean road hauliers' association, who only a few years earlier had unequivocally sided against President Allende.<sup>22</sup> Vilarín himself would go on to reiterate his opposition to the regime in a late 1978 interview in the communist daily *l'Unità*, by which time more than 30% of Chilean truck drivers were unemployed and Santiago had become unrecognisable through the displacement of entire working-class neighbourhoods to make way for luxury buildings.<sup>23</sup>

The drastic changes in Chile's economic landscape were also described with similar concern by Latin American scholars in Italy. Among them Antonio Annino wrote, in the autumn of 1978:

On the home front the neo-liberal policy of monopoly capital reigns unchallenged, and now seeks to extend its control over the rural sector through a new capitalist redistribution of production factors. For the first time in the history of Chile, the rural sector finds itself subordinate to and enclosed within the financial capital that has developed in the industrial sector.<sup>24</sup>

Much more neutral was the journal *International Relations*, which attributed certain weaknesses in the regime's economic policies to ‘adverse economic conditions’ while also emphasising that ‘the strict economic measures of the liberalists now in power have succeeded in bringing a certain stability to the financial and industrial sectors [...] this news and a

<sup>20</sup> Pino Morabito, ‘Corporativismo a Santiago’, *Avanti!*, 8 July 1977.

<sup>21</sup> Pinochet partner sleale del Patto Andino’, *Avanti!*, 10 October 1976. The Andean Pact is an international cooperation agreement created in 1969 with the aim of establishing a customs union, later replaced in 1997 by the Andean Community and comprising Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Perù and Venezuela.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Una cambiale firmata Pinochet. Fra due settimane il Club di Parigi dovrà decidere se fare ancora credito alla giunta’, *L'Espresso*, XXI, 23 February 1975.

<sup>23</sup> Giorgio Oldrini, ‘Il liberismo puro ha portato alla fame’, *l'Unità*, 4 November 1978.

<sup>24</sup> Antonio Annino, ‘La via cilena al neoliberalismo’, *Il Ponte*, XXXIV, 10 October 1978, p. 1184.

marked improvement in the balance of trade cause the economists to be optimistic'.<sup>25</sup>

Other contradictions were revealed by *L'Espresso* at the end of 1978. The weekly noted the upturn in international macroeconomic indicators but also the price paid by certain sectors of society to achieve them. On the one hand, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was galloping at 7% per annum, inflation had dropped from 400% to 35% in two years and foreign investment was on the rise; but against this, there were dramatic aspects of the 'shock therapy': a drop in industrial production, a fall in real wages of around 69% and a surge in unemployment of over 25%.<sup>26</sup> In conclusion, it spoke of a 'return to a capitalism model of the 1920s: an attempted U-turn against the political, cultural and psychological structures of the last half-century', and it predicted the reverse of what actually happened: that the regime would be short-lived.<sup>27</sup>

During the years of the Carter administration in the United States, several Italian newspapers tended to underestimate the resilience of the Pinochet government and its ability to control dissent, which was not as yet organised across the different political factions. To take but one example, a September 1977 editorial in *L'Europeo* foresaw a short life for *caimán* and *pirañas*, groups of speculators satisfied with the ease of investing 'in a country without strikes'.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly to the daily *Avanti!*, the Italian Communist Party organ *l'Unità* also continually expressed alarm for the Chile of the Chicago Boys. From the very first months after the coup it drew a parallel between physical torture and extreme poverty,<sup>29</sup> made direct reference to the gravity of a crisis comparable only with that of the 1930s<sup>30</sup> and depicted deterioration in the social and psychological conditions of the entire community. Guido Vicario, in particular, recorded a 60% drop in school attendance in December 1977, combined with high levels of delinquency and child prostitution, a direct consequence, in his analysis, of the drastic fall in

<sup>25</sup> 'Il Cile, quattro anni dopo', in *Relazioni Internazionali*, XLI:37, 10 September 1977.

<sup>26</sup> Antonio Gambino, 'Il generale mette un fiore sul chepi', *L'Espresso*, XXIV, 17 December 1978.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Gian Carlo Mazzini, 'Cile, ancora pochi mesi', *L'Europeo*, 30 December 1977.

<sup>29</sup> Alceste Santini, 'Fame e tortura in Cile', *l'Unità*, 30 July 1975.

<sup>30</sup> 'Altamirano ci parla del Cile', *l'Unità*, 29 November 1975.



wages.<sup>31</sup> Vicario also reported the concerns of small and medium-sized industrialists, endorsed by the former president of the Chilean republic Frei and the former president of Confindustria Saez, in the face of capital concentrating in the hands of 'extremely small and minority groups in the entrepreneurial field'.<sup>32</sup> *L'Unità* focused in particular on shrinking domestic industrial output, the collapse of the metalworking sector (which had previously grown under the umbrella of the Andean Pact), as of electrical appliances (swallowed up by Brazilian and American competition) and textiles, swept away by imports from the Far East.<sup>33</sup> Again in the communist-leaning press, Marco Calamai commented in the newspaper *Rinascita* on the dramatic transformation brought about by the outright agricultural counter-reform the country had undergone, as well as changes to the rural labour force following the preference for a few new crops with which to woo the international market, to the detriment of domestic needs.<sup>34</sup>

All in all, the criticisms around 1978–79 (when the measures of the Plan Laboral concerning labour protection legislation and the scope of the trade unions came into effect) presented a sort of interim balance sheet for the first five years of the authoritarian regime.

Six years after the coup, *P'Unità* reported a recurring slogan in the world of labour, 'those who have breath swim, those who have no breath drown', alluding not only to the fierce competition among medium-sized entrepreneurs but also to the action of a state that was far from absent when it came to repressing the salaried workforce.<sup>35</sup> Vicario's analysis of the Chicago Boys finally focuses on the extent to which Chile was part of, even a forerunner in, a transnational trend in which Great Britain patently played a leading role:

The regime's group of 'economic brains' is replacing the kind of entrepreneur who lived on investments, state credits and subsidies, protectionism and price and currency exchange controls by the figure of a 'competitive' entrepreneur, bent on the degree of international efficiency that will grant

<sup>31</sup> Guido Vicario, 'Quando si spense la luce nelle università del Cile', *P'Unità*, 23 December 1977.

<sup>32</sup> Guido Vicario, 'Cile, il prezzo del fascismo', *P'Unità*, 11 September 1976.

<sup>33</sup> Oldrini, 'Il liberismo puro ha portato la fame'.

<sup>34</sup> Marco Calamai, 'Pinochet cerca di consolidare il potere', *Rinascita*, 8 June 1979.

<sup>35</sup> Guido Vicario, 'La palestra dei Chicago Boys', *P'Unità*, 17 July 1979.

him membership of the club of western capitalism. As it were, being invited to Mrs Thatcher's tea party.<sup>36</sup>

There was a clear perception that the Chilean recipe was not just national, or regional, but represented a new global trend, and was indeed its most blatant face.

By the end of the decade denunciation of periodic crises besetting the regime, which tended to prevail in the second half of the 1970s in a number of Italian newspapers, seemed to give way to a longer-term disquiet. As the regime's first distinct successes stabilised, a doubt crept in: might this not bolster consensus at home and abroad? Vicario continued:

The economic strategy of the Pinochet-Chicago Boys alliance is a forceful idea around which active consensus of the bourgeoisie can be constructed and which is perhaps capable of attracting other sectors of society. Economic growth such as that desired by Chile's post-Golpist leaders accentuates social inequality and crises ... However, looking to its potential development, it may represent an important means of international political recognition and internal legitimization, as the examples of South Korea or Brazil demonstrate.<sup>37</sup>

A position that divided those in the field was expressed by *Corriere della Sera*. Alberto Cavallari, at the beginning of 1979, voiced his doubts as to the Chicago neo-liberal model being adopted in Europe too—witness the sceptical reception accorded to the group of 'new French economists'.<sup>38</sup> Cavallari agreed with the objections to Santiago raised by *The New York Times* which pointed out that 'Pinochet's Chile achieved certain successes by trade union repression and unemployment that have never been seen in any other country' where 'the policy followed was to suspend all trade union negotiations and even to make workers choose between resignation and arrest during the restructuring of companies', resulting 'in consolidation of the disparate forces of the Marxist and Christian trade unions in opposition'.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Alberto Cavallari, 'Quando arrivano i "nuovi economisti"', *Corriere della Sera*, 30 January 1979.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

A few weeks later, in the same newspaper, Roberto Gervaso interviewed Milton Friedman, displaying admiration for his intellect and the spread and application of his theories on the international stage. He also wrote that the well-known economist distanced himself entirely from the provocative rumour that he ‘gave advice to Pinochet’; Friedman stated that ‘in Chile he only held lectures, while in Yugoslavia he produced studies for the Central Bank’.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, it was not the first time that Friedman had publicly taken a distance from the military government, as reported, among other sources, by *Chile América*,<sup>41</sup> the best-known Chilean magazine in the world for Chilean exiles, in reference to a series of lectures held in Brazil.

The further we move into the 1980s, the more widespread the declarations of distance, at least officially, from a regime whose image continued progressively to deteriorate on grounds of human rights violation. Quite significant in this regard, and full of contrasts, is a 1982 letter from Margaret Thatcher to the Austrian economist Von Hayek. As a fervent admirer of Pinochet, the Iron Lady on the one hand praised the ‘remarkable successes’ of the Chilean case, from which ‘many lessons’ might be learned; at the same time she added that, although the reform process was ‘painfully slow’, given the consensus required by democracy, British democratic standards made some of the measures adopted by Pinochet ‘unacceptable’.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Roberto Gervaso, ‘Un Adamo Smith per il Ventunesimo secolo’, *Corriere della Sera*, 12 March 1979.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Friedman se lava las manos’, *Chile América*, 28, 1977, 70, Rome, Archivio Storico della Fondazione Basso.

<sup>42</sup> ‘I was aware of the remarkable success in the Chilean economy in reducing the share of government expenditure over the decade of the 1970s. The progression from Allende’s socialism to the free enterprise capitalist economy of 1980s is a striking example from which we can learn many lessons. However, I am sure you will agree that in Britain with our institutions and the need for a high degree of consent, some of the measures adopted in Chile are quite unacceptable. Our reforms must be in line with our traditions and our Constitution. At times the process may seem painfully slow. But I am certain we shall achieve our reforms in our way and in our own time. Then they will endure.’ Letter from Margaret Thatcher to Frederick Von Hayek, 17 February 1982, Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/117179> [accessed January 2023].

### 3 SOLIDARITY INITIATIVES IN ITALIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

Immediately after the coup d'état in Chile, Italian trade unions mobilised their members and used their enormous political and social weight to face the emergency, i.e. the destruction of Chilean democracy and trade unionism which, despite criticism, had a high level of international visibility. United in the CGIL-CISL-UIL federation, the Italian unions mobilised leaders, delegates and militants to deal with the first emergencies.<sup>43</sup>

Alberto Cuevas, a scholar of Chilean trade unionism and long-time promoter of many cooperative initiatives between Italy and Chile, recalls the intervention of the Italian trade unions, which were particularly active in that the political parties left it to them to organise acts of solidarity in face of that brutal emergency. Inside sources, such as those of the Chambers of Labour of the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL), confirm how a clear and early stance was taken in the days of the coup.<sup>44</sup> Action developed on several fronts: (a) commitment to agitate for the release of prisoners, especially trade unionists; (b) undertakings to assist and integrate many refugees into Italian society through provision of group accommodation, recreational activities, vocational and Italian language courses; (c) psychological support and specific clauses in company contracts facilitating the employment of Chilean refugees; (d) a warm welcome in Italy for Chilean trade unionists so that they could continue their representative activities, even from exile.<sup>45</sup>

In other cases, exiled political leaders were welcomed to various arenas of Italian society, both literal and symbolic. Eloquent here are some photos in the Lombardy historical archive of when Communist leader Luis Corvalán visited the Pirelli factory in Milan,<sup>46</sup> of the honorary citizenship

<sup>43</sup> See Alberto Cuevas, Preface in Tarcisio Benedetti, *Alborada. La tipografia della libertà* (Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 2021), <https://www.iscoscisl.eu/2020/12/07/una-storia-nel-cile-della-dittatura-militare/> [accessed January 2023].

<sup>44</sup> Archivio Storico CGIL, '25.08.1973–29.11.1973, Colpo di stato in Cile. Proteste, risoluzioni e ordini del giorno contro il golpe, provenienti da sindacati di categoria, camere del lavoro, assemblee comunali, consigli di fabbrica; press release Ausi'. See also 'Verbali della Segreteria del 19.09.1973', [https://www.cgil.it/la-cgil/la-nostra-storia/archivi/2021/11/22/news/archivio\\_storico\\_della\\_cgil-1660438/](https://www.cgil.it/la-cgil/la-nostra-storia/archivi/2021/11/22/news/archivio_storico_della_cgil-1660438/) [accessed August and September 2022]. Thanks to Ilaria Romeo, CGIL Roma, for the report.

<sup>45</sup> Cuevas, *Alborada*.

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/fotografie/schede/IMM-2w020-0003995> [accessed September 2022].

conferred on him in the town of Parma and the more than 5500 Italian city council meetings in support of a democratic Chile in the first years following the coup.<sup>47</sup>

Between Rome and Bologna, thanks to the joint initiative of CGIL, Italy-Chile, the League of Cooperatives and important Emilian industrial producers (Granarolo and Felsinea Latte), various milk collections were organised in aid of Chilean children, in many cases undernourished despite government rhetoric concocted to mark the UN-proclaimed International Year of the Child (1979).<sup>48</sup> As *Chile América* magazine itself reported, the economic policies of the previous three years had produced a deterioration in the physical and mental health of Chile's children, causing malnutrition, an increase in child prostitution and the spread of venereal diseases.<sup>49</sup> In the same newspaper, Marxist scholars of international standing such as André Gunder Frank had provocatively branded the Chicago Boys' policies as *economic genocide*.<sup>50</sup>

The memoirs of the main Italian trade union leaders of the time highlight a plethora of strikes organised in solidarity with the Chileans against the authoritarian turn of events, an action which *Avanti!* argued for as early as July 1975, including a boycott on copper. Copper was a strategic product for dozens of companies in Italy such as the Italian Metallurgical Society (SMI), whose most important customers included national institutions such as the Italian Railways, Fiat and Enel.<sup>51</sup>

The most significant examples include the boycott of Chilean ships organised by the dock workers of Genoa, as recalled by the leader of the Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions (CISL) Emilio Gabaglio in a long interview on the period of federation among the three main Italian trade unions between 1972 and 1984: CGIL, CISL and UIL (Italian Labour Union).<sup>52</sup> The city of Genoa, among others, witnessed the first joint demonstrations against the regime as early as 24 hours after the

<sup>47</sup> Legislative Assembly of the Emilia-Romagna Region, catalogue *Time of exile. L'Emilia Romagna a fianco del popolo cileno 1973–1988*, Bologna, 2017, 49, 57.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 70 ff.

<sup>49</sup> 'Salud y ambiente de vida del niño chileno bajo la junta militar', *Chile América*, 41–42, 1978, 61–62, AFB.

<sup>50</sup> André Gunder Frank, 'Segunda carta abierta a Milton Friedman y Arnold Harberger: "Genocidio económico en Chile"', *Chile América*, 19–20, 1976, 36, AFB.

<sup>51</sup> P.R., 'Blocked Chilean copper?', *Avanti!*, 19 July 1975.

<sup>52</sup> Emilio Gabaglio, Carlo Ghezzi, Franco Lotito, 'La voce dei protagonisti', in *L'unità possibile. La Federazione Cgil, Cisl, Uil 1972–1984* (Rome: Viella, 2017), 282 ff.

coup;<sup>53</sup> mention of the strikes in support of Chilean workers was also to be found up to ten years later, in 1983 (a year of intense popular unrest also in Santiago)<sup>54</sup> and in 1984.<sup>55</sup>

Other documentary collections, such as the rich Murillo archive kept in the Fondazione Feltrinelli,<sup>56</sup> illustrate how the resonance of the Chilean case in Italy was not limited to the emotional impact produced by the dramatic coup and political emergency of 11 September 1973. Rather, it went beyond that dramatic conjuncture and the political emergency. In 1986 we still find initiatives in support of the working world that had been wrecked by the Plan Laboral: the Education Section of the CGIL in Milan, for instance, organised campaigns to bolster opposition to a system that exclusively financed private, elite schools to the total detriment of public education.<sup>57</sup>

The Catholic response was equally wide-ranging<sup>58</sup> and not just by Catholic trade unions: for example, the regular attention devoted to the Chilean issue in the periodicals *Mondo e Missione* (MEM) and *SIAL* published by the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME). One should note the time frame in question, for the focus on the impact of the neo-liberal model in Chile was kept high not only in the beginnings of the

<sup>53</sup> Fabrizio Loreto, *Il sindacato nella città ferita. Storia della Camera del Lavoro di Genova negli anni sessanta e settanta* (Rome: Ediesse, 2016), 255.

<sup>54</sup> *Per un CILE libero, Piazza De Ferrari, Genova. Manifestazione di solidarietà per un CILE libero e democratico. Interventi di Giulio Derchi per la federazione CGIL CISL UIL di Genova, Manuel Bustos per il Comitato Sindacale CILE costituito presso la federazione*, in Camera del Lavoro di Genova. Fondo manifesti, Inventario (1972–2016), Unità archivistiche, 27 July 1983. Thanks to Giovanna Cereseto and Sebastiano Tringali for archival support.

<sup>55</sup> *Per la libertà e la democrazia nel Cile. FLM Genova, Conferenza stampa con collegamento telefonico con il Comando Nacional de Trabajadores di Santiago del Cile per testimoniare la vicinanza dei lavoratori genovesi ai lavoratori e al popolo cileno colpito dalla dittatura di Pinochet*, in *ibid.*, 28 November 1984.

<sup>56</sup> The fund named after Fernando Murillo Viaña, Chilean journalist and diplomat, donated to the archives of the Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli in Milan, consists of a catalogue of over 200 pages. <https://fondazionefeltrinelli.it/fonti/archivio/> [accessed 30 March 2024].

<sup>57</sup> Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Folder 134, *Exilio 1984*, f. 134.2, 'Exiliados en Italia', *Cile. Insegnanti per la democrazia. Rapporto relativo alle lotte sostenute dai lavoratori dell'Educazione in Cile dal 1973 al 1987, a cura del comitato esuli cileni* Milano.

<sup>58</sup> A broad overview in Massimo de Giuseppe, *L'altra America: i cattolici italiani e l'America Latina. Da Medellin a Francesco* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2017).

authoritarian regime,<sup>59</sup> but also during the democratic transition of the 1990s.<sup>60</sup> This medium-term view should come as no surprise in light of the violent protests which ravaged the country in October 2019, in response to economic inequalities that democratic governments had only partly addressed.

Several Italian scholars have seen Chile in the 1970s and 1980s as a symbolic front breeding synergy and unity among different political and social components,<sup>61</sup> leading them to rise above internal division and discord. The ‘Chilean cause’, starting from the first half of the 1970s, thus intercepted what Giancarlo Monina considered a significant phase of transition from ‘classic internationalism’ to transnational activism, where the arguments of human rights in many respects conjured and reconciled Marxist, Christian, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist values.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Risultati di un’inchiesta Gallup’, *MEM*, 1, 1976, 11; ‘Crisi e malcontento’, *MEM*, 10, 1983, 304; ‘Torni la democrazia!’, *MEM*, 22, 1983, 597.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Modello economic insostenibile’, *SIAL*, 11, 1993, 15; ‘Riconciliazione e sviluppo’, *SIAL*, 84, 1994, 55; ‘La classe operaia va all’inferno’, *SIAL*, 11, 1994, 18; ‘Cile, risparmio a scuola’, *MEM*, 5, 1999, 20.

<sup>61</sup> ‘On Chile, however, the unity of action did not stop. It is a surprising fact, but political and trade union action on the Chilean issue continued to develop in unity, without the rancour and abrasiveness of those years. Chile was a bridge between the strife-torn Italian trade union organisations.’ See Cuevas, *Alborada*.

<sup>62</sup> Giancarlo Monina, *Diritti umani e diritti dei popoli. Il Tribunale Russel II e i regimi militari latinoamericani (1971–76)* (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2020).

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# The Rise of the Energy Question. 16 October 1973. Economy, Birth of an Energy Problem and Consumer Goods Shock

*Marco De Nicolò and Federico Mazzei*

*Translated by Ralph Nisbet*

## I THE YOM KIPPUR WAR AND OIL ‘RETALIATION’

Amid all the economic and political hiccups of the half-decade prior to 1973, the price of crude oil may have nudged upwards at times, but had never caused a western statesman, or a European, Japanese or American citizen to lose sleep.

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The first and third sections were written by Marco De Nicolò, the second by Federico Mazzei.

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It had been other issues—economic, financial, political—that had bothered the foreign offices and treasuries of many western states. August 1971 had seen the end of the Bretton Woods equilibrium, achieved in 1944, a fixed international reference point for over twenty-six years.<sup>1</sup> The international scene had watched the United States struggling to get a grip of her Vietnam involvement; relations between the United States and the countries of Western Europe no longer looked so close-knit; the German Federal government's Eastern policy, the protectionist measures on many US products and the beginning of détente with China were factors affecting the well-worn picture of an already known international face-off which, without altogether altering the surface of things, did vary the intensity of Euro-American relations.<sup>2</sup>

Since 1960 another major player had entered the economic and political arena, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. Behind it were the main producer countries, 'eager to play a bigger role on the international political scene and above all to improve contractual formulae and revenue'.<sup>3</sup> The UN's acknowledgement of each country's sovereignty over its own natural resources lent weight to the demands that the oil supply system be revised. In the Middle East such claims came on top of an already tense situation: the Six Day War of 1967 had soured relations between Arabs and Israelis and made the plight of Palestine desperate. As of the following year a wind of decolonization had blown along the North African and Middle Eastern coast, fed by feelings of national pride and economic revenge, the common factor behind which was the bid to nationalize all or most of the energy sources.<sup>4</sup> The upshot was further geopolitical tension caused by the possibility of new alliances with the two superpowers.<sup>5</sup> At the same time in the Arab world support for the Palestinian cause was mounting.

<sup>1</sup> On the birth of the fixed exchange system, see Benn Steil, *La battaglia di Bretton Woods*, (Rome: Donzelli, 2015); on the malaise of the international monetary system during those years, Robert Mossé, *Les problèmes monétaires internationaux au tournant des années 1970*, (Paris: Payot, 1970).

<sup>2</sup> Claudia Hiepel (ed), *Europe in a Globalising World: Global Challenges and European Responses in the 'long' 1970s*, (Baden Baden: Nomos, 2014). See especially the essay by Giuliano Garavini, 'Western Europe and the Long Energy Crisis of the 1970s', 147–165.

<sup>3</sup> Matteo Pizzigallo, 'Le risorse energetiche dalla stabilità alla crisi petrolifera', in Valerio Castronovo (ed), *Storia dell'economia mondiale*, vol. 5: *La modernizzazione e i problemi del sottosviluppo*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2001), 464.

<sup>4</sup> James L. Gelvin, *Storia del Medio Oriente moderno*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2020), 405.

<sup>5</sup> Guido Formigoni, *Storia della politica internazionale in età contemporanea*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2000), 468–471; Ennio Di Nolfo, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*, vol. 2: *Gli anni della guerra fredda 1946–1990*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2020. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2015), 604–612.

In such a setting there was a strong likelihood of the long-smouldering tension increasing between Israel and the Arab countries that had lost the two wars of 1948 and 1967. Israel's retention of the territory she had occupied in Sinai, West Bank and Golan after the 1967 war blew wind on the coals. New leaders appeared in Syria, Libya and Egypt where President Anwar Sadat posed as the heir to Nasser's national pride. It all fuelled the likelihood of war, which duly broke out during the Jewish feast of Yom Kippur. The aim was not to destroy Israel but to recover the lands lost in 1967. Egypt banked on regaining Sinai or at least a large part of it so as to have a foothold on the other bank of the Suez Canal; Syria under Hafiz al-Assad was bent on taking back the Golan Heights. Behind these targets was a kind of political ambition to scotch the perception of an invincible Israel and gain consensus and popularity on the home front and throughout the Arab area. After alternating threats and deliberate diversions designed to get the western world to seek a negotiated agreement, there came the morning of 6 October 1973<sup>6</sup> when Egypt attacked the Sinai Peninsula and Syria the Golan Heights. The ceasefire reached on 25 October marked victory, by and large, to the Israelis. As soon as war erupted, the Arab representatives of OPEC broke off all the newly launched dialogue over the price per barrel.<sup>7</sup> Negotiations were not resumed: exports would be gradually tapered as long as Israel continued to occupy the land she had seized in the previous conflict.

That unilateral resolution sent crude oil prices rocketing, slashed exports by up to 25% and led thereafter to the decision to put an embargo on many European countries<sup>8</sup> and on the United States as being allies of Israel.<sup>9</sup> Between 16 and 20 October 1973 the governments of Abu Dhabi, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya and Qatar decided to raise the price per barrel by 70% as well as formalizing the embargo versus the United States and countries supporting Israel. In the space of a few days

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad H. Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, (London: Collins, 1975), 15; Benny Morris, *Vittime. Storia del conflitto arabo-sionista 1881–2001*, (Milan: Rizzoli, 2001), 498–499.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 599.

<sup>8</sup> Elisabetta Bini, Giuliano Garavini, Federico Romero, *Oil Shock: The 1973 Crisis and Its Economic Legacy*, (London-New York: Tauris, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> On relations between the Arab countries and the United States, see Giampaolo Valdevit, *Stati Uniti e Medio Oriente dal 1945 a oggi*, (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2003). For the section covering the Yom Kippur war and its consequences, 88–90.

the cost of petroleum soared from \$3 to \$12 a barrel.<sup>10</sup> Nearly half the world was caught up in the event: unexpected, but hardly unpredictable, given the overall picture of political and economic tensions in the area, the gradual weakening of the oil majors in their ability to leverage the price regime and the economic/political ambition smouldering in many an Arab leadership.<sup>11</sup>

Twenty years' steady development had lulled the western and Japanese world into thinking things might go on unchanged; more rational analysis would have suggested a different pattern of events. The 1973 crisis marked the first pause, followed by growth in fits and starts<sup>12</sup> and then recession.<sup>13</sup>

All the productive sectors of western economies, from agriculture to industry, and likewise the service sector and consumer supplies, from transportation to domestic heating, depended massively on petroleum. To quench that thirst it took 55 million barrels a day—the rate of production in 1973—more than half of which came from the Middle East.<sup>14</sup> Western Europe resorted to that energy source to the tune of 70%, Japan entirely so.<sup>15</sup> Italy was one of the countries most heavily exposed to Middle Eastern sources of petroleum.

<sup>10</sup> John M. Blair, *The Control of Oil*, (London: Macmillan, 1976), 261–275; Sonia Shah, *Oro nero. Breve storia del petrolio*, (Milan: Mondadori, 2004), 65; Giuliano Garavini, *The Rise & Fall of Opec in the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). On western countermeasures and boosting production in other countries to offset the Middle East shortfall, 219–220. In December 1980, after a series of ups and downs, the price was fixed at \$32.5 per barrel. Giuliano Procacci, *Storia del XX secolo*, (Milan: Mondadori, 2000), 477.

<sup>11</sup> Giacomo Luciani, *L'Opec nell'economia internazionale*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1976); Francesco Petrini, *Imperi del profitto: multinazionali petrolifere e governi nel XX secolo*, (Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2015), 208; Giovanni Favero, Angela Faloppa, 'Price Regimes, Price Series and Price Trends: Oil Shocks and Counter-Shocks in Historical Perspective', in Duccio Basosi, Giuliano Garavini, Massimiliano Trentin (eds), *Counter-Shock. The Oil Counter-Revolution of the 1980s*, (London-New York: Tauris, 2018), 21–26.

<sup>12</sup> Patrick K. O'Brien, 'Europa e Terzo mondo nell'economia internazionale (1789–1989)', in *Storia d'Europa*, vol. 5: *L'età contemporanea. Secoli XIX–XX*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), 1340.

<sup>13</sup> Franco Amatori, Andrea Colli (eds), *Il mondo globale. Una storia economica*, (Turin: Giappichelli, 2017), 226–230.

<sup>14</sup> Energy Information Administration, 'Annual Energy Review', 2001, US Department of Energy, Washington, DC, November 2022, table 11.5, 287.

<sup>15</sup> Steven Schneider, *The Oil Price Revolution*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1983).

## 2 ITALIAN POLITICS AND INSTITUTIONS UNDER THE PETROLEUM SHOCK

Facing the consequences of the oil shock was the fourth Rumor government that formed on 8 July 1973. The four-party centre-left majority (DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI) was back in power, but things had changed: 'emergency' measures had been taken to curb inflation. The oil crisis burst upon that government at the end of its first 'hundred days' during which clamp-down by the 'troika' of Economics Ministers (Republican Ugo La Malfa at the Treasury, Socialist Antonio Giolitti for Budget & Planning, Christian Democrat Emilio Colombo at the Ministry of Finance) had brought a partial revaluation of the lira (from 20% to 10%) and halted the inflationary spiral by a three-month freeze on consumer prices (scheduled until 31 October). Just as the government was poised to begin Round Two of stabilization—no longer emergency but structural—its economic policy was put to the test by a new wave of inflation: the price hike on petroleum products worsened the already negative balance of payments and threatened a public deficit of 750 billion (equal to 0.7% of GDP).<sup>16</sup>

The political debate over the consequences of the oil shock thus combined with the search for government solutions to contain the twofold crisis—inflation and recession, the novel phenomenon of 'stagflation'. News of measures being tried in other industrialized countries brought home the realization that this was worldwide crisis. This comparative perception, stoked by the Italian press coverage, heightened the public awareness of looming emergency.<sup>17</sup> It emerged that all the countries exposed to the 'sheiks' blackmail' (Holland reeling from the total embargo caused by her pro-Israeli stance,<sup>18</sup> and even the United States, though not dependent on Arab oil)<sup>19</sup> were clamping down with drastic rationing of public and private energy consumption, acts of 'dirigisme' like state limitation on vehicle and domestic heating fuel, banning Sunday road traffic, curbing industrial supply rates, shortening working hours and shop opening

<sup>16</sup> Ugo Indrio, 'Due ministri due pesi e due misure', *Corriere della Sera*, 4 November 1973.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, 'Speciale emergenza' published in the Sunday edition of the Roman daily *Paese Sera*, 2 December 1973.

<sup>18</sup> Arturo Guatelli, 'L'appello dell'Olanda rimane senza risposta', *Corriere della Sera*, 6 November 1973.

<sup>19</sup> Dino Frescobaldi, 'Un freno in America ai consumi di petrolio', *Corriere della Sera*, 4 November 1973.

times.<sup>20</sup> Across the continent the 'petroleum war' waged by OPEC showed up the lack of unity in the European Community of Nine; its inability to find any real 'exit strategy' from energy dependence on the producer countries. Various European partners (France to the fore) even sought to ease the oil ban by yielding to Arab demands in the Middle East war.<sup>21</sup>

In this international setting Italy was the last western country to introduce austerity regulations in response to the oil crisis. The wait-and-see Rumor government began by putting medium-term energy supply action on hold. All it did was set up an Interministerial Committee for Economic Planning (CIPE) under the Socialist undersecretary for industry Stefano Servadei, whose task was to draw up a 'petroleum plan' designed to restore 'responsible supply behaviour [...] among the public sector'.<sup>22</sup> On the day the Committee convened, 8 November, Minister Giolitti tasked it with preparing for the oil earthquake that would hit the Italian economy when, well after the immediate emergency, it was forced to adjust 'from a situation of plentiful cheap energy to one of sky-high prices and by no means automatic supply mechanisms'.<sup>23</sup> It was thus not failure to grasp the radical nature of the shock that caused the government to dither over the most urgently awaited short-term measures to control energy prices and consumption.<sup>24</sup> Even the daily press, which had promptly swung in favour of 'austerity',<sup>25</sup> put the delay down to deliberate prudence on the part of the government: pinning its faith, seemingly, on an optimistic 'theory of [Arab] goodwill' towards a 'neutral' country like Italy which was not rated an 'enemy' or target for oil embargo;<sup>26</sup> and at the same time consciously

<sup>20</sup> Cf. 'Petrolio: l'Occidente corre ai ripari', *Corriere della Sera*, 11 November 1973; Luca Lauriola, 'I Paesi industriali reagiscono alla crisi dei prodotti petroliferi', *Il Popolo*, 21 November 1973; 'Dure restrizioni nei Paesi dell'Est', *ibid.*, 25 November 1973; P.F., 'Misure nel mondo per combattere la crisi', *ibid.*, 25 November 1973.

<sup>21</sup> Alfredo Pieroni, 'Il dilemma per l'Europa', *Corriere della Sera*, 8 November 1973; Arturo Guatelli, 'Consensi e critiche alla scelta dei Nove', *ibid.*, 8 November 1973.

<sup>22</sup> Giuseppe B.[ellucci], 'Benzina e gasolio: il freno ai consumi non sarà drastico', *Il Popolo*, 9 November 1973.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Demetrio De Stefano, 'La sete di petrolio divide l'Europa. L'Italia non ha ancora preparato un piano', *Corriere della Sera*, 6 November 1973; Giuseppe B.[ellucci], 'Prezzi e contenimento di consumi petroliferi', *Il Popolo*, 7 November 1973.

<sup>25</sup> 'Chiediamo austerità', *Corriere della Sera*, 18 November 1973.

<sup>26</sup> 'Per benzina e gasolio fumata nera', *ibid.*, 11 November 1973.

playing for time in order to 'sensitise and prepare public opinion' on the home front.<sup>27</sup>

But there were other reasons for dilatoriness: disagreement had broken out again in the government majority as to how the energy emergency should be handled.<sup>28</sup> The first to speak out was Minister La Malfa: soaring prices and lack of oil-based products, he feared, would be such as to cripple the development mechanisms of advanced industrial countries and the consumer welfare on which democratic consensus rested.<sup>29</sup> An alarmist diagnosis that continued to justify his call for deflationary austerity: shock therapy in response to a shock from outside which, in Italy's case, might worsen the inflationary trend of domestic demand, financed by current spending.<sup>30</sup> The priority, La Malfa insisted, must be to reduce 'superfluous' consumption. This he assessed as 1350 billion lire, corresponding to the gap between national income consumed (80,278 billion) and income produced (81,268 billion) by a country continuing to live 'beyond its means'.<sup>31</sup> Support for this restrictive policy came from DC secretary Amintore Fanfani who claimed that curbing consumption had become necessary 'owing to the acceleration affecting globalization processes in world business'.<sup>32</sup> At the same time he sincerely hoped—launching the new slogan 'austerity for progress'—'that this should not rebound on the

<sup>27</sup> Gino Palumbo, 'Parlare subito e con chiarezza', *Corriere d'informazione*, 12 November 1973.

<sup>28</sup> For the Italian case in context, cf. Giuliano Amato, 'Il gran problema del petrolio', in *La congiuntura più lunga. Materiali per una analisi della politica economica italiana 1972–1974*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 1974), 292–320; Amato argues that the Italian political class stopped trying to curb at root level the factors affecting soaring oil prices and went over to espousing 'as the final solution a new development model which, punning apart, seem[ed] to hinge on consuming less energy' (302).

<sup>29</sup> Gianfranco Piazzesi, 'La Malfa dà l'allarme: siamo ai limiti di rottura', *Corriere della Sera*, 8 November 1973.

<sup>30</sup> La Malfa's next report (his last as Republican secretary) was entirely devoted to analysing the oil crisis; it was delivered to the XXXI National Conference of the PRI, held at Genoa on 27 February–2 March 1975: Ugo La Malfa, *Una prospettiva alle energie del Paese*, in Ugo La Malfa, *L'altra Italia. Documenti su un decennio di politica italiana 1965–1975*, Preface by Rosario Romeo, (Milan: Mondadori, 1975), 227–286.

<sup>31</sup> Piazzesi, 'La Malfa dà l'allarme: siamo ai limiti di rottura'; Cesare Zappulli, 'Viviamo al di sopra dei nostri mezzi', *Corriere della Sera*, 21 November 1973.

<sup>32</sup> 'Italia ed Europa di fronte al momento politico-economico', *Corriere della Sera*, 6 December 1973.

rate of production or bring about a lull in the country's economic recovery'.<sup>33</sup>

Opposition to La Malfa within the ranks of the majority came from the socialist faction: the priority, they argued, should be for new public investments to combat recession.<sup>34</sup> The clash between La Malfa at the Treasury and Giolitti at Budget & Planning emerged at the government summit on 14 November (at which both handed Prime Minister Rumor their economic reports)<sup>35</sup> and again in their 20 November speeches to the Senate at the end of its general debate on the budget. La Malfa acknowledged that curbing energy consumption would affect the production potential ('albeit relatively'), but insisted that compensatory expansion measures should be ruled out: the ceiling of 7300 billion fixed for the deficit must not be exceeded, he urged. Against this, Giolitti suggested priority go to 'other forms of intervention than simple containment of the monetary basis' imposed by 'stringent' external constraints; the target he proposed was a 6% increase in the national income, arguing that the real waste was not 'undue and superfluous consumption' but 'resources not being used, lack of investments, reforms shelved'.<sup>36</sup> At the end of that Senate debate differences were provisionally patched up when the agenda for 21 November approved by the parliamentary majority groups (with only the Communists abstaining) called on the government urgently to put forward a draft bill authorizing—for the 1974 and 1975 financial years—a 2% reduction in current spending to be redeployed as financial coverage for 'a special fund for operations in the South'.<sup>37</sup>

The Rumor government got round the disagreements over economic policy, and at the Council of Ministers on 22 November approved the 'austerity code' which came into force without going through Parliament

<sup>33</sup> 'Austerità per il progresso', *Il Popolo*, 17 November 1973.

<sup>34</sup> According to Minister Giolitti, one needed to 'make a virtue of necessity' and 'from the necessary emergency measures deduce and flesh out a plan of reform proceeding from limiting private vehicle use to augmenting public transport services': 'Aumenta il gasolio. Benzina a 200 lire', *Avanti!*, 23 November 1973. Similarly 'Le misure restrittive devono essere accompagnate da un profondo impegno di rinnovamento', *ibid.*, 24 November 1973.

<sup>35</sup> Antonio Pa.[dellaro], 'Oggi vertice economico. Documento di La Malfa a Rumor', *Corriere della Sera*, 15 November 1973.

<sup>36</sup> *Atti Parlamentari, Senato della Repubblica, VI legislatura, 218ª seduta pubblica, resoconto stenografico, seduta pomeridiana del 20 novembre 1973*, pp. 10752–10759 speech by Giolitti; pp. 10759–10765 speech by La Malfa. For a summary of the debate, cf. Rosario Manfredotto, 'La "troika" parla al Senato', *Corriere della Sera*, 21 November 1973.

<sup>37</sup> 'Il Senato dice al governo ridurre le spese correnti', *La Stampa*, 22 November 1973.



by Law n. 304. The measures introduced in Italy what many countries had decided under the shock of the oil crisis: a ban on private car use on Sundays and holidays, early closing for shops, public offices, halls of entertainment and even television broadcasting, lower electricity supply overnight and a 4% cut in municipal street lighting.<sup>38</sup> The restrictions severely affected private fuel consumption, but ensured that industrial production was maintained, exempt from the ties of energy austerity.<sup>39</sup> Prime Minister Rumor backed up the new policy with a television appearance in which he warned the public that the ‘age of plentiful cheap energy’ had ended and called for ‘a serious rethinking of economic development, lifestyles, and the priority of investing’.<sup>40</sup> The measures met with journalistic approval, not just for their economic impact, but for the psychological message of rigour from the top.<sup>41</sup> Enforcement of them would encourage the public to make an ‘effort of self-sacrifice’ and in general adjust their lifestyle to the prospect of a drastic suspension of economic progress.<sup>42</sup>

The very structural level of the oil crisis upon which the government decree was justified<sup>43</sup> did tend to make such emergency austerity restrictions look inadequate. The communist opposition above all came out in criticism: the energy shock only confirmed how unsustainable the capitalist model was;<sup>44</sup> the Communists rejected ‘false austerity’ with its attempt to cushion the consequences by a generalized curtailment of mass consumerism.<sup>45</sup> The PCI answer to the worldwide economic crisis was to advocate ‘structural reforms’ designed to create a demand for goods and social services ‘replacing’ the individualistic demand which should be sacrificed to

<sup>38</sup> ‘In sedici punti il “codice dell’austerità”’, *Corriere della Sera*, 23 November 1973; Giulio Mazzocchi, ‘Tutte le misure’, *La Stampa*, 23 November 1973.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Guido Formigoni, *Storia d’Italia nella guerra fredda (1943–1978)*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2016), 444.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Ognuno impegnato a fare la sua parte’, *Il Popolo*, 24 November 1973.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Gianfranco Piazzesi, ‘Sacrifici inevitabili’, *Corriere della Sera*, 23 November 1973. In the DC daily, cf. Giuseppe Bellucci, ‘Una scelta obbligata’, *Il Popolo*, 23 November 1973; Nicola Guiso, ‘Sì ai provvedimenti perché indispensabili’, *ibid.*, 25 November 1973.

<sup>42</sup> Giuseppe B.ellucci], ‘La “crisi petrolifera” imporrà rettifiche alle nostre abitudini’, *Il Popolo*, 7 November 1973; Giulio Nascimbeni, ‘Cambia la nostra vita’, *ibid.*, 23 November 1973; Francesco Alberoni, ‘Austerità e sacrificio’, in *ibid.*, 23 November 1973.

<sup>43</sup> Marcello Gilmozzi, ‘Prospettive difficili’, *Il Popolo*, 28 November 1973.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Ferma critica dei comunisti ai decreti sull’energia’, *l’Unità*, 24 November 1973; l. pa. [Luca Pavolini], ‘Modello in crisi’, *ibid.*, 27 November 1973; Gian Carlo Pajetta, ‘Intervenire in crisi’, *ibid.*, 8 November 1973.

<sup>45</sup> Luciano Barca, ‘La falsa austerità’, *l’Unità*, 25 November 1973.

the 'just requirements of control and intervention'.<sup>46</sup> The call to reboot communal forms of consumption was picked up by Luciano Barca<sup>47</sup> in *Corriere della Sera* and met with some support among the governing majority, which exacerbated the divisions in it. The PSI came under particular fire for giving way to La Malfa's rigorism. For that very reason it was decided to go a separate way, following the lead of party secretary Francesco De Martino who backed Minister Giolitti's proposed 'reforms' by way of a social counterpart to private rationing.<sup>48</sup> The socialist call to expand public spending heavily on investments was meant to allay widespread fear (voiced among others by the union confederations) of a recessive backlash triggered by the 'oil austerity' recipe,<sup>49</sup> which threatened to repeat the 1963 precedent of restrictive stabilization.<sup>50</sup> A similar line was taken by the Christian Democrat left-wing under Giovanni Marcora who, against Fanfani's pro-austerity arguments, insisted on the need for 'a pro-productivity policy' serving 'to overcome the imbalance between sectors and parts of the country, as well as to give broader resonance to social consumption'.<sup>51</sup> In the same area of the majority party Giovanni Galloni likewise admitted that 'sacrifices in terms of lowering consumption' could only be expected 'if structural reforms were urgently set in motion'.<sup>52</sup>

The criticisms encountered by austerity made it necessary for a new government policy agreement to be negotiated. This was undersigned on 12 December at the 'summit' of the four majority parties which pledged

<sup>46</sup> 'Iniziativa e lotta nel Parlamento e nel Paese per modificare le gravi misure sui carburanti', *l'Unità*, 24 November 1973. Concerning this PCI line, cf. Francesco Barbagallo, *Enrico Berlinguer*, (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2006), 192–195.

<sup>47</sup> Massimo Riva, 'Barca: critiche e proposte dei comunisti', *Corriere della Sera*, 13 December 1973.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. 'Le misure restrittive devono essere accompagnate da un profondo impegno di rinnovamento', *Avanti!*, 24 November 1973; Gianfranco Piazzesi, 'La nuova linea del PSI', *Corriere della Sera*, 29 November 1973; Michele Giannotta, 'Avviare il Paese a prospettive nuove', *Avanti!*, 2 December 1973.

<sup>49</sup> Massimo Riva, 'La contrazione dei consumi frenerà la ripresa economica?', *Corriere della Sera*, 24 November 1973; Demetrio De Stefano, 'I sindacati ritengono che l'austerità blocchi la ripresa economica del paese', *ibid.*, 29 November 1973.

<sup>50</sup> Nino Andreatta, 'Non ripetere l'errore del '63', *Corriere della Sera*, 2 November 1973.

<sup>51</sup> Giovanni Marcora, 'Consumi petroliferi e sviluppo economico', *Il Popolo*, 22 November 1973. Cf. also Giuseppe Bellucci, 'L'aumento dei consumi sociali scelta di fondo per l'economia', *ibid.*, 12 December 1973.

<sup>52</sup> Franco Amadini, 'Un attento esame della situazione', *Il Popolo*, 6 November 1973.

to temper the price control regime<sup>53</sup> by new ‘upgrade’ measures in public spending towards boosting productivity and increasing social investments.<sup>54</sup> Yet not even the subsequent accord managed to quell the disagreements, the result of which was to prevent the oil shock from being tackled by structural reforms to economic policy. The final blow to such hopes came in February 1974 when La Malfa resigned after a new clash with Giolitti over the macro-economic conditions for the latter’s deal of a loan from the IMF.<sup>55</sup> Austerity thus marked the end of the road for the Republican leader’s ministerial career: he had opted to shield behind the ‘external constraint’ argument in order to push through an ‘emergency’ line over the heads of the centre-left majority<sup>56</sup>—vital, he maintained, to avert an ‘economic Caporetto’.<sup>57</sup> The austerity decree restrictions remained in force until June 1974, but failed to stem the decline in economic parameters (from deficit spending to inflation running at over 20%). So much was admitted by President Rumor when he presented his 5th and last government to Parliament in July 1974.

### 3 ECONOMY, SOCIETY AND PUBLIC OPINION UP AGAINST THE OIL CRISIS

For Italy, too, 1973 was a watershed year. The country had reached the top of a long haul catching up with the other advanced economies. The year 1972 had still registered a growth rate of 3.2% and 6.3% in 1973.

<sup>53</sup> See La Malfa’s defence of this in the press taking up cudgels both with his socialist allies and with his communist adversaries: Ugo La Malfa, ‘Nodi al pettine’, *La Voce repubblicana*, 4 December 1973, now in Ugo La Malfa, *La Caporetto economica*, Introduction by Giovanni Spadolini, (Milan: Rizzoli, 1974), 123–126; Ugo La Malfa, ‘Il meccanismo di sviluppo e la sua modifica’, *La Voce repubblicana*, 6 December 1973 (La Malfa, *La Caporetto economica*, 127–129); Ugo La Malfa, ‘Un diverso modello o un pugno di mosche?’, *La Voce repubblicana*, 9 December 1973 (La Malfa, *La Caporetto economica*, 130–132); Ugo La Malfa, ‘Non è un problema di mediazione’, *La Voce repubblicana*, 11 December 1973 (La Malfa, *La Caporetto economica*, 133–134).

<sup>54</sup> Gianfranco Piazzesi, ‘Verso la politica dei redditi’, *Corriere della Sera*, 13 December 1973; Luigi Bianchi, ‘Dal “vertice” un centro-sinistra più solido’, *ibid.*, 13 December 1973; C. R., ‘Le riforme non hanno alternative’, *Avanti!*, 13 December 1973. But see the communist press for Luciano Barca’s contrary view, ‘Il “vertice”’, *l’Unità*, 13 December 1973.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Adolfo Battaglia, *Né un soldo, né un voto. Memorie e riflessioni dell’Italia laica*, Preface by Stefano Folli, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2015), 181–182, 185–187.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Piero Craveri, *La Repubblica dal 1958 al 1992*, (Turin: UTET, 1995), 537–538.

<sup>57</sup> La Malfa, *La Caporetto economica*.

Over two years Italian growth might be as much as 6% more than the average of other EEC countries, 'partly as a result of a particularly expansive economic policy (monetary and budgetary) in 1972'.<sup>58</sup> As a result of that upward trend, together with an average increase in income, there was less of a gap between the social classes, the poverty level had fallen and social reforms had been introduced that would later in the decade bolster other benchmarks of welfare, such as education and health. But for all these flattering data, the 1970s and 1980s seem fraught with incipient signs of the decline and subsequent crisis of the ensuing twenty years, both in economic terms—with the permanent imbalance in public accounts, a hardening North-South divide and loss of productive potential among the most advanced industrial sectors—and in terms of the entire ruling class's ability to steer the processes of development.<sup>59</sup> The coinciding of the fixed exchange system ending and the onset of the oil crisis clove a great deficit in the balance of payments. The reaction, says Vera Zamagni, was 'a complete abandoning of the "virtuous" behaviour previously adhered to where inflation was concerned; the new mentality was to let the exchange rate slide and enlarge public spending, heavily financing the deficit'.<sup>60</sup> Italy's decision to devalue, unlike other European countries, so as to boost exports did have a good effect on exchanges with abroad, but generated a pronounced inflationary spiral. The subsequent much-needed fiscal and monetary restrictions undertaken in 1974 failed to halt inflation, which soared from 6.8% to 17.5% in the period 1970–1975, while the public debt grew to 60.3% of GDP.<sup>61</sup> The acme of the crisis lasted one year, but the effects due to recession, debt and drastic cutting of emergency reserves brought about an urgent need to reduce imports as of 1976.<sup>62</sup> Other data confirming the state of crisis manifested with stagnation in productivity, a

<sup>58</sup> Luigi Federico Signorini, Ignazio Visco, *L'economia italiana*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 1997), 59.

<sup>59</sup> Emanuele Felice, *Ascesa e declino. Storia economica d'Italia*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2015), 283–285.

<sup>60</sup> Vera Negri Zamagni, 'I mutamenti dell'economia internazionale e l'Italia', in Agostino Giovagnoli, Silvio Pons (eds), *L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni settanta*, vol. 1: *Tra guerra fredda e distensione*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003), 234.

<sup>61</sup> Giovanni Balcet, *L'economia italiana. Evoluzioni, problemi e paradossi*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1977), 65–69.

<sup>62</sup> Napoleone Colajanni, *L'economia italiana dal dopoguerra a oggi*, (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 1990), 234–235.

14.4% industrial contraction as early as 1974<sup>63</sup> and a gradual increase in prices from 13% to 35% recorded that same year.<sup>64</sup> To make the bleak picture of those years even worse, there was a slump in investments and a decline in the overall national income as well as the gross domestic product which went negative for the first time since 1945,<sup>65</sup> not to mention the unemployment rate which rose to 5.9%.<sup>66</sup> Castronovo relates that in ten years, from 1964 to 1974, while the population rose by 4 million, 2 million jobs were lost; those in gainful employment dropped from 20.5 million to 18.5 million.<sup>67</sup>

The oil shock was not the only reason for this sombre scenario; but, given the large Italian dependency on supplies from the Middle East, it was the spark that set off a chain reaction in the minefield areas of the Italian economy.

The first effect to hit the Italian people was an almost inevitable increase in the tax on petrol and soaring tariffs in certain consumer areas.<sup>68</sup>

The pressure on the petroleum-induced price rise would cause the demand for vehicles to contract, dragging down car manufacturing and spin-off products which had hitherto been ‘the chief piston of the industrial system’.<sup>69</sup> So the oil crisis was the prime factor bearing on a technologically backward industry that was anyway showing its limits.

The first measures passed by the government in November 1973 to cope with the shortfall in available energy were largely insufficient.

<sup>63</sup> Albert Carreras, ‘Un ritratto quantitativo dell’industria italiana’, *Storia d’Italia. Annali*, vol. 15: *L’industria*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), table 1, 192.

<sup>64</sup> Paolo Frascani, *Le crisi economiche in Italia. Dall’Ottocento a oggi*, (Milan: RCS Media Group, 2019. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2012), 174.

<sup>65</sup> Guido Crainz, *Il Paese mancato. Dal miracolo economico agli anni ottanta*, (Rome, Donzelli, 2005. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2003), 438–439. On the beginning and duration of inflation, see Michele Salvati, *Alle origini dell’inflazione italiana*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 1980); on the recession and GDP figures Colajanni, *L’economia italiana*, 234, and Giovanni Bruno, ‘Le imprese industriali nel processo di sviluppo’, *Storia dell’Italia repubblicana*, vol. 2, t. I: *La trasformazione dell’Italia: sviluppo e squilibri. Politica. Economia. Società*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1994), 415.

<sup>66</sup> Balcet, *L’economia italiana*, 68–69. Unemployment hit first the building sector, then textiles, metalworkers and the chemical sector. Sergio Turone, *Storia del sindacato in Italia dal 1943 ad oggi*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1984), 487–488.

<sup>67</sup> Valerio Castronovo, ‘Economia e classi sociali’, in Valerio Castronovo (ed), *L’Italia contemporanea 1945–1975*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), 47.

<sup>68</sup> Felice, *Ascesa e declino*, 285.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 365.

The effect of the crisis was a reshuffle in the productive system as small and medium businesses gradually gained importance. The press later came to herald this transformation of Italian manufacturing. The slogan ‘small is good’<sup>70</sup> seemed to confirm the new business trend as a fact and quickly caught on. But right though it was to praise small and medium firms for their skill in navigating in a more and more complex market, the tapering potential of large industry was being concealed. The phenomenon was anyway cushioned by Italian exports being helped by the exchange rate favouring foreign buyers. The central and north-eastern regions especially witnessed the process of artisans gradually turning into small companies.<sup>71</sup>

The austerity measures set back the average Italian’s standard of living: the law banning use of private motor vehicles over the weekend, on which days fuel stations were closed—leaving the options of public transport or the bicycle—came as a brusque muzzling of the sense of freedom brought by mass motorization. The car was by now a symbol of welfare that had come to stay, a kind of collective social conquest. Private mobility had advanced impressively: in 1960 there were 4 cars per 100 inhabitants, in 1965 it was already 10.6, in 1970 19, while by 1975 the figure had risen to 26.9 vehicles per 100 inhabitants. In Western Europe that 1975 figure was second only to Germany (29.4) and France (29.3).<sup>72</sup> In the growing consumerism linked to leisure time the motorcar was a must. The car industry was a marker of productivity spurring other fields like raw materials, road networks, fuel supply networks and services such as sales, spare parts and repair workshops.<sup>73</sup> So deep was the conditioning that, only a month or so after the ban was lifted, the whole country was back ‘living on four wheels’.<sup>74</sup>

From April 1974 on, the decision was taken to halve the vehicles in circulation by an alternate number-plate rule (one weekend for even number-plates, the next for odd). Families were apparently being given back at least half of what they had lost. Some families had more than one

<sup>70</sup>The expression was echoed by Ernst F. Schumacher’s book, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*, (London: Blond & Briggs, 1973).

<sup>71</sup>Valerio Castronovo, *Storia economica d’Italia dall’Ottocento ai giorni nostri*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), 374–375.

<sup>72</sup>Victor Scardigli, *La consommation, culture du quotidien*, (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1983).

<sup>73</sup>Giuseppe Maione, ‘L’economia internazionale negli anni Settanta: la transizione verso un nuovo sistema’, in Giovagnoli, Pons (eds), *L’Italia repubblicana nella crisi*, 175.

<sup>74</sup>Turone, *Storia del sindacato*, 485.

car, of course, and with a bit of luck they might not both be ‘odd’ or ‘even’, so that family members could easily get round the ban. Naturally none of this solved the basic production issue—the number of new cars registered fell sharply—nor did it properly limit the consumption of hydrocarbons. Again, neither did reducing heating in private homes achieve as much as the government hoped, despite a press campaign plugging thermostats to regulate temperature and urging people to cut down the heating period during the daytime. But anyway the price of diesel had gone up, so thrift was the watchword in the winters of 1973–1974 and 1974–1975.<sup>75</sup>

Other measures again worsened the quality of life. Closing shops at 7 pm, turning off signs and shop window lighting and saving on public street lighting sounded like an invitation to hurry home early. The TV news was set forward to 8 pm, television broadcasting stopped at 10.45, cinemas closed at 11: it made the day end earlier. Things were only slightly better for those dining out or going to the bar: the shutters had to come down by midnight.<sup>76</sup> In turn, work in public offices changed quite noticeably with the introduction of standardized working hours.

It was a distinct setback in terms of daily living, like a warning that things might be changing permanently. For the first time in years the possibility of unlimited consumption was queried, when ever since the 1950s it had been seen as a middle-class option. Increasing the demand for goods had given more of the population a higher standard of living: everyone could own electric appliances, vehicles and their own television which for years had been a collective article of consumption (tending to be watched in bars, as in the Alberto Sordi movie *Il vigile*). Increased production and growing demand had greatly boosted consumerism.

The Italian public were now bombarded with alternating messages from the media: first alarmism about restrictions, closely followed by reassurances. People seemed at the mercy of events and decisions outside their control. Even government decisions were caught up in the general hawking, now giving in to price increases, now reassuring people they would remain stable and then appealing to the public to be responsible and cut

<sup>75</sup>Vittorio Ianari, ‘L’Italia e il Medio Oriente: dal “neoatlantismo” al peace-keeping’, in Giovagnoli, Pons (eds), *L’Italia repubblicana nella crisi*, 393.

<sup>76</sup>Crainz, *Il Paese mancato*, 439–440.

down consumption.<sup>77</sup> There began to be newspaper columns giving practical advice on how to save energy in home life,<sup>78</sup> a small but clear sign of the need to go back to sobriety.

Petroleum had hitherto been a 'silent' commodity. A great majority of Italians were unaware of the route by which crude oil extracted in distant lands arrived in the form of petrol. But many even of the ruling class had not thought about the issue since Mattei died; they too assumed it would go on growing for ever.<sup>79</sup> The supply of such an everyday commodity was taken for granted.

The Italians thus came to realize a link being projected between the small world they lived in and the global dimension in which they were embedded. Even those who did not frequent union or political branch headquarters and were unversed in elementary economics underwent a steep, if rudimentary, learning curve, grappling with the phenomenon of inflation. They learnt new words. In journalistic jargon two terms kept cropping up. One, widely employed, seemed clear at once in the sense of curbing consumption: austerity, an English term shared by public opinion Europe-wide. The other was reserved for those at home with some notions of economics: stagflation; that is to say, the fatal combination of a marked inflationary trend and economic/productive stagnation, high interest rates and a high unemployment index.<sup>80</sup>

The 1973 shock had made it quite clear that the scope for expanding the economy was limited; it buried long-term planning for ever.

<sup>77</sup> Giuseppe Selvaggi, 'Nuovo aumento per la benzina', *Il Messaggero*, 24 October 1973; 'L'aumento della benzina non è necessario. Gasolio con il contagocce', *ibid.*, 25 October 1973; Giuseppe Selvaggi, 'Per evitare un nuovo rincaro', *ibid.*, containing government assurances that fuel prices would be maintained. 'Un romano su due resterà senza riscaldamento', *ibid.*, 30 October 1973; Giuseppe Selvaggi, 'Benzina e gasolio: confermati gli aumenti', *ibid.*, 31 October 1973; 'Gasolio e benzina: nessun razionamento. Il governo tranquillizza il Paese', *ibid.*, 9 November 1973; 'Razionamento sì o no? Per ora verrà a mancare il gasolio', *ibid.*, 13 November 1973. See *Corriere della Sera* and *Il Messaggero* on 24 November 1973 for government recommendations that people consume 'responsibly'.

<sup>78</sup> After the alarming press release by the petroleum distributor president, summarized by *Il Messaggero* on 8 November in the article 'Ai primi freddi termosifoni spenti', there followed some small sections giving practical tips: 'Temperatura', 'Orario', 'Bruciatore', 'Termosifoni', 'Sprechi', 'Spifferi'.

<sup>79</sup> Underestimation of the possibility of unchecked growth was stigmatized by Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, *Energy and Economics Myth: Institutional and Analytical Economic Essays*, (London: Pergamon, 1976).

<sup>80</sup> Robert Gilpin, 'I mutamenti economici degli anni Settanta e le loro conseguenze', in Giovagnoli, Pons (eds), *L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi*, 160.



Internationalization of trade had tightened the knot binding political to economic issues. One of the questions that would remain in public debate and appears unsolved even today concerns a planet with finite resources faced with the delusion of limitless development and hence unlimited consumption.

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# Schmidt Becomes Chancellor of West Germany. 6 May 1974. The Changes in German Politics as Seen from Italy: Reactions and Debates

*Jacopo Perazzoli*

*Translated by Mariangela Palazzi-Williams*

## 1 'WILLY BRANDT? AN ORANGE SQUEEZED DRY'

Between the 1960s and 1970s, 'politically, Germany [was] becoming more and more interesting'.<sup>1</sup> The attention that Italy had been paying to Germany since the immediate post-war period<sup>2</sup> was not solely attributable to economic and industrial causes, important though these were. In 1969, after a long series of governments led by the Christian Democrats and an

<sup>1</sup> Letter by Vittorio Brunelli, West Germany correspondent of *Corriere della Sera*, to N. Galli, Bonn, 3 December 1969, f. FV422, (Milan: Fondazione Corriere della Sera).

<sup>2</sup> See Filippo Triola, *L'alleato naturale. I rapporti tra Italia e Germania occidentale dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale (1945-1955)*, (Florence: Le Monnier, 2017).

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interregnum of the *Große Koalition* (a grand coalition between the Christian Democratic Union, CDU; the Christian Social Union, CSU; and the Social Democratic Party of Germany, SPD), Willy Brandt had taken office as Chancellor at the head of a coalition comprised of the SPD and the Liberal Party (Free Democratic Party, FDP).

Less than five years after taking office, on 6 May 1974 Brandt had to stand down. It was a choice that came about because, in the meantime, the 'Guillaume affair' had blown up. A member of the Chancellor's staff, namely Gunther Guillaume, had been arrested on 25 April when his real identity as a secret agent of the German Democratic Republic (DDR) was discovered.<sup>3</sup> On 16 May, ten days after Brandt had quit the political stage, the majority made up of Social Democrats and Liberals elected Helmut Schmidt as the new head of government.

True, Brandt did resign because of the fall-out from his former colleague's arrest, but that was not the only reason. Between 1973 and 1974, even in stable West Germany, the repercussions of the 'shock of the global' were making themselves felt, for example, through the loss of a million jobs. Brandt had already been in difficulty in 1973 because of ever-increasing disagreements with Schmidt, the then Finance Minister, over spending cuts. He had also fallen out with Herbert Wehner, Group Leader in the *Bundestag*, about pursuing rapprochement with East Germany. Brandt's position was further weakened following several electoral setbacks, including defeat in the social democratic stronghold of Hamburg and losses in Rhineland-Palatinate and Schleswig Holstein.<sup>4</sup>

Well before the 'Guillaume affair', the crisis had been brewing from early 1974: the *L'Espresso* was wondering what had happened to the 'suntanned and smiling Brandt', the Kennedy-like '*Schön Willy* of the Berlin years'. By this time, he was attracting attention mainly for his poorly concealed 'desire to resign', giving himself over to 'jaundiced prophecies' as to the future of Germany, Europe and humanity.<sup>5</sup>

Over and above the contingent problems, in 1974 it was difficult to envisage 'that Willy Brandt's star' was to fall to earth so rapidly, especially after the SPD's triumph in the federal elections of 'autumn '72'. According to sources close Christian Democracy (DC), Brandt's departure from the

<sup>3</sup> See Eckard Michels, *Guillaume, der Spion. Eine deutsch-deutsche Karriere*, (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> See Barbara Marshall, *Willy Brandt: A Political Biography*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 91–96.

<sup>5</sup> Francesco Russo, 'Willy Brandt? Un'arancia spremuta', *L'Espresso*, XX, 31 March 1974, 39.

scene was not due to espionage: if anything, he was induced to stand down because he was well aware that his government had not achieved particularly good results. While the much-vaunted economic democracy still had to be realised, the policy of *Ostpolitik* owed its existence mainly to the goodwill of 'the Americans' and 'the Soviets'.<sup>6</sup>

Even though historical hindsight was to confirm that Brandt and his staff played a leading role in the rapprochement between East and West Germany,<sup>7</sup> in the Spring of 1974 the DC pointed out that the SPD had had little effect on the conciliation of international relations, and moreover considered that the 'economic policy of the Brandt government, caught between the coils of a policy line that was inadequate' and had never 'made up its mind to be realistically social, and an inflation' which had 'never allowed it to meet the basic requirements of any serious reform programme'.<sup>8</sup> In short, the former Chancellor was blamed for not having practised Keynesian economics, showing how effective that type of 'interventionism' was rated not only by the Social Democrats, but also by the Christian Democrats.<sup>9</sup>

In commenting on Brandt's departure, the Christian democrat camp stressed that his policies had not been very effective, as the German electorate at once realised when, at the 1974 local elections, they failed to confirm the preferences expressed at the Federal elections of 1972. In the opinion of *Il Tempo*, a daily paper more moderate in its views than the DC, another major reason for his removal was 'a series of electoral defeats, albeit in local elections, but no less indicative of the electorate's attitude to the government's actions'. Once he noticed the drop-off in his own prestige, Brandt used the 'Guillaume affair' to get out of an ever-rising flood of controversy.<sup>10</sup> Another reason, at least in the opinion of *Il Borghese*,<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Pier Antonio Graziani, 'La maternità interrotta di Brandt', *La Discussione*, 15 May 1974.

<sup>7</sup> See Giovanni Bernardini, *Nuova Germania, antichi timori. Stati Uniti, Ostpolitik e sicurezza europea*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2013), 81–120.

<sup>8</sup> See Filippo Paliotta, 'La resa di Brandt', *Il Popolo*, 8 May 1974.

<sup>9</sup> See Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945*, (New York: Penguin, 2005), 360 ff.

<sup>10</sup> 'Improvise dimissioni del Cancelliere Brandt', *Il Tempo*, 7 May 1974.

<sup>11</sup> Close at that stage to the MSI, the magazine exploited every circumstance to strike at the Italian Left, even, as in the case of Brandt, through intermediaries. See, in this regard, Mario Bozzi Sentieri, *Dal neofascismo alla nuova destra: le riviste 1944-1994*, (Rome: Nuove Idee, 2007), 62–63.

was to avoid too much attention being focused on his former colleague, whose main job was reportedly to ‘find girls’ for the former Chancellor.<sup>12</sup>

Fundamentally, in the days immediately after his resignation, reconstructions of events focused on the reasons that led to Brandt’s decision. Unlike the position held by the DC, sources close to the Italian Republican Party (PRI) traced the resignation back to the attitude of the ‘liberal right-wing’, which was supported within the SPD itself, and in particular in more moderate circles led by Schmidt.<sup>13</sup> Just when disagreements between Republicans and Socialists were growing over different ideas about how to overcome Italy’s economic problems, Brandt was presented as the victim of political manoeuvring aimed at reducing his capacity for reform: his exit from the political scene coincided with the departure of ‘a hero of our time’.<sup>14</sup>

## 2 A ‘SPY AFFAIR IN BONN’

Looking afresh at reactions ‘in the heat of the moment’, many outcomes could be traced back to the so-called Cold War of espionage and intelligence.<sup>15</sup> According to various observers, Brandt’s departure could be presented as a consequence of the behaviour of the West German secret services. Neither political counter-espionage, nor military counter-intelligence, nor the information service managed to prevent a DDR agent from becoming one of the head of government’s closest colleagues. Hence, it was no simple mistake, but probably a deliberate choice for an anti-social democratic purpose: furthermore, as *ABC* explained, ‘the only one who knew everything well in advance [was] the leader of the Bavarian Christian Social Union, Franz Josef Strauss’.<sup>16</sup>

An ideological conflict with the most far-reaching possible consequences for Italy,<sup>17</sup> the ‘Guillaume affair’ showed that the Cold War was

<sup>12</sup>Nerin E. Gun, ‘SS: Sesso e Spionaggio’, *Il Borghese*, XXV, 2 June 1974.

<sup>13</sup>‘Le difficoltà in politica interna e l’ostruzionismo Dc dietro la caduta di Brandt e l’avvento di Schmidt’, *La Voce Repubblicana*, 8 May 1974.

<sup>14</sup>Salvo Ponz De Leon, ‘Un eroe dei nostri giorni’, *La Voce Repubblicana*, 9 May 1974.

<sup>15</sup>Philip Deary, Mario Del Pero, *Spiare e tradire. Dietro le quinte della guerra fredda*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2011), 10.

<sup>16</sup>‘Nel letto del potere’, *ABC*, 30 May 1974.

<sup>17</sup>See Guido Formigoni, *Storia d’Italia nella guerra fredda (1943-1978)*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2016).

continually marked by 'espionage competition'.<sup>18</sup> Thus, to *Corriere della Sera* the West German secret services had exploited the issue to weaken Brandt's position, until they forced his resignation.<sup>19</sup> A truly disquieting episode, given that the former head of government had had 'his movements'<sup>20</sup> constantly watched.

As well as the Bonn secret services, others saw the hand of the CIA, too, in Brandt's exit from the political scene. The CIA was quite happy to cause difficulties for a politician who had always tried to smooth relations with the Eastern Bloc through his *Ostpolitik*. On this view, then, the project of rapprochement and opening up to the East, led by the SPD, had not found favour with the USA: Washington was not prepared 'to be replaced [...] in its relations with Moscow', and did not accept 'intermediaries' among its allies, only 'butlers'.<sup>21</sup>

The leading Italian dailies and periodicals espoused the theory of action by the German secret services, probably nudged in turn by the American secret services. The same interpretation was given by the pro-Italian Communist Party press. This attitude should come as no surprise: Brandt finished in the vortex of the German moderate press, just as he was trying to develop his *Ostpolitik* further.<sup>22</sup> Behind its convinced defence of Brandt one detects the PCI's wish to safeguard his image, at a time when the Italian Communists were seeking to foster relations with European Social Democrats, particularly those in Germany.<sup>23</sup>

### 3 'WITH BRANDT, THE STRONGEST REFORMISM FELL'

Whatever the hypothetical role played by the secret services in Brandt's resignation, the main Italian newspapers, whether overtly political or mainstream, forecast a moderate change of direction with Schmidt's arrival in the Chancellery. According to *Corriere della Sera*, the new head of

<sup>18</sup> See Deary, Del Pero, *Spiare e tradire. Dietro le quinte della Guerra fredda*, 10.

<sup>19</sup> See Vittorio Brunelli, 'Brandt vittima dei servizi segreti', *Corriere della Sera*, 10 May 1974.

<sup>20</sup> Lela Gatteschi, 'I servizi segreti implicati nella "congiura" contro Willy Brandt', *Il Messaggero*, 12 May 1974.

<sup>21</sup> Aldo Santini, 'Maggiordomo degli USA', *L'Europeo*, 30 May 1974.

<sup>22</sup> See 'Schmidt sarà il successore del dimissionario Brandt', *l'Unità*, 8 May 1974; 'C'è stata una trappola Schmidt?', *Paese Sera*, 9 May 1974.

<sup>23</sup> See Bernd Rother, '"Era ora che ci vedessimo". Willy Brandt e il PCI', *Contemporanea*, 1, 2011, 61–82.

government operated not only as a ‘promoter of law and order’, but also as a ‘supporter of a western foreign policy, pro-American and Atlantic’.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, as *La Stampa* noted, Schmidt had made no secret of wanting to exclude ‘Brandt’s most authoritative colleagues’: there was to be a change from ‘a government guided by men inspired by high ideals’ to ‘a government of ambitious men, full of energy, who look to the short term’.<sup>25</sup>

However, if one focuses on party newspapers, or at least those with a very precise political and cultural position, then one finds clear criticism of the baton being passed. Although the Italian Left was divided on various political issues, at that moment it united in forecasting a swing to the middle ground imminent in Bonn.

By electing Schmidt, commented *Mondoperaio*, the SPD had ‘chosen no longer the centre, but the centre-right in foreign and domestic policy’.<sup>26</sup> *Il manifesto*, too, considered it a substantial step backwards, given that ‘with Brandt [...] the strongest reformism in Europe’s strongest power’ had fallen.<sup>27</sup> *L’Unità* took a similar line: just when the PCI was cosying up to the SPD,<sup>28</sup> the communist daily judged that European politics was entering ‘a new era’, not necessarily better than the one that had gone before.<sup>29</sup>

For his part, when it came to economic policies, Schmidt seemed to be aligned with the wishes of the ‘employers’, who would probably have a freer hand to ‘squeeze wages and clash with trade unions in the name of the free market economy and deflationary policy’.<sup>30</sup> As far as the *Ostpolitik* was concerned, the failure to re-appoint Egon Bahr, who had been Brandt’s ‘right hand man’ in achieving inter-European détente, was proof

<sup>24</sup>Vittorio Brunelli, ‘La nuova rotta dell’aggressivo Schmidt’, *Corriere della Sera*, 8 May 1974.

<sup>25</sup>Tito Sansa, ‘Bonn: Schmidt sta per varare il nuovo governo. Esclusi i più autorevoli collaboratori di Brandt’, *La Stampa*, 9 May 1974.

<sup>26</sup>Marcello Dell’Omodarme, ‘La missione politica di Willy Brandt’, *Mondoperaio*, XXVII:6, June 1974, 86.

<sup>27</sup>Franz Koessler, ‘Brandt si dimette da cancelliere. L’asse della socialdemocrazia e della politica tedesca si sposta verso destra’, *il manifesto*, 8 May 1974.

<sup>28</sup>See Michele Di Donato, *I comunisti italiani e la sinistra europea. Il PCI e i rapporti con le socialdemocrazie (1964-1984)*, (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2015), 115–123.

<sup>29</sup>Ennio Polito, ‘Dopo Brandt’, *L’Unità*, 19 May 1974.

<sup>30</sup>See Giuseppe Conato, ‘Un colpo che viene a destra’, *Rinascita*, XXXI, 17 May 1974, 10–11.



that the new government's foreign policy had become markedly more pro-American.<sup>31</sup>

Seen from the perspective of the 'shock of the global', Schmidt's arrival was indeed interpreted as a hiatus: not only was foreign policy going to change, but economic policy too. Moreover, faced with the instability of the early 1970s, which Brandt struggled to keep under control, it was much better to stabilise the country 'on the ground of balanced moderation, to safeguard existing positions and diplomatic relations as they have crystallised up to now'.<sup>32</sup>

In his inaugural address, Schmidt expressed his intention to continue down the route set by Brandt. However, confirming the change of direction, many Italian newspapers noted that the *Ostpolitik* was not even mentioned by the new Chancellor. Besides those mainstream newspapers that had embraced the strategy of rapprochement with Eastern Europe and were consequently dismayed,<sup>33</sup> *La Stampa* too thought the new head of government had prioritised domestic problems, above all relaunching the European Community, which was to be achieved by setting up a new axis with Paris.<sup>34</sup>

As for the economy, after 'Brandt's daring more democracy',<sup>35</sup> a more moderate and pragmatic approach was being adopted, with the declared objective of stabilising the economic situation both at home and abroad.<sup>36</sup> In practice, Schmidt had no problem with showing that he wanted to break 'mercilessly with the reformist dreams which his predecessor had championed', declaring himself in favour of 'a policy of small steps'.<sup>37</sup>

Schmidt was thus the standard-bearer of a new policy line, designed to respond to the changes occurring in the early 1970s, a line that was about to be realised. This transformation was applauded by the Republicans: the

<sup>31</sup> See 'Bonn: Scheel oggi presidente e Schmidt domani cancelliere', *l'Unità*, 15 May 1974.

<sup>32</sup> 'Schmidt fa entrare la Germania in una fase di equilibri moderati?', *La Voce Repubblicana*, 18 May 1974.

<sup>33</sup> See 'Fuori i vecchi brandtiani', *Paese Sera*, 10 May 1974; Claudio Pozzoli, 'L'Ostpolitik ha varcato l'Atlantico', *L'Espresso*, XX, 19 May 1974, 66; Aldo Santini, 'Germania. Che cosa c'è dietro la caduta di Brandt?', *L'Europeo*, XXX, 30 May 1974, 32–35.

<sup>34</sup> See 'Schmidt ha formato il governo', *Corriere della Sera*, 11 May 1974; 'Critiche alla Comunità del cancelliere Schmidt', *La Stampa*, 17 May 1974.

<sup>35</sup> See Axel Schildt, Wolfgang Schmidt (eds), *'Wir wollen mehr Demokratie wagen.'* *Antriebskräfte, Realität und Mythos eines Versprechens*, (Bonn: Dietz, 2019).

<sup>36</sup> See Vittorio Brunelli, 'La nuova rotta dell'aggressivo Schmidt', *Corriere della Sera*, 8 May 1974.

<sup>37</sup> Cesare De Carlo, 'Schmidt dice addio ai sogni riformistici', *La Nazione*, 18 May 1974.

new pragmatism would be used by the SPD to win back the votes of the middle classes that ‘had abandoned them at the last elections’. However, it was also considered a good way of relaunching the Italian Centre-Left, weakened by continual disagreements between the majority forces, which were struggling to meet the challenges of economic crisis and social unrest.<sup>38</sup> On the contrary, the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), one of the junior partners in the coalition government led by the DC, took the view that the way outlined by Schmidt represented a U-turn on Brandt’s approach, which it would be better not to gainsay, especially if the new Chancellor’s strategy were to coincide with the end of the ‘time of great political ideas’ and with strict observance of ‘Atlantic Alliance’<sup>39</sup> mechanisms.

#### 4 ‘NEO-LIBERAL’ CHANGE OF DIRECTION BY THE SPD AND THE PSI

Although described in different tones according to their various political positions, it did not escape anyone’s notice that a major turning point had been reached: Schmidt was to be one of the main promoters of moving on from the ‘embedded capitalism’ that had marked the golden age of European Social Democracy. Though his position on economic policy was probably more nuanced, ultimately the liberalisation of exchange rates would become one of the characteristics of the post-Bretton Woods economy.<sup>40</sup>

From the perspective of the Social Democratic Parties, after the optimism of the 1950s and 1960s, in which growth seemed unlimited, it was the ‘shock of the global’ that forced them to completely update their political programmes. Faced with a radically altered scenario, the SPD reacted by launching a new manifesto, ‘Orientierungsrahmen ’85’. However, it had little influence on the party’s everyday political practice.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> See ‘Schmidt fa entrare la Germania in una fase di equilibri moderati?’.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Solidarietà per Brandt’, *Avanti!*, 9 May 1974.

<sup>40</sup> See Giovanni Bernardini, ‘Helmut Schmidt, the “Renewal” of European Social Democracy, and the Roots of Neoliberal Globalization’, in Knud Andersen, Stefan Müller (eds), *Contesting Deregulation: Debates, Practices and Developments in the West since the 1970s*, (New York: Berghahn, 2017), 121.

<sup>41</sup> See Heinrich Potthoff, Susanne Miller, *Kleine Geschichte der SPD, 1848-2002*, (Bonn: Dietz, 2002), 238–244.

Schmidt had never put much faith in that document. In his opinion, rather than going back to basic programmes, the crisis could be overcome by taking specific economic and political decisions: abandoning the Keynesian approach to labour and wages, reducing the state presence in the economy, global liberalisation of the flow of goods and capital.<sup>42</sup> In practical terms, that meant negotiating a more moderate position with the trade unions on wage claims, while encouraging other Social Democratic Parties to take similar action.<sup>43</sup>

Without making direct reference to the SPD's experience, several suggestions from the pragmatic liberal matrix did appear in 'Progetto Socialista', launched by the PSI during its National Conference in 1978. These included a new economic policy that could be effected by means of 'a programme of public promotion', 'modernisation [...] of the means of [...] production', 'making industry more efficient, productive and advanced' and finally implementing genuine 'mobility of labour'.<sup>44</sup>

In any case, for the PSI, unlike Schmidt, it was not just a matter of accepting the new global economic picture; if anything, they wanted to strike 'a line of march' that would be 'opposed to statism', with the idea of extending 'levels of participation and equality', so as to 'create a superior form of liberal democracy'.<sup>45</sup>

On the Conference floor the 'Progetto Socialista' was backed by a massive majority thanks to the combined support of two trends: one led by party secretary Craxi, the other comprising left-wing members close to Riccardo Lombardi and Claudio Signorile. While Craxi interpreted that document as a basis from which to make the PSI definitively autonomous of the PCI,<sup>46</sup> Lombardi took it as a cue to encourage the strategy of a left-wing alternative. Faced with the economic crisis, the PSI did need to focus on 'profound changes to the (economic) infrastructure, through radical reforms'. One could certainly ask the workers to make sacrifices, but one could hardly deny them prospects that would make it 'worth their while to do so'.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See Bernardini, 'Helmut Schmidt', 114.

<sup>43</sup> See 'La crisi in Europa', *Avanti!*, 3 April 1977.

<sup>44</sup> Bettino Craxi, *Un garofano rosso*, (Milan: Biblioteca rossa, 1978), 60–61.

<sup>45</sup> Giovanni Scirocco, 'Prima del Vangelo', in Giovanni Scirocco (ed), *Il Vangelo socialista. Rinnovare la cultura del socialismo italiano*, (Turin: Aragno, 2018), XXXV.

<sup>46</sup> See Andrea Spiri, *La svolta socialista. Il PSI e la leadership di Craxi dal Midas a Palermo (1976-1981)*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2012), 130–138.

<sup>47</sup> 'Battere i tentativi di soluzioni moderate alla crisi del Paese', *Avanti!*, 30 April 1977.

As the 1970s merged into the 1980s, the harmony between Craxi and Lombardi declined: while the left-wing again came up with the prospect of ‘national solidarity, with the Communists participating (in government)’, the secretary’s tendency was to take another path. To the great satisfaction of the American State Department, the PSI positioned itself as the standard-bearer of Italian stability, aligning itself almost definitively with the DC with a view to governing the country.<sup>48</sup>

To face up to its difficulties and resolve them, in the words used by Craxi during the 1981 Conference, Italy would have to fight a relentless battle against ‘inflationary pressures’. In this struggle, both the ‘government’ and ‘social forces’ would have to ‘converge [...] towards common objectives’.<sup>49</sup> Even though future studies will have to decide the true influence of Schmidt’s measures on this kind of proposal, the echo of the German Chancellor’s arguments was still very evident. Furthermore, the neo-liberal change of direction could be glimpsed in the cutting of 3 percentage points off the sliding wage scale: implemented by Craxi in 1984, it was still consistent with what was anticipated in 1981.<sup>50</sup>

## 5 ‘A SYMBOLIC CHANGE’: BRANDT, SCHMIDT AND THE ITALIAN PERCEPTION OF THE ‘SHOCK OF THE GLOBAL’

As I have tried to show, the changeover from Brandt to Schmidt was not initially seen as a turning point. Between the end of April and the beginning of May 1974, the most frequent explanation cited the weakening of Brandt’s position within the SPD, especially after the Social Democrats had experienced major defeats in the elections of early 1974, above all those in their ‘fiefdom’ of Hamburg.

At the same time, the other interpretation that was particularly common in those days was that of the ‘Cold War among spies’: it held that Brandt resigned after a ‘lynching’ brought about by West Germany’s

<sup>48</sup> See Simona Colarizi, Marco Gervasoni, *La cruna dell’ago. Craxi, il partito socialista e la crisi della Repubblica*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2005), 115–128.

<sup>49</sup> See ‘Il rinnovamento socialista per il rinnovamento dell’Italia. Un messaggio di lotta, di fiducia e di speranza’, *Avanti!*, 23 April 1981.

<sup>50</sup> See Pepijn Corduwener, ‘The P.S.I. and the Crisis of Party Democracy. The Transformation of the Italian Socialists’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2022.2073419> [accessed 30 June 2024].

intelligence agencies,<sup>51</sup> either because they were close to the CDU-CSU or because they were egged on 'by proxy' by the American CIA. Such a reading of the situation ought not to come as a total surprise, given that in the Federal Republic, a 'border state' between the two blocs, spying was really nothing new.<sup>52</sup>

Once the SPD-Liberal coalition's intention to appoint Schmidt as Chancellor became known, along with the latter's plan to exclude the Social Democrats closest to Brandt, above all Bahr, from government, the changeover between the two top leaders of the SPD was presented as a 'symbolic change in German politics'.<sup>53</sup> However, given how central West Germany was to that geo-political theatre and to economic relations, the change at the head of the Bonn government, with the new Chancellor setting out his *modus operandi* right from his inaugural address, could but have international repercussions.

Indeed, if one considers the decisions taken by Schmidt in 1974, the 'shock of the global' could not be clearer. After opening by cutting overseas aid to developing countries,<sup>54</sup> the new Chancellor not only decided, in agreement with the USA, to oppose the 'Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States', which set a series of rules for economic relations among states,<sup>55</sup> but on his first visit to the White House in December 1974 admitted he was sceptical about the top-down steps taken to get out of the early 1970s' crisis.<sup>56</sup> The metamorphosis in German policy set in motion by the new Chancellor (who, in the remainder of his time at the helm of the Federal Republic, showed on more than one occasion that he was intent on internationalising the economy, rather than relying on a traditional approach from the mainstream of 'classic social democracy') did not escape notice.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Santini, 'Germania. Che cosa c'è dietro la caduta di Brandt?', 33.

<sup>52</sup> See Heinrich August Winkler, *Germany: The Long Road to West*, Vol. 2: 1933-1990, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. 1st ed. 2000), 570-575.

<sup>53</sup> Bernd Faulenbach, *Willy Brandt*, (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2013), 86.

<sup>54</sup> See Bernd Rother, Wilhelm Schmidt, 'Einleitung', in Willy Brandt, *Berliner Ausgabe*, Vol. VIII: Bernd Rother, Wilhelm Schmidt (eds), *Über Europa hinaus: Dritte Welt und sozialistische Internationale*, (Bonn: Dietz, 2006, 25.

<sup>55</sup> See 'All'ONU gli occidentali accusano la tirannide della maggioranza', *Corriere della Sera*, 8 December 1974.

<sup>56</sup> See Vittorio Brunelli, 'Dialogo sulla crisi mondiale tra Ford e Schmidt a Washington', *Corriere della Sera*, 6 December 1974.

<sup>57</sup> See Federico Romero, 'Refashioning the West to Dispel Its Fears: The Early G7 Summits', in Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol, Federico Romero (eds), *International Summitry*

Schmidt's 'hardline' attitude to economics found no support in those sectors of Italian politics that, even after Brandt's resignation was made official, did not hide their sympathies for the now-former Chancellor. *Avanti!* opined that the moderate, money-minded approach of the new head of government in Bonn had taken 'social tensions in the Federal Republic to dangerous levels',<sup>58</sup> while during the Paris EEC summit in December 1974 *l'Unità* highlighted Schmidt's opposition to increasing resources for the Social Fund.<sup>59</sup>

A few months after the inauguration, a significant portion of Italy's political press considered the metamorphosis between Brandt's approach and Schmidt's to have been entirely foreseeable: one could be traced back to social democratic ideology, the other was orientated towards economic internationalisation and strongly promoting the *Modell Deutschland*.<sup>60</sup> It was a judgement that would later be confirmed by history. In her biography, the historian Kristina Spohr presented Schmidt in the clothes of a 'global Chancellor': rather than following the course set by Brandt aimed at 'normalising' relations with the Eastern bloc and developing Keynesian economic policies, Schmidt endeavoured to develop the 'diplomatic mechanisms [...] necessary to facilitate cooperation in an increasingly interdependent world': above all, the group of 'seven leading nations' (G7), which met for the first time as a six-nation gathering at Rambouillet in November 1975.<sup>61</sup>

As the 1970s progressed, Schmidt's approach had a major influence on the Italian political debate; but from spring 1974 onwards, it was already fairly clear that a turning point of particular significance had been reached.

*and Global Governance: The Rise of the G7 and the European Council, 1974-1991*, (London: Routledge, 2014), 117-158.

<sup>58</sup> Enzo Unfer, 'Europa senza illusioni', *Avanti!*, 8 December 1974.

<sup>59</sup> See Paolo Forcellini, 'Persistono i contrasti nella CEE alla vigilia del vertice di Parigi', *l'Unità*, 3 December 1974.

<sup>60</sup> On the two visions within European social democracy in the early 1970s see Di Donato, *I comunisti italiani e la sinistra europea*, 125-127.

<sup>61</sup> Kristina Spohr, *The Global Chancellor: Helmut Schmidt and the Reshaping of the International Order*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.

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# International Conference on Minorities in Trieste. 10–14 July 1974. The Defence of Linguistic Minorities and the Embryonic Beginnings of the Liga Veneta

*Paolo Barcella*

*Translated by Mariangela Palazzi-Williams*

## 1 THE TRIESTE CONFERENCE

In July 1974, the Italian press reported on the proceedings of a Conference on Minorities in Europe, organised in Trieste by Michele Zanetti, the young President of that particular Province in the Friuli region and the Conference's promotional committee. Hundreds of papers, representing all of Europe's minorities, were submitted and discussed by the delegates, as well as by academics, among them young linguist Tullio De Mauro, who had been invited as experts to offer their scientific assessment and take on a reality that was now both politically and institutionally highly

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charged.<sup>1</sup> The papers were divided into three main sections to examine the phenomenon, respectively, in its cultural-linguistic, socio-economic and legal-institutional terms.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, the reports of those days dealt with the situation of minorities from the usual perspective, in the main the geopolitical, referring to the charters signed in the various international fora that, in previous decades, had set parameters of what is to be a ‘minority’, qualifying their ethnic, religious and linguistic attributes, and addressing the crucial issue of the protection of their rights in countries where history had pushed them.<sup>3</sup> In short, the Conference brought to the surface ethnic and national issues, the relations between minority groups and the central powers of states that had already agitated—and sometimes torn asunder—European political life in the past. Given the venue and the organising bodies of this particular Conference, discussions concerning the Italian Eastern Front, the problems of Italians in Slovenia and of Slovenes in the Italian border region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia were invested with considerable importance. However, alongside this perspective, different interpretative keys emerged in the papers submitted and singled out by the press, which connected the discourse on linguistic minorities to the broader phenomena that swept through the 1970s:

The genocides like that in Vietnam; the various forms of *social alienation*; the *sad migrations of workers connected to the growing European economic development*; the *territorial policies marred by property speculation*, which is often accentuated to the detriment of the territories of minorities; the *formation of new and different sub-proletariats*, all of the above cause very serious phenomena of internal colonisation. And the great pitfall of our time has been attributed by mutual consent to the *multinational corporations*, their highly refined *techniques of mass manipulation*, their intrinsic need to marginalise from development a large part of the world’s population, which thus becomes a gigantic, paradoxical minority. And so, in these respects, the

<sup>1</sup>Sandro Meccoli, ‘L’Europa delle piccole patrie’, *Corriere della Sera*, 10 July 1974, 3; Sandro Meccoli, “No” a ogni discriminazione per i piccoli gruppi etnici’, *ibid.*, 11 July 1974, 11; Sandro Meccoli, ‘Come tutelare le piccole patrie’, *Corriere della Sera*, 18 July 1974, 3; Giorgio Fattori, ‘L’Europa delle piccole patrie’, *La Stampa*, 10 July 1974, 3; Giorgio Fattori, ‘A Trieste, mille delegati difendono le minoranze’, *ibid.*, 11 July 1974, 2.

<sup>2</sup>Tullio De Mauro, *Conferenza internazionale sulle minoranze: 10–14 luglio 1974, atti della Conferenza*, (Provincia di Trieste: 1979–1981).

<sup>3</sup>Fabrizio Dal Passo, ‘Storia e diritti delle minoranze’ [accessed 23 November 2023]. [https://rosa.uniroma1.it/rosa03/semestrale\\_di\\_geografia/article/view/15352/14816](https://rosa.uniroma1.it/rosa03/semestrale_di_geografia/article/view/15352/14816).

ethnic, linguistic and economic problems of minorities are now only one face of the frightening problem that is ‘*opulent aggression*’.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, globalisation and modernisation—realised as much in the form of the new international migrations as in that of multinational corporations with their powerful instruments of mass communication—were perceived by many observers as serious threats to minority groups, which appeared, if left to themselves, helpless and incapable of self-protection. As they overflowed from city centres to the peripheries, the opulence and wealth of the urban and industrial worlds seemed to cause drawbacks and death: was the cultural fascination with the US-driven politico-economic hub losing its lustre?

## 2 THE PERIPHERIES AND THE HEADWINDS OF GLOBALISATION

Particularly interesting is the interpretation of the Conference printed in the monthly *La Patrie dal Friûl*, a publication that proved very popular in Friulian emigrant circles, which provided a North-Eastern analysis on the nature of the processes unleashed by the world’s economic and political hubs. The issue of Italian emigration returned to feature on the pages dedicated to commenting on the Conference from a variety of perspectives. Firstly, in fact, *La Patrie* argued that ‘the phenomena of industrial concentration and labour exploitation [had] provoked massive waves of emigration’ which were responsible for the ‘depopulation of the countryside and mountains, [as well as] chaotic urbanisation’.<sup>5</sup> As a consequence, the power of attraction of the industrial centres threatened the minorities—understood as marginal groups with respect to the processes of global development—because it denuded their historical homelands, making them spaces devoid of the energy of the youth and places increasingly inhabited mainly by the elderly, who were inevitably unable to pass on their language and culture to their grandchildren since these were now born and raised far away. Secondly, emigration forced Italians abroad to experience what all the world’s linguistic minorities were experiencing, having to share the same specific problems. The monthly magazine, for

<sup>4</sup> Meccoli, ‘Come tutelare le piccole patrie’, 3.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Relazione dei lavori della commissione prima: uso della lingua e della cultura – Trieste, 14 luglio 1974’, *La Patrie dal Friûl*, II:3, 15 October 1974, 2.

example, recorded how ‘schooling among the children of emigrants, which presents great analogies with the problems of minorities, [had] been the subject of many initiatives’.<sup>6</sup>

The Friulian political and cultural world—from the right-wing to the left—debated these issues extensively, occasionally managing to bring their demands to national attention. It was precisely in those years, for example, that a key player of the Friulian emigration to Switzerland, Leonardo Zanier, made his first appearance in the national media and world of publishing. He was a political and trade union activist and dialect poet who dedicated much of his political and literary work to the question of minorities in their relationship with migration and with the processes of socio-economic transformation caused by globalisation.<sup>7</sup> In 1977, a few months after the earthquake that devastated Friuli, Garzanti, a major Italian publishing house, reprinted his main work, which had already been published by a local Friulian publisher in the mid-1960s, *Libers ... di scugnî lâ / Liberi... di dove partire*—in which the end of peripheral societies was described as one of the most serious threats of the day.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to this aspect, *La Patrie* emphasised two factors which it viewed as a serious threat to minority languages and cultures: schools, first of all, were pointed out as the agents responsible for the ‘distortion’ of the cultures of the ‘small nations’;<sup>9</sup> the mass media also seemed to contribute to the same objective, which ‘in a communications civilisation such as ours’ would play a decisive role—depending on the particular political deployment—in the development, survival or disappearance of linguistic minorities.<sup>10</sup>

The fallout from the factors that constituted the lifeblood of globalisation was highlighted, while a reversal of perspective with respect to the reality that had characterised the previous decades, their hopes and expectations, was evident. From the point of view of the Italian ruling classes, in fact, schooling had been one of the crucial instruments in the construction of an Italian-speaking national and linguistic community, which would

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>7</sup> Paolo Barcella, Valerio Furneri, *Una vita migrante. Leonardo Zanier, sindacalista e poeta (1935–2017)*, (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Leonardo Zanier, *Libers... di scugnî lâ / Liberi... di dove partire. Poesie 1960–1962*, Preface by Tullio De Mauro, (Milan: Garzanti, 1977).

<sup>9</sup> ‘Fatto il punto a Trieste sulle minoranze dell’Europa occidentale’, in *La Patrie dal Friül*, II:3, 15 October 1974, 1.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Relazione dei lavori della commissione’, 2.

otherwise remain fragmented in a complex mosaic of dialects and regional tongues.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, a large part of the organised working classes had identified school education as one of the key engines to unite proletarians around the world, to build a global democratic citizenry and to provide paths to social emancipation, starting with the acquisition of a rich and evolved linguistic background that would free the working classes from all forms of subjugation and subordination. Within the more general framework of what has been described as the golden age of mass schooling,<sup>12</sup> the organisations of the Italian political Left and trade unions led bitter battles for the increase of both spaces and hours of schooling open to all. One need to only think of the battle for the ‘150 ore’ (i.e. 150 hours), a law passed in the early 1970s, which granted Italian workers the right to attend up to 150 hours of training for their cultural and professional development during paid working hours.<sup>13</sup> Now, however, in the speeches of sections of the Italian provinces, the educational system itself appeared to be in the dock, accused of threatening local communities because of its power to homogenise and annihilate traditional knowledge in favour of a flat global culture. The aforementioned Leonardo Zanier, who in 1975 was chosen by the trade union CGIL as the national head of its Studies, Training and Research Office (Ufficio studi, formazione e ricerche), was one of the few who tried to pick up on this type of concern within the Italian left-wing world of the day. In fact, between 1976 and 1977, he organised a national conference in which was discussed the advisability of introducing the teaching of cultures, popular and minority languages and

<sup>11</sup> Vincenzo Sarracino, Enricomaria Corbi, *Storia della scuola e delle istituzioni educative (1830–1999)*, (Naples: Liguori, 1999); Giovanni Genovesi, *Storia della scuola in Italia dal Settecento a oggi*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1998); Ester De Fort, *Scuola e analfabetismo nell'Italia del '900. Il lento diffondersi dell'istruzione di massa dall'inizio del secolo alla seconda guerra mondiale*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 1995); Remo Fornaca, *Storia della scuola moderna e contemporanea*, (Rome: Anicia, 1994); Simonetta Soldani, Gabriele Turi (eds), *Fare gli italiani: scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Irvin Sobel, ‘The Human Capital Revolution in Economic Development: Its Current History and Status’, *Comparative Education Review*, 22:3, 1978, 278–308. See also Michele Dal Lago, *Supply-Side Education. Occupabilità, formazione e mercato del lavoro nel dibattito contemporaneo*, Doctoral Dissertation, (Bergamo: University of Bergamo, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Eugenia Valtulina (ed), ‘*Questa voglia di cambiare la condizione umana*’. *Per una storia della FIOM CGIL di Bergamo dall'Autunno caldo alla scala mobile*, (Palermo: NDF, 2017); Alfiero Boschiero, Annamaria Lona, Filippo Maria Paladini (eds), ‘La scuola delle 150 ore in Veneto’, *Venetica*, 1, 2015.

dialects into schools: once again, renowned linguist Tullio De Mauro played a key role as primary scientific interlocutor.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, as previously mentioned, the mass media—from national newspapers to radio and TV—stood indicted. Over the preceding twenty years they had made a crucial contribution to the diffusion of Italian, both through specific cultural products—think of Alberto Manzi’s famous *Non è mai troppo tardi*—and via simple national-popular programming—think of the quiz *Lascia o Raddoppia?* and the *Sanremo*, Italian song festival: all programmes that were highly instrumental in the diffusion of shared customs and models. These same media stations were spreading new languages, Anglicisms and foreign words, such as *rock ‘n roll*, considered by many as a threat to local traditions.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, numerous intellectuals of opposing political persuasions had already articulated critical elaborations of the culture industry and technological modernity, and even among leading politicians, there were those who paid attention to such instances. Gaetano Arfé, for example, would go on to present a resolution to the European Parliament in 1981 to promote the drawing up of a charter for the protection of ethnic and linguistic minorities: among other things, it called for the training of delegates specialising in the work of enhancing the value of minorities and their cultural heritage, so that they could be regularly hosted by the local media.<sup>16</sup>

The pages of the Friulan monthly *La Patrie* presented a simplified political reading of these issues, contrasting the mass media’s progressive potential with their homogenising power and their ability to annihilate traditional, regional, minority cultures.

<sup>14</sup>Ufficio studi, formazione e ricerche (ed), ‘Aggiornamento e formazione insegnanti, materiali per problemi: minoranze linguistiche, parlate locali, sviluppo delle capacità espressive nella scuola’, (Rome: ECAP-CGIL, 1977), <https://www.reteitalianaculturapopolare.org/archivio-partecipato/item/2795-aggiornamento-e-formazione-insegnanti-materiali-per-problemi-minoranze-linguistiche-parlate-locali-sviluppo-delle-capacita-espressive-nella-scuola.html> [accessed November 2023].

<sup>15</sup>Pietro Cavallo, Pasquale Iaccio, *Penso che un sogno così non ritorni mai più. L’Italia del miracolo tra storia, cinema, musica e televisione*, (Naples: Liguori, 2016); Leonardo Campus, *Non solo canzonette. L’Italia della ricostruzione e del miracolo economico attraverso il Festival di Sanremo*, (Florence: Le Monnier, 2015).

<sup>16</sup>Gaetano Arfé, ‘Risoluzione del Parlamento Europeo su una carta comunitaria delle lingue e culture regionali e una carta dei diritti delle minoranze etniche’, 16 October 1981, <https://1.flcgil.stgy.it/files/pdf/19811016/risoluzione-arfe-su-minoranze-etniche-parlamento-europeo-16-ottobre-1981-1878912.pdf> [accessed November 2023].

It was precisely in the 1970s, moreover, also in the wake of the implementation of ordinary administrative regions, that numerous other factors contributed to fuelling the tensions between national and local identities in the Italian media, with non-linear and, in many respects, counter-intuitive and controversial outcomes. Throughout the history of Italy, in fact, the local press had exercised a marginal and secondary role compared to its national counterpart, for reasons due, at least in part, to the task assigned to modern journalism after Unification, i.e. contributing to the construction of the nation and ‘facilitating the national integration of a country that for centuries had been characterised by divisions and fractures with enormous social and cultural distances between the different territorial realities’.<sup>17</sup> The local daily press—which produced some significant examples, thanks to territorial political and economic initiatives that gave rise to papers such as *La Prealpina* of Varese, *L’Eco di Bergamo* or *L’Unione Sarda*—was impacted by this process and developed a tendency to devote a certain number of pages to national and international events, emulating broadsheets such as *Corriere della Sera*.<sup>18</sup> After 1975, however, a reversal of the trend occurred and provincial papers entered a phase of significant expansion, a phenomenon that was experienced throughout the peninsula, but particularly in Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, Veneto, Marche, Trentino, Tuscany, Puglia and Sicily.<sup>19</sup> Two main factors contributed to this process: on the one hand, the improvement in the literacy rate together with the increase in the number of Italian readers had expedited the process, and, on the other, the technological development, which lowered production costs and allowed for more efficient printing works and fewer employees. At the same time, the crisis of the Italian parties and trade unions was beginning, a crisis that involved also their local, sectional and factory news sheets: through those instruments, in the two decades following the Second World War, parties and trade unions had deeply penetrated the territories, dealing with local issues from a general, national or class perspective. The information void caused by such crisis was filled by

<sup>17</sup> Carlo Sorrentino, ‘Il giornalismo locale. Nuova frontiera del giornalismo italiano?’, in *La professione giornalistica in Italia. Anno primo 1988–89*, (Città di Castello: il Campo, Fondazione Adriano Olivetti, 1990), [https://www.byterfly.eu/islandora/object/librib:20554/datastream/PDF/content/librib\\_20554.pdf](https://www.byterfly.eu/islandora/object/librib:20554/datastream/PDF/content/librib_20554.pdf), 57 [accessed November 2023].

<sup>18</sup> Mario Isnenghi, ‘La stampa quotidiana locale’, in Valerio Castronovo, Nicola Tranfaglia (eds), *La stampa italiana nell’era della TV. Dagli anni Settanta a oggi*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2002), 320.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Castronovo, Tranfaglia (eds), *La stampa italiana nell’era della TV*.

the proliferation of local periodicals—and with a localist outlook, as opposed to party and trade union ones—which also came to the fore between the 1970s and 1980s following the public financing of the press.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Italian radio and television also trod a similar path. The free and democratic radio stations took hold in the Italian provinces assuming the role of radios of the territories that, regardless of their political outlook, intended to participate in the life of the communities, to animate them, sometimes with explicit reference to the value of proximity between media and users.<sup>21</sup> With regard to television, however, as TV journalist Aldo Grasso has written:

In the wake of the student and workers' protest movement, public broadcasting seemed to participate in the process of deconstructing national identity in the totalising sense affirmed until then: the reform of national Italian TV, RAI, of 1975 develops [...] a policy aimed at giving visibility to multiple identities [...], through the so called 'programmi dell'accesso' [10-minute independent broadcast programmes]; with the launch of the TV channel RAI 3, in 1979, there is also a desire to respond to a need to bring the audience closer together [...]. Commercial television [...] on the one hand kept the local horizon alive through a robust 'secondary' advertising market expressed, for example, in 'teleshopping'; [on the other hand,] at the same time [...] private TV created the hybrid of the 'local-national'.<sup>22</sup>

### 3 THE REACTION IN VENETO

While the processes described were under way, in the Veneto region some individuals were taking their first steps into public life, people who, within a few years, would give the tensions of their day a new political shape, from a conservative and, at times, reactionary perspective. This was at the end of 1977, when Bruno Bosetto, Franco Costantini, Maurizio Calligaro, Michele Gardin, Armando and Antonia Lorenzet, and Tarcisio Zanchetta decided to launch a season of initiatives aimed at recovering the Venetian language and culture. They were soon joined by Franco Rocchetta, who

<sup>20</sup> Paolo Barcella, *Stampa locale e storia: tra localismi e regionalismi*, in Barbara Bracco (ed), *Sfogliare il passato. La storia nei giornali italiani*, (Rome: Viella, 2019), 51–64; Gruppo Cronisti Lombardi, *La stampa locale in Lombardia*, (Milan: Quaderni di documentazione regionale-Regione Lombardia, 1984).

<sup>21</sup> 'Sulla cresta dell'onda. Suoni e parole alla conquista dell'etere', *Zapruder*, 34, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Aldo Grasso, 'La TV negli anni Settanta', in Fiamma Lussana, Giacomo Marramao (eds), *Culture, nuovi soggetti, identità*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2001), 58–59.



within a few years would become the most important figure of the early days of Liga Veneta, as well as president of political party Lega Nord in the early 1990s.<sup>23</sup> National broadsheet *Corriere della Sera* dealt with that group of ‘Venetists’ in February 1978, by which point the propagandist literature they produced and disseminated had gained a fair amount of visibility:

In reaffirming the worth and dignity of the Veneto language, as a linguistic tool valid at every level of communication, and recalling that the use of one’s mother tongue does not hinder, but rather encourages, the learning of other languages, the authors of the flyer invited parents brought up in the Veneto language ‘to speak their mother tongue Veneto proudly to their children’. A similar invitation was addressed to teachers, journalists, and cultural figures, called upon respectively to promote the knowledge and study of the language of this region [...] and to contribute to its revival, ‘*by curbing the current indiscriminate and homogenising use of the Italian language*’.<sup>24</sup>

In the same year, the instigators of this initiative set up the Venetian philological society (Società filologica veneta), which appealed to the charters and international treaties on minorities, affirming their desire to recognise Venetian dialects as a language to be promoted in all public fora, and also proposing that they be taught in schools. The first article of the society’s statute highlighted the political vocation and polemical force that animated its founders:

‘Società filologica veneta’ was founded to broaden and spread knowledge and awareness of the linguistic heritage of the Veneto, to reaffirm the nation’s right [...] to maintain and develop its culture, its language, its roots and its identity, in accordance with the spirit of the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Italian Constitution, the Statute of the AIDLCM, the Charter of Helsinki, the Manifesto of the Veneto Language, the Statutes of the Veneto Region and neighbouring

<sup>23</sup> Davide Mutto, *Venetismo. L’invenzione identitaria e i suoi usi politici nel Veneto contemporaneo*, (Lucca: Tralerighe editore, 2020), 26; Giovanni Fracasso, ‘Alle origini dei venetismi: la Società filologica veneta’, *Venetica*, 7, 2003, 93–107; Ilvo Diamanti, *Il male del Nord. Lega, localismo, secessione*, (Rome: Donzelli, 1996); Ilvo Diamanti, *La Lega. Geografia, storia e sociologia di un nuovo soggetto politico*, (Rome: Donzelli, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> Arnolfo Pacini, ‘Otto “paladini” in difesa della lingua dei dogi’, *Corriere della Sera*, 4 February 1978, 7.

regions, in order to help overcome the cruel prejudices and discriminatory and *denaturalising* practices which have been carried out against Veneto culture for too many decades, to promote the use and study of the Veneto language and the teaching of the history of Veneto civilisation in schools.<sup>25</sup>

A few months later, the 'Lettere al *Corriere*' column published a letter echoing the controversy over the role of the mass media in the stifling of regional language communities:

While noting with satisfaction the start of TV broadcasts in the Ladin language by the RAI offices in Bolzano and Trento, broadcasts aimed at the Ladin populations of South Tyrol and Trentino, I would like to ask these RAI offices [...] until when they will delay the start of similar TV programmes in the Veneto language for the populations in the Veneto language and culture of southern and eastern Trentino.<sup>26</sup>

These sentiments took the form of orchestrated political action after the meeting between key figures of the Veneto circuit and the experience of the Union Valdôtaine, an autonomist organisation that, on the occasion of the first European elections in 1979, had spearheaded a list of parties devoted to defending the interests of linguistic minorities and Italian regional communities.<sup>27</sup> Bruno Salvadori, a regional councillor and theorist of Valdostan autonomism, had moved in those months in search of men and women committed to federalist projects and, in the process, had accidentally met Umberto Bossi in Pavia, the future Lega Nord politician, then still unknown. In the last months of that year, the people of Veneto thus had crucial ideas for forming their own party, the Liga Veneta, whose objective was to pave the way for 'el autogoverno e la autodetermination de la nathion veneta'.<sup>28</sup> The posters and slogans of the Liga immediately focused on the issues that had also emerged from some of the speeches presented at the Trieste Conference and analysed at the outset, although rethought in the light of a political battle that needed to find concrete opponents to fight against, and not just theoretical aspects to discuss. According to the *Lighisti*, Veneto had to defend itself against the attempts

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Mutto, *Venetismo*, 29.

<sup>26</sup> Nico Orso, 'Quando in TV la lingua veneta?', *Corriere della Sera*, 23 February 1979, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Gianluigi Da Rold, 'Rivolta ideologica per mettere in cassaforte la ricchezza', *Corriere della Sera*, 9 May 1980, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Mutto, *Venetismo*, 272.

at Italianisation conducted by the ‘Roman’ state with the instruments of schooling and radio-television. Ethnic, social and economic ‘preservation’ then could be achieved only by closing of emigration tap and implementing political initiatives to bring back to Veneto the people who were originally from Veneto.<sup>29</sup> In addition, it became necessary to address the issue of the southern immigrants, whose presence was perceived by a growing number of Veneto people as problematic, especially as such immigrants were employed in public administration, schools and the police forces. Southerners were accused of playing the role of public officials without having the right to do so, because they lacked the necessary language skills to speak to the local population. In schools, moreover, southerners were experienced—and not only in Veneto<sup>30</sup>—as hostile, on the occasions when they prevented native children from expressing themselves in the language of their parents, concealing regional history and culture. Those were the years when, from Verona to Venice, from Belluno to Treviso, graffiti appeared on walls calling for the expulsion of people from the South. Some went so far as to invoke the eruptions of Mount Etna and Vesuvius in their writings on the sides of bridges and on palaces, in the hope that the southern regions themselves would be razed to the ground, always in the name of safeguarding Veneto’s society, language and culture.<sup>31</sup> Anti-meridionalism was back on the agenda.<sup>32</sup> Fervent polemics developed that, at the beginning of the 1980s, made the national headlines and were noted by the most attentive observers of the political and cultural transformations sweeping the country.<sup>33</sup> Riding on these tensions, in the 1983 parliamentary elections the Liga Veneta elected a deputy and a senator: Achille Tramarin and Graziano Girardi. Tramarin, in order to send a strong signal about the objectives of his party’s battles, even attempted to speak in Veneto dialect during parliamentary proceedings.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> ‘Electoral Programme of the Liga Veneta (1980)’, *ibid.*, 248–249.

<sup>30</sup> Paolo Barcella, ‘Gli insegnanti meridionali nella provincia di Bergamo’, in Michele Colucci, Stefano Gallo, *In cattedra con la valigia. Gli insegnanti tra stabilizzazione e mobilità*, (Rome: Donzelli, 2017), 137–154.

<sup>31</sup> Paolo Morando, *’80. L’inizio della barbarie*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2016).

<sup>32</sup> Antonino De Francesco, *La palla al piede. Una storia del pregiudizio antimeridionale*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Mario Isnenghi, Silvio Lanaro, ‘Un modello stanco’, in Silvio Lanaro (ed), *Storia d’Italia. Le regioni dall’Unità a oggi. Il Veneto*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1984).

<sup>34</sup> C.P., ‘Spaccatura nella Liga Veneta per i finanziamenti pubblici’, *Corriere della Sera*, 15 November 1983, 4.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

The political form which the Liga battle took was characterised as a reaction to the social, cultural and economic developments that, having imposed themselves forcefully in the Golden Age years, after the mid-1970s were increasingly perceived as the cause of the disappearance of peripheral communities and cultures. The mass media, the school that trained Italian-speakers, internal and international migrations driven by the attractive potential of the great industrial centres frightened the peripheries; Euro-American consumerist opulence, in the 1970s, no longer generated the fulfilment that, in the 1950s and 1960s, its mere promise had seemed to guarantee; dissatisfaction was accentuated by the awareness of losing, as a consequence of development, the certainties of familiar worlds. All these aspects took centre stage, starting with the issue of the defence of minority languages, in the controversy of the first Liga Veneta. The party grew during the 1980s and gained popularity as a majority force in a large part of the territories of the Veneto province, its fortunes intertwined with those of the Lega Lombarda, founded by Umberto Bossi in 1984. Lombard leagueism had many common elements with that of the Veneto region, but also profound differences, which explain the tensions that characterised their relations. When Lega Nord—which federated the northern leagues with a statute signed at the end of 1989—spread nationwide, in the wake of the events of 1992 and the set of problems that came to the attention of the media under the label of the ‘questione settentrionale’ (northern issue),<sup>35</sup> the tendency developed to explain its success, both in scientific and media terms, precisely from the crisis of the First Republic. As we have tried to demonstrate here, however, some of its original characteristics can only be understood by observing the tensions produced in the peripheral areas of the North East by the shock of the 1970s: those same moods of reaction to post-war modernisation were, moreover, still clearly recognisable in the words used by Umberto Bossi to explain the nature of his party in *Vento dal Nord. La mia Lega, la mia vita*, the first work of evolved Lega self-representation that, significantly, opened with this food for thought:

<sup>35</sup> Filippo Sbrana, ‘Nord non chiama Sud. Genesi e sviluppo della questione settentrionale (1973–2013)’, in Simona Colarizi, Agostino Giovagnoli, Paolo Pombeni (eds), *L’Italia contemporanea dagli anni Ottanta a oggi*, (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2014), 361–381.

I had not returned to these parts [i.e. in the Varese suburbs] for more than thirty years. What was holding me back was the fear of seeing my world transformed, gutted, destroyed. Of finding cement in place of trees, factories where the fields of my childhood used to be. I preferred to keep the images of memory, populated with people and landscapes that had disappeared.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Umberto Bossi, Daniele Vimercati, *Vento dal Nord. La mia Lega, la mia vita*, (Milan: Sperling&Kupfer, 1992), 4.

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# The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. 1 August 1975. Détente in Europe as an Opportunity to Overcome Cold War Divisions

*Guido Formigoni*

*Translated by Daniel Newton*

After a first slackening of Cold War tensions in Europe, following the Cuban missile crisis of 1962,<sup>1</sup> international détente underwent a phase of consolidation in the early 1970s, as it finally became clear that, in the light of their respective economic, political and strategic difficulties, the world's

<sup>1</sup>Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement 1945–1963*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 398–399.

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two superpowers were interested in stabilizing the bipolar relationship.<sup>2</sup> With this new scenario of more relaxed international relations, various different ways were proposed of capitalizing on the successful turn of events to kickstart changes in Europe, potentially going beyond the conservative nature of the Moscow-Washington entente.<sup>3</sup>

## I CONSERVATION AND INNOVATION: TWO ASPECTS OF DÉTENTE

In Italy, where domestic politics directly mirrored international Cold War divisions, views on détente varied considerably from the outset. Welcomed among those of a more progressive mindset as an opportunity to escape from the rigors of ideological conflict, for many conservative diplomats and politicians it was a threat that would encourage a lowering of psychological and practical barriers between the two rival camps (in 1955 the ambassador to France, Pietro Quaroni, called it ‘a disaster’).<sup>4</sup> During the 1960s, however, as stable bipolarity became gradually more established, it gained acceptance—albeit without any great enthusiasm—even by some in the moderate-conservative world. At the same time, there began to be signs of people imagining how the situation might potentially evolve.

Addressing the Christian Democracy (DC) congress in 1967, Aldo Moro, who for a considerable time in the 1960s had been prime minister of a centre-left government (with the Italian Communist Party, PCI, in opposition but the Socialists, PSI, forming part of the ruling majority), outlined the hypothesis of a ‘progressive transcending of military blocs, as the reasons that produced them gradually disappear’. Such a goal, Moro underlined, was to be pursued within a framework of stability and thus for the time being preserving Atlantic unity, and yet at the same time

<sup>2</sup> Mario Del Pero, *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 66 ff.; Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1985); Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War*, (Washington: Potomac Books, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Wilfried Loth, *Overcoming the Cold War: A History of Détente, 1950–1991*, (Basingstoke-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 102 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Brunello Vigizzi, ‘L’Italia e i problemi della “politica di potenza” dalla crisi della Ced alla crisi di Suez’, in Ennio Di Nolfo, Romain Rainero, Brunello Vigizzi (eds), *L’Italia e la politica di potenza (1950–1960)*, (Milan: Marzorati, 1992), 18.



cultivating the prospect of establishing ‘a more stable and humane international order’.<sup>5</sup> When Moro later reiterated these ideas as Foreign Minister in the early 1970s, the reaction of the PCI, while clearly not entirely concordant, nonetheless showed striking parallels. The communist line under Palmiro Togliatti’s leadership had been very critical of the Atlantic Alliance, but had shifted to follow the Soviet position on ‘peaceful coexistence’ (though continuing to demand that Italy withdraw from the organization); Enrico Berlinguer, who became deputy PCI secretary in 1969 and then party secretary in 1972, toned down the PCI’s anti-NATO sentiment and gradually distanced the party from Moscow. Berlinguer nevertheless conceived of détente as an opportunity to advance socialism in the world, while at the same time announcing the goal of building a Europe that was independent of blocs and ‘neither anti-Soviet nor anti-American’.<sup>6</sup>

The inevitable reverberations that such questions generated within domestic politics rendered everything more complicated. In a speech to the DC congress in 1973, Moro warned those imagining rapid change that détente in the short term would amplify ‘problems of internal cohesion in both military blocs’.<sup>7</sup> This notwithstanding, he introduced a strategy of ‘confronto’ (dialogue) with the communist opposition, abandoning the position of open conflict. Some months later, Enrico Berlinguer, pointing to the favourable conditions presented by international détente for overcoming the domestic dividing lines between the DC and PCI, would formulate his own ‘historic compromise’ proposal.<sup>8</sup> Such developments were watched with high concern in both the superpower political leaders.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Guido Formigoni, *Aldo Moro. Lo statista e il suo dramma*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2023), 222–223.

<sup>6</sup> Silvio Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), 23–30; Francesco Barbagallo, *Enrico Berlinguer*, (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2006), 175–178.

<sup>7</sup> Formigoni, *Aldo Moro*, 274.

<sup>8</sup> Enrico Berlinguer, *La crisi italiana. Scritti su ‘Rinascita’*, (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1985), 45–75; on the links with international détente, see Silvio Pons, *I comunisti italiani e gli altri. Visioni e legami internazionali nel mondo del Novecento*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2021), 221–233.

<sup>9</sup> Guido Formigoni, *Storia d’Italia nella guerra fredda (1943–1978)*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2016), 447 ff.; Mario Del Pero, Federico Romero, ‘The United States, Italy and the Cold War: Interpreting and Periodising a Contradictory and Complicated Relationship’, in Antonio Varsori, Benedetto Zaccaria (eds), *Italy in the International System from Détente to the End of the Cold War: The Underrated Ally*, (London: Palgrave, 2018), 25–30; Antonio Varsori, *Dalla rinascita al declino. Storia internazionale dell’Italia repubblicana*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2022), 359 ff.

At the same time, there began to be a sense of potential change afoot in Europe—first with the West German *Ostpolitik* then, soon after, as plans unfolded for a pan-European conference. The latter was a proposal Moscow had previously floated on a number of occasions, meeting each time with refusal by the West, which wished to avoid legitimizing the post-war status quo, including Soviet pre-eminence in central-eastern Europe. In 1970, however, NATO struck a more conciliatory note and proposed tying an agreement on borders to a basket of more general agreements regarding cooperation and openness between the blocs. This was followed by a further conciliatory step by the Warsaw Pact, which agreed to the United States and Canada taking part in the Conference. The Conference process finally got underway with a series of multilateral meetings in November 1972, while the first stage proper took place in Helsinki in July 1973, with European Foreign Ministers meeting to prepare what would prove a long and complex process.<sup>10</sup>

## 2 1973: COMMUNIST PLAUDITS AND CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT OPTIMISM AS THE CSCE GETS UNDERWAY

As evinced by reports in the Italian press, the Conference was the focus of fairly widespread public attention. Within the governing centre-left area—in particular the DC and the Catholic world—the reaction was generally positive, though not emphatically so. The socialist newspaper *Avanti!* spoke of ‘an opportunity for Europe’ and looked forward to what it called a ‘dynamic interpretation of détente’, highlighting that Washington had chosen the path of dialogue with Moscow.<sup>11</sup> *La Voce Repubblicana* was more critical, describing Helsinki as potentially crystallizing the status quo—a prospect that, it averred, Europe could not just passively accept.<sup>12</sup>

*Avvenire*, the official newspaper of the Italian Bishops’ Conference, considered Helsinki as evidence that Europe was not a mere ‘geographical expression’, but played a ‘vital balancing role’<sup>13</sup> although much work remained to be done. The periodical of the Italian Jesuits, *La Civiltà*

<sup>10</sup>With regard to the long preparatory process, see Angela Romano, *From Détente in Europe to European Détente: How the West Shaped the Helsinki Cscce*, (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2009), 55 ff.

<sup>11</sup>‘Un’occasione per l’Europa’, *Avanti!*, 3 July 1973; ‘Est e Ovest cercano l’intesa sui fatti’, *ibid.*, 5 July 1973.

<sup>12</sup>‘Due strade per l’Europa’, *La Voce Repubblicana*, 12 July 1973.

<sup>13</sup>‘Una svolta per l’Europa?’, *Avvenire*, 8 July 1973.

*Cattolica*, affiliated with the Vatican, reported that 'the overall impression, while not spectacular, has certainly been positive'.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile the official Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano* (in contrast with the custom in previous decades, the Holy See had been invited to take part in the Conference), expressed its approval for the address given in Helsinki by the Italian Foreign Minister, Christian Democrat Giuseppe Medici.<sup>15</sup>

The DC weekly magazine *La Discussione* recognized the advantages that would accrue to the USSR from the agreement and acknowledged how the climate surrounding the Conference had cooled, noting that 'euphoria has given way to realism'. However, it cautioned, just as before there had been an excess of optimism, it was important now not to fall victim to an excess of pessimism.<sup>16</sup> The party's daily newspaper echoed this position, suggesting the possibility of a transition, after Helsinki, from a 'peace of position' to a 'peace of movement'.<sup>17</sup> The journalist Gustavo Selva, writing in *La Discussione*, warned against the risk of a continued hegemony of USA-USSR bilateralism; he pointed out that, since the West had already made broad concessions in recognizing the de facto situation, the Soviets needed in return to give way on freedom of movement of people and ideas. If, wrote Selva, the USSR was serious about the promises made, it ought to commit to removing the Berlin Wall.<sup>18</sup>

Communist enthusiasm for Helsinki seemed, if anything, even more marked: the Conference indeed was seen as a corollary to the marked progress made in Soviet-US détente, which in turn was broadly interpreted as a success for Moscow's line. Writing in the official PCI party organ, Agostino Novella referred to the 'liquidation of the long and tormented period of the Cold War' as a result of a change in global power relations 'between socialism and imperialism, between imperialism and national forces fighting for their own independence, between reactionary and progressive America'. Helsinki, wrote Novella (citing and praising the words of the socialist newspaper *Avanti!*), was an important opportunity for European countries to 'ride the tiger' of peace and leave military blocs behind. At the very moment in which a new government was being

<sup>14</sup>The quote can be found in 'La Conferenza per la sicurezza e la cooperazione europea (prima fase)', *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 4–18 August 1973, 286, and also Antonio Messineo, 'Verso il superamento della coesistenza pacifica?', *ibid.*, vol. IV, 1973, 527–537.

<sup>15</sup>*L'Osservatore Romano*, 7 July 1973.

<sup>16</sup>Arturo Pellegrini, 'Da Helsinki con realismo', *La Discussione*, 19 July 1973.

<sup>17</sup>Marcello Gilmozzi, 'Dalla distensione alla cooperazione', *Il Popolo*, 3 July 1973.

<sup>18</sup>Gustavo Selva, 'I "blocchi" in agonia', *La Discussione*, 12 July 1973.

formed (with the return of the centre-left alliance, following interruption of Andreotti's centre-right coalition with the conservative Liberal Party), Italy would enjoy an opportunity to rethink her foreign policy.<sup>19</sup> In the same vein, Sergio Segre in *l'Unità* interpreted détente as showing concrete realization of the enormous destructive power of weapons—a new development for humankind that would make it possible to envisage ‘a world without wars’, he speculated. Segre quoted Gramsci: ‘The schism of the human race cannot last long’ and ‘humanity tends towards internal and external unification, it tends to organize itself in a system of peaceful coexistence which will allow the reconstruction of the world’.<sup>20</sup> Other reactions to the Conference ploughed a similar furrow, with criticism of those Western countries that, having failed to embrace the concept of gradually overcoming antagonistic blocs, were overly critical of the superpowers.<sup>21</sup>

The former socialist Tullio Vecchiatti, now close to the PCI, argued that if the Conference were to lead eventually to the signing of a ‘European charter’, it would mean ‘definitive liquidation of a whole legacy of power relations based on the balance of terror’. This would, he said, represent a success for the anti-imperialist cause and definitive recognition that socialism (for which, read the Soviet bloc) was an irreversible reality, particularly since the United States appeared now to admit—at least partially—that their own hegemony was in crisis. European countries and Italy in particular would thus, Vecchiatti suggested, no longer need to feel constrained by any lingering reservations in this regard.<sup>22</sup>

### 3 CRITICISM FROM LEFT AND RIGHT

Clear criticism of the Helsinki initiative emerged from the radical Left, which took a distinctly negative view of the USSR's international role and was alert to signs of social tension in the West. The newspaper *il manifesto* referred to what it termed a conservative ‘planetary condominium’ between ‘the two colossi’. For this reason, it affirmed, ‘the European security being discussed in Helsinki was essentially the status quo (in terms of

<sup>19</sup> Agostino Novella, ‘Usa, Urss, Europa’, *Rinascita*, 6 July 1973.

<sup>20</sup> Sergio Segre, ‘L'Italia e il dialogo nel mondo’, *l'Unità*, 30 June 1973.

<sup>21</sup> Franco Bertone, ‘Helsinki atto primo’, *Rinascita*, 13 July; Romolo Caccavale, ‘Più spedito dopo Helsinki il cammino della coesistenza’, *l'Unità*, 9 July 1973.

<sup>22</sup> Tullio Vecchiatti, ‘Helsinki, un'occasione storica’, *ibid.*, 3 July 1973.

borders and class relations)'; the Conference confirmed 'Western Europe's marginality' within a set of 'subordinate structures' lacking the strength to express the existing contradictions.<sup>23</sup>

The newspaper of the Catholic Left, *Settegiorni*, likewise believed the Conference risked being nullified by US-USSR bilateral relations, noting that there would be no discussion of military or even trade questions. Those forces in the East and West alike that were interested in an alternative European system would need to mobilize afresh.<sup>24</sup>

Although the arguments given were a little different, pessimism prevailed in the secular liberal/progressive press, too. Underpinning the pessimism was the expectation that the two superpowers would not permit any change in the relationship between their respective spheres of influence. This was, for example, the view taken by weekly periodical *L'Espresso*.<sup>25</sup> The Rome-based daily *Il Messaggero* echoed this position: the goal of bipolar dialogue was to maintain the status quo, ensuring military and political security within the two rival blocs via a policy of mutual non-interference. In such a context, the newspaper asked, what room could there be for change?<sup>26</sup> The more moderate Tuscan newspaper *La Nazione* referred to what it called a 'diplomatic parade',<sup>27</sup> while, finally, *Corriere della Sera*, edited by Piero Ottone, limited itself to fairly anodyne comment.<sup>28</sup>

The magazine *il Mulino* (a collaboration between Catholics, Socialists and Progressive Liberals) expressed scepticism with regard to the notion that 'the CSCE will lay the foundations for a new system of collective security in Europe that might in the future—albeit not in the short term—replace the current division into blocs', stressing that it was necessary to distinguish between 'real potential' and 'unreal hopes'. An analysis of Soviet policy showed how once the objective of preventing German rearmament and stopping the United States from forging alliances in Central Europe had failed, Moscow had focused on slowing down or preventing an alternative power centre emerging in Western Europe. The Kremlin's proposal of the Conference was, the magazine suggested, a tactic to divert attention away from Soviet intervention in Prague and obtain legitimization

<sup>23</sup> A.N. [Aldo Natoli?], 'Finis Europae?', *il manifesto*, 4 July 1973.

<sup>24</sup> Emanuele Ranci Ortigosa, 'La Conferenza per che cosa?', *Settegiorni*, 1 July 1973.

<sup>25</sup> 'Il club di Helsinki', *L'Espresso*, 8 July 1973.

<sup>26</sup> Maurizio Montefoschi, 'L'ipoteca dei "Grandi"', *Il Messaggero*, 3 July 1973.

<sup>27</sup> Sergio Galli, 'Una parata diplomatica', *La Nazione*, 4 July 1973.

<sup>28</sup> 'Secondo passo verso la sicurezza europea', *Corriere della Sera*, 19 September 1973.

of the Soviets' declared peaceful intentions. Even in terms of trade (to which the word 'cooperation' in the title of the Conference paid lip service), the notion of greater interdependence principally stood to benefit Soviet interests.<sup>29</sup>

A series of articles were dedicated to the question by the Fiat-owned Turin newspaper *La Stampa*, which was normally quite progressive in its outlook. Czechoslovakian dissident Jiří Pelikán was highly critical of Western recognition of the status quo (as well as of its implicit acceptance of the 'Brezhnev doctrine' regarding the limited sovereignty of the People's democracies).<sup>30</sup> Some editorials and comment appearing in the newspaper, however, identified two different visions in play at the Conference: 'One idea static, conservative, with reactionary elements, the other dynamic, progressive, in some respects experimental'. In this the newspaper sided with the pessimists: common rules—even vague ones—were needed, but were not sufficient to justify innovation.<sup>31</sup> Concluding its discussion of the question, *La Stampa* returned to the idea of a genuinely sovereign Western Europe independent of the blocs and to the importance of developing strategic European defence, which might even include a nuclear deterrent (an issue that had already been touched on previously by Roberto Guidi, a pseudonym of the influential diplomat Roberto Gaja).<sup>32</sup> Needless to say, this suggestion was heavily criticized by *l'Unità*.<sup>33</sup>

The Conference's harshest critics, perhaps unsurprisingly, were to be found on the conservative Right, among both the Conservative Liberals and the Neo-fascists of the Italian Social Movement (MSI). Although the central theme here, too, was European impotence, the focus of much of the criticism was the West's acquiescence in the face of Soviet demands.

*Il Borghese* did not mince its words, dismissing Helsinki as merely a 'sop', after the Soviet-US summit in Washington had highlighted Europe's impotence: 'Détente is armed. Cordial backslapping is the privilege of those sitting on piles of atomic bombs of equal height';<sup>34</sup> it thundered, noting: 'By now, even dullards have realized, with legitimate

<sup>29</sup> Franco Reyes, 'L'Urss e la conferenza europea', *il Mulino*, July–August 1973, 567 ff.

<sup>30</sup> Jiří Pelikán, 'Cecoslovacchia dimenticata', *La Stampa*, 4 July 1973.

<sup>31</sup> 'Due idee dell'Europa', *ibid.*, 7 July 1973; Aldo Rizzo, 'Convivere', *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> 'Difesa dell'Europa. La sintesi di un dibattito', *ibid.*, 14 July 1973.

<sup>33</sup> Sergio Segre, 'L'Europa con la bomba?', *l'Unità*, 20 July 1973.

<sup>34</sup> Piero Buscaroli, 'Soli al mondo: ricchi, disarmati, impotenti', *Il Borghese*, 29 July 1973.

disappointment, that détente only serves to reinforce slavery in the East'.<sup>35</sup> The USSR had by this stage put to bed the idea of invading Europe. What it wanted instead, contended *Il Borghese*, was the Western European economic system at its service, in a position of neutrality, along the lines of Finland, Austria or Sweden. For the time being, in Helsinki the USSR had only obtained recognition of borders, but there was no room for complacency, the periodical warned: 'If it is unable to unite and arm itself with its own weapons, Europe will have nothing for it but to choose between being the servant (not the friend or equal, but the servant) of America or the slave of Russia'.<sup>36</sup>

Following the public inauguration and the interest generated by the Helsinki meeting, the Conference moved to Geneva, where, over the course of a year, a series of sub-committees were tasked with drafting the overall text of the agreement. In the Italian government's understanding, the CSCE was a starting point for processes that would develop slowly over time. In October Moro—who had just returned to the post of Foreign Minister—addressed Parliament, promising that Italy would take an active part in the work taking place in Geneva, aiming to strengthen those parts of the text dedicated to human rights.<sup>37</sup> Moro would subsequently insist that he envisaged the process as bringing potential changes, confirming in a speech to the Foreign Affairs Commission on 1 August 1974: 'We do not want détente to be a crystallization of the *status quo*'.<sup>38</sup>

#### 4 THE CONFERENCE'S 1975 FINAL STAGE IS GREETED WITH CAUTION BY THE CENTRE-LEFT

Hindered by slowdowns and numerous conflicts over individual questions, work on the Conference was delayed by several months. During this time, the Italian press showed little interest, with the exception of some specialist publications, such as *Relazioni Internazionali*, as well as, surprisingly, *La Civiltà Cattolica*.<sup>39</sup> The final stage was not reached until the

<sup>35</sup> Piero Buscaroli, 'La "guerra atlantica"', *ibid.*, 5 August 1973.

<sup>36</sup> Piero Buscaroli, 'Armati, servi o schiavi', *ibid.*, 12 August 1973.

<sup>37</sup> Francesca Zilio, *Roma e Bonn tra Ostpolitik e Cse (1969–1975)*, (Rome: Aracne, 2014), 179–198, provides an account of Italian protagonism in the issue.

<sup>38</sup> Aldo Moro, *L'Italia nell'evoluzione dei rapporti internazionali*, ed. by Giovanni Di Capua, (Rome-Brescia: Ebe-Moretto, 1986), 505.

<sup>39</sup> Giovanni Rulli, 'La Conferenza per la sicurezza e la cooperazione europea (seconda fase)', *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 19 January 1974, 182–196.

following year, in summer 1975, when heads of state and government returned to Helsinki to sign the Final Act (an option the Soviets had repeatedly insisted on and which was accepted by the West only at the close of 1974). Moro, who in the meantime had returned as head of the Italian government, also signed on behalf of the EEC, since Italy held the rotating presidency.

As the closing stage got underway, support from the Catholics and Christian Democrats appeared more decisive—albeit still shot through with prudent realism. Former Christian Democrat Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti, in an impassioned article appearing in the conservative Roman daily *Il Tempo*, wrote that ‘it is absurd not to acknowledge the constructiveness of this peace system and to paint participation in dialogue as capitulation and surrender’. Naturally, noted Andreotti, it did not make sense to demand alliances be dissolved, but ‘holding the Conference must go down as among the most positive points of the tormented history of contemporary humanity’.<sup>40</sup>

*Avvenire* reacted positively to the speech given by Moro in Helsinki. ‘Of course, the Conference is not a point of arrival but, rather, the beginning of a new era’, wrote the catholic newspaper, suggesting that it might be seen as the ‘nail in the coffin of the Cold War that for so many years has been a source of tension and friction, particularly in Europe’.<sup>41</sup> In the same newspaper Angelo Paoluzi struck an open, hopeful note, while at the same time warning that ‘the good faith of all’ would be judged on actual conduct.<sup>42</sup>

Speaking at the Conference itself, the Vatican diplomat Monsignor Casaroli read out a letter containing encouraging words from Pope Paul VI.<sup>43</sup> The press close to the Vatican shared the Pontiff’s positive assessment, *La Civiltà Cattolica* commenting that ‘the Final Act signed in Helsinki appears to be sufficiently balanced and constructive and may be considered as a step forward on the road to détente and collaboration’.<sup>44</sup>

*Aggiornamenti Sociali*, the journal of the Milanese Jesuits, reported on the long-drawn Conference in sober, unemphatic terms, admitting that the Final Act was ‘a “declaration of intent” that lacked any binding power’.

<sup>40</sup> Giulio Andreotti, ‘Giorno memorabile’, *Il Tempo*, 30 July 1975.

<sup>41</sup> Enzo Ferraiuolo, ‘Vive speranze di una pace “sicura e certa”’, *Avvenire*, 31 July 1975.

<sup>42</sup> Angelo Paoluzi, ‘Una prova per la distensione’, *ibid.*, 3 August 1975.

<sup>43</sup> *L’Osservatore Romano*, 3 August 1975.

<sup>44</sup> Giovanni Rulli, ‘Risultati della Conferenza per la sicurezza e la cooperazione in Europa’, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 20 September 1975.



It did note, however, that the PCI's approach to the question and the party's hopes for change in the East could already be taken as positive signs of the meeting's effects.<sup>45</sup>

The Christian democrat newspaper *Il Popolo* viewed the criticism by Solzhenitsyn (who had urged US President Gerald Ford not to sign the agreement, dismissing détente as unilateral) as 'excessive'<sup>46</sup> and saw the Final Act as a necessary step 'if we are to keep alive the hope of the principle of cooperation prevailing over the principle of confrontation in East-West relations'.<sup>47</sup> Following the signing of the Act, an article in the same publication discussed historical comparisons, suggesting that the Conference was more like Versailles or Munich than Vienna and recognizing the implicit reaffirmation of Soviet control over the East, while at the same time highlighting as a positive aspect the fact that Europe (and, as part thereof, the Italian government, which had proposed extending participation in the Conference to the Mediterranean) had sought to take advantage of 'the slender opportunities open to it within its limited sphere of action'.<sup>48</sup>

A similar line was taken by the party's weekly magazine, *La Discussione*, which noted that the Conference's Final Act contained 'a whole series of intentions', begging the question of whether the USSR's future conduct in humanitarian questions would respect such intentions. The magazine described its position as a 'pessimism that seeks to avoid painting a completely black scenario', concluding that 'so far, only a marriage has been celebrated. It is truly premature to sing hymns of joy or tear out one's hair'.<sup>49</sup>

Others, meanwhile, traced links with the Italian home situation. Luigi Granelli, the DC undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, noted a 'more autonomous position' from Moscow on the part of the PCI, which he saw as the basis for a 'less hostile, more constructive dialectic between government and opposition'.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Piero Fornara, 'L'"Atto finale" della Conferenza paneuropea', *Aggiornamenti Sociali*, September–October 1975, 525 ff.

<sup>46</sup> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, cited unsurprisingly by Mauro Lucentini, 'Un grido scuote l'America', *il Giornale nuovo*, 7 August 1975.

<sup>47</sup> Gianfranco Rossi, 'Dubbi e speranze a Helsinki. La difficile distensione', *Il Popolo*, 30 July 1975.

<sup>48</sup> Arturo Pellegrini, 'L'Italia a Helsinki', *ibid.*, 3 August 1975.

<sup>49</sup> Federico Marini, 'Il vero discorso inizia ora', *La Discussione*, 4 August 1975.

<sup>50</sup> 'Luci e ombre dopo Helsinki', *Il Popolo*, 6 August 1975.

The prevailing assessment in the socialist camp was also one of openness to future developments. *Avanti!* referred to a developing process and the important role to be played by progressive forces in Europe in implementing its contents.<sup>51</sup> The former Minister Mario Zagari went so far as to speculate about the ‘sunset’ of the Cold War in Europe and the dawn of a new system, which, though not yet perfect, was ‘founded on growing collaboration’. Justifying his optimism, Zagari pointed to the removal of significant obstacles to collective security in a reference to the German question, applauding the efforts of the European Socialists. He did, however, also recognize the Conference’s weak points, as well as the persistent ambiguities regarding the circulation of ideas and the free exchange of people.<sup>52</sup>

The liberal progressive and radical press, meanwhile, gave further confirmation of its already widespread scepticism, focusing in particular on the evident conservatism of the military blocs. Writing in *L’Espresso*, the influential journalist Antonio Gambino noted that while the idea of the Conference when proposed in 1966 could still have conveyed the sense of a ‘thaw’, or ‘moving beyond blocs’, after the events of 1968 in Prague and the German *Ostpolitik*, normalization had been achieved via a different route. Gambino was critical of the PCI’s optimism (comprehensible, he said, only from a tactical point of view), objecting that ‘everything, absolutely everything, has stayed the same as before’. The ‘renewal of Europe’—if what he called ‘the logic of Yalta’ was ever to be overcome—would not be achieved through the CSCE.<sup>53</sup>

*Il Giorno* expressed its regret that the Conference had stopped halfway, ruing the lack of ‘greater concreteness in terms of liberalizing measures’.<sup>54</sup> An expert in international issues, Basilio Cialdea, justified the ‘extremely cautious’ interpretation of the event given by President Ford, noting that Helsinki had seen the emergence of ‘everything and its opposite’.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Alberto Ninotti, ‘Firmato l’“atto finale” dai capi di 35 paesi’, *Avanti!*, 2 August 1975.

<sup>52</sup> Mario Zagari, ‘La Conferenza europea tra illusioni e realtà’, *ibid.*, 3 August 1975.

<sup>53</sup> Antonio Gambino, ‘Helsinki: ecco cosa non è successo’, *L’Espresso*, 10 August 1975; on 28 March 1976, *L’Espresso* published a document by Prague dissidents that was heavily critical of the CSCE.

<sup>54</sup> Victor Simpson, ‘L’accordo di Helsinki rafforza la “politica della distensione”’, *Il Giorno*, 2 August 1975.

<sup>55</sup> Basilio Cialdea, ‘L’atto di Helsinki: tutto e il contrario di tutto’, *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 3 August 1975.

*Panorama* looked forward, in particular, to future benefits in terms of growth in trade between the blocs. Moscow, it commented, had taken 'some risks' that an Eastern European country might reject the Brezhnev doctrine, while the concessions on civil rights requested by the West, although present on paper, were, in reality, very 'limited'.<sup>56</sup> In the final analysis, the USSR had gained more, the magazine claimed, despite Ford having argued in his summit speech against a 'one-way détente'.<sup>57</sup>

Writing in *Il Sole 24 Ore*, the Italian financial newspaper owned by the employers' federation Confindustria, Dino Del Bo referred to what he called the 'declaratory nature' of the agreement, citing the energy question as a missing factor that would need to be addressed if there were to be any genuine hopes of real issues being tackled in common.<sup>58</sup>

Further strong criticism came from *La Stampa*, which concluded that 'the West's attempt to open up a breach in the despotic communisms of the East and to build a "cultural" and "human" bridge must be considered to have failed', dismissing the commitments made by the Soviet side as merely 'vague promises'. Notwithstanding these objections, the newspaper qualified, 'détente, which as of tomorrow will be celebrated in Helsinki, is a difficult gamble, but not a useless one, so long as we do not forget certain fundamental truths, and one above all—that it is based not on words and promises, but on the hard reality of the balance of power'. The possibility of any change (including that of greater freedom in the East), it averred, was dependent on the existence of an 'alternative centre of power in Western Europe, performing a dialectic function'.<sup>59</sup> Such a prospect was, however, viewed pessimistically by the prominent historian Giuseppe Galasso, writing in the same newspaper, who warned: 'The enemy of European unity is not to be found in Moscow or Washington [...] but in the political and economic capitals of the nation states'.<sup>60</sup>

In comparison, *La Voce Repubblicana* (the Italian Republican Party, PRI, was a close ally in Moro's government) struck a slightly more positive note. In signing the Final Act, it said, the USSR had accepted 'principles

<sup>56</sup>Massimo Conti, 'La pace dei trent'anni', *Panorama*, 7 August 1975; see also Pietro Sormani, 'Gli occidentali giudicano distensivo l'intervento di Breznev a Helsinki', *Corriere della Sera*, 1 August 1975.

<sup>57</sup>Mario Margiocco, 'Un punto per Breznev', *Panorama*, 14 August 1975.

<sup>58</sup>Dino Del Bo, 'Dopo Helsinki', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 3 August 1975.

<sup>59</sup>Aldo Rizzo, 'Distensione difficile scommessa', *La Stampa*, 30 July 1975; and subsequently in Aldo Rizzo, 'I compiti dell'Europa', *ibid.*, 2 August 1975.

<sup>60</sup>Giuseppe Galasso, 'La conferenza c'è per quale Europa?', *ibid.*, 31 July 1975.

that do not belong to its social system', which although at the present time they were not of great use, might be useful in the future. The real limit, the newspaper warned, was the West's difficulty in 'organizing a common policy'.<sup>61</sup>

## 5 COMMUNIST RESERVATIONS AND BITTER CRITICISM FROM THE RIGHT

Communist enthusiasm compared with two years previously appeared to have waned. Giuseppe Boffa, writing in *l'Unità*, suggested it had not been realistic to imagine any rapid abandoning of the blocs, while noting that the very fact that Cold War hostility had come to an end suggested that a 'gradual ending to the long-standing antagonism was not wishful thinking'.<sup>62</sup> Writing in the party magazine, *Rinascita*, Boffa referred to the 'singular' character of the Conference, describing it as a 'new development'. He recognized, however, that all would now depend on how 'the principles agreed upon will be applied'. Although recriminations over Soviet advantages were misplaced, given that the Cold War strategy for changing the situation in the East was already a proven failure, he recognized that no progress had been made with the idea of 'supplanting rival alliances in the name of a system of collective security'. Boffa noted: it was natural that the process of détente should involve an 'agreement between the two blocs', but this could not, he warned, be considered a 'point of arrival'. In an article that avoided all oversimplification, Boffa confirmed his support for the part of the Final Act containing declarations on the free movement of ideas and people, concluding: 'The people have gained instruments of pressure'.<sup>63</sup>

Likewise writing in *Rinascita*, PCI leader Giancarlo Pajetta viewed Helsinki as part of a thirty-year process which could no longer be reversed, but which it was necessary to continue and broaden, with a view to increasing 'the chances of achieving socialism in a new way, by paths that peace and a guarantee of independence assure to all peoples'.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> 'Il dialogo continua', *La Voce Repubblicana*, 30 July 1975.

<sup>62</sup> Giuseppe Boffa, 'Un clima mutato', *l'Unità*, 1 August 1975.

<sup>63</sup> Giuseppe Boffa, 'Adesso la verifica dei fatti', *Rinascita*, 8 August 1975; also Giuseppe Boffa, 'I dieci punti della conferenza', *l'Unità*, 30 July 1975; Giuseppe Boffa, 'Processo fruttuoso', *l'Unità*, 2 August 1975.

<sup>64</sup> Gian Carlo Pajetta, 'Una tappa per l'Europa', *Rinascita*, 8 August 1975.

The non-communist Left reiterated its earlier scepticism. For *il manifesto*, the key issue continued to be the weakness of the superpowers and their consequent rigidity: the USSR wanted to 'avoid the erosion of its bloc', while the Americans 'appeared to be focused above all on reaffirming European subalternity'. Both, meanwhile, were engaged in 'seeking in any way possible to prevent Europe from collectively reacquiring unrestricted sovereignty'. *Il manifesto* was critical of the Italian government, too, which, it suggested, had given 'the impression of agreeing with everybody on everything'.<sup>65</sup> Essentially, the newspaper concluded, the Final Act was a document 'enshrining principles of which everybody is already aware and which will never be respected'.<sup>66</sup>

At the other end of the political spectrum, the conservative press likewise continued to be heavily critical. The magazine *Il Borghese* denounced what it saw as a betrayal of principles by the United States, accusing the Conference of sanctioning 'the enslavement of Eastern Europe', again citing Solzhenitsyn.<sup>67</sup> The right-wing intellectual Giuseppe Prezzolini, meanwhile, wrote in disparaging terms of how 'over lunches, toasts, handshakes and hugs, America handed Europe over to Russia on a silver platter, in exchange for a promise to receive a thousand or so Jews who were causing trouble in their homeland'.<sup>68</sup> The connection with individual countries' home situations was clear: America's backing down in the 'Finnish carnival' might well have repercussions in Western Europe. How, asked Piero Buscaroli, would Washington deal with the risk of further political acquiescence in Portugal or Italy? Local communisms, claimed Buscaroli, were not all the same—and the softer they were, the more dangerous they could be: 'By and large Portugal, with its climate of civil war, has a much greater chance of saving itself than Italy, which will offer its throat up to be slit like a sacrificial lamb, without so much as a reaction or complaint'.<sup>69</sup>

In *Secolo d'Italia*, the newspaper of the neo-fascist MSI, the philosopher Armando Plebe compared 'the less than noble spectacle of so many Western politicians kneeling before the Soviets' with the courageous speech by a young Margaret Thatcher, newly elected leader of the British

<sup>65</sup> Gabriele Antonucci, 'Giochi (pericolosi) senza frontiere', *il manifesto*, 30 July 1975.

<sup>66</sup> 'Ford e Breznev hanno raggiunto un accordo sugli armamenti: questo il vero risultato del vertice di Helsinki', *ibid.*, 3 August 1975.

<sup>67</sup> 'Tradimento americano', short article, *Il Borghese*, 3 August 1975.

<sup>68</sup> Giuseppe Prezzolini, 'Italia sott'occhio', *ibid.*, 24 August 1975.

<sup>69</sup> Piero Buscaroli, 'La "sicurezza europea" vista da Washington, Lisbona e Roma', *ibid.*, 31 August 1975.

Conservatives, who had railed against détente as surrendering to the Soviets without obtaining anything in return.<sup>70</sup>

Writing in *il Giornale nuovo* newspaper, newly founded by the liberal-conservative journalist Indro Montanelli, Enzo Bettiza did not hold back, offering damning criticism. The reality behind the rhetoric, he claimed, was 'sombre and squalid', coming in a 'climate of resignation, of tacit complicity' that was quite 'akin' to Munich 1938. 'Cosmetic détente' merely offered confirmation of 'the law of the strongest', while all the speeches at the Conference were a bolero-like crescendo confirming the *leitmotif* imposed by Brezhnev.<sup>71</sup> The impact could already be seen in Italy: the spreading 'map of erosion', the 'asymmetric coexistence of strength and weakness'. The only hope, the journalist suggested, lay in 'the hidden strength of the fearsome but silent anti-Soviet energy accumulated over decades of terror and hate in the viscera' of the Eastern nations, as well as in the unexpected firmness of Chinese government, which had led the country to directly criticize the Helsinki Conference.<sup>72</sup>

Newspapers such as *La Notte* (which spoke of 'grandiloquent promises')<sup>73</sup> and *La Nazione* (which cited reservations expressed by *The New York Times*) struck what was essentially a similar note in reporting the Conference.<sup>74</sup>

*Il Tempo*, which had previously published Andreotti's positive judgement, now commented in much more critical terms. The future, it suggested, would tell whether a united Europe would succeed in making its voice heard and whether the West would remain compact. Otherwise, the process would lead merely to surrender to the Soviet empire.<sup>75</sup> Ford had clearly spoken about 'two-way' détente, but it remained to be seen whether America would have the appetite for an ongoing confrontation with the communist East.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Armando Plebe, 'Un atto di coraggio', *Secolo d'Italia*, 30 July 1975.

<sup>71</sup> Enzo Bettiza, 'Il bolero di Ravel', *il Giornale nuovo*, 1 August 1975.

<sup>72</sup> Enzo Bettiza, 'Dopo Helsinki', *ibid.*, 3 August 1975.

<sup>73</sup> 'Sicurezza europea: 35 firme autorevoli per promesse gracili', *La Notte*, 2 August 1975.

<sup>74</sup> Girolamo Modesti, 'Bilancio in pareggio si dice a Washington', *La Nazione*, 3 August 1975.

<sup>75</sup> Emanuele Bonfiglio, 'Un passaggio verso il futuro', *Il Tempo*, 31 July 1975.

<sup>76</sup> Emanuele Bonfiglio, 'America europea', *ibid.*, 2 August 1975.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

The attention given to the Helsinki process was thus, it may be argued, fairly extensive in Italy, although naturally the Conference gave rise to a range of interpretations. Those tending towards a more positive view of the event were no doubt of the opinion that it might favour the slow process of adjusting the borders between the blocs and changing their identities. The Catholic Democrats could see in it—as suggested in a historical reconstruction—‘a western challenge to the communist monolith’,<sup>77</sup> while the Communists interpreted it as an opportunity to legitimize the potential for new forms of socialism developing in the West.

The centre-left had reached its final incarnation in the form of the Moro-La Malfa government. Just a few months later, the increasingly critical PSI would put an end to the alliance. Aldo Moro had spoken previously about the prospect of pursuing a policy of ‘national solidarity’ in a bid to tackle the difficulties facing the country. But this would not involve adopting Berlinguer’s proposed ‘historic compromise’. Rather, Moro’s vision entailed embarking on a brand new ‘third phase’ of Italian politics. Although the contents of this dialogue still needed working out, the premise was essentially that of abandoning direct confrontation. Following the 1976 elections, the PCI in fact suspended its political opposition for a couple of years. Yet it did not join the government: any change to the composition of the country’s leadership would have required a favourable international environment and such conditions were slow to emerge, with neither the Ford administration nor the Soviet leadership viewing the process taking place in Italy positively.<sup>78</sup> In addition, over the following two years, while the political processes resolving the long-standing ‘domestic cold war’ in Italy were still in the pipeline, international détente had begun to experience a series of setbacks.

According to some scholars, Italy’s political leaders were guilty of underestimating the conservative aspect of détente,<sup>79</sup> while others have suggested there may have been some ‘overestimation of the creative possibilities of the political choice’.<sup>80</sup> The debate in the country surrounding the CSCE would, however, appear to demonstrate that awareness of the

<sup>77</sup> As per Romano, *From Détente*, 227.

<sup>78</sup> For a brief summary, see my *Storia d’Italia nella guerra fredda (1943–1978)*, 471–474.

<sup>79</sup> For example, Carlo Pinzani, ‘L’Italia nel mondo bipolare’, in Francesco Barbagallo (ed), *Storia dell’Italia repubblicana*, vol. II, part 1, (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), 160.

<sup>80</sup> Franco De Felice, ‘Nazione e crisi: le linee di frattura’, *ibid.*, vol. III, part 1, 60.

issues at stake was actually not quite so slight. Meanwhile, the space for potential development could be seen in the processes underway in Europe and, not surprisingly, the political right was the most reluctant to take them seriously. 'But in Cold War terms the Helsinki Final Act was to have consequences far beyond what anyone could have foreseen in 1975.'<sup>81</sup> It is worth remembering that, in just a few short years, the weakening of the Soviet empire would become evident, in part owing to that real, if slight, new permeability of borders between blocs developing out of the *Ostpolitik* and Helsinki.<sup>82</sup> Naturally, the changes underway in Europe remained slow and contradictory, which in the short term did not help anyone wishing to move out of subordination to the two superpowers.

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<sup>81</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, (New York: Basic Book, 2017), 391.

<sup>82</sup> In this perspective: Michael Cotey Morgan, *The Final Act: The Helsinki Accords and the Transformation of the Cold War*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Nicolas Badalassi, Sarah B. Snyder (eds), *The CSCE and the End of the Cold War: Diplomacy, Society and Human Rights, 1972–1990*, (New York: Berghahn, 2019).



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# The End of European Colonialism. 11 November 1975. Italy and Southern Africa on the Cusp of the 1970s

*Andrea Argenio*

*Translated by Emma Mandley*

‘Angola is one of the biggest slices cut out of the map of Africa by colonialist countries, without any respect for traditional values’, and that is why, on 11 November 1975, the date of the country’s independence, the world was handed a country divided into three parts, with ‘Chinese instructors and Chinese arms, American arms [...], French arms [...], many mercenaries of the same nationality, a “mixed” column from South Africa, as well as Portuguese officers and soldiers still loyal to General De Spínola and active in the Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Portugal, the clandestine right-wing organization operating from bases in South Africa and Spain’.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Eric Salerno, ‘L’Angola alla prova dell’indipendenza’, *Africa*, December 1975, 575–579.

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This description of the political and military contexts immediately after the Portuguese retreat from the capital, Luanda, clearly evokes the confusion surrounding events that were convulsing one of the last former Portuguese colonies, at that time embarking on a difficult path to stability. Angola was one of the many hotbeds of tension that existed across Southern Africa in that decade. While the civil war in Mozambique had similar aspects to the Angolan conflict, much of the 1970s was dominated by the bitter confrontation between Rhodesia's white supremacist minority, supported by South Africa, and the independence movements supported by China and the USSR. In the context of the Cold War, none of these conflicts could be confined to their specific geographical areas, especially in a decade that was witnessing a slow passage from a climate of détente between the two superpowers to greater nervousness prompted by the perception of increased Soviet power politics in Africa.

This chapter aims to address how events pertaining to the African continent were perceived and analysed by Italian public opinion at a time when the country was facing its own political and social emergencies. In line with Giovanni Sartori's definition, we use the term 'public opinion' to mean a public or multiple publics, whose various mindsets (opinions) interact with information flows concerning the state of public affairs. Public opinion incorporates needs, desires, values and attitudes and therefore the ingredients of any mindset; but it also characteristically involves information about how public affairs are being managed. Scrutiny of the key periods of opinion, the generalist newspapers and the party press will enable us to verify whether and to what extent there was interest in events which, although peripheral to the Italian situation, were intrinsic to the context of the Cold War as its character changed. This chapter, while concerned principally with events in former Portuguese colonies and Rhodesia, will also address other important events taking place in Africa in the 1970s: the war between the two socialist states of Ethiopia and Somalia which had had a long relationship with Italy (as Zbigniew Brzezinski said: 'détente lies buried in the sands of the Ogaden') as well as the first complex steps in diplomatic relations with the new Libya led by Colonel Gaddafi.

## I AN IDEA OF AFRICA

During the 1960s the process of decolonization reached its peak. The year 1960 was universally heralded as the 'Year of Africa', and through the press in Italian homes, the echo was heard of events taking place in a

continent that was still seen as fairly mysterious. In new daily papers such as *Il Giorno*, owned by the state-owned oil company Eni led by Enrico Mattei, as well as in more established magazines with a marked interest in the developing world such as *L'Europeo*, entire pages were dedicated to African stories and situations. Yet in some cases even these publications tended to narrate the separation from colonial powers in tones of exoticism—or at any rate suggesting a perception of deepest Africa as in the works of Conrad, an amalgam of plausible aspects reminiscent of an Edward W. Said definition of Orientalism: a set of veracious or fictitious notions of the East.

While Italy had avoided the traumas of decolonization experienced by Britain and especially by France and Portugal, it had not engaged in a serious debate about the role of colonization in its recent history. This was partly because liberal governments had played a not inconsequential part in the acquisition of overseas territories, so responsibility for the whole issue could not be laid solely at the door of Fascism. It is not surprising that academic studies on Italian colonialism and the Commission for the documentation of Italy's activities in Africa, set up by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, were still influenced by nostalgia and fervent nationalism impervious to news from overseas, such that Aldo Moro, who became Foreign Affairs Minister in August 1969, thought it best to get external scholars to prepare a dossier responding to revolutionary Libya's demand for reparation for the damage caused by colonialism.<sup>2</sup> This decision shows the extent to which the idea of Africa in the early 1970s was still tied to antiquated stereotypes, not to mention the impact that the idea of 'Third-Worldism' had had on the political and social debates of 1968, tantamount to 'real massification, entering the vocabulary of newspapers, periodicals, political and trade union debates'.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, while this was true, interest in a continent seen as so different from Europe was confined to a small number of people or was based on old premises such as imperialism or the fear that the new African elites lacked the maturity to lead the newly independent nations. While the main majority and opposition parties, despite their different sensitivities and interests,

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2002), 442–443.

<sup>3</sup> Massimo De Giuseppe, 'Il "Terzo mondo" in Italia. Trasformazioni di un concetto tra opinione pubblica, azione politica e mobilitazione civile (1955–1980)', *Ricerche di storia politica*, April 2011, 41.

agreed on the justice of the struggle in the former Portuguese colonies and considered the attitude of the Rhodesian ruling party towards London and the independence movements to be at the very least outdated, the more reactionary circles and those closest to the right-wing Italian Social Movement (MSI) raised the spectre of a continent completely controlled by the indigenous population, which in the long term would result in the wholesale ethnic cleansing of white people, or 'Westerners' to use their preferred term.

And then there was the Holy See, a key protagonist, which showed considerable interest in African affairs through Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* and especially his 1967 Apostolic Letter *Africae terrarum*. This recognized the positive value of decolonization where achieved in an orderly and peaceful way, as nearly always; even when violence prevailed, this should not result in a general condemnation of a whole people or a whole nation, or—worse still—a whole continent. Without naming them, there was a clear reference to the separatist regimes of Rhodesia, South Africa and the last Portuguese enclaves in the section on racism, in which the Pope asked for 'equal participation in civil power, a more just distribution of national income and the recognition of fundamental rights denied by arrangements that artificially maintain economic, social, political and psychological barriers'.<sup>4</sup> Paul VI's commitment to newly independent countries went on to address the problems of underdevelopment analytically, setting out guiding criteria for immediate and longer-term solutions: from the campaign against hunger to the duty of all people to support the poorest, from distribution of surplus goods to the impoverished, to the need for concerted development programmes going beyond mere occasional aid. Furthermore, as noted by a discerning observer, Danilo Veneruso, the Church should and could be one of the stakeholders ready to step in against any new forms of radicalism and extremism 'especially when targeting the ex-colonial powers and everything connected with the West, which is held responsible for the shortages, imbalances and delays from which indigenous societies are suffering'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Africae terrarum*, 29 October 1967.

<sup>5</sup> Danilo Veneruso, 'Sul tramonto del colonialismo e sulla posizione della Chiesa nei confronti del mondo extra-europeo', *Studium*, 66:6, 1970, 496.

## 2 ITALY, DÉTENTE AND THE FOCUS ON AFRICA

The debate about Africa and the third wave of decolonization became part of the common image-store and entered daily political life at a time when the two superpowers had chosen to move towards détente—a conservative policy of *status quo* but one which, as the then Italian Prime Minister, Mariano Rumor, expressed it in April 1969 to US President Nixon, could be of benefit to governing parties if well managed and so long as they did not lose control of it.<sup>6</sup> The actions of Aldo Moro seemed to heading in that direction. He had become Foreign Affairs Minister that year and in that position, as when Prime Minister, he would be one of the decade's foreign policy protagonists who paid the most attention to what was happening on the African continent. It was no coincidence that Moro confided to Ambassador Egidio Ortona: 'To avoid a dangerous slide towards the left, we must evaluate motions coming from the Left and head them off'.<sup>7</sup> In practice, his 'doctrine of peace', expressed for the first time at the UN assembly in 1969, was intended to mean that Italy, not being a great power, could and should have a mediating role in that complex process called détente: solid transatlantic consensus was clearly sacred, but that would not prevent a gradual search for ways round obstacles, perhaps bolstering the idea that Europe could become the fourth hub of world politics alongside the newly independent countries in Africa and Asia.

This attitude partly explains the official non-interference in a particularly important event which took place in Rome in late June 1970, when Rome became the setting for the International Conference in Support of Peoples of the Portuguese Colonies. It was organized by a wide array of political and cultural forces: the Independent Left, the Italian Communist Party (PCI), the Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (PSIUP), the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), the Italian Communist Youth Federation (FGCI), the Communist, Christian Democrat and Republican youth organizations, the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL), the Italian Confederation of Trade Unions (CISL), the Italian Labour Union (UIL), the Italian Workers' Christian Associations (ACLI), the National Association of Italian Partisans (ANPI), the Italian Federation of Partisan

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Guido Formigoni, *Storia d'Italia nella guerra fredda (1943–1978)* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2016), 382.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 385.

Associations (FIAP) and the Association of Political Culture (ACPOL).<sup>8</sup> Thus it was Italy that drew the world's attention to the situation of the three Portuguese colonies (Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique) where fierce ongoing battles were being fought between various guerrilla groups and the Portuguese armed forces that had been spilling blood on those lands since the early 1960s, making Portugal's international reputation even more problematic. The presence of the main leaders of the independence movements—Amílcar Cabral, Agostinho Neto and Marcelino dos Santos among others—was a mark of the venture's undoubted success: and significantly the president of FRELIMO, the Liberation Front of Mozambique, thanked the people of Italy and especially the Italian government 'for having enabled our voice to be heard in Italy'.<sup>9</sup>

Rumor and Moro, although constrained by allegiance to the Atlantic alliance, supported the Conference and took no notice of the Portuguese government's vehement protests, which culminated in the decision to recall the Portuguese ambassador to the Holy See when Pope Paul VI received the three revolutionary leaders in the Vatican. Although the Pope hoped for a peaceful solution to the various conflicts, he demonstrated his support for the demands of the independence organizations despite the Portuguese regime's proud claims of adherence to Catholic principles.<sup>10</sup> The truth is that pressure from certain sectors of the Italian Church as well as from the Christian Democracy (DC) may well have contributed to the audience being arranged: 'an *audience* that the Vatican probably never thought would become a "historic event" as it turned out to be for the African liberation movements'.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup>The International Conference in Rome was also attended by 177 political, trade union and religious organizations from 64 countries in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America as well as official delegations from the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

<sup>9</sup>"Tre Vietnam" nel continente africano, *l'Unità*, 29 June 1970.

<sup>10</sup>A telling note was issued by the Secretary of State the day after the meeting: although it was not the Pope's role to pass judgement on the actual situation, 'he felt a duty to remind people of the Church's thinking: namely, that even when seeking to claim that which we believe is our right, we must always do so by peaceful means and legitimate political competition, in line with God's law, which is the law of harmony and brotherhood among all men. No word was said that could have offended Portugal, or suggested a lesser respect for its dignity, criticism of its politics or interference in its domestic affairs'. Quoted in Vincenzo Russo, *La Resistenza continua. Il colonialismo portoghese, le lotte di liberazione e gli intellettuali italiani* (Milan: Meltemi, 2020), 130.

<sup>11</sup>Russo, *La Resistenza continua*, 139.

Some have underlined how the conference's impact on public opinion stemmed from a 'model reminiscent of the National Liberation Committee [CLN, the umbrella organization for the Italian resistance movement during German occupation], in other words the convergence of positions and interests from different political spheres which [learnt] to speak with the common language of anticolonial solidarity, despite being driven by sometimes antithetical political backgrounds and objectives'.<sup>12</sup> This almost seemed to anticipate the Historic Compromise or at least a policy of paying heed to the Italian Communist Party.

Italian foreign policy, which throughout the decade was managed exclusively by Christian Democrat Ministers, could in reality be flexible, especially in its attitude to ongoing events in the Portuguese colonies and the white supremacist states, thanks to the idea that détente had to be multipolar, allowing African people to exercise the right of self-determination. Moro was among the quickest to realize that public opinion was beginning to show considerable interest in foreign policy and seemed decidedly in favour of Italy playing this unorthodox role—a role that entailed a lengthy and complex series of actions in which it was not always simple to find a meeting point between ideal aspirations, concrete policy and polarized tactics. Moro and the other Christian Democrat Ministers never wavered in their aversion to colonialism and racism, phenomena that were harmful to the individual's rights and dignity and inevitably destined to disappear. However, while recognizing and pursuing 'a line that was unequivocally anticolonial and against racial discrimination', in relations with the two segregationist countries it was necessary to use 'language that was somewhat objective. The less heated the language, the more authoritative it was'.<sup>13</sup>

Accordingly, Italian policy towards these countries did not follow a linear pattern but adapted to circumstances, avoiding radicalization that would have been unhelpful to the cause of those fighting the *status quo*. Although it continued publicly to promote policies in favour of decolonization and the end of the racist regimes in Southern Africa, in 1970 Italy withdrew from the United Nations' Special Committee on Decolonization. Meanwhile, when it came to voting for motions against the Portuguese

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Andrea Negrotto di Cambiaso, 'Appunti. Per un ricordo di Aldo Moro', in Alfonso Alfonsi (ed), *Aldo Moro nella dimensione internazionale. Dalla memoria alla storia* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2013), 143.



colonial policy, 'when the Western powers voted against resolutions to promote decolonization, Italy abstained; when they abstained, Italy voted in favour'.<sup>14</sup> This attitude might appear contradictory considering the significant supply of arms to the Lisbon regime, but it was not seen as such by the independence leaders and instead provoked substantial irritation in Portugal, where the Italian position was regarded as inconsistent with the much-vaunted principle of transatlantic solidarity.<sup>15</sup>

In matters connected with Southern Rhodesia, Italy also tried to reconcile its loyalty to the West with the opening-up of decolonization. It decisively and unequivocally condemned both the unilateral declaration of independence from Britain in 1965 and the apartheid policy of the Salisbury government, declaring its support for sanctions against the African country while emphasizing its clear opposition to the tendency, prevailing in the General Assembly, especially on the part of the African states, to extend the condemnation to Britain. But once again it was Moro who took it upon himself to support Rhodesia's exclusion from the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich. It was by now impossible not to take account of a new development and a sign of the times: the existence of 'global public opinion, human conscience with its own voice. It exists and it carries weight. Terrible things have been prevented by it, and still more will be prevented in the future'. There was no legal basis for the Rhodesian protests, since the unilateral declaration of independence had no real legal status: 'Rhodesia is not a state whose political regime is contestable and contested; in fact it is not a state at all. Rhodesia does not exist, but in this context white men and those of colour are pitted against each other despite the laws of equality and democratic coexistence'.<sup>16</sup> This was a significant stance to take in relation to an area of crisis that had never resonated much in Italy and that even the press often covered less thoroughly than South

<sup>14</sup> Luciano Tosi, 'Africa e Mediterraneo nella diplomazia multilaterale di Aldo Moro', in Alfonsi (ed), *Aldo Moro nella dimensione internazionale*, 68. Tosi pointed out in another essay that 'the resolutions approved from 1976 to 1980 were a significant exception, concerning the interests blocking the application of the Declaration on decolonization. Italy, together with its principal Western partners, voted against these: the relevant resolutions contained explicit accusations that some NATO member countries were colluding with the racist South African government and in the final three Italy was also taken to task!', Luciano Tosi, 'L'Italia fra la Nato e l'Onu', in Agostino Giovagnoli, Luciano Tosi (eds), *Un ponte sull'Atlantico. L'Alleanza occidentale 1949-1999* (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2003), 243.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Antonio E. Duarte Silva, 'O litígio entre Portugal e a ONU (1960-1974)', in *Análise Social*, 130, 1995, 36-44.

<sup>16</sup> Aldo Moro, 'La coscienza parla più forte dello Stato', *Il Giorno*, 6 September 1972.

Africa, for example. Rhodesia seemed more 'exotic' than South Africa and correspondents' reports often failed to express the dramatic nature of the situation and the severity of the racial conflict, dwelling instead on the eccentricity of an African country with 'the appearance of Old England' where 'white people attend horse races [...] play bowls and cricket [...] and meet in the clubs reserved for them'.<sup>17</sup>

Italy, in accord with other Western partners, nevertheless expressed its approval for direct negotiations between London and Salisbury. These came to a positive conclusion in December 1979 thanks to the role of Margaret Thatcher, the new British Prime Minister, and the main leaders of the Marxist guerrillas—including Robert Mugabe, who would subsequently become President of the new Zimbabwe.

A similar attitude was shown towards the new revolutionary Libya, despite the expulsion of the Italian community and the confiscation of their assets. The Italian reaction was delayed and mild because of the government crisis in July–August 1970 and was expressed in a conventional letter from the President of the Republic, Giuseppe Saragat, to which Colonel Gaddafi replied courteously, reiterating that he had exercised a legitimate right. None of this prevented the start of fruitful and cooperative relations between the two countries, including the supply of arms, despite initial opposition from the United States and public opinion. In particular, it was the Italian Social Movement who over time became standard bearers for a moderate and nostalgic electorate which opposed Italian policy towards Tripoli, including the Libyan purchase of 10% of Fiat's shares, reproaching the various governments for their cordial relations with a regime that had no qualms about sacrificing the fortunes of Italians living in Libya in the pre-Fascist period.<sup>18</sup>

### 3 DECOLONIZATION, COOPERATION AND DÉTENTE

In the mid-1970s two former Italian colonies, Ethiopia and Somalia, experienced a period of heightened tension when the two countries, both socialist regimes which enjoyed excellent relations with the USSR, faced

<sup>17</sup> Sandro Ottolenghi, 'L'ultima spiaggia dei bianchi', *L'Europeo*, 26 March 1976.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Mario Salvatorelli, 'Tripoli con il petrolio', *La Stampa*, 22 December 1976; Massimiliano Cricco, 'Aldo Moro e la cooperazione economica con i paesi arabi', in Daniele Caviglia, Daniele De Luca, Francesco Perfetti, Andrea Ungari (eds), *Aldo Moro nell'Italia contemporanea* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2011), 625.

each other in a war for control of the Ogaden region, a border area under Ethiopian rule but largely inhabited by a Somali-speaking people. The conflict between the two countries was deeply embarrassing for the Italian Communist Party which, while trying to mediate between the two sides, reluctantly supported Mengistu's Ethiopia. The conflict was viewed by the other parties, especially Christian Democracy, and by a fairly large proportion of public opinion, as yet another show of strength by the USSR in Africa which would probably aggravate an international situation already boiling at the interruption to the Salt 2 negotiations and especially at the Russian-Chinese rivalry 'for supremacy in a continent that was beginning to feel like a test-bed for opposing systems and ideologies'. In fact, Moscow's show of force was intended 'to discourage new initiatives by Peking [now Beijing] that were likely, for instance, in Rhodesia, in Namibia, and in South Africa itself'.<sup>19</sup>

The Ogaden war, along with the Angolan, Mozambiquan and Rhodesian conflicts, was viewed as further indication of a world order watching the Soviet Bloc making clear inroads into continents beyond Europe and in particular Africa. Public opinion—even among those most sympathetic to the indigenous populations' claims—gleaned this impression from the first reports of those arriving in places still plagued by violence and internecine wars, despite Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau acquiring independence in 1974 and Angola in 1975 (Italy was one of the first EEC countries to recognize the country officially and the very first to have its own ambassador in Luanda). The end of the Mediterranean dictatorships supported the hypothesis of a dynamic relationship between the two blocs, but subsequent events gave public opinion, and especially the Soviet leadership, the impression that the strategic and tactical advantage of the Soviet bloc was more obvious in Africa. So much for Henry Kissinger's secret memorandum only a few years earlier, in which he had given his personal conviction that the white regimes of southern Africa would survive for a long time.<sup>20</sup>

The reality described by the press on the spot showed that observers had quickly recognized the turning point in the Cold War. In the view of *Avvenire*, 'at the very moment that it was proclaiming independence, Angola showed itself to be the most dependent of countries': at first it

<sup>19</sup> Arturo Pellegrini, 'L'Unione Sovietica e il Corno d'Africa', *Il Popolo*, 19 January 1978.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Maria Cristina Ercolessi, *L'Angola indipendente* (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2011), 42–43.

certainly had 'a harsh and exploitative master, Portugal; now it has a whole host of them'. What would be the outcome? 'It is not out of the question that Angola will become a new battleground on which [the two super-powers] can pit themselves against each other from a distance and by proxy'.<sup>21</sup> While the extreme Right continued to blame the Portuguese democratic government, which 'in obedience to the demagoguery of its principal exponents, had proceeded towards decolonization too hastily and with deplorable negligence',<sup>22</sup> or to indulge in crude irony—'white Africa is looking black'<sup>23</sup>—concerns also emerged on the left, not so much about Angola's destiny but about Soviet and Cuban muscle-flexing with regard to the Americans and about the unclear role played by the Chinese. *L'Avanti!* thought the difficulties being experienced by the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) reflected the 'sometimes heavy-handed support of the USSR'<sup>24</sup> while Beijing continued 'its absurd policy of supporting reactionary movements against the legitimate MPLA government'.<sup>25</sup> Even *il manifesto*, while remaining sympathetic to the MPLA, recognized that the conflict would only be resolved by a united solution which was hard to imagine, given that 'the heavy burden of material dependency on the USSR weighed on the new people's republic' as it also did 'on American decisions'.<sup>26</sup> The country's independence was an indisputable fact but in the present circumstances 'delivering Angola to the "Angolans"' meant, 'as the situation has actually turned out, not delivering it to anyone and letting the strongest take it'.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, the Mozambique experience and the unifying policy pursued by FRELIMO showed how, notwithstanding the different contexts, the struggle for independence could turn out differently even in a similar scenario of instability and tensions.<sup>28</sup>

In summary, as a seasoned observer on a news magazine with a large circulation pointed out, this conflict was nothing but a proxy war and 'since the MPLA blacks weren't making a go of it, the Moscow leadership

<sup>21</sup> Gaetano Nanetti, 'L'Angola da oggi indipendente', *Avvenire*, 11 November 1975.

<sup>22</sup> 'L'Angola diventa indipendente in un clima di guerra civile', *Secolo d'Italia*, 11 November 1975.

<sup>23</sup> 'Africa nera o rossa?', *Il Borghese*, 30 November 1975.

<sup>24</sup> 'L'Angola è un paese libero e indipendente', *Avanti!*, 12 November 1975.

<sup>25</sup> 'Armi occidentali usate contro l'Mpla', *Avanti!*, 18 November 1975.

<sup>26</sup> 'Armi straniere invadono la nuova Angola', *il manifesto*, 19 November 1975.

<sup>27</sup> Ennio Polito, 'Amara eredità', *l'Unità*, 11 November 1975.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Marisa Musu, 'Il Mozambico è indipendente', *l'Unità*, 25 June 1975.

asked Fidel Castro to send a few men'. Thus 'Angola risked becoming the first victim of Kissinger's policy of détente at all costs and of James Schlesinger's dismissal'.<sup>29</sup>

Faced with this scenario, added to instability in Mozambique and the continent's many other tension hotspots, the various Italian governments chose a policy that exploited the opportunities of détente and was committed to strengthening a Euro-African area that would make the south of the globe one of the key players in a new world order, since 'the resources of the Six [founding members of the EEC] are absolutely necessary to supply financial, technical and economic aid to reinforce moderate governments'.<sup>30</sup> Thus, responding to the demands of public opinion and a revised debate about the developing world, there emerged a desire to go beyond the old concept of aid as a lump sum and explore a new form of international cooperation. With the introduction of a new *ad hoc* law in November 1971, this led to an extended series of measures partly inspired by the Communists and Socialists and by a number of agencies calling for a new approach to technical aid and a renewed focus on the decolonization. Among these, it is worth mentioning IPALMO, a state body that from 1971 was concerned with promoting and developing cultural, economic and social relations between Italy, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East: 'a sort of political core group'<sup>31</sup> which included Christian Democrats, Communists, Socialists and the Independent Left—a varied group which over time carved out an important role for itself, especially during the presidency of Christian Democrats Franco Maria Malfatti and Piero Bassetti, promoting dialogue between the various political cultures and even overcoming the testy relationship between the majority and opposition parties.

<sup>29</sup> Ricciardetto [Augusto Guerriero], 'Chi soffia sul fuoco dell'Angola', *Epoca*, 13 December 1975.

<sup>30</sup> Elena Calandri, *Prima della globalizzazione. L'Italia, la cooperazione allo sviluppo e la guerra fredda 1955–1995* (Padua: Cedam, 2013), 144.

<sup>31</sup> Massimo De Giuseppe, 'Le relazioni tra l'Italia e il "Terzo mondo": la vicenda dell'Ipalmio', in Alfredo Canavero, Davide Cadeddu, Roberta Garruccio, Daniela Saresella (eds), *Milano tra ricostruzione e globalizzazione. Dalle carte dell'archivio di Piero Bassetti* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2011), 218.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

From the second half of the 1970s, Italy played an increasingly important role in the North-South debate, becoming one of the countries that showed the most interest in Africa. As such, for an overwhelming majority of African countries it became one of the most popular nations, thanks to recognition of its role as a middle-ranking power free from colonial interests and highly active in the field of international cooperation.

The 1971 law, promoted by the Christian Democrat Mario Pedini but written with the Communist Renato Sandri, marked a new development: the involvement of social forces. This explains the new prominence of the League of Cooperatives (Lega delle Cooperative) which signed a series of protocols agreeing to the training of technical and administrative personnel in various countries (Angola, Mozambique, Somalia and Tanzania among others), following a different method from that used in the past, as the then president Vincenzo Galletti described: 'We are not going to Africa to build roads or dams and then come home, nor to establish a neo-colonial type of relationship'. The League of Cooperatives saw its mission in a developing country as 'getting it to the point where it can manage on its own, helping it to stand on its own two feet'.<sup>32</sup> It scored some considerable successes and enjoyed a good reception in various African countries, partly thanks to the role of the Italian Communist Party, which used ideological and political support for the campaign to decolonize the Portuguese countries as an incipient slow break with the Soviet bloc.

The decision by Berlinguer, leader of the Italian Communist Party, to pursue an accommodation with Christian Democracy on a national level drove the party, on an international level, to try and build a new, democratic, antifascist Europe, capable of fighting against the white supremacist regimes and helping the African socialist countries. However, the foreign policy of the 'national solidarity' governments did not depart from those that went before: Moro never had it in mind to vault the hurdle of the Cold War or even to mitigate the challenge it posed—his politics 'remained enclosed within the bounds of bipolarity, showing few real signs of an

<sup>32</sup> 'Gli accordi africani della Lega delle Cooperative', in *Politica internazionale*, April 1976, 63–64. Cf. also Paolo Borruso, 'L'Italia e la crisi della decolonizzazione', in Agostino Giovagnoli, Silvio Pons (eds), *L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni Settanta. Tra guerra fredda e distensione* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003), 430–442; Paolo Borruso, 'Le nuove proiezioni verso l'Africa dell'Italia postcoloniale', *Studi Storici*, 54:2, April–June 2013, 470–475.

open-mindedness to the progressive and “third view” demands that conversely [...] he tended to support domestically’.<sup>33</sup> This was partly because Moro understood that Africa, and in particular the eastern and Mediterranean zones (Gaddafi’s Libya, Maghreb and the Horn of Africa), was in danger of becoming the ideal place for an increasing Soviet presence, which presented risks for Italy too.<sup>34</sup>

The events of the following years, marked among other things by scandals associated with Italy’s cooperation,<sup>35</sup> did not belie this interpretation, characterizing the 1970s as a crucible for future crises rather than a moment of crisis in its own right. Revolutionary illusions were soon overturned, while the very concept of Third-Worldism lost its mythical aura and was replaced by what Didier Fassin was to call ‘humanitarian reason’,<sup>36</sup> in other words moral considerations became the primary political instrument for responding to the world’s emergencies. This phenomenon also had an impact on public opinion, whose approach to African problems in the 1980s was based on the idea of emergency and humanitarian campaigns run by voluntary organizations with no political connections, using the paradigm of urgency rather than ideology.

The legacy of the 1970s was thus a changed image of Africa, one that was less tied to stereotypes, but still seen through the prism of exceptionality and difference.

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<sup>33</sup> Calandri, *Prima della globalizzazione*, 144.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Angelo Del Boca, *Una sconfitta dell’intelligenza. Italia e Somalia* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1993).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Didier Fassin, *La raison humanitaire: Une histoire morale du temps présent* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010).

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# The First G6 Summit Takes Place at Rambouillet. 15–17 November 1975. Emergence of an International Governance of Globalization?

*Giovanni Mario Ceci*

*Translated by Ralph Nisbet*

‘Generally [the] Italian press has given front-page treatment to the big six summit.’<sup>1</sup> The US Embassy in Rome seems to have summed up best the mood of Italian public opinion concerning the Rambouillet summit. From 15 to 17 November 1975 the ‘heads of state of the six main western industrial countries’ met in the ‘romantic Fourteenth century castle’ of Rambouillet 50 kilometres outside Paris to discuss and tackle the grave

<sup>1</sup> *Italian Press Comments on Big Six Summit*, from American Embassy Rome (Beaudry) to SecState, 17 November 1975, in National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), RG 59, Access to Archival Database (AAD), Document Number (DN): 1975ROME16707.

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international economic, financial and political emergency. ‘No-one at the time imagined that would be the first of a series of meetings destined to recur periodically’,<sup>2</sup> the so-called G7.

The Rambouillet meeting was indeed ‘a major transformation of the European and international institutional systems’. It marked the ‘emergence’ of a ‘new practice of institutional summits’, a ‘new wave of international institution-building’. The goal was clear: to try and create ‘new instruments of coordination for international governance’, proper ‘global governance’ of the latest state of globalization and interdependency.<sup>3</sup> Managing globalization ‘from the top’—to quote Germany’s ‘Global Chancellor’, Helmut Schmidt.<sup>4</sup>

Headed by her PM, Christian Democrat Aldo Moro, Italy was one of the six ‘biggs’ at Rambouillet. The US Embassy was surely right to comment that Italian interest in the summit was running significantly high.

So what were the Italians’ expectations? What interpretations of that historic event were going the rounds of the peninsula? How did Moro and his government view the meeting and what line did they take? Above all, how deeply did different Italian actors—political leaders, political parties and public opinion—grasp the historic nature of Rambouillet as a major way-stage in the process of globalization and all attempts at governing it? These are the questions this chapter seeks to answer.

<sup>2</sup>Harold James, *Rambouillet, 15 novembre 1975. La globalizzazione dell’economia* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1999), 7. Besides the present volume, on the Rambouillet summit (and evolution of the G7) see especially Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol, Federico Romero (eds), *International Summitry and Global Governance: The Rise of the G7 and the European Council, 1974–1991* (London: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>3</sup>Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol, Federico Romero, Introduction: ‘Analysing the Rise of Regular Summitry’, in Mourlon-Druol, Romero (eds), *International Summitry and Global Governance*, 1–4.

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Emmanuel Mourlon-Druol, “Managing from the Top”: Globalisation and the Rise of Regular Summitry’, Mid-1970s–early 1980s’, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 23:4, 2012, 696. The definition ‘the Global Chancellor’ formed the title of a book by Kristina Spohr, *The Global Chancellor: Helmut Schmidt and the Reshaping of the International Order* (New York: OUP, 2016).

# 1 A SUMMIT BY THE CAPITALIST WEST IN TROUBLE...

Very few voiced confidence, hope or optimism as the Rambouillet summit got under way—and significantly, those few came largely from the majority party, Christian Democracy (DC), the linchpin of the government at that time.<sup>5</sup> Nearly all the other Italian political forces and areas of public opinion viewed the meeting on French soil with a mixture of scepticism, concern, uncertainty, pessimism, cold detachment or prudence. The general reason for such sentiments was, of course, the universal perception that an extremely grave crisis was in progress. The background was already fraught with alarm that détente might have its days numbered; and there was a widespread sensation in Italian political circles that this was no mere ‘black cycle’ but a structural, capillary crisis of the economy—much of the blame being traced, at least partially, to Washington and its policies and strategies. A crisis with a host of different faces (commercial, financial, monetary; bearing on energy and productivity; threatening recession, inflation, unemployment), one without precedent since the Second World War ended (the only possible parallel was 1929, a far from comforting precedent). A crisis that might cause the whole Western system to collapse. Another equally clear-cut and widely shared sensation in Italy at that point was that the very model of capitalism (for all its efficiency) might for the first time be radically in jeopardy (or need serious questioning, others might say). Whether it would survive seemed indeed to hang in the balance. By a significant coincidence, the same date as the French venue saw a major conference taking place in Rome on the ‘future of capitalism’; and still more significantly, two leading moderate Italian dailies, *Corriere della Sera* (22 November) and *La Stampa* (22 November), greeted the Rome meeting with headlines: ‘Has capitalism a future?’ and ‘Is there any future for capitalism?’.

The tension was naturally exacerbated by the Cold War climate of competition. Even several moderate observers held the crisis to be exclusively Western, capitalistic. Fragmented—even to the point of anarchy, given its isolationist tendencies—the West seemed for once to be lagging behind the more orderly, disciplined Eastern bloc,<sup>6</sup> whose member states seemed

<sup>5</sup> Giuseppe Bellucci, ‘Azione comune dei “Sei” per uscire dalla recessione’, *Il Popolo*, 16 November 1975.

<sup>6</sup> Bernardo Valli, ‘Un ritiro religioso nel castello dei re’, *Corriere della Sera*, 15 November 1975. Cf. also Cesare Zappulli, ‘Solidarietà da ritrovare’, *il Giornale nuovo*, 15 November 1975.

to be enjoying greater health, or so opined certain commentators closer to the Italian Communist Party (PCI).<sup>7</sup> One further fear was raised by a sophisticated economist, Siro Lombardini, elected a DC Senator the following year: that the whole situation might cause public opinion to consider the economy completely out of control, drifting destabilized and without governments at the helm.<sup>8</sup> The consequences of this might clearly be devastating for people's political and democratic alignment (especially in Europe).

If the crisis was so grave, small wonder the Italian press and politicians viewed the Rambouillet summit coldly, even pessimistically, at least in its early hours and the days building up to it. First, and foremost, is because they doubted whether the 'Six' were truly minded to collaborate and seek some concrete remedy to the worst crisis of the postwar years. Would it simply be a 'parade of vanity', the main content of which would be a sterile display of wishful thinking and 'diplomatic acrobatics', wondered the nation's leading economic daily, *Il Sole 24 Ore*—and much of the Italian press wondered likewise. The 'risk—not to say expectation—is that the mountain will give birth to the classic little mouse'. And if such were the (far from unlikely) case—concluded *Il Sole 24 Ore*—the 'consequences' would be 'dire' in the 'immediate upshot' and for the wave of 'lost confidence that would sweep across the western world'.<sup>9</sup>

What added to the climate of prudence, scepticism and pessimism among Italian politicians and journalists was the fraught atmosphere in which the meeting took place. Too many shadowy areas lurked in that medieval castle for hopes to be high, let alone optimism: rivalries, conflict, tension on too many crucial issues (especially energy, trade and finance). There were too many 'notables' absent (first and foremost, the EEC) and hence too many understandably protesting at being excluded; too many national interests were at stake, and at the same time the interests of all (including absentees) were insufficiently being consulted; diagnoses varied too widely, too many pre-concocted 'recipes' were being thrust forward for any hope of curing the disease; positions were being defended purely on grounds of prestige, hiding an ambition to build new hegemonies (or repeat old ones).

<sup>7</sup> Giorgio Fanti, 'Quando la retorica diventa sostanza', *Paese Sera*, 19 November 1975.

<sup>8</sup> Siro Lombardini, 'Un rischio da evitare', *Il Giorno*, 17 November 1975.

<sup>9</sup> Ivan Arnaldi, 'Yalta economica o circo delle vanità?', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 15 November 1975.

To many Italian observers, the summit thus seemed doomed from the outset. Significantly, many were uncertain even what the true nature of the meeting was. Its goals seemed essentially theoretical, and contemplative. Was it some kind of spiritual retreat, a seminar, a conclave, a council? More to the point, was the agenda of Rambouillet to be an economic-monetary-financial summit or a political occasion? In short, at a time of fluctuating currencies, the identity of the summit itself sounded distinctly fluctuating—or so thought that popular Catholic weekly, *Famiglia Cristiana*.<sup>10</sup>

In the upshot, the ‘politico-economic quiz’ (*Paese Sera*, 16 November) was solved (partly, at any rate). Just before the event got under way most Italian commentators agreed upon a clear reading of the situation (which would gain confirmation as work proceeded). The Rambouillet summit had an essentially *political* purpose, and that was to be taken as a victory by the USA over France: meaning that the powerful US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, espousing the ‘political’ line, had prevailed over the Secretary of the Treasury, William Simon, and his ‘economic’ line, while France, of course, would likewise have wanted the talks to focus on economic and financial issues. Not but the economy, finance, trade and energy were key aspects raised in the castle rooms as Washington and Paris squared up to one another—a fact noted by various organs of the Italian press. Yet here again great confusion reigned as to analyses and recipes for weathering the crisis; it left a leading journalist in *Corriere della Sera*, Bernardo Valli, wondering whether the gathering of leaders was propending for Ricardo, Keynes, Friedman (or perhaps all three together?).

## 2 ...TO HAUL THE CAPITALIST WEST OUT OF ITS CRISIS

On the Italian view, then, an American-driven Rambouillet ended by prioritizing ‘global political issues of western cooperation’ over monetary and economic questions, as *La Discussione* put it.<sup>11</sup> That weekly organ of the main Italian party made it quite plain: one profile stood out in all the appraisals by Italian politicians and opinion-makers: ‘the West’, flanked by its co-protagonists, ‘capitalism’ and ‘democracy’. ‘In the first person: the West’ (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, 11 November); ‘The West closes ranks’ (*Il Popolo*, 19

<sup>10</sup> Carlo Cavicchioli, ‘D’ora in poi il dollaro non farà capricci’, *Famiglia Cristiana*, 30 November 1975.

<sup>11</sup> Massimo Brain, ‘Per ricostruire la solidarietà occidentale’, *La Discussione*, 24 November 1975.

November); 'To rebuild western solidarity' (*La Discussione*, 24 November)—a cross-sample of press headlines on the Paris summit. In short, the forces of public opinion and politics in Italy harboured no doubts as to the end-goal of the meeting: Rambouillet was witnessing the birth of a new 'Holy Alliance'<sup>12</sup> among the principal Western nations to save and reboot a crisis-torn West. Some, it is true, hoped the summit might give rise to a new and fairer global order than East/West bipolarity. But the prevailing view in all walks of Italian politics and culture without distinction was that Rambouillet represented a jointly coordinated effort on the part of Western capitalist economics and politics to haul the West out of its crisis. By clearly restating their faith in the market economy, capitalism and liberal values, the 'Big Six' were implementing Kissinger's 'operation confidence': in working together to heal the economy, they were bolstering the West's faith in its own values and system, as well as in democracy itself (which was likewise perceived to be floundering, as had concluded the Trilateral Commission's report only a few weeks earlier).

If this was common ground, the appraisal of it varied widely from sector to sector. Not surprisingly, the left-wing and Communists came out heavily against a summit serving Western capitalism as a way of saving itself. On the Right and extreme Right, again unsurprisingly, the response was one of huge enthusiasm. 'The fears and wishes of 560 million people are henceforth the true protagonists of the "summit" of the six industrial democracies. Fears for the safeguarding of our civilization, income and labour; wishes that such achievements may spread to the rest of the world', wrote the right-wing daily *il Giornale nuovo* (16 November) commenting on the meeting's efforts to preserve the 'economic future of the West'. The same position was voiced still more forcibly by the extreme-right party the Italian Social Movement (MSI). Given the Cold War dynamics, and fears of succumbing to communism both home and abroad, the MSI was strongly in favour of the Paris summit as a new founding moment for rebooting 'Western civilization'. The 'Western summit' must serve to devise (as indeed it had) a 'strategy for the West' against Moscow and the Communists who were counting on the economic crisis to destroy Western institutions and values. In other words, the 'West' (not just the USA), the 'Free world' united at Rambouillet, had picked up the 'communist challenge' and pledged to fight for the 'survival of democracy and liberty'.

<sup>12</sup> Ugo Stille, 'Quasi una Santa Alleanza per salvare la democrazia', *Corriere della Sera*, 15 November 1975.

Italy itself (the linchpin of the Western world)—and Moro too, whom the MSI saw as giving in to the Communists—must take the lesson of Rambouillet on board. It was time to dispel the ambiguity of a ‘regime’ that considered PCI support ‘inevitable’.<sup>13</sup>

These were the most radical positions. For the rest, the governing parties and broad swaths of press opinion took a far more moderate line. Some were mildly critical of the fact that Rambouillet boiled down to a US-led bid by the West to find a common way of saving its own skin. Others, the majority, were more favourable in their judgement, though even here there were obviously shades of difference. While it was a broadly felt hope that the West should close ranks and assume a new ‘inter-occidental’ solidarity (which appeared to have happened at the castle near Paris), two distinct lines seemed to be emerging. Some areas of Italian culture and politics espoused the idea of Western primacy, Western hegemony, a Western driving input behind the process of crisis-solving, promotion of development and governance of the dynamics of interdependency. But other important mouthpieces of the press and politics—the DC and Catholic world to the fore, though not exclusively—thought fit to caution that restating the values of Western solidarity should not translate into some ‘Holy Alliance’ of non-communist nations; or a ‘new Atlanticism’<sup>14</sup> based maybe on the idea of a self-sufficient West isolated from the rest of the world and lacking a ‘planetary’ strategy;<sup>15</sup> or a new economic Yalta, hauling the West out of its crisis, no doubt, but preserving the existing *status quo*.

### 3 A WESTERN CLUB TO STEER INTERDEPENDENCY?

Moro took up a still different position. As head of a shaky centre-left government, he represented Italy at the Rambouillet summit. (It was no foregone conclusion that Italy should take part, but a ‘concession’ following lengthy and complex work on the part of the diplomats.)<sup>16</sup> Like many

<sup>13</sup> *Secolo d'Italia*: 15, 16, 18, 19 November.

<sup>14</sup> Brain, ‘Per ricostruire la solidarietà occidentale’.

<sup>15</sup> Arturo Pellegrini, ‘Una strategia per lo sviluppo’, *Il Popolo*, 16 November 1975.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Antonio Varsori, *Dalla rinascita al declino. Storia internazionale dell'Italia repubblicana* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2022), 370–372; and Marinella Neri Gualdesi, ‘Under a Multinational Mantle: Italy’s Participation in the G7 (1975–76)’, in Antonio Varsori, Benedetto Zaccaria (eds), *Italy in the International System from Détente to the End of the Cold War: The Underrated Ally* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 69–94.



Italians at the time, Moro insisted that Rambouillet was an occasion where a new solidarity might be forged. For many, of course (including large areas of his own party) that meant new solidarity among the West; but for the Italian prime minister it needed to extend both in theory and in practice onto a worldwide level. This was no random thought. Unlike many other national and international leaders, Moro went to Rambouillet with a clear idea in mind: besides enhancing the ‘mutual understanding’ among ‘governments of the industrialized world’ bearing ‘quantitatively the greatest responsibility’, Moro thought they should vigorously uphold ‘the principle of *active solidarity* on the international plane’. To his mind, that was the ‘only’ principle ‘capable of bringing progress’ in a world—as he spelt out to the press only hours before the summit—‘where no-one is allowed any longer to isolate or withdraw into himself’. Such ‘natural solidarity’ was obvious (though needing ‘to be made more operative’) among the Six gathering within the castle, ‘united by direct ties—be it of friendship, alliance or community membership—but anyway and always close’. Yet if one wanted ‘truly to consolidate peace’, it should be solidarity ‘in general among all peoples’ that aspired to ‘human and civil advancement, a goal ever more universally felt’.<sup>17</sup> And when the summit ended, he would insist to the press, more urgently than other colleagues at Rambouillet, on the need for ‘international cooperation’, ‘concretely and open-mindedly [...] pursuing dialogue between the industrialized and the emerging countries with a view to promoting constant economic and social advancement among the emerging nations within a stable world economy’.<sup>18</sup>

Some weeks earlier Moro had put forward still clearer arguments at the Brussels NATO summit in late May 1975. Faced with a ‘rapidly changing’ world (be it ‘energy, meeting food requirements, supplying raw materials, environmental change, economic development’), ‘the West will survive insofar as it learns to tackle, assimilate and manage change’. That was Moro’s forthright warning to NATO. ‘The problem of change’ posed a dramatic challenge: ‘it is no longer on a single-country scale’. Hence,

<sup>17</sup> Aldo Moro, [*In vista del vertice di Rambouillet*], in *Aldo Moro, Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Aldo Moro*, s. 1: *Scritti e Discorsi*, vol. 4: *Il ritorno al centro-sinistra e la ‘solidarietà nazionale’ (giugno 1973–maggio 1978)*, ed. by Guido Formigoni, Agostino Giovagnoli, edition and historical-critical note by Chiara Zampieri (Bologna: Università di Bologna, 2021).

<sup>18</sup> *Dichiarazioni dell’On. Presidente del Consiglio Moro al termine dell’incontro di Rambouillet*, 17 November 1975, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Rome, Archivio Aldo Moro (AAM), s. *Scritti e Discorsi*, b. 31, f. 676.

Moro argued, one's reasoning must take stock of an evident imperative: 'the imperative of interdependency'.<sup>19</sup>

Such reasoning may have inclined Moro to be prudent from the outset, not to say cool, about the Paris summit. Even before it started, he significantly emphasized 'the informal nature of the meeting' and the fact that there were no 'decisions to take'. Moro's view was that the real decisions needed 'taking at the appropriate venues'—spelling out that 'we are thinking particularly of the European Community'.

He seemed clearly to be distancing himself not just from the Rambouillet meeting. His convictions had deeper, more all-embracing roots. Some acute Italian commentators did glimpse that Moro's coolness betrayed a clash between two approaches to governing the ongoing worldwide political and economic transformations. On one side—thought some Italian journalists—there was the US idea, and above all the Kissinger idea, of making the Paris G6 (and later G7s) a venue for the governance of interdependency (a category, this last, dear to the heart of the US Secretary of State), a directorate for monetary and economic governance of the West, a permanent club of the big industrialized Western powers. On the other side lay Moro's vision (though not only his, of course). Moro was outspokenly against the idea that governing a more and more interdependent world should be entrusted to a club of Western powers. There should be other more inclusive seats of decision-making, he argued. A more united and integrated Europe, in particular, should play a key role in governing the complex ongoing world transformations. Those in Italian politics and public opinion who were closest to this viewpoint were naturally the most outspoken in their fears that Rambouillet—and any permanent Western club—might drive a dangerous wedge among Europeans, splitting the EEC (not invited to Paris): in short, a 'rift in European solidarity'. And such a rift might be especially serious for Italy: 'more than other European countries—warned a *Corriere della Sera* editorial, perhaps espousing the Moro line—we are interested in there being a concrete European entity; more than the others we see the birth of a club of the Big Few banding with America as a menace to the future of Europe'.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> [*Al vertice Nato*], Brussels, 29–30 May 1975, *ibid.* Cf. also ACS, AAM, s. *Scritti e Discorsi*, b. 30, f. 649.

<sup>20</sup> Michele Tito, 'Speranze e rischi della presenza italiana', *Corriere della Sera*, 15 November 1975.

#### 4 IN OPPOSITION (TO CAPITALISM)

The loudest criticisms of the Rambouillet summit came, of course, from the Left. The extreme left-wing daily *il manifesto* dismissed the Rambouillet meeting out of hand, calling it an expression of ‘bourgeois internationalism’ and US ‘imperial hegemony’ (16 November); and this was also the tone of the Italian Communist Party, at the time the leading opposition force. The communist analysis—harshly criticized by the Republican Party which was then a partner in the DC government<sup>21</sup>—was quite explicit. The ‘capitalist world’ forces had been *compelled* to meet at Rambouillet to sort out the woes of capitalism. Self-convened around the ‘sickbed of the capitalist system’, the ‘six most industrialized capitalist countries’ were patently faced with an impossible task. To the Communists, capitalism had come to a dead end. The Rambouillet meeting had simply confirmed the capitalist forces’ ‘impotence’ to deal with their crisis (‘Impotence of the Big Six Summit’ was the headline of the PCI article in its weekly, *Rinascita*). Various reasons lay behind this attitude. First, Italy’s Communists were convinced the ‘intra-capitalist contradictions’ were too deep and were left ‘unsolved after Rambouillet’. The PCI was still wedded to the paradigm of the ineluctable ‘crisis of capitalism’.<sup>22</sup> This standpoint was staunchly reiterated in a joint declaration by the PCI and its French counterpart (PCF). Besides accusing ‘the forces of big capital and imperialism’ of being ‘incapable’ of tackling the crisis, the declaration spelt out the room for manoeuvre in which the PCI and PCF should conduct their political offensive: that is to say, the ‘march towards socialism and building a socialist society’. A ‘socialist transformation’ to be ‘achieved as part of a constant democratizing of economic, social and political life’, one that entailed ‘public control over the chief means of production and exchange’ and ‘the progressive socialising thereof’.

Rambouillet was capitalism’s pointless ‘race against the inexorable stopwatch of economic failure’, to which the PCI added a final argument: the guilty designs and behaviour of the Americans themselves (or ‘US imperialism’, as the joint declaration called it). On that view, the USA had played a decisive part in causing the crisis and was now trying to wriggle out, ‘at great cost to the others’ (thanks also to the ‘multinationals’). They would

<sup>21</sup> ‘Il lamento su Rambouillet’, *La Voce Repubblicana*, 19 November 1975.

<sup>22</sup> Guido Formigoni, *Storia d’Italia nella guerra fredda (1943–1978)* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2016), 463–464.

certainly not effect any ‘inversion of trend’, but would plough ahead as before (until the next crisis). To the PCI, indeed, Rambouillet was just another US opportunity ‘to reboot its own hegemony’ and further a ‘protectorate’ policy. Not only: the problem was that, hard by the gates of Paris, the Americans had actually ‘laid down their own law’, while the disorganized Europeans had ‘once again been subjected to the American line’. Thus, the real ‘winners’ at Rambouillet were the Americans—by no means a foregone conclusion. They had also secured one of their prime objectives: ‘to slow down as far as possible’, if not ‘bury altogether’ the European unification project. The truly vanquished were the Europeans: they had put up a ragged performance and ended the summit weaker and more divided than ever. On the losing side Italy was the outstanding loser: it had failed—said the PCI daily—either to be a ‘spokesperson for the marginalized or to join the Bigs’ club’. ‘Everyone, even quite openly’, had considered its presence there as something ‘marginal and tolerated with a bad grace’.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the PCI publicly made a lukewarm show of supporting Italy’s participation—though it had been hinted within the party (not without pressures from Italian diplomatic circles) that it should show ‘appreciation’ for its taking part.<sup>24</sup>

## 5 THE ITALIANS AND THE ‘SHOCK OF THE GLOBAL’

Many in the wide-ranging Italian political and media scene cottoned on straightaway to the importance and novelty of the Rambouillet summit: the ‘first initiative to have such a demanding framework’, commented the Italian Jesuit review, *La Civiltà Cattolica* (20 December); perhaps ‘the beginning of a new turn in the history of international relations’, observed the socialist party newspaper (*Avanti!*, 18 November), which added: ‘the future of much of mankind is probably at stake in the castle of Rambouillet’ (*Avanti!*, 16 November); a ‘historic date’, wrote Rome’s first daily (*Il Messaggero*, 18 November); ‘the hour of the truth’, ran the editorial headline of *Corriere della Sera* on 16 November; while the DC daily (*Il Popolo*, 18 November) spoke of a ‘turning point’, matched by *Il Sole 24 Ore*’s ‘historic watershed’ (15 November).

<sup>23</sup> Quotations taken from the PCI daily, *l’Unità* (15, 16, 17, 18, 19 November 1975), and the PCI weekly, *Rinascita* (21 November 1975).

<sup>24</sup> *Nota di Sergio Segre per Enrico Berlinguer*, 16 October 1975, in Fondazione Gramsci, Archivio Partito Comunista Italiano (APCI), Fondo: Note a Segreteria, mf. 208, 482–483.

Nor was that all. In reconstructing the comments and judgements passed in Italy at the time of that Rambouillet G6, one notes the first signs of certain politicians and journalists having glimpsed (perhaps intuitively and unawares) some of the elements of global and globalizing change afoot. Though even in the lucid commentaries the perspective was distinctly ‘Western-centric’, several actors at Rambouillet did take to using ‘interdependency’ as a category to portray the dynamics at work among the various countries. Many highlighted the new weight of the ‘emerging countries’ (and the need to form new and different relations with them)—likewise, the obligation to take a North/South approach, not just East/West. Some of the more attentive analysts stressed the vital need for greater *integration* among the world economies and hoped that Rambouillet would encourage new prospects of ‘global economic harmonization’ (*Il Popolo*, 16 November); others called for the birth of a ‘new order’, fairer, more inclusive, based on more effective dialogue among nations; while a very few went so far as to speak explicitly of a new ‘global dimension’, feeling that at Rambouillet, and for the first time, the Big Six had adopted policies inspired by that new awareness (*Il Tempo*, 18 November).

By way of conclusion, however, one notes that such awareness of the exceptionally important Rambouillet summit, and the glimpses of change in progress, often failed to be matched by any full, clear grasp of the radical transformations, especially the process of globalization—and governance thereof—which were just beginning to take shape: changes that the G6 had been one of the first venues to explore.

In other words, the broad-ranging and articulate debate triggered by one of the founding events of the new globalization revealed that perhaps no one in Italy at that moment fully realized the ‘shock of the global’ and its repercussions. Significantly, even before the summit, in a change of his traditional perspective, Kissinger began insisting on the concept of interdependency as well as taking stock of the fact that ‘global problems demanded global solutions’. During those selfsame months of 1974, the word *globalization* ‘first appeared in the pages of *The New York Times*’.<sup>25</sup> The USA—commented the DC weekly, *La Discussione* (24 November)—has grasped that issues need to be tackled from ‘a global angle’.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel J. Sargent, ‘The United States and Globalization in the 1970s’, in Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, Daniel J. Sargent (eds), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010), 49–64 (quotes are from 50 and 53).

The picture in the peninsula was quite different. Despite the occasional perception or intuition of movements and developments afoot, the Italian politicians, and more generally the ruling class and Italian press, had only the slightest awareness of that extraordinarily deep and structural upheaval: how a new economy was arising, and also a new statehood.

One can trace various—and at times overlapping—reasons behind that partial lack of awareness.

In the first place is the considerable weight of ideology, which Cold War Italy was well supplied with. One thinks of certain shared attitudes circulating on the Right and extreme Right. Obsessed by a new decline of the West (witness the growing support for the PCI in Italy), the only prospect in which they found any hope was that the West as a whole should band together to save itself. No room for alternative global scenarios, in short. Yet take the opposite stance, the Communists': though partly aware of the new economic interdependency (and internationalization), the Communists were still deterministically over-attached to the 'necessary and inevitable collapse of capitalism': it was too much of a hermeneutic pillar for them even to imagine any global evolution or radical transformation of capitalism. Again, part of the Communists' blindness to the 'shock of the global' was, needless to say, their fierce opposition to the USA, amounting to outright anti-Americanism in so many cases. Nor was radical criticism of America confined to the PCI: it was rife among moderate Italians, Catholics or secular. That too was a barrier to any fuller understanding of the changing world.

There was also another, decisive factor cramping awareness of globalization and its impact.

What counted especially was a kind of cultural sluggishness, a lack of cultural perspectives centred on modernization (typical of all the country's main political cultures at the time). A conservative tendency prevailed: to interpret the world through traditional paradigms. Though certain needs and phenomena commanded attention (the South, emerging/developing countries, poor nations, the energy question), the outlook on the planet was still West-centred. Although people were increasingly aware of interdependency, the idea that gripped the Italian mind at the time of the Rambouillet summit was a simple one: the crisis lay in the Western capitalist world, so the solution must lie first of all *with* Western forces acting *on behalf of* Western forces, since on those the economy was based. Significantly, this all led to the Rambouillet summit being surprisingly underrated at times. Some important names in journalism and Italian

culture paid little or no attention to the meeting. Even some persons of note, like the former Governor of the Bank of Italy, Guido Carli, pooh-poohed Rambouillet in sarcastic terms: ‘it sounds as though Rambouillet has discovered the telephone’ (*Corriere della Sera*, 22 November), he remarked in a jest aimed at the new climate of international collaboration.

When it came to *governing* the newly emerging global order, by and large, the solutions people came up with in Italy at that time were also traditional and conservative.<sup>26</sup> Rather than imagine new models of global governance, new ‘sets of institutions and practices’,<sup>27</sup> the policies put forward smacked of ‘yesterday’s world’ (‘active solidarity’, or invoking EEC intervention), not the world that was in the offing.

So our analysis of a key moment at the dawn of the new global era (viz. the Rambouillet summit) evinces a low degree of awareness as to the impending havoc that globalization would bring. Exceptions, like Moro (at least partially), were few and far between. That lack of awareness may have been decisive for the future of Italian politics. If that crisis—as Charles Maier aptly phrased it in a seminal essay devoted to the 1970s—describes ‘a painful transition that compels new assumptions about how societies are best governed or how they progress’,<sup>28</sup> then one can only conclude that in Italy (and not just Italy) such ‘new assumptions’ did not materialize as new plans for governance. In that lacuna, that dearth of awareness, lies one of the factors behind the collapse of the party system in the early 1990s.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup>There exists a full and enlightening dossier prepared for Moro’s participation at Rambouillet; open though this was to wide-ranging issues, it paid little attention to any globalising trends: ACS, AAM, Serie: 4. Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri (IV-V Governo), 2. Ufficio del consigliere diplomatico, Sottoserie: Questioni diverse, b. 126, f. 35 (Vertice Monetario di Rambouillet, 15–17 November 1975).

<sup>27</sup>Mourlon-Druol, Federico Romero, Introduction: ‘Analysing the Rise of Regular Summity’, 1.

<sup>28</sup>Maier, ‘“Malaise”: The Crisis of Capitalism in the 1970s’, in Ferguson, Maier, Manela, Sargent (eds), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*, 27.

<sup>29</sup>For an earlier statement of this idea, see Giovanni Mario Ceci, ‘Alle origini del crollo: l’Italia, lo Shock of the Global e la crisi degli anni Settanta’, *Mondo contemporaneo*, 2, 2019, 150–166.

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# The Concorde Is Airborne. 21 January 1976. Italy and the Flight to a Smaller World

*Tiziano Torresi*

*Translated by Ralph Nisbet*

If you're going to dream, make it big. And if the dream is about one of man's most alluring adventures—flying at supersonic speed—it grows as big as the world. 'It will change the shape of the world, it will shrink the globe by half',<sup>1</sup> said British Technology Minister Tony Benn in 1969 when they asked what the main ambition was of the Anglo-French project to build Concorde, the supersonic civil aircraft.

The story of the most controversial, expensive, exclusive, seductive aeroplane in history regularly ploughing the Atlantic skies as of January 1976 is a journey that starts in the imagination, challenges technology, pursues its way through politics and ends as myth. So much is clear if you check out the impact it made on Italian media: that 'crazy flight' stirred emotions and fierce criticism, to become the icon of the 1970s: a world waking up to find itself more modern, faster, smaller.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jad Adams, 'Flight of the Imagination', *History Today*, December 2011, 18–20.

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In November 1973 a RaiUno documentary on the future of air transport let viewers savour the impressions that forthcoming supersonic flight would arouse. Soon passengers 'will be basking in the spectacle afforded by a huge natural atlas: a true bird's eye view of the coastline, lakes, rivers, townscapes. When the earth is covered in cloud, the show will be no less emotive. Vast stretches of eiderdown cloud, ever-changing as in a cartoon, forming the weirdest shapes. They'll be experiencing a fantasy world'.<sup>2</sup>

## 1 FASTER THAN THE SUN

To bring off that 'lofty fantasy' took years of hard work and one of the most spell-binding races in the history of civil aviation. It saw the top four aeronautical powers—the USA, France, the UK and the USSR—vying in feats of pride and espionage to achieve a form of civil transport that was faster than sound. The United States backed out halfway. In spring 1971 the American Senate blocked Boeing's plans for SST (Super Sonic Transport) which had taken wing five years before, only to get entangled in technical headaches, exorbitant costs and public disapproval. Soviet supersonic Tupolev Tu-144 was actually the first to fly, on 31 December 1968. In December 1975 it set up a scheduled Aeroflot shuttle between Moscow and Alma-Ata—but stuck at the experimental stage for years.

The project that made it to the finishing line was called Concorde. It was launched on 29 November 1962 when the UK and French governments signed an agreement along with their respective research industries, British Aircraft Corporation and Sud Aviation (later Aérospatiale) for the body of the plane, Rolls-Royce and SNECMA for the engines. The engineering effort was enormous, funding was state-covered and the name proved appropriate, given the historic rivalry across the Channel. The shape they hit upon was a tapering 62-metre long fuselage and an ogival delta wing formation; the aircraft beak was mobile to achieve the perfect angle of attack. Maximum speed was to be contained within Mach 2.2, i.e. 2,320 km/hr, with a maximum autonomy of 6,230 km, the fuel tanks holding 155,000 litres. Cruising altitude was set at 15,600 metres to reduce heat from air friction and enable aluminium to be used, not the far more costly steel or titanium. The Olympus 593 Mk.610 engines were

<sup>2</sup> Giuseppe Repossi, *Mach 5: il volo di oggi, il volo di domani*, RaiUno, 2 November 1973, Rai Teche, C18030.

four turbojets fitted with afterburners and mounted in pairs beneath the wings.

Though important, technological requisites were not alone in deciding the outcome of the project. The prestige it enjoyed played its part: that *grandeur* cherished by Charles De Gaulle as restoring France's aeronautical pride and waking up a technologically backward, sentimental country that was engaged in a dramatic withdrawal from its colonies. The sentiment chimed with Harold Macmillan's Europeanist ambitions: he was prepared to candidate the UK—herself orphaned of an empire—for membership of the European common market and pay an appreciable entrance fee. In 1963 France vetoed that scheme, amid changing concerns and priorities, but nonetheless the supersonic project sealed a joint strategic interest between the long-standing rivals, London and Paris. It was a rare case of political and technological reasons prevailing over economics.<sup>3</sup> The first prototype was baptised on 2 March 1969. There followed an intense round of operative evaluations and test flights. Performance was unbelievable. In June 1974, in a spectacular test race between Paris and Boston, Concorde halved the flight time of a Boeing 747.<sup>4</sup> Applause all round—but not in the Italian press.

Doubts had already been voiced in June 1973 following the accident at the Le Bourget aeronautical salon, when a Tu-144 prototype began to crack up in flight and crashed due to a combination of design faults and human error. *Corriere della Sera* queried: 'Are we ready at this point in time for such a revolution? Do not the quite fast enough subsonics already meet the traffic volume requisites, especially now that air giants like Jumbo, DC 10 and Tristar have joined the schedule? Doesn't breaking the sound barrier just add to the normal hazards of flying?'<sup>5</sup> The 'flashy statistics of the Concorde propagandists' were unconvincing: it seemed early days for such a revolution. Why not wait till the century's end when we would be flying at Mach 3 and passenger capacity would be greater? In short, commercial flights faster than sound were judged unappealing. The proof was that 'so far the transatlantic air companies, past masters in the

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lewis Johnman, Frances Lynch, 'A Treaty too Far? Britain, France, and Concorde, 1961–1964', *Twentieth Century British History*, 13:3, 2002, 253–276.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Prince, 'Supersonic gamble', *Aviation History*, March 2018, 64–71.

<sup>5</sup> Giancarlo Masini, 'Le illusioni del supersonico. Una rivoluzione prematura', *Corriere della Sera*, 6 June 1973, 19.

aeronautical trade, have shelved the idea [while] Alitalia, for all its problems, has done well not to fall for the supersonic lure'.<sup>6</sup>

Back in the previous January, Italy's top daily had criticised the project in a dossier outlining the quite unexpectedly soaring costs, the despair of the 'constructors [who] are standing cap in hand at the customers' door' to explain that Concorde is a business and not just a prestige luxury, while 'public opinion wavers between protest and sarcasm'.<sup>7</sup> Yet even the detractors in Italy seemed unable to resist the fascination of the 'super-newswy supersonic'.<sup>8</sup> Fantasy was flying high even before Concorde managed to: "Don't expect me back for lunch or dinner. I'm popping over to New York. But I'll be back before midnight": in two years' time that'll be your Parisian businessman saying goodbye to his wife after a leisurely *grand-crème en famille*. He'll be off around 10 a.m. on Concorde; three and a half hours later he'll be keeping his Manhattan appointments; will get his business done in four hours, catch the plane and be back in Paris three and a half hours later. Departure Orly 10 a.m., arrival New York 8.30. Concorde is faster than sound, and faster than the sun too'.<sup>9</sup>

Emotions began to ride high as we moved from fantasy to reality. In May 1975 on the test flight from Paris to Dakar with press representatives aboard, *Corriere della Sera* correspondent commented: 'The portholes are little bigger than arrow-slits. At a cruising altitude of 20,000 metres the sky is an intense blue blob; land far below, invisible. There are practically none of those vibrations and bumps that make passengers on other flights shiveringly share the life of the plane and the pilot's adventure'.<sup>10</sup> On 19 November Air France placed its brainchild at the disposal of the Fondazione Agnelli in Turin. In Italian magazines at the year's end, a two-page ad showed the plane's futuristic silhouette outlined against the clouds, with

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. Cf. also Mario Righetti, 'Da Parigi a Nuova York. Tre ore e mezzo con il "Concorde"', *Corriere della Sera*, 11 October 1972, 15, which presents the 'diametrically opposite' idea of using supersonic aircraft on civilian routes.

<sup>7</sup>Giancarlo Masini, 'Perché è nato vecchio il supersonico europeo', *Corriere della Sera*, 31 January 1973, 5.

<sup>8</sup>'Il supersonico superchiacchierato', *Corriere della Sera*, 7 January 1973, 22.

<sup>9</sup>Giampaolo Sansa, 'Rumore e inquinamento sono la vera minaccia', *Corriere della Sera*, 31 January 1973, 5.

<sup>10</sup>Massimo Riva, 'È cominciata la sfida del "Concorde"', *Corriere della Sera*, 30 May 1975, 1.

the caption ‘it’s so stable in the air, it doesn’t even ripple the champagne in the glass’.<sup>11</sup> The 1970s ‘monument of aeronautical engineering’ was ‘reality at long last’.<sup>12</sup>

## 2 MACH 2. DAY 1

On 21 January 1976 two Concorde take off simultaneously from London and Paris, bound respectively for Bahrein and Rio de Janeiro. Thousands of packed onlookers stand in the countryside around Heathrow and Roissy. The event is covered live on television. It figures on Italian TV News<sup>13</sup> and in all the main dailies. The specialist magazines list the plane’s qualities in detail.<sup>14</sup> Reference is made to its ‘crop of records, some technical, others for pure originality’,<sup>15</sup> and the dainty fare served on board, washed down with superb bubbles for the privileged few who paid the fare—jests *Il Sole 24 Ore*—‘a paltry one million seven hundred lire’.<sup>16</sup> Poles apart from the jubilation across the Channel.<sup>17</sup> But, confides la *Gazzetta del Popolo*, ‘now that advertising brings us increasingly live tastes of history, perhaps overmuch so, the first scheduled flight of supersonic

<sup>11</sup> Cf., for instance, *Panorama*, 27 November and 18 December 1975.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Concorde decolla in gennaio’, *La Stampa*, 20 November 1975, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Teche Rai contain some as yet undigitalised footage: *Londra: tutto pronto per il primo volo Concorde*, 15 January 1976, R170021; *Londra: consegnato il primo Concorde della British Airways*, 16 January 1976, R170032; *Il volo inaugurale del Concorde*, 22 January 1976, R170094; *Rio Janeiro, Brasile: arrivo dell’aereo Concorde a tempo di primato*, 24 January 1976, R170118.

<sup>14</sup> Cf., for example, Antonio Balzamo, ‘Con il Concorde si apre l’era supersonica per il trasporto aereo commerciale’, *Rivista aeronautica*, LII:1–2, January–February 1976, 107–124; and Antonio Balzamo, ‘Concorde, facciamo il punto’, *Rivista aeronautica*, LII:5–6, May–June 1976, 181–182.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Conclusioni a Parigi e a Londra del primo volo dei “Concorde”’, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 23 January 1976, 5.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Domani il volo inaugurale del “Concorde”’, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 20 January 1978, 7. Cf. also ‘Il Concorde è da ieri una realtà nel volo supersonico di linea’, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 22 January 1976, 9; ‘Da oggi il “Concorde” entra in servizio’, *Avanti!*, 21 January 1976, 8; ‘Primi voli di linea del Concorde. Verso Bahrein e Rio’, *Avanti!*, 22 January 1976, 7; Paolo Pat[runo], ‘Oggi da Londra e da Parigi voli di linea del Concorde’, *La Stampa*, 21 January 1976, 16. ‘Domani il “Concorde” in servizio’, *Secolo d’Italia*, 20 January 1976, 6; ‘Sua maestà il “Concorde”’, *Secolo d’Italia*, 22 January 1976, 7; ‘Concorde conferma: metà del tempo’, *Paese Sera*, 22 January 1976, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Gillman, ‘Supersonic Bust: The Story of the Concorde’, *Atlantic Monthly*, 239, 1977, 72–81.

Concorde was framed as a major event, coopting all possible forms of mass medium and resorting to all possible imagery'.<sup>18</sup>

The Italian press is a perfect mixture of admiration and scepticism. No denying the success of the venture which marks the beginning of a new era of aviation, tracing the future by 'a 60-metre long sharpened pencil connecting every point on the planet twelve hours apart at most'.<sup>19</sup> More words spent describing the unique allure of the experience. 'There you lounge in a comfy futuristic armchair, and something tells you you're living out a dream: this great steel and thermo-resistant lightened-aluminium bird represents fourteen years' study, an outlay approaching 2,500 billion lire, the cream of European technology. [...] Flying Concorde is psychic travel. Your senses don't tell you you're flying at twice the speed of sound, breaking through barriers deemed quite out of reach a few years back'.<sup>20</sup>

Yet apart from the 'inebriating and somewhat nationalistic atmosphere'<sup>21</sup> which Italy noted as a mere onlooker; apart from the unjustified and rather provincial fear that the London-Bahrein route with its sound-barrier bang over the Adriatic might endanger Venice;<sup>22</sup> or over-the-top speculation that 'if some fault caused abrupt cabin decompression at 18,000 metres, the passengers' blood would literally boil',<sup>23</sup> it was mostly mistrust that reigned in the dailies and magazines. 'A strange destiny' wrote *Paese Sera* 'that of the arrogant beaky bird taking off this morning: it could well not fly far, wear out soon, become an eagle with clipped wings'.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup> 'Il futuro è cominciato a tempo di "bossa nova"', *Gazzetta del Popolo*, 22 January 1976, 16.

<sup>19</sup> 'Il Concorde è in servizio', *Gazzetta del Popolo*, 21 January 1976, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Fabio Galvano, 'Domani vola il Concorde. Supersonic', *Stampa Sera*, 20 January 1976, 9.

<sup>21</sup> Mario Ciriello, 'Dove potrà volare il Concorde?', *La Stampa*, 23 January 1976, 16.

<sup>22</sup> 'Da oggi "Concorde" in volo', *Il Mattino*, 21 January 1976, p. 16; Marco Tosatti, 'Oggi è già domani. Concorde, il temerario che sfida i continenti', *Stampa Sera*, 15 January 1976, 9; L.F., 'Cominciati i voli del Concorde', *La Nazione*, 22 January 1976, 13.

<sup>23</sup> 'Concorde della discordia', *Panorama*, 5 February 1976, 63.

<sup>24</sup> Marco D'Eramo, 'Volà il Concorde ma il suo futuro rimane incerto', *Paese Sera*, 21 January 1976, 15. *La Repubblica* waxed ironical: 'With no feasible destinations, and hence no scheduled flights, the managing director of BEA faces a problem: what to give the new super-airbus passengers in exchange for the superprices they'll be expected to pay. Taking a leaf out of Marie Antoniette's book, they've opted for something quite plain but in point of fact sophisticated: soufflé à la Concorde': 'Concorde volerà con poche speranze e molte perdite', *la Repubblica*, 21 January 1976, 19.

Quite paradoxically, the symbol of the future was seen by many as ‘a highly expensive legacy’<sup>25</sup> of the past. The aggressive icon of the future was born already old, scion of an ideological investment, a hang-over from a defunct epoch. Its political value was linked to yesterday rather than tomorrow.<sup>26</sup> Besides, the jubilant France and Great Britain that watched it take off in 1976 were profoundly different from the countries that had signed the agreement fourteen years before.<sup>27</sup> It was also a different world. The energy crisis, soaring prices, recession in production worldwide, unemployment. In the leaden world economic scenario in which the last quarter-century took off, Concorde—as *Epoca* wrote—resembled the ‘classic legacy of the boom years when technological progress might be pursued regardless of cost’.<sup>28</sup>

### 3 BEYOND THE SOUND BARRIER A WALL OF DOUBT

Another big paradox that one glimpses in the press: the fate of a Concorde made in Europe and symbolising the Old Continent’s frustrated pride was to be decided ‘in a stop-watch race umpired by the Americans’.<sup>29</sup> Without the great airports of US metropolises Concorde might well not survive. To *Corriere della Sera* the challenge was hence ‘a pipedream, since creating a supersonic aircraft does not mark the birth of a European aeronautics industry rivalling the United States: it remains an isolated gesture, the high cost of which is unlikely to be amortised in any reasonable time-span’.<sup>30</sup> Another blunder was the project’s lack of European outlook. It was hard to forget how Alitalia was seduced into joining the pharaonic American project SST in the mid-Sixties, only for this to be quashed. Ten years on, the airline’s growth rate—first in 1969 to fly only jets, seventh in the international ranking, third in Europe for passenger and goods

<sup>25</sup> Lavinia Cavalletti, ‘A 2200 chilometri l’ora. È cominciata ieri l’era del “Concorde”’, *Il Mattino*, giovedì 22 January 1976, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Alberto Cavallari, ‘Concorde: “l’ora della gloria” rinvia le critiche sull’impresa’, *La Stampa*, 22 January 1976, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Lewis Johnman, Frances Lynch, ‘The Road to Concorde: Franco-British Relations and the Supersonic Project’, *Contemporary European History*, 11:2, May 2002, 229–252.

<sup>28</sup> Livio Caputo, ‘Il boom della paura’, *Epoca*, 14 January 1976, 7–12, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Giorgio Porro, Pietro Calabrese, ‘Concorde, il mondo s’accorcia’, *Il Messaggero*, 21 January 1976, 18.

<sup>30</sup> Bernardo Valli, ‘I piloti del “Concorde” a colazione da Giscard’, *Corriere della Sera*, 23 January 1976, 5.

movement, boasting an airfleet of over seventy planes including the latest 3-engined DC10, airlinks to 163 cities, including the Trans-siberian route to Tokyo opened in 1973—was menaced by a fuel price rise caused by the oil crisis. Amid such commercial expansion with all the hazards it entailed, Concorde stood as the (possibly ephemeral) ‘symbol of Old Europe’, a ‘mirage for so many citizens of the Old Continent whose view of European unity includes sectorially integrated organizations which, like air transport, need a broader context than the narrow national confines if they are to grow independently and survive’.<sup>31</sup>

From aeronautics to geopolitics. Hard after take-off, the real dilemma was bound up with the patently tottering Tu-144:<sup>32</sup> would the United States opt to ‘favour or curb the expansion of European technology competitive with the Soviets’.<sup>33</sup> The reasons behind Washington opposition came under fire. *Il Giorno* spoke of ‘USA pique at having dropped their own supersonic liner project, and annoyance at seeing it brought off by a dumb crowd of Europeans, the fear being that they may lose a profitable slice of transoceanic traffic’.<sup>34</sup> *L’Unità* wrote of ‘smarting under a contrived jealousy’ at others’ successes which chimes with ‘the mentality of hegemonic politics’ on America’s part, though Concorde has actually been ‘an economic Vietnam [...], a rash prestige project that is a never-ending drain’.<sup>35</sup> Everyone agreed, anyway, that whether the technological dream would turn into a commercial nightmare would be decided, not in mid-Channel, but mid-Atlantic.

For months the environmentalists held up the American government with talk of the supersonic’s enormous pollution and unbearable noise all around airports, as well as uttering dire forecasts about nitric acid being ejected into the ozone layer. To American consumers the only good thing

<sup>31</sup> Angelo Padovan, ‘Concorde: via col vento’, *Il Popolo*, 21 January 1976, 3.

<sup>32</sup> The absolute dearth of media coverage given to its inaugural flight in December 1975 suggested to *Il Sole 24 Ore* that the USSR ‘is not interested in flaunting any immediate spectacular success’. They have no opportunity for rivalry on the international routes or feel like ‘risking their own prestige by following the French and British in promoting a supersonic flight on a world scale’. The real aim is to smooth over the ‘disastrous policy’ of the last 5-year plan in their home public’s eyes: ‘Improbabile rivale del Concorde il Tupolev-144’, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 23 January 1976, 5.

<sup>33</sup> A.C., ‘Battaglia finale per il “Concorde”’, *La Stampa*, 3 January 1976, 16.

<sup>34</sup> Franco Fucci, ‘“Concorde”: incomincia l’avventura supersonica’, *Il Giorno*, 21 January 1976, 11.

<sup>35</sup> A.P., ‘Il supersonico Concorde vola da ieri carico di passeggeri’, *l’Unità*, 22 January 1976, 13.



seemed to be the downward-tilting nose of the fuselage.<sup>36</sup> Prospects were grim that spring: only three Chinese options, two Iranian, while negotiations for a Tokyo purchase were subject to the USSR granting airspace for the Europe-Japan link. France was all for going ahead with another four Concorde as well as the sixteen in the workshop, but she had to accept the British viewpoint in order to avoid ructions that would plunge the civil aeronautics industry into irreversible crisis. The venture was in danger of 'being murdered by the unjust American veto', wrote *l'Unità* hinting at a far-fetched ominous hypothesis: 'When the two governments decided to take two months out to study how Concorde should be developed, they gave it to be understood there might be a *super* Concorde project on the cards in liaison with the United States. That means that America, currently complaining of an eight-year delay in building the supersonic civil aircraft, would find herself inheriting an unexpected technical windfall and, with her great production potential, soon managing to mop up what remained of Europe's aeronautical industry'.<sup>37</sup> An eventuality that 'would leave Italy outside the door, as usual'<sup>38</sup>—though in the event it never came off.

In May a grand-style visit to the USA by Giscard d'Estaing finally opened a breach for Concorde on American soil.<sup>39</sup> As of 24 May, Concorde began to land twice a week for a sixteen-month trial period at the Foster Dulles airport, Washington.<sup>40</sup> During that period expensive apparatus measured the air and noise pollution caused by the super jet in that area. Every month a detailed report, including any complaints from residents near the airport, was sent to the civil aviation authorities (FAA), along with a NASA report on the low-frequency vibrational damage it might cause to vegetation and buildings.<sup>41</sup>

By the year's end, though the balance of the first ten weeks did not justify the pessimists (time-keeping was always first class, coefficients of job

<sup>36</sup> Cf. M.C., 'Il "decollo" americano del Concorde. Ancora critiche a Parigi e a Londra', *La Stampa*, 6 February 1976, 18; Cf. also 'Notizie in breve. La "guerra del Concorde"', *Avanti!*, 17 January 1976, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Augusto Pancaldi, 'Si fa sempre più scuro il destino del Concorde', *l'Unità*, 2 April 1976, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Nicolino Pizzuto, 'Chi ha paura del "Concorde"?', *l'Unità*, 27 April 1976, 8.

<sup>39</sup> 'Giscard prepara viaggio in USA stile "grandeur"', *Avanti!*, 22 April 1976, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Paolo Patruno, 'Il "Concorde" inaugura oggi la linea Parigi-Washington', *La Stampa*, 24 May 1976, 17.

<sup>41</sup> 'Riavvicinamento tra Francia e USA', *Avanti!*, 20 May 1976, 6.

employment extremely high)<sup>42</sup> the Italian press could only agree that Concorde ‘has every quality, but one grave defect: it is unsaleable. The governments of France and Great Britain have finally admitted as much after much hesitation and self-delusion. They have decided to block construction once the sixteen aircraft scheduled for July 1978 are finished’.<sup>43</sup> Runways at JFK airport, New York, the real international air transport hub, would not open up to regular Concorde flights until 22 November 1977, after a legal tussle lasting nineteen months and going all the way to the Supreme Court.<sup>44</sup>

Six months later an Enzo Biagi documentary on *la douce France* let viewers relive the emotions of Mach 2 flight and interviewed the pilots in the cockpit. But Biagi’s summing up of the disastrous commercial outcome of the ‘boldest challenge’ by Old Europe to the USA ran as follows: ‘The sums just don’t work out, estimates have been greatly exceeded. The pessimists forecast sales of 150, the optimists 450. In all *nine* have been sold to companies in the two constructor countries. It was meant to cost two billion francs in 1962. It cost twenty-two. It was scheduled to come into service by 1970. It only began making regular flights five years later’.<sup>45</sup>

In spite of everything, it went on doing so for another twenty-five. That quarter-century would bear out the realism of many comments from the Italian press. The Concorde fleet would not surpass twenty in number; running and maintenance costs remained exorbitant, the aircraft’s flying future was always uncertain; in the end the (no doubt premature) revolution in civil supersonic flight dwindled to a luxury for the few. The beginning of the end for the world’s safest passenger service occurred on 25 July 2000. Air France flight 4590, a Concorde, crashed at Gonesse in France when a foreign body on the runway caused a tyre to explode. The toll was disastrous: 100 passengers died, nine members of the crew and four persons on the ground. In autumn 2003 Concorde ceased to fly.

<sup>42</sup> Aldo Vitè, ‘Il Concorde, quale avvenire?’, *La Stampa*, 18 December 1976, 13.

<sup>43</sup> Lorenzo Bocchi, ‘Il Concorde condannato a morte’, *Corriere della Sera*, 5 November 1976, 7.

<sup>44</sup> Richard K. Smith, ‘The supersonic airliner fiasco: frenzied international aeronautical saga of communicable obsessions. 1956–1976’, *Air Power History*, Fall 2019, 5–20.

<sup>45</sup> Enzo Biagi, *Douce France. Diario filmato di un viaggio verso il futuro*, RaiUno, 19 April 1978, Teche Rai, M78109/029.

## 4 TODAY IS ALREADY TOMORROW

To an Italian eye, the entry of civil aviation into the supersonic era was, as we have seen, an event full of meaningful contradictions. These mirrored the fits and starts of incipient globalization, the symbol of which was ‘one of the marvels of the modern world [upon which] all manner of adjectives have been lavished, for better or worse’. After mobilising governments and industry, sucking dry the public treasury, stoking the sense of *grandeur* and unleashing industrial espionage, it was at last airborne, ‘halving the dimensions of the Earth without committing the indiscretion of that fact being noticed’.<sup>46</sup>

Setting reality against myth, concrete outcome against flights of imagination, in the coverage of the Italian media the gap could hardly have been wider. Designed to unite the opposite poles of the planet, Concorde was a giant of discord triggering the greatest tug-of-war in the aeronautical industry. The marvel of technology hymned in the publicity blurb, with its ‘unmatchable style’,<sup>47</sup> proved to be a ‘monster’ arraigned on the front cover.<sup>48</sup> The symbol of ‘technological civilization aiming Prometheus-like at ever more weird and wonderful goals was the very image of a ‘drama embedded in western culture’, since success, when divorced from the complex connected issues of an already globalised world, may prove counterproductive.<sup>49</sup> The star fêted by folklore in the airports of five continents was that selfsame machine which sparked off argument and dismay at its devastating environmental impact. The aircraft that ploughed the troposphere was a business proposition planned in the flatlands of geopolitics, the arid tables of industrial accountancy, the red tape of legal administration. The gauntlet that old Europe threw down before the United States proved to be a worldwide commercial operation wound up by the latter. The dreamchild of a happy epoch was an unsustainable devourer of kerosene baptised at a moment of energy crisis and pessimism.

<sup>46</sup> Giancarlo Graziosi, ‘Il “gigante della discordia” vola: è vero che può ucciderci tutti?’, *Domenica del Corriere*, 78:5, 29 January 1976, 13–15.

<sup>47</sup> See, among so many, the photographic volume Wolfgang Tillmans, *Concorde*, (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2002).

<sup>48</sup> ‘L’ultimo mostro della tecnologia, il “Concorde”, comincia a volare. L’airone supersonico’, *Epoca*, 18 February 1976, 64–67. Cf. the front cover of the forementioned *Domenica del Corriere*.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Alfredo Todisco, ‘Vola il Concorde: dieci in velocità, zero in ecologia’, *Corriere della Sera*, 8 January 1976, 1.

Loved and hated: perhaps that is the secret to Concorde's enduringly irresistible allure. Supersonic flight is, admittedly, 'the most fascinating adventure that can befall a traveller in this day and age, the experience of flying faster than a rifle bullet, being so high you can see the curvature of the Earth, travelling 35 kilometres in one minute, breaking the sound barrier twice over'. In an hour-long documentary on RaiDue, 1 January 1978, the voice of Paolo Meucci allowed viewers to relive the aeroplane's journeyings those last fifteen years with its passenger cargo of Heathrow-lounge VIPs soaring 12,000 metres aloft where 'man is between earth and space', where the world appears immensely small.<sup>50</sup>

In short, from its first-ever flight Concorde was already compromised as to how it would be used and what returns it would bring. But the dream remained. Its aim persisted: to beat the barriers of time and space. In the end it became a hybrid of hope and resignation: from the moment it took off, the aircraft of the future was the creature of past fantasy, the flying icon of a sci-fi world that would never be.

The Air France slogan appearing in the press at the time hit the nail on the head: 'an aeroplane for your time'. Flying time saved; also time as experienced in the controversial Seventies. Future-hungry years for which Concorde was, and still remains, a futuristic, anachronistic icon.

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<sup>50</sup> Paolo Meucci, *Supersonic*, *Tg2 Dossier*, RaiDue, 1 January 1978, Rai Teche, D7846.

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# Modern Myths and Mass Culture in the 1970s. 25 May 1977. Italy Reacts to *Star Wars*

*Maurizio Zinni*

*Translated by Ralph Nisbet*

## 1 A COLOSSAL OF OUR OWN TIMES

It is probably only today that we can grasp the symbolic scope and seminal importance of the first *Star Wars* film to appear (fourth in the saga composed of nine films in all). Nearly fifty years on from the first public projection of the episode *A New Hope* on 25 May 1977, the fantasy universe conceived by George Lucas has given rise to a full-scale transmedial parallel world made up of cinema spin-offs, animated series, fictions, strip cartoons, books, videogames, articles of clothing and all kinds of gadget. It seems to have become one of the main mass culture franchises to survive the transition from old millennium to new.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chris Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe: The Past, Present and Future of a Multibillion Dollar Franchise*, (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

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Costing some 10 million dollars to make and yielding box-office returns of 775 million in all, the worldwide success of the movie has had an impact that only decades of historical perspective and scholarship have managed to gauge, a revolutionary, innovative phenomenon affecting the cultural, social, economic and, to some extent, even political environment. It was a watershed event in the history of cinema (and other areas too) and still something of a puzzle. Though interpretations of the phenomenon tend to differ, they do agree on two central and strictly interrelated aspects: the economic and financial model that enabled such a worldwide success to be brought off; and the legendary legacy it has bequeathed to millions of viewers of every language, creed and culture, at the time and in our own day.

On the first point, as the 1970s merged into the 1980s the big names of Hollywood began to get absorbed by world-level entertainment corporations differing widely in their outlook. The change was reflected in a different approach to the cinema product. Films began to be conceived as a function of a global, intergenerational audience accustomed to a consolidated entertainment and narrative pattern that was increasingly standardised.<sup>2</sup> Commercial success was sought by intensive exploitation of the product, not just in time (via sequels), but also by merchandising in various connected sectors. The winning market strategies were auditorium saturation the first moment the film was released, massive capillary advertising, and creation of a brand that would induce fans to spend.<sup>3</sup> Like Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* before it, *Star Wars* stands as a prototype for the success of this new way of conceiving the movie product in response to the challenge of a more and more globalised entertainment economy.

The process called for a redesigning of market strategies on the part of new worldwide economic and financial entities. It paralleled developments in the American movie industry in the years when so-called new Hollywood was on the decline. The 1950s and 1960s had seen the mass culture industry steadily commercialising the message of the protest movement, whether by cinema, music, theatre or literature, targeting a youthful

<sup>2</sup> Alberto Mario Banti, *Wonderland. La cultura di massa da Walt Disney ai Pink Floyd*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2017), 488–490.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society and Politics*, (New York: Free Press, 2001), 150.

public whose values were at variance with their parents.<sup>4</sup> Towards the end of the 1970s, a less thinky model of entertainment came back into vogue; it followed classic narrative patterns making a sharp distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, whether the production was actually conservative or liberal.<sup>5</sup> In the case of *Star Wars*, this materialised as a nostalgic hark-back to early Hollywood genres guaranteed to succeed, and a narrative syntax updating certain key features of traditional adventure—the quest myth or the journey idea—to fit in with the futuristic scenarios of a modern space fantasy (as well as much of contemporary mainstream cinema).<sup>6</sup> By the end of the decade, the Hollywood system was heading for crisis, its whole cultural and economic basis needed questioning. The success of Lucas's and Spielberg's films pointed the way objectives ought to be thought out again if they were to fit in with the new production scene and a public whose tastes were undergoing a metamorphosis.

On its own the economic factor only partly explains the film's ability to cross the boundaries of its day and age, becoming over the decades a cultural benchmark at the widest of latitudes and catering for all generations. The key to unravelling this phenomenon ties up with our second point: the mythology underpinning the work. That 1977 movie created a saga on a world scale, hooking whole generations of viewers.<sup>7</sup> To understand the hold exerted by a film like *Star Wars* entails going back to the origins of mythical narrative,<sup>8</sup> grasping its value for those who accept and

<sup>4</sup> Rebecca J. Sheehan, 'Liberation and Redemption in 1970s Rock Music', in Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, Daniel J. Sargent (eds), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011), 295–303.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Douglas Brode, Introduction, in Douglas Brode, Leah Deyneka (eds), *Myth, Media, and Culture in Star Wars: An Anthology*, (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 34.

<sup>7</sup> When the film was released, George Lucas explained more than once that a prime source of inspiration was Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949); the plot of *Star Wars* unfolded with Campbell's analysis in mind as to the original kernel of all mythic narration, so-called 'monomyth'. Cf. Andrew Gordon, 'Star Wars: A Myth for Our Time', *Literature Film Quarterly*, 6, Fall 1978, 314–325.

<sup>8</sup> Besides Campbell's already mentioned book, one must mention Vladimir Propp's research on the bearing structure of fable and myth as expounded in his book *Morfologija skazki* (*Morphology of the Fable*) 1928.



disseminate it, its ability to drive major processes of development.<sup>9</sup> Pondering its decades of planet-wide success thus becomes an important step in understanding the channels by which new global myths caught on in modern post-industrialist and post-materialist society, the idioms they used, the coordinates of form and content that enabled them to take root and generate a new community of 'believers' amounting to a mushrooming 'fandom'.

This study proposes to analyse how the film was received in Italy (it was first released on 21 October 1977) and what factors shaped the judgement of the main daily and periodical reviewers. It will be possible to see how, and how far, the novel features of the *Star Wars* phenomenon that caught the collective imagination across the globe were perceived in Italy.<sup>10</sup> Analysis of journalistic sources will focus on three salient features in reviews of the film: its connection with its period and the major political, economic and cultural phenomena attesting to the so-called shock of the global;<sup>11</sup> developments in the cinema industry and the new distribution channels of mainstream mass culture in that globalised post-industrial setting; and the birth of a new worldwide myth tailoring a new version of the traditional 'hero cult' to the late 1970s in response to the various demands voiced by the social body, and providing helpful bearings on a historical context that many find hard to fathom.

<sup>9</sup> On myth in the contemporary age and the cinema's mythopoieic function, see not only the early theories of Roland Barthes—*Mythologies*, (Paris: Seuil, 1970)—but the book by Christopher Flood: *Political Myth: A Theoretical Introduction*, (New York: Garland, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> To borrow a point made by Peppino Ortoleva and apply it more generally to how films are perceived, every comment or review of the film '[...] becomes an element in that overall system of knowledge present throughout a society and to some, even marginal, extent conditioning the production and reception of other messages': *Cinema e storia. Scene dal passato*, (Turin: Loescher, 1991), 98.

<sup>11</sup> Rather than a full-scale crisis in the 1970s, Niall Ferguson's definition pinpoints 'a widespread *perception* of crisis [...] – and very often a crisis that was global in scale', i.e. a broad sensation of anxiety and insecurity spreading from the economic sector to the political, cultural and social milieus following on epoch-making events such as the 1973 oil crisis, the outcome of the Vietnam War, the end of the development model that came in after the Second World War. Niall Ferguson, 'Crisis, What Crisis? The 1970s and the Shock of the Global', in Ferguson, Maier, Manela, Sargent (eds), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*, 14–15.

## 2 'THE LAST FRONTIER AGAINST MATERIALISM'

Even before it came out on Italian screens, the success of *Star Wars* in America caught the attention of the national press. From the comments arriving from the US some articles tried to anticipate what would happen in Italy in impressionistic terms: 'a galactic western',<sup>12</sup> 'a cosmic fairy tale'.<sup>13</sup> One notes at once the approach focusing on the product as a cultural hangover stemming from the traditional genres of the Studio System (westerns, cloak and dagger, war films, pirate stories) pepped up by a clever advertising campaign and innovative special effects. Then, when it was distributed in Italy and patently became a social phenomenon rather than just a fashion, linked to the situation of political and social uncertainty, many analyses fell back on a simplistic, banalising interpretation: an alleged 'desire for escape into the realm of fantasy'<sup>14</sup> by people scared at the impending unknown.<sup>15</sup> The movie as such struck the more unobservant reviewers as 'an amusing film, a kind of animated cartoon, a multicoloured spectacle dazzling the eye and imagination by a pyrotechnical sequence of special effects',<sup>16</sup> a film 'that says nothing about ourselves'<sup>17</sup> but manages by 'fable-like simplicity'<sup>18</sup> to attract an intergenerational audience, thanks to its appeal to the 'innocent imagination of the viewer plunging back into childhood'.<sup>19</sup> Some even forecast that 'the twelve-year-old inside each of us' would be 'too wily to be hooked by a moralising pep-talk worthy of some pre-war movie'.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>12</sup> 'Stanlio e Ollio galattici', *Corriere della Sera*, 3 June 1977, 15 [Stanlio e Ollio = Laurel & Hardy].

<sup>13</sup> Francesco Piccolo, 'Hollywood racconta una favola cosmica', *Famiglia Cristiana*, 25 May 1977, 48.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> *L'Europeo* ascribed the success of the film and the sci-fi genre to two reasons: contemporary society's need for the scary so as not to think about real present-day fears; the public's need to regress to infancy and experience a fairy tale future where they can delude themselves about tomorrow, cf. Claudio Lazzaro, *In cerca di paure per farsi coraggio*, 28 October 1977, 61.

<sup>16</sup> 'Stanlio e Ollio galattici'.

<sup>17</sup> Roberto Vacca, 'Guerre stellari', *La Nazione*, 3 November 1977.

<sup>18</sup> Franco Occhiuzzi, 'Ancora squali ed esorcismi mentre De Niro suona il jazz', *Corriere della Sera*, 22 June 1977, 15.

<sup>19</sup> Maurizio Porro, 'Cambia il cinema dello spazio', *Corriere della Sera*, 20 August 1977, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Ornella Ripa, 'Un western tra le stelle: ecco il "colossal" da 8 miliardi', *Gente*, 44:XXI, 5 November 1977, 178.

Yet in these and other articles what clearly emerges is more than a mere hark-back to the mythical image store of the early cinema, with its accoutrement of heroes, battles in a just cause, and shared values triumphant: the film with its symbolic guide to the present and the future did manage to address the requirements of the audience. As was pointed out at the time by Alessandro Blasetti, one of the fathers of modern Italian cinema, 'Science fiction is the last frontier against materialism. At a time of waning values and querying of everything it is a flash of hope'.<sup>21</sup> The mythopoetic value of the adventure story based on 1950s sci-fi or Flash Gordon albums was sensed by Maurizio Porro. Porro came straight to the point: the deeper reasons for an unprecedented success lay not just in the audience's wish to escape from the uncertain present. 'Since today more than ever cinema needs to appeal internationally, it has to blend reality and illusion in a way all latitudes can appreciate.' To do so it must adopt 'guiding models'. On the big screen that means 'mythical heroes and dream subjects [...]. As a culture industry, cinema fleshes out the eternal themes of novels, reducing literary archetypes to pictorial stereotypes'.<sup>22</sup>

From this succinct comment we begin to glimpse the film's symbolic significance, its deeper function of bringing together mythical material with a new socially widespread sensibility as well as processes of history in the making.

This interpretation appeared in various reviews around the time the film came out in Italy, in a more or less clear and aware version. In his first article *Corriere della Sera's* reviewer Giovanni Grazzini saw a close connection between the movie's success and the historical and political background that generated it. 'Pure whimsy? Definitely not. The infantile projection into the future reflects sneaking doubts by Americans living in the heart of technological civilization yet fearing the situation is going off the age-old humanistic and democratic rails.' In an even more interesting later review, he picks out the cultural references in which Lucas was steeped: 'The relish of the film lies partly in providing amusement for various types of viewer—learned followers of Propp, expert readers of Burroughs, well-known cartoon experts or simple consumers of that genre—who can vie in tracing its heroes to the ancient or modern adventures of Ulysses, Arthur, Flash Gordon, Eighteenth century philosophical

<sup>21</sup> G. GS., 'Una grande fiera della fantascienza', *Corriere della Sera*, 20 July 1977, 10.

<sup>22</sup> Maurizio Porro, 'Cambia il cinema dello spazio'.

tales or the latest Tarzan and Superman [...].<sup>23</sup> The apparently simple content conceals not exactly a subtle analysis of today's world, but the need to tailor myths and symbols from the past to an increasingly uncertain present. In short, 'behind Flash Gordon lie Milton', Poe, Bosch, Grandville,<sup>24</sup> and more generally 'a recourse to mythical archetypes and legends of old'.<sup>25</sup>

On closer inspection, albeit missing some of the implications, a number of more observant commentators caught the modern yet traditional nature of the movie: a cultural product designed for a worldwide mass audience, exploiting cinema's unique vehicle—the image—to enable viewers of all ages and latitudes to share a broad heritage of symbols and interpretative clues bearing on a present (and future) relevant to the entire world.

### 3 'A PERFECT MONEY-SPINNER'

Alongside these pronouncements as to the impact of new global myths on the national and international mindset, the eminently financial and industrial success of the *Star Wars* phenomenon began to receive close attention.

Articles in *l'Unità* and *Avanti!*—the communist and socialist dailies—larded their analyses with the tools of historic materialism. *Star Wars* was yet another attempt at cultural imperialism from across the Pond. *L'Unità* judged it to be a 'fairly silly "product", more or less endearing':

Although its motives are unpleasing, evidently Hollywood is always right. It 'knows its chickens', how to raise them and take them to market. [...] *Star Wars* is a toy for the super-underage which leaves nothing to the imagination [...]. George Lucas has rehashed a typically medieval fable [...].<sup>26</sup>

No less explicit is the comment a few days before the release in Italy, 18 October 1977, by Alberto Jacoviello, *l'Unità* correspondent in New York:

<sup>23</sup> Giovanni Grazzini, 'C'era una volta nelle galassie', *Corriere della Sera*, 21 October 1977, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Carlo Laurenzi, 'Un mitico universo in lotta per l'armonia delle galassie', *il Giornale nuovo*, 21 October 1977, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Morando Morandini, 'Battaglia nel cosmo fra il bene e il male', *Il Giorno*, 21 October 1977, 23.

<sup>26</sup> David Grieco, '"Star Wars" è solo un levigato giocattolone', *l'Unità*, 20 September 1977, 9. The same comment would be repeated in the film review published on 21 October 1977.

‘Quite what fascinates the Americans about this movie I’m at a loss to say’. One explanation, he thought, might lie in its being ‘the best product destined for generations brought up in front of the television’. The only certain thing was that ‘a typical United States mechanism is at work: success breeds success. The movie earns money? The publicity machine [...] almost automatically sets about making it earn still more’.<sup>27</sup>

In its article ‘Spettacolare galattico per un pubblico infantile’ (Supergalactic entertainment for the infantile public) *Avanti!* dismissed the film as ‘the most blatant “film gadget” [sic] in cinema history’. The review ended with a short-sighted and ill-founded summing up on American cinema, especially when seen with hindsight: ‘We here have the extreme product of a cinema civilization in big trouble, where movies have nothing more to say’.<sup>28</sup> What looked like the swan-song of a dying industry was, actually, the generator powering an economic come-back, launching growth in years to come.

The two left-wing dailies’ caustic criticism is hardly surprising: they saw the film only as a product of a mass culture industry labouring for decades under an American brand of capitalist consumer mentality that successfully turned ‘this collective folly into a “business”’.<sup>29</sup> But though less tied to an ideological position, other organs of the Italian press (quite different if not opposite in their political affinities) hinged their comments on the central role that the modern communications and entertainment industry had played in the commercial, more than cultural, success of the *Star Wars* project.

*Gente* preened itself on being too professional in its film reviewing to fall for the ‘advertising hype’, ‘talk of fabulous box-office returns’, ‘titbits of gossip circulated by those in the game’, and claimed to judge the film’s worth without external influence.<sup>30</sup> *Epoca* thought the knock-on profits of the whole operation the most newsworthy side, especially the surge on the stock exchange by Fox as producer and the Star Wars Corporation specially set up by George Lucas to cash in on all aspects of the commercial success. Focusing on the industrial and merchandising factor, the magazine painted a profile of the potential consumer of the *Star Wars* product, including the Italian market in the bonanza accruing from what it called a

<sup>27</sup> Alberto Jacoviello, ‘Le foglie e i robot’, *l’Unità*, 18 October 1977, 3.

<sup>28</sup> E.V., ‘Spettacolare galattico per un pubblico infantile’, *Avanti!*, 22 October 1977, 15.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Guerre stellari batte lo squalo’, *ibid.*, 13 September 1977, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Ripa, ‘Un western tra le stelle’, 177.

full-blown sci-fi craze.<sup>31</sup> Likewise Tullio Kezich began his review in *la Repubblica* by talking of ‘a perfect money-spinner extending out into an authentic toy and gadget supermarket’; in the modern entertainment industry, movies are a product like so many others, catering for as many viewers as possible and hence geared largely to the economic return.<sup>32</sup> This direct reference to the Disneyland model unwittingly anticipated what would happen in 2012 when the Walt Disney Company purchased the rights to the *Star Wars* universe for some 4 billion dollars, thereby setting up the umpteenth world entertainment giant.

It is perhaps worth pointing out that the many references to the film’s technological novelties were all intended to show it up as the last word in entertainment and hence yet another ‘trick’ by which to bamboozle the child/viewer and cover up any shortcomings of plot. All the reviewers here examined took the special effects emphasis to be the corollary of a big entertainment product turning the latest techniques to maximum economic effect. There was a lack of awareness of nascent digital technology and how it would affect medium and long-term developments in movie production. This may have been because Italian cinema was historically diffident about genres heavily employing innovations, sci-fi to the fore.

#### 4 ‘ANYONE CAN FIND WHATEVER THEY WANT IN SCIENCE FICTION’

One would need to examine many more press reviews over a longer period to properly map the impact of *Star Wars* on the national imagination across the turn of the decade. The risk lurking in such an operation is of projecting one’s own time’s criteria of interpretation onto the past. Nonetheless, this first glance through the documents of the period enables one to draw some conclusions on how the cultural world of Italy, and through its society at large, digested the overt and latent implications of the *Star Wars* phenomenon.

<sup>31</sup> Remo Guerrini, ‘Che cosa c’è dietro il boom della fantascienza. Tutti i deliri del nostro futuro’, *Epoca*, 1413:CIX, 2 November 1977, 108–114.

<sup>32</sup> Tullio Kezich, ‘Molti giochi per dirci che conta solo la forza’, *la Repubblica*, 21 October 1977, 14. *La Stampa* took much the same line (Ernesto Baldo, “Robot” e navi spaziali nella galassia per una fiaba moderna senza violenza’, 4 October 1977, 7) as did *L’Europeo* (Lazzaro, ‘In cerca di paure per farsi coraggio’), significantly subtitled ‘Perché la fantascienza è diventata un affare?’ (Why did sci-fi become a business?).

Its novelties did not escape the commentators. Even those prejudiced against it realised the extent of the success and the film's ability to resonate with the people.

In many cases this realisation stopped short at a superficial level. Theme-wise, the direct focus was on the moment of uncertainty and the social need for the public to 'regress' and not face up to the real contingent problems. From the industrial viewpoint, reviewers (especially of the Left) fell back on the Frankfurt school and bemoaned the manipulateness of advertising and capitalist media.<sup>33</sup> Many articles hinted more or less openly at a world audience of cinema-going consumers anaesthetised by mainstream mass culture and willingly averting their gaze from real issues, refuge from which lay in fantasy stoked by a standardising of language and content. They often betrayed engrained and barely concealed prejudice against stars & stripes mass culture—something found not just in Marxist culture.<sup>34</sup>

The idea of a modern symbol and value system, shared and spread across the globe by a transnational mass culture industry connected to other economic sectors (entertainment, clothing, food, and so on), was perceived and analysed, albeit in embryonic form; most of the time it was banalised and seen through blinkers without grasping what a novel and winning phenomenon it was.

Confirmation of this is to be found in the attention the debate of the day paid to the political significance of the myth with which *Star Wars* is imbued. With few exceptions, assessment and interpretation of the ideology behind it was perfunctory and largely pursued by the left-wing press. *L'Unità* hinted at the close connection between the film's success and a shallow materialist consumer ideology ('Is there perhaps some thinking analogy in this mixing of yesterday and tomorrow's dark epic? We may safely say it is quite by chance').<sup>35</sup> Similarly, *Panorama* dismissed the entire

<sup>33</sup>This interpretation—first propounded by Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, *Dialectica dell'Illuminismo*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1980. 1st ed. 1947) 126–181—is still commonly found in various mainstream mass culture analyses across the turn of the millennium. It merely highlights the great and undisputed influence of the economic factor.

<sup>34</sup>In the conservative 'glossy' *Gente* the content of the film was summarily described: 'This goodwill mission, strung upon religious spirit, superstition and faith in man's paranormal powers, gives a generic representation of eternal values of the spirit which technological man has forgotten and in so doing gone to the bad. [...] old strip-cartoon adventures served up again by a smart young author' (Ripa, 'Un western tra le stelle').

<sup>35</sup>Grieco, 'Star Wars'.

operation as escapist entertainment for children and infantile adults, implicitly lamenting the lack of political motivation except of a conservative kind.<sup>36</sup> The only reviewer to take an open stand was Tullio Kezich in *la Repubblica* and *Panorama* where he pointed out an insistent reference to the 'Holy Grail myths as investigated by Julius Evola', linking the Jedi 'mystique of force' to a right-wing culture, as much as to say 'in hymning Ben Kenobi one ends up in Vietnam with Lieutenant Calley'.<sup>37</sup> As he put it, reverting to twelve years of age was all very well, 'but not in *balilla* uniform'.<sup>38</sup>

Still fewer assessments managed to frame the final message of the film within a progressive view of present and future. *L'Europeo* was alone in this: it saw the semantic plurality of the movie and much sci-fi of the period in terms of a 'return [...] to the fantasy world of myth, without losing sight of the social dimension'.<sup>39</sup>

Rather than the clash between right-wing and left-wing interpretations of the film, what deserves to be underscored is the broad absence of any clear political identification attributable to this cultural product. Even those most openly attentive to Lucas's complex recasting of a symbolic universe (which would underpin the worldwide revival of the Hollywood industry across the turn of the millennium)<sup>40</sup> failed to go into the features and scope of a work in living contact with certain drives that were socially widespread across nations and generations. *Star Wars* stood at once as a *mythos*. What many failed to realise was that, under the guise of an apparently uncommitted restatement of a distant myth, couched in a traditional idiom though updated with the latest special effects, this was actually the latest step in myth narration for a post-ideological globalised society (at least as regards political cultures of the day). The devices of genre storytelling enabled the film to put across to everyone a teleological idea of progress based on the shared values of peace, freedom and development tailored to the individual. Not a vision of peace, but managing nonetheless to sublimate fear and anxiety in a future that was still left in men's hands.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Oliviero Spinelli, 'Spazio per tutti', *Panorama*, 14 June 1977.

<sup>37</sup> Kezich, 'Molti giochi per dirci che conta solo la forza'.

<sup>38</sup> Tullio Kezich, 'Guerre stellari', *Panorama*, 8 November 1977.

<sup>39</sup> Lanfranco Vaccari, 'Fantascienza e politica', *L'Europeo*, 28 October 1977, 63.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, (London: Boxtree, 1996); Robert McKee, *Story, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*, (London: Methuen, 1999).



The global myth of *Star Wars* was neither right-wing, left-wing, conservative nor liberal. Its very transversal nature allowed it credibly to put across a cultural proposal reflecting positions on either side of the line-up. As in science fiction, so in Lucas's film 'anyone can find whatever they want'.<sup>41</sup>

But the observers and intellectuals failed to grasp the revolutionary extent of the phenomenon; they merely described it with the few tools they had to hand, in a few cases getting there by intuition. They adopted categories stemming from the twentieth century in which they were deeply enmeshed. Hence, while the movie's impact economically and on national and international mindsets could not be denied, they failed almost entirely to see how it broke with the cultural output of previous decades. In 1970s Italy *Star Wars* came across as the classic success story spawned by a bygone tradition, not as one of the first expressions of a new economic, media, cultural, social and political system now knocking at the door.

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<sup>41</sup> Vaccari, 'Fantascienza e politica'.

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# Pope John Paul II Is Elected. 16 October 1978. The New Global Sacred

*Donatello Aramini*

*Translated by Ralph Nisbet*

## 1 A CHURCH IN CRISIS

At 6.45 p.m. on 16 October 1978, the world learnt of the election of Karol Wojtyła.<sup>1</sup> John Paul II's was not the first papal election to be covered by telecameras and reporters from far-flung countries. But it did immediately take on a truly global resonance. *Le Monde*, for example, wrote that the Pope's message went out to the world entire.<sup>2</sup> *Financial Times* described the event as symbolizing and consolidating a gradual process of renewal that might enable the Church to relate to the modern world's

<sup>1</sup>Walter Tobagi, 'Alle 18.45 l'annuncio che sorprende il mondo', *Corriere della Sera*, 17 October 1978, 2.

<sup>2</sup>'Le message de Jean Paul II au monde', *Le Monde*, 18 October 1978.

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difficulties and changes.<sup>3</sup> Some days later from across the Pond *The Washington Post* opined that Wojtyla would shunt the Church towards a new era.<sup>4</sup>

Why such worldwide overtones, such challenging appraisals? And how did Italy reckon with a new Pope coming from afar? These are questions to which the present chapter will seek answers in an attempt to verify whether the appointment of John Paul II was perceived as a further step in the transforming of society as a whole.

To grasp properly how Italy's dailies and periodicals interpreted the election of Wojtyla, one needs to realize that it came at the end of a watershed decade for the Christian as much as the secular world. The 1970s are now known to have been the decade of hopes rescaled; there was a widespread sense of living in an interim. All certainties, ideologies, knowledge or behaviour came to be judged with suspicion and assessed on an individual basis.<sup>5</sup> Crisis was the word with which contemporaries summed up their decade.<sup>6</sup> It stemmed from a thoroughgoing querying of the whole pattern upon which the West had founded its own identity. The 1970s saw ideology and the myth of progress tottering,<sup>7</sup> succumbing to an emerging belief in the subjective,<sup>8</sup> a shift in the mindset captured by the idea of 'the "Me" decade'<sup>9</sup> moving from material to post-material needs.<sup>10</sup>

The Christian world was itself fully receptive to that atmosphere. Secularization was advancing by leaps and bounds and—just like the secular utopias—was prone to radical subjective reappraisal. A slow coming to

<sup>3</sup> Paul Betts, 'Papal choice shows Catholic transformation to meet conditions of the modern world', *Financial Times*, 17 October 1978, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Xavier Murphy, 'A Pope to Move the Church into a New Era', *The Washington Post*, 22 October 1978, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar. La nostra storia 1945–2005*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2005), 590–599.

<sup>6</sup> Niall Ferguson, Introduction: 'Crisis, What Crisis? The 1970s and the Shock of the Global', in Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, Daniel J. Sargent (eds), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010), 1–21.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Il Novecento. Secolo delle ideologie*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1997), 306–323; Agostino Giovagnoli, *Storia e globalizzazione*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2003), 60–61.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism. American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1979).

<sup>9</sup> Tom Wolfe, 'The "Me" Decade and the Third Great Awakening', *New York Magazine*, 23 August 1976; Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 158–177.

<sup>10</sup> Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).

terms with Second Vatican,<sup>11</sup> the laborious sifting and vetting of its documents,<sup>12</sup> the prudent way in which various walks of Catholicism sought guidance from above via bishops and clergy upon every item involving change,<sup>13</sup> all clashed with a desire by certain Catholics to introduce instant reforms to the Church message. They itched to transform what they saw as a hierarchy-bound, authoritarian, monarchical Church, wedded to power, into a Church of the people, a de-clerified community of local churches overthrowing the centralism of Rome and attuned to the needs of the poor, the persecuted, oppressed and starving, in touch with the more radical circumstances outside Europe.<sup>14</sup> In 1970s Italy, in short, the Church and Catholic world appeared to be labouring under a crisis of identity: hence, for example, the dwindling vocations, the move away from religious practice. There were a plethora of movements,<sup>15</sup> some in open contestation, filtering the Christian message through thinking akin to Marxism; others, like *Comunione e Liberazione*, championed a modern, lay-based approach to Christianity where the Catholic community was militantly engaged in fighting back against the secularization of Italy.<sup>16</sup> The divide was no longer between Catholics and non-Catholics, but between conservatism and change.<sup>17</sup> The situation was so broadly experienced, it belied the model of Italy the Catholic nation<sup>18</sup> and gave rise to

<sup>11</sup> Alberto Melloni, 'Gli anni Settanta della Chiesa cattolica. La complessità nella ricezione del Concilio', in Fiamma Lussana, Giacomo Marramao (eds), *L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni Settanta. Culture, nuovi soggetti, identità*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003), 202, 206–207.

<sup>12</sup> Giovanni Vian, 'Il Concilio Vaticano II: una riconciliazione con il moderno?', in Daniele Menozzi (ed), *Le religioni e il mondo moderno*, vol. 1: *Cristianesimo*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2008), 474–489.

<sup>13</sup> Marco Impagliazzo, 'Il dissenso cattolico e le minoranze religiose', in Lussana, Marramao (eds), *L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni Settanta*, 231–249.

<sup>14</sup> Latin America is a particularly important case, cf. Silvia Scatena, *La teologia della liberazione in America Latina*, (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2008); Jean-François Zorn, 'Il cristianesimo e l'emancipazione dei popoli extraeuropei', in Menozzi (ed), *Le religioni e il mondo moderno*, vol. 1: *Cristianesimo*, 510–511.

<sup>15</sup> Tito Forcellese, 'Giovanni Paolo II e il mondo cattolico', in Marco Impagliazzo (ed), *Shock Wojtyła. L'inizio del pontificato*, (Rome: Edizioni San Paolo, 2010), 29–34.

<sup>16</sup> Guido Formigoni, *L'Italia dei cattolici. Dal Risorgimento a oggi*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2010), 184–185.

<sup>17</sup> For a reconstruction, see also Daniele Menozzi, *Storia della Chiesa*, Vol. 4: *L'età contemporanea*, (Bologna: EDB, 2019), 263–294.

<sup>18</sup> Marco Impagliazzo, 'Introduzione', in Marco Impagliazzo (ed), *La nazione cattolica. Chiesa e società in Italia dal 1958 a oggi*, (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2004), 13–18.

Cassandra-like prophecies as to the very unity of the Church,<sup>19</sup> the unstemmable decline of the sacred, even the death of Christianity and silent apostasy.<sup>20</sup> Pope Paul VI himself had slowly succumbed to a pessimistic view that events heralded some kind of end.<sup>21</sup> The enemy no longer appeared to be communism but secularization, de-Christianization:<sup>22</sup> it was rife even in Italy, still seen as the heart of Christendom, ‘the lens through which one judges the world’<sup>23</sup>—despite the planet-wide boost to Catholicism that had been imparted by the Council.

Paul VI was dead, after praying in vain for the release of Aldo Moro; so was Pope Luciani, whom all remembered as the classic pastoral bishop close to the faithful, hailing from staunchly Catholic, mainly conservative Venetia which was as yet untainted by secularization.<sup>24</sup> It seemed indeed ‘almost to herald the end of a particular style of being Pope’.<sup>25</sup>

## 2 JOHN PAUL II: COMMENTS

This was the climate in which Italy set about commenting on the election of Karol Wojtyła.<sup>26</sup> The immediate response was of huge expectations and stunned surprise. New epoch, turning-point of history, prophetic choice, revolutionary choice: such were the pronouncements from all quarters alike on that first non-Italian Pope for centuries. Many, of course, delved into the Holy Father’s past, praising his humanity and his normality. But the main thrust of the commentators was twofold:<sup>27</sup> on the one hand, a

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Il contadino della Garonna. Un vecchio laico si interroga sul mondo presente*, (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1977).

<sup>20</sup> Jean Delumeau, *Le christianisme va-t-il mourir?*, (Paris: Hachette, 1977).

<sup>21</sup> Daniele Menozzi, *I papi e il moderno. Una lettura del cattolicesimo contemporaneo*, (Brescia: Editrice Morcelliana, 2016), 100–111; Fulvio De Giorgi, *Paolo VI. Il papa del moderno*, (Brescia: Editrice Morcelliana, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> Andrea Riccardi, ‘Il caso religioso italiano’, in Impagliazzo (ed), *La nazione cattolica*, 28–29.

<sup>23</sup> Melloni, ‘Gli anni Settanta della Chiesa cattolica’, 202, 227.

<sup>24</sup> Rudolf Lill, *Il potere dei papi. Dall’età moderna a oggi*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2010), 188–189.

<sup>25</sup> Melloni, ‘Gli anni Settanta della Chiesa cattolica’, 211.

<sup>26</sup> Giovanni Spadolini, ‘Interrogativi sulla Chiesa’, *Stampa Sera*, 16 October 1978; Giuseppe Chiarante, ‘Ancora aperto il dopo Giovanni e il dopo Paolo’, *Rinascita*, 6 October 1978.

<sup>27</sup> For space reasons, in the remaining notes only some of the articles consulted for this work will be cited; it is actually based on systematic consultation of all the main Italian secular and Catholic newspapers. Cf. the reconstruction to be found in Tito Forcellese, ‘Giovanni

belief in common that the arrival of Wojtyła put paid to Italo-centred Catholicism which had prevailed since the sixteenth century; on the other, the crux of opposition between Conservatives and Progressives. Under the first heading, it was noted that John Paul II spelt a change of direction curbing the influence of the papacy on Italian political life:<sup>28</sup> without its traditional papal support, Christian Democracy<sup>29</sup> would be more independent, which might help unblock the Italian political situation.<sup>30</sup> In short, the new Pope would produce a less provincial Church. Some thought it would lead to new dialogue with non-Catholics. Taking up this line, some commentators hoped that a non-Italian Pope, being less tied to the Roman Curia, might set in motion the kind of changes outlined by Second Vatican<sup>31</sup>—and long overdue, thought the Progressives. There was much speculation as to the power dynamics within the Conclave: what the role of the conservative faction had been, and what influence it would have on the new pontiff's reign. Many construed John Paul II's past actions as suggesting an open-minded, progressive kind of Pope, unshackled from the typical institutional, monarchical, anti-modern brand of Catholicism. At the same time, though, a glance at the new Pope's roots and background prompted a more traditional conservative line of interpretation, bound up with diplomatic relations between East and West.<sup>32</sup> Many journalists harped on Wojtyła's Polish background: how he was head of a struggling, militant, martyred church<sup>33</sup> known as the *silent* church whose

Paolo II e il mondo cattolico italiano', and Antonio Scornajenghi, 'Stampa laica e mondo politico in Italia di fronte a Giovanni Paolo II (1978-1979)', in Impagliazzo (ed), *Shock Wojtyła*, 27–78, 79–129.

<sup>28</sup> Gaspare Barbiellini Amidei, 'Simbolo di unione', *Corriere della Sera*, 18 October 1978; Francesco Margiotta Broglio, 'Molti problemi ancora aperti tra Stato e Chiesa', *Avanti!*, 19 October 1978, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Gaspare Barbiellini Amidei, 'Un Papa "straniero" in un'Italia provinciale', *Corriere della Sera*, 24 October 1978; Stefano De Andreis, Mariella Leone, 'La sfida di Wojtyła', *Panorama*, 31 October 1978, 42–45; Massimo Tosti, 'E adesso povera Dc', *Il Settimanale*, 1 November 1978, 6–9.

<sup>30</sup> Eugenio Scalfari, 'Una novità storica e positiva per il mondo', *la Repubblica*, 17 October 1978; cf. 'Con un Papa polacco cosa muta per la Dc?', *l'Unità*, 18 October 1978; l.p. [Luigi Pintor], 'Vaticano avventurista', *il manifesto*, 18 October 1978.

<sup>31</sup> Giovanni Spadolini, 'Raccoglie la migliore eredità del Concilio', *La Voce Repubblicana*, 18 October 1978.

<sup>32</sup> Barbara Spinelli, 'Un enigma per Mosca', *la Repubblica*, 20 October 1978; Sandro Magister, 'Chi ha paura di Gesù Cristo?', *L'Espresso*, 29 October 1978, 6–9.

<sup>33</sup> Nino Milazzo, 'Il lungo confronto fra Stato e Chiesa in un paese che è cattolico e comunista', *Corriere della Sera*, 17 October 1978, 4.

anticommunism spelt resistance to atheism.<sup>34</sup> This offered hopes of a combative papacy dawning<sup>35</sup> which might put an end to the crisis of religion in general and restore the Church to its origins in the catacombs.<sup>36</sup> Certain commentators evoked the resurgence of a compact, powerful Church triumphant, a stronghold against its enemies.<sup>37</sup> Many described Polish Catholicism as an island of strength that had not been through the crisis experienced by the western Church;<sup>38</sup> they conjured the image of an almost pre-conciliar Church—hierarchical, fully aligned with the West, a Carolingian Church,<sup>39</sup> able to tackle communism head on<sup>40</sup> and bring about a heroic new liberation,<sup>41</sup> both abroad and—where it was urgently needed—in Italy now that for the first time the Italian Communist Party (PCI) was joining the governing majority.<sup>42</sup>

In many respects, then, the comments on John Paul II reflected hopes and expectations, fears, traumas and changes already present in Italian society and within the Catholic world. Despite their deep differences of outlook and political affiliation, the press demonstrably voiced a more general message: that behind the election of John Paul II there was more than the ‘mere’ appointment of a foreign pontiff: it smacked of a global response to the major changes afoot, beginning with changes within religion.

First, the general approval of the name Wojtyła spoke of a desire for something new, a papacy opening its doors to change, the sort of change

<sup>34</sup> S.D., ‘Nella Chiesa e in Italia’, *Stampa Sera*, 17 October 1978; Piero Benetazzo, ‘La chiesa militante ha vinto la battaglia’, *la Repubblica*, 17 October 1978, 4; Enzo Bettiza, ‘Un Papa che sa’, *il Giornale nuovo*, 18 October 1978.

<sup>35</sup> Indro Montanelli, ‘Un Papa di frontiera’, *il Giornale nuovo*, 17 October 1978; Mauro Paissan, ‘Lo spirito procede da (e verso) Oriente’, *il manifesto*, 17 October 1978.

<sup>36</sup> Guido Vigna, ‘Hanno dato la parola alla Chiesa del silenzio’, *Corriere d’Informazione*, 17 October 1978; Luciano Cavalli, ‘Non più solo figli ma anche fratelli’, *Il Giorno*, 18 October 1978.

<sup>37</sup> Jean François Revel, ‘Le voci del silenzio’, *il Giornale nuovo*, 28 October 1978; Francesco Alberoni, ‘Forza e debolezza della Chiesa-fortezza’, *il Mulino*, January-February 1979, 35–42.

<sup>38</sup> Giancarlo Zizola, ‘Dato principale: è dell’Est e simbolo di una chiesa che non conosce crisi’, *Il Giorno*, 17 October 1978.

<sup>39</sup> Lo Svizzero [Emilio Cavaterra], ‘Il Papa e l’Europa’, *Il Borghese*, 5 November 1978, 596.

<sup>40</sup> Paolo Mazzanti, ‘Papa di fede ferma nemico dell’Ostpolitik’, *il Giornale nuovo*, 17 October 1978; Marco Nese, ‘I polacchi aspettano dal Papa una rivoluzione copernicana’, *Corriere d’Informazione*, 21 October 1978, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Nino Tripodi, ‘Un polso temprato’, *Secolo d’Italia*, 17 October 1978.

<sup>42</sup> Desmond O’Grady, ‘Realista ma anticomunista’, *Il Mondo*, 25 October 1978, 12–13.



desired by a world that was fast gaining momentum, while the Church marked time: it appeared uncertain how to meet the challenges of modernity or—some thought—insensitive to the need for open-mindedness towards other cultures, whether religious, social or political.<sup>43</sup> Needless to say, some newspapers sought to play down the innovation of a Polish Pope;<sup>44</sup> there was no such thing as foreigners within Catholicism,<sup>45</sup> and the Second Vatican agenda would proceed unchanged.<sup>46</sup> But the mere fact of his winning against Italian cardinals made one think that, perhaps, with Wojtyła the Church might start to shed its provincialism, open up to the world,<sup>47</sup> regain a pastoral, evangelical dimension that was global.<sup>48</sup> Wojtyła's references to the Second Vatican Council in his first orations should thus be read not so much as showing a pro-Council or progressive stance, but as evidence that the papacy had changed, despite the Roman Curia, which a Polish Pope anyway did not belong to.<sup>49</sup> Their purport was to resurrect the Church's universal function within a world whose problems were daily and increasingly 'interwoven and interconnected on a world scale'.<sup>50</sup> Wojtyła's first acts thus presaged the global irrupting into the local scene—something only a foreign Pope could have brought to Rome.<sup>51</sup> Again, the new Pope's very first talk of building up collegiate government of the Church<sup>52</sup> indicated a desire to change a rigidly Rome-centred system into something where global factors (i.e. the national churches with their own issues and cultures) took a direct part in central management.<sup>53</sup> This triggered a new reading of the Church's mission and

<sup>43</sup> Gianni Baget Bozzo, 'Questa volta ha vinto il Concilio', *la Repubblica*, 17 October 1978; Luigi Accattoli, 'Sarà il papa del Concilio', *la Repubblica*, 18 October 1978.

<sup>44</sup> Angelo Narducci, 'Una scelta profetica', *Avvenire*, 17 October 1978.

<sup>45</sup> Guido Gonella, 'Il discorso della fedeltà', *Il Tempo*, 18 October 1978.

<sup>46</sup> Silvano Stracca, 'Nel solco della storia', *Avvenire*, 18 October 1978.

<sup>47</sup> 'A Giovanni Paolo II', *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 21 October 1978, 105.

<sup>48</sup> Giuseppe Alberigo, 'Uno straniero: la svolta della Chiesa dopo mezzo millennio', *Corriere della Sera*, 17 October 1978, 3; Giuseppe Alberigo, 'Il papato uscito dall'italianità', *Corriere della Sera*, 18 October 1978, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Arturo Carlo Jemolo, *Recisi i fili con la curia*, cit. in Antonio Scornajenghi, 'Stampa laica e mondo politico in Italia', in Impagliazzo (ed), *Shock Wojtyła*, 100.

<sup>50</sup> Geno Pampaloni, 'Dove la fede è forte', *il Giornale nuovo*, 17 October 1978.

<sup>51</sup> Luigi Accattoli, 'È come aver eletto uno del Terzo Mondo', *la Repubblica*, 17 October 1978, 3.

<sup>52</sup> 'Il Vescovo di Roma dice: collegialità', *il Regno*, 15 November 1978, 433–435.

<sup>53</sup> Paolo Giuntella, 'Coraggio nella fedeltà', *Il Popolo*, 19 October 1978; Giovanni Gennari, 'Perché scrivo di Papa Wojtyła', *l'Unità*, 21 October 1978, 3; Luigi Accattoli, 'Le dimensioni internazionali della Chiesa', *il Mulino*, January-February 1979, 43–70.

priorities. The themes of injustice, persecution, inequality and violation of human rights in the world formed the core of a pastoral message which some called ‘the only possible moral that is universal and revolutionary’.<sup>54</sup> It put an end once and for all to any defensive entrenchment by the Church, projecting her into the midst of the debate and chessboard of international politics,<sup>55</sup> a reference point for the whole of mankind,<sup>56</sup> within the fold or not.<sup>57</sup> The Church was to go planet-wide, in short, broadening her horizons,<sup>58</sup> reacting to ongoing transformations uniting the whole world in the field of communications and information, economic operations and international political relations.<sup>59</sup> She was launched on a course that would thrust her from Italy into Europe, and from there into the planet as a whole, putting an end to anti-modern Counter-reformation ideology in which the Church had stood as a bastion and stronghold.<sup>60</sup> Some newspapers made the point that a Pope from Poland would de-westernize Catholicism—identified with the West as it had been since medieval times, a coincidence that the hard years of the Cold War had only intensified. Besides, precisely because Poland stood geographically as a frontier country, it would make the Church confines permeable,<sup>61</sup> facilitating dialogue between Catholicism and secular or Marxist interlocutors<sup>62</sup> bent on surmounting the crisis of both capitalist and communist

<sup>54</sup> Paolo Flores D’Arcais, ‘Sarà un papa del dissenso?’, *Avanti!*, 23 October 1978, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Arturo Gismondi, ‘Una scelta per la Chiesa del futuro’, *Paese Sera*, 18 October 1978; Leone Piccioni, ‘Il coraggio della fede’, *Il Tempo*, 18 October 1978; Stefano Tommassini, ‘Quale universalità’, *La Voce Repubblicana*, 19 October 1978.

<sup>56</sup> Giuseppe Chiarante, ‘La Chiesa a una svolta’, *Rinascita*, 20 October 1978, 1–2; Fabio Mussi, ‘Un capitolo inedito ancora tutto da scrivere’, *Rinascita*, 27 October 1978, 7.

<sup>57</sup> Paolo Giuntella, ‘Volontà di dialogo’, *Il Popolo*, 21 October 1978; Paolo Giuntella, ‘Coraggioso appello del Papa al mondo’, *Il Popolo*, 24 October 1978; Geno Pampaloni, ‘La fede di Giovanni Paolo II non si ritrae dai conflitti della storia’, *il Giornale nuovo*, 24 October 1978.

<sup>58</sup> Giuseppe Zilli, ‘La Chiesa volta pagina’, *Famiglia Cristiana*, 29 October 1978, 5–6.

<sup>59</sup> Paolo Brezzi, ‘Il cammino della Chiesa’, *Paese Sera*, 18 October 1978, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Giulio Goria, ‘Si spezza un legame ombelicale con l’Italia’, *Paese Sera*, 17 October 1978; Francesco Margiotta Broglio, ‘Dopo la scelta di Karol Wojtyła’, *Il Ponte*, October 1978, 1178–1182; Gianni Baget Bozzo, ‘La fine del “privilegio” italiano’, *Rocca*, 1 November 1978, 15–16.

<sup>61</sup> Carlo Bo, ‘La Polonia: fede, realismo e tradizione’, *Corriere della Sera*, 17 October 1978, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Giovanni Franzoni, ‘Un papa non italiano? Come è stato possibile?’, *Com-Nuovi Tempi*, 22 October 1978, 1; Antonio Parisella, ‘Papa: le nuove prospettive impongono al movimento un impegno più qualificato’, *Com-Nuovi Tempi*, 5 November 1978, 2.

systems<sup>63</sup> and ‘seeking truth with the world’.<sup>64</sup> A feature which some saw confirmed by Wojtyła’s first rounds of apostolic journeying.<sup>65</sup> The Church emerged as a ‘great spiritual power’ able to cross boundaries and solve world issues:<sup>66</sup> Mexico, Poland, Ireland, the United States, were all reputedly frontier lands where dialogue and meeting were always on the agenda. Wojtyła’s Church thus seemed to be emerging from a defensive stance and going down the road of change and a new identity;<sup>67</sup> to be engaging with the world in bilateral dialogue<sup>68</sup> and reforming the centre of Catholicism in the name of God made man and of Pope Roncalli’s message.<sup>69</sup>

### 3 A LONG TRANSITIONAL PONTIFICATE

The message with which John Paul II launched his papacy—appealing for borders to be flung open to Christ and likewise economic and political systems, centres of civilization, culture and development—was broadcast in worldview to an audience of one-and-a-half billion in the presence of various religious leaders and many heads of State. As was written at the time, the message was ‘strong, both ancient and contemporary’; it came in the midst of a ‘global crisis that is essentially a crisis of orientation’.<sup>70</sup> Wojtyła’s response—as has been stated—was to make the Church not a mere sanctuary but an alternative pole, possessing moral and social authority,<sup>71</sup> oriented towards worldwide re-Christianization.<sup>72</sup> In those first months of the papacy, he seemed to have put the Church back in sync with the times, out of the ghetto in which she had languished down to

<sup>63</sup> Domenico Sassoli, ‘Una vocazione universale’, *Il Popolo*, 17 October 1978, 3; Gennaro Acquaviva, ‘La svolta del Conclave’, *Avanti!*, 17 October 1978; Carlo Cardia, ‘Muta l’orizzonte’, *l’Unità*, 18 October 1978; Alceste Santini, ‘La Chiesa svilupperà il dialogo col mondo’, *l’Unità*, 21 October 1978; Carlo Cardia, ‘Il segnale che viene dalla Chiesa di Wojtyła’, *l’Unità*, 26 October 1978.

<sup>64</sup> Valerio Ochetto, ‘Il papa che viene dall’Est’, *Critica Sociale*, 14 November 1978, 29.

<sup>65</sup> Giancarlo Zizola, ‘Il Papa viaggia’, *Il Giorno*, 31 October 1978.

<sup>66</sup> Carlo Benedetti, ‘Wojtyła sogna una Chiesa grande potenza spirituale’, *Paese Sera*, 16 October 1979.

<sup>67</sup> Alberto Cavallari, ‘Un vescovo che viene dall’Est’, *Corriere della Sera*, 17 October 1978.

<sup>68</sup> Nazareno Fabbretti, ‘Con Papa Wojtyła la Chiesa è ancora più universale’, *La Discussione*, 23 October 1978, 7.

<sup>69</sup> Raniero La Valle, ‘La sorpresa del cambiamento’, *Rocca*, 15 November 1978, 17–19.

<sup>70</sup> Vittorio Citterich, ‘All’umanità’, *Il Sabato*, 28 October 1978, 1.

<sup>71</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, 725.

<sup>72</sup> Giovagnoli, *Storia e globalizzazione*, 222–225.

Pius XII's time (and could always revert).<sup>73</sup> The new Pope conferred a new style, less conformist, more modern, theatrical and closer to the idiom of mass society.<sup>74</sup> The Church thus not only resumed her universal vocation,<sup>75</sup> but broadcast a signal of religious fervour flowering worldwide.<sup>76</sup> She provided an answer to re-emerging forms of mass religion (rooted in devotion to popular cults and sanctuaries, mushrooming lay groups and communities, spontaneous pilgrimages and new forms of gathering).<sup>77</sup> She stood as a credible alternative to secularization, which was apparently not so unstoppable as had lately been assumed.<sup>78</sup>

The general way in which Wojtyła's election was interpreted thus depended on the political inclination or the many shades of differing sensibility within the Church in Italy. The core message was that it strengthened the primacy of evangelism as the grass-roots response amid the sea of modernity. Yet the implications varied widely according to the Catholic groups in question. By some the process of opening up was welcomed as prompting the Church community to emerge from the institutions and plunge into the living fabric of social life; this was the line taken by the Italian Conference of Bishops and voiced by the daily *Avvenire*,<sup>79</sup> for example. Others felt it should initiate open ecumenical dialogue and exchange with other religions, cultures and political ideologies; so thought the multifarious world of Catholic dissent, for example the movements grouped around the journals *Testimonianze*, *Il Gallo*, *Com-Nuovi Tempi*.<sup>80</sup> Others again thought the evangelizing spirit should spur the Church

<sup>73</sup> Gianni Licheri, 'I primi sei mesi di Papa Wojtyła', *Aggiornamenti Sociali*, June 1979, 467–482.

<sup>74</sup> Domenico Del Rio, 'Chiesa stil nuovo', *la Repubblica*, 24 October 1978, 4.

<sup>75</sup> On the Christian calling to expand throughout the world, Zorn, *Il cristianesimo e l'emancipazione dei popoli extraeuropei*, 491.

<sup>76</sup> Alfredo Vinciguerra, 'Perché rifiorisce la religiosità', *Il Popolo*, 17 October 1978, 3.

<sup>77</sup> Franco Bolgiani, 'Il significato dell'elezione di Karol Wojtyła', *il Mulino*, January–February 1979, 3–34.

<sup>78</sup> Gianpaolo Salvini, 'L'elezione di Giovanni Paolo II', *Aggiornamenti Sociali*, November 1978, 649–651.

<sup>79</sup> Silvano Stracca, 'Una dedizione senza limiti', *Avvenire*, 21 October 1978; Angelo Narducci, 'Non potere ma servizio', *Avvenire*, 22 October 1978; Silvano Stracca, 'Professione di fede', *Avvenire*, 24 October 1978.

<sup>80</sup> Daniela Saresella, 'Il "dissenso" cattolico', in Impagliazzo (ed), *La nazione cattolica*, 265–289; Alessandro Santagata, 'Una rassegna storiografica sul dissenso cattolico', *Cristianesimo nella storia*, 31, 2010, 207–241; Silvia Inaudi, Marta Margotti, *La rivoluzione del Concilio. La contestazione cattolica negli anni Sessanta e Settanta*, (Rome: Studium, 2017).

towards dialogue deep within society of course, but with a view to defending and disseminating an already clearly defined identity, as in the case of *Comunione e Liberazione*<sup>81</sup> or *Opus Dei*,<sup>82</sup> the latter with its more forthright criticism of modernity. Amid the contemporary world's lack of certitude, Wojtyła's Church seemed to offer an answer to man's existential angst, albeit one that erred on the side of excessive self-sufficiency; it seemed to offer a new kind of rallying call.<sup>83</sup> A 'minority' Church not representative of any superior civil wisdom or social alternative, still less a Church of opposition to the world, but dialoguing with it.<sup>84</sup> To some this conferred a strong 'public dimension'.<sup>85</sup>

These last quotations show how the first analyses of the Wojtyła election reflected a series of already ongoing transformations. Electing a foreign Pope might seem to fuel a process that was turning Italy into a country like any other—a prospect that Paul VI feared—but it did carve out new avenues for action, and an approach to the world that might forge a new Christian identity, based on a new style of being Pope.<sup>86</sup> Thus the first Italian commentators thought (in some cases wishfully) that the choosing of Wojtyła and his first steps as pontiff offered a Catholic response to the 1970s crisis and the persisting need for religion in a secular society<sup>87</sup> which was losing its own identity amid the increasing fragmentation and postmodern expansion of space.<sup>88</sup> With Wojtyła the Church seemed to be welcoming a revival of sacrality,<sup>89</sup> a change in the religious experience from solid practice to something more strange and pilgrim-like, breaking with

<sup>81</sup> Citterich, 'All'umanità'; 'La Chiesa italiana dopo l'elezione di Papa Wojtyła', *Il Sabato*, 21 October 1978, 5; Francesco Ricci, 'Dalla fedeltà di un popolo cristiano il nuovo dono dello Spirito', *Litterae communionis*, November 1978, 3–4; Rocco Buttiglione, 'Di fronte al suo insegnamento', *Litterae communionis*, October 1979, 15–17; Josef Zverina, 'Un anno con Wojtyła', *Il Sabato*, 13 October 1979, 1.

<sup>82</sup> c.c. [Cesare Cavalleri], 'Un anno con Giovanni Paolo II', *Studi Cattolici*, October 1979, 594.

<sup>83</sup> Giuseppe Chiarante, 'Il papato di Wojtyła: la Chiesa del dopo-Concilio', *Critica Marxista*, July–August 1979, 43–61.

<sup>84</sup> Gianni Baget Bozzo, 'Il discorso del papa', *la Repubblica*, 24 October 1978.

<sup>85</sup> Carlo Zola, 'Il John Travolta dello Spirito Santo', *L'Europeo*, 4 October 1979, 40–52.

<sup>86</sup> Melloni, *Gli anni Settanta della Chiesa cattolica*, 212–213.

<sup>87</sup> David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978).

<sup>88</sup> Giacomo Marramao, 'Politica e società secolarizzata', in Lussana, Marramao (eds), *Culture, nuovi soggetti, identità*, 21–22.

<sup>89</sup> Daniel Bell, 'The Return of the Sacred? The Argument on the Future of Religion', *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 31:6, March 1978, 29–55.

the traditional model of Church-State relations, allowing scope for a fluid individual faith, a subjective ‘take’ on beliefs, an individual tailoring of practice no longer fully in line with the institutional rubric.<sup>90</sup> Wojtyła seemed to promise a new way of experiencing religion made up of exceptional and irregular moments, extraordinary events in the face of which the ambit of the faithful was broadened, making it necessary to dialogue and rub shoulders with different beliefs. In short, by his stepping outside the ceremonial, his charismatic humanity, his constant journeys each of which turned into a mass media event, Wojtyła apparently embodied the attempt to steer a transition from secularism to the post-secular society<sup>91</sup> in which religion returned to prominence and regained its public function.<sup>92</sup> Briefly put, it was God’s revenge in Catholic garb<sup>93</sup> amid a world where identity was falling apart.<sup>94</sup> In that last fling of the 1970s, it was still unclear what kind of reaction to the ‘shock of the global’ this spelt, but—some analysts hoped—Wojtyła was ushering in a papacy of transition towards globalization and modernity.<sup>95</sup> In actual fact, as two leading historians of Catholicism argued, it remained incomplete, ambivalent, fettered by with a traditional, hierarchical, heavily Petrine view of faith in relations with the world;<sup>96</sup> it left little scope for connection with the changing times as so many hoped in 1978—something that is now a mainstay of Pope Francis’s occupancy of the Chair.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>90</sup> José Casanova, *Oltre la secolarizzazione. Le religioni alla riconquista della sfera pubblica*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2000); José Casanova, ‘Lo Stato post-secolare e il pluralismo religioso’, *Vita e Pensiero*, 1, 2017, 15–21; Danièle Hervieu-Léger, ‘Cristianesimo e post-modernità: il cattolicesimo’, in Menozzi (ed), *Cristianesimo*, 571–574.

<sup>91</sup> Jürgen Habermas, ‘Notes on Post-Secular Society’, *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 25:4, September 2008, 17–29.

<sup>92</sup> Agostino Giovagnoli, ‘Religione e laicità in un mondo post-secolare’, in Andrea Riccardi (ed), *Le chiese e gli altri. Culture, religioni, ideologie e chiese cristiane nel Novecento*, (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2008), 333–340.

<sup>93</sup> Gilles Kepel, *La revanche de Dieu: Chrétiens, juifs et musulmans à la reconquête du monde*, (Paris: Seuil, 1991).

<sup>94</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Mondo globale, mondi locali. Cultura e politica alla fine del ventesimo secolo*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 1999).

<sup>95</sup> Formigoni, *L’Italia dei cattolici*, 181–185.

<sup>96</sup> Daniele Menozzi, *Giovanni Paolo II. Una transizione incompiuta? Per una storicizzazione del pontificato*, (Brescia: Editrice Morcelliana, 2006); Giovanni Miccoli, *In difesa della fede. La Chiesa di Giovanni Paolo II e Benedetto XVI*, (Milan: Rizzoli, 2007).

<sup>97</sup> Daniele Menozzi, *Il papato di Francesco in prospettiva storica*, (Brescia: Editrice Morcelliana, 2023), 81–99.

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# Deng Xiaoping Launches the ‘Four Modernizations’. 13 December 1978. The Turning Point of Chinese Communism as Seen from Italy

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## 1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In the aftermath of Mao Zedong's death and the arrest of the ‘Gang of Four’ (September–October 1976), the ruling group of the Communist Party and the People's Republic of China, now led by Hua Guofeng, needed to close the door on a troubled phase and set the country on a new course.

The foundations for the turnaround had been laid by Zhou Enlai, the reform leader who had facilitated the rehabilitation of Deng Xiaoping, disgraced during the Cultural Revolution. In the inaugural session of the Fourth National People's Congress held in January 1975, Zhou Enlai

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re-launched the project of the ‘four modernizations’ (in the fields of agriculture, industry, the army and science) which he had proposed in 1964 but implementation of which had been interrupted by the Cultural Revolution. On the same occasion he also nominated Deng as his successor, a choice endorsed by Mao but opposed by the extremist wing of the Gang of Four. Elected Vice-President of the Central Committee, Deng began to set in motion the programme formulated by Zhou. On Zhou’s death, however, Mao favoured the more cautious Hua Guofeng instead, and Deng was again marginalised. In April, the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in his support, suppressed by the police, worsened his political position. However, with Mao’s death and the liquidation of the Gang of Four, the balance of power shifted once again. In 1977, after a partial self-criticism, Deng became Party Vice-President. He introduced himself not just as the heir to Zhou Enlai but also to Mao, whose motto ‘practice is the sole criterion of truth’ he emphasised: a principle in line with historic materialism, but also with that supremacy of concrete results over ideological proclamations which reversed the stance of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>1</sup>

Considering the different political currents at play after Mao’s death, Odd Arne Westad places Deng at the top of the ‘modernisers’: these were cadres with long party seniority, who were uninterested in the ways of the Cultural Revolution and whose priority was ‘to make China rich and strong, and to make Chinese society a better environment for its inhabitants’.<sup>2</sup>

On 10 November 1978 the National Party Conference opened for the 3rd Plenum of the 11th Central Committee. In his inaugural speech, Hua Guofeng argued the need to orient the Party’s work towards ‘socialist modernisation’.<sup>3</sup> However, the main topics of his first and second speeches were, in fact, political: the ‘counter-revolutionary’ role of the Gang of Four, the mistakes of the Cultural Revolution, reinterpretation of the

<sup>1</sup> Sandro Bordone, ‘La lotta per la successione a Mao e la fine del maoismo’, *Il Politico*, 71:3 (213), 2006, 5–39, 10–20.

<sup>2</sup> Odd Arne Westad, ‘The Great Transformation: China in the Long 1970s’, in Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, Daniel J. Sargent (eds), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s*, in *Perspective*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010), 74.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Hua Guofeng’s Speech at the Opening Session of the CCP Central Work Conference’, 10 November 1978, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121688> [accessed 1 September 2024].

Tiananmen Square incidents of 1976 following what was now called 'a revolutionary mass movement'.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, not far from Tiananmen Square, large posters appeared criticising Mao and the Cultural Revolution and openly supporting Deng and the four modernisations. If the demonstrations of 1976 had been, as Roderick Macfarquhar writes, 'the first act in the popular struggle to rehabilitate Deng', the posting of the *dazhebaos* on what was called the 'Wall of Democracy' was its 'second act'.<sup>5</sup>

Interviewed by *The Washington Post* reporters Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, while distancing himself from the most critical positions, Deng expressed a positive opinion of the ongoing mobilisation, stating that he was committed to promoting a decisive turnaround from the chaos of the Cultural Revolution in favour of a policy of reform and dialogue with the United States.<sup>6</sup> Even in his talks with the Party's top leaders, he confirmed the assumptions that drove him: 'We must acknowledge that we are backward, that many of our ways of doing things are inappropriate, and that we need to change.'<sup>7</sup>

## 2 THE 13 DECEMBER SPEECH AND THE 3RD PLENUM OF THE 11TH CENTRAL COMMITTEE

On 13 December, the final day of the Conference, Deng delivered 'the most important speech of his life'<sup>8</sup> just before Hua's concluding remarks. Emphasising the historical value of the Conference and the frankness of the discussion, the Party Vice-President stressed the key condition for achieving the four modernisations: first and foremost, he told the CCP cadres, it was necessary to 'emancipate our minds, use our heads, seek

<sup>4</sup> 'Hua Guofeng's Second Speech at the CCP Central Work Conference', 25 November 1978, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121689> [accessed 1 September 2024].

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Chubb, 'Democracy Wall, Foreign Correspondents, and Deng Xiaoping', *Pacific Affairs*, 89, 3 September 2016, 567–589, 574–575; Roderick Macfarquhar, 'The Succession to Mao and the End of Maoism', in Denis Twitchett, John K. Fairbank (eds), *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 15: *The People's Republic, Part 2: Revolutions Within the Chinese Revolution 1966–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 305–401, 382–383.

<sup>6</sup> Chubb, 'Democracy Wall', 583–584.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011), 218.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 241.

truth from facts'. It was therefore necessary to break free from dogmatism and to overcome the 'ideological taboos' and 'forbidden zones' established by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four.

That speech by the 'pragmatist' Deng is therefore above all a hymn to free thinking and restoration of a correctly understood Marxism. The attack on dogmatism is linked to the criticism of 'bureaucratism', the result of 'over-concentration of power'. Individual responsibilities were overshadowed; indeed, 'in some cases, people who worked well were attacked while those who did nothing or just played it safe weathered every storm'. 'People whose thinking has become rigid [...] go along with whatever has the backing of the authorities and adjust their words and actions according to whichever way the wind is blowing'; but this is precisely what it means to forgo 'the Party spirit'. Therefore, 'our drive for the four modernizations will get nowhere unless [...] the minds of the cadres and the masses are completely emancipated', and this must happen 'in every factory, government office, school [...] as well as in [...] Party committees'.

Democracy was therefore 'a major condition for emancipating the mind'. He added, 'for quite a long time democratic centralism was not genuinely practised: centralism was divorced from democracy'. On the contrary, the rights of citizens had to be respected, the masses listened to, the right to criticise encouraged. But it was also necessary to implement 'economic democracy', by expanding 'the decision-making powers of mines, factories and [...] production teams', increasing incentives, guaranteeing the workers 'rights of democratic election, management and supervision'. Democracy had to be 'institutionalized and written into law'; criminal and civil codes had to be enacted, the judiciary to be strengthened. Deng thus raised the issue of the socialist rule of law.

Mistakes, he continued, needed to be corrected. Leaders who had erred were to 'draw the necessary lessons', after which, they would return to the ranks. Balance and moderation were needed: 'In dealing with people who have made mistakes,' he pointed out, 'it is better to err on the side of leniency', especially 'with rank-and-file Party members', while being 'more severe with leading cadres'. In general, more care was to be taken in the selection of cadres, distrusting conformists and those who were 'obsessed by factionalist ideas'.

Deng also mentioned an assessment of Mao's work. 'The great contributions of Comrade Mao in the course of long revolutionary struggles,' he said, 'will never fade. [...] were it not for Chairman Mao there would

be no New China'. Thus, his thought was 'the greatest intellectual treasure of our Party'. But Mao 'was not infallible'; it was therefore necessary to frame his work 'scientifically and in historical perspective'.

The last part of the speech concerned how to deal with the new problems, starting with three areas: methods of management, structure of management and economic policy. Regarding the methods, 'overcoming bureaucracy' and avoiding management 'marked by overstaffing, organizational overlapping, complicated procedures and extremely low efficiency' was essential. 'We must learn to manage the economy by economic means'. As for management, it was necessary to 'strengthen the work responsibility system'. The need was to 'extend the authority' of the directors, but also that of technicians, engineers, accountants, by implementing incentives and a 'system of evaluation' that favoured 'friendly emulation'. 'If the standard of living of some people is raised first, this will inevitably be an impressive example [...]. This will help the whole national economy to advance'.

'The four modernizations', he concluded, 'represent a great and profound revolution in which we move forward by resolving one new contradiction after another'; we must 'learn well and always keep on learning' in order to 'change the backward condition of our country and transform it into a modern and powerful socialist state'.<sup>9</sup>

What Deng envisaged, therefore, was a radical change and a difficult learning process. His speech can be compared to Khrushchev's reports to the 20th Congress of the CCP, similar to Khrushchev's secret report in its critical tone, and to his public one for its indication of a new perspective. Unlike Khrushchev, however, Deng showed no iconoclastic spirit: on the contrary, he took on Mao's legacy, setting out to rectify the failures of the Cultural Revolution, without demanding any recantation or excommunication. According to Silvio Pons, 'the figure of Deng was much more similar to Malenkov than to Khrushchev' and his 'demaioisation [was] prudent and selective'.<sup>10</sup> However, the new leader's ideas 'represented a fundamental departure from the Mao era'; no longer voluntarism, but incentives.

<sup>9</sup>Deng Xiaoping, 'Emancipate the Mind, Seek Truth From Facts and Unite As One In Looking to the Future', Speech at the 3rd Plenum Of The 11th CCP Central Committee, 13 December 1978, <https://dengxiaopingworks.wordpress.com/2013/02/25/emancipate-the-mind-seek-truth-from-facts-and-unite-as-one-in-looking-to-the-future/> [accessed 1 September 2024].

<sup>10</sup>Silvio Pons, *La rivoluzione globale. Storia del comunismo internazionale, 1917-1991*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2012), 356.

Deng 'gave the assembly party leaders an overview of his approach for the new era'.<sup>11</sup> His speech constituted the keynote of the 3rd Plenum of the 11th Central Committee, which opened five days later and formed 'the conclusion of a process of political liberalisation initiated during the year', with the new Constitution and 'the "truth criterion" campaign'.<sup>12</sup>

In terms of economic policies, the main change enacted by the Plenum concerned agriculture. Collectivisation was halted; it was stated that 'the property rights of the people's communes, brigades and production teams and their decision-making power' were to be guaranteed; wage egalitarianism was to be abolished on the basis of the socialist principle 'to each according to his work'; private plots of land and village markets were to be protected as 'necessary complements of the socialist economy'. As for industry, a rebalancing between heavy and light industry was initiated. Deng thus emerged victorious from the Plenum, supported by the 'pragmatists', who had always been critical of the Cultural Revolution, but also by the intellectuals, who had faith in his policy of openness.<sup>13</sup>

### 3 THE TURNING POINT AS SEEN FROM ITALY

The Italian press followed with interest the evolution of the Chinese situation from Mao's death onwards, noting the gradual consolidation of Deng's position. In August 1978, in the weekly *L'Espresso*, widely read in progressive circles, the renowned reporter Tiziano Terzani observed that, 'even if China "demaioises", it will do so in the name of Mao', though his political legacy had been overturned. The Chinese knew that they were 'twenty years behind' and must 'gain ground quickly'; the 'four modernizations' implied the importing of 'machinery, technology, know-how: hence the growing interest in establishing relations with the United States, with Western Europe, in accepting loans'.<sup>14</sup> In a later report, three days before Deng's speech, Terzani grasped the political core of the turning point: Deng 'is the hero of the moment', he wrote; thanks to him China 'comes to terms with its past and now faces its second liberation: that of

<sup>11</sup> Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping*, 242–245.

<sup>12</sup> Bordone, 'La lotta per la successione a Mao', 20–21.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 21–23.

<sup>14</sup> Tiziano Terzani, 'L'Abc del dopo Mao', *L'Espresso*, 13 August 1978.

thought. [...] now the people in the streets of Beijing speak explicitly of “freedom””.<sup>15</sup>

In *La Stampa*, a broadsheet owned by the Agnelli family, *Le Monde*'s correspondent from Beijing Alain Jacob returned to the campaign of the *dazebaos*, which had raised the question of rehabilitating party functionaries defined in the past as ‘right-wing opportunists’, discerning a sort of bouncing of ideas between mobilisation from below and Deng's stance.<sup>16</sup> According to *l'Unità*, the press organ of the Italian Communist Party, the Chinese leaders rehabilitated are now about sixty in number.<sup>17</sup> The PCI newspaper also recorded the reversal of judgement on the events of Tiananmen Square in 1976. According to Giuseppe Boffa, a long-serving Moscow correspondent, it made ‘the terms of the clash between the different tendencies more explicit’; at the same time, the calls for unity by the CCP leadership ‘tend to close a whole phase of political clashes and restore a balance to China that is considered the necessary premise for implementing development plans’.<sup>18</sup> The communist press thus seemed to be expressing a positive view of the current turnaround.

In the magazine *Rinascita*—also linked to the PCI—Enrica Collotti Pischel, Italy's foremost sinologist, detected a ‘confrontation between “two lines”’: on the one hand, that of Hua Guofeng, more in continuity with Mao's policy although aware of having to fight its ‘degeneration’; on the other hand, Deng's line, which as early as 1977 had already raised the issues of wage differentiation, individual responsibility and managerial changes. Nor were these demands ‘incompatible’ with the socialist option, since on the contrary ‘it is not possible in a socialist country [...] to tackle the problem of the rapid accumulation of capital without combating negative phenomena such as low labour productivity, disorganisation, attitudes of parasitism, bureaucratism and authoritarianism’. There were other elements that left one ‘perplexed’, from the start of foreign indebtedness to spending on rearmament. The scholar's judgement, however, was on the whole positive.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, even before the speech on 13 December, columnist Ugo Stille of *Corriere della Sera*—Italy's leading daily and a point of reference

<sup>15</sup> Tiziano Terzani, ‘A Pechino hanno fatto una scoperta: la Cina’, *ibid.*, 10 December 1978.

<sup>16</sup> Alain Jacob, ‘Cina: perché Peng è stato riabilitato’, *La Stampa*, 13 December 1978.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Sessanta riabilitati in Cina’, *l'Unità*, 4 December 1978.

<sup>18</sup> Giuseppe Boffa, ‘La contesa che cominciò sulla Tien An Men’, *ibid.*, 2 December 1978.

<sup>19</sup> Enrica Collotti Pischel, ‘Cina: guerra di manifesti, lotta politica e scelte di sviluppo’, *Rinascita*, 1 December 1978.

for the bourgeoisie—had proposed a parallelism between Deng’s new course and the Khrushchevian turn of the 20th Congress. Compared to the latter, he wrote, the former appears ‘more limited on a formal level and more extensive on a substantial level’: no ‘demaioisation’, but a “re-dimensioning” of Mao’s image, which allows him to remain in the sacred role of “father of the revolution”, while initiating ‘a change that goes far beyond [...] what took place in Russia in 1956’, with ‘a programme of political liberalisation and economic modernisation that drastically alters the Maoist ideological assumptions’. The two elements converged with the CCP’s new ‘international strategy’. In other words, opening up to the West enabled the modernisation which Mao had also dreamed of but which had been impossible within a framework of isolation, and the same went for ‘revising [...] the management of the economy’ which sought to ‘reconcile socialist programming with the methods of a limited market economy’.<sup>20</sup> Stille clearly saw Deng’s reforms as the start to a kind of ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ which would have its main lever precisely in the use of market instruments.

Deng’s dialectical approach in dealing with Mao’s legacy also emerges from the Vatican newspaper *L’Osservatore Romano*, which reported the contents of a conversation between the CCP Vice-President and a Japanese delegation. The *dazhebaos* affair was described by Deng as ‘a continuation of Mao’s policy of correcting mistakes through a mass campaign’. The Vice-President also pointed out that he ‘owed a lot’ to Mao, who ‘saved him from persecution by the “Gang of Four”’ and the then Defence Minister Lin Biao. As for the current ruling group, Deng emphasised its unanimous effort towards achieving the four modernisations, reiterating the combination of ‘stability and unity’.<sup>21</sup> The same Vatican newspaper, quoting passages from Deng’s interview with Evans and Novak, emphasised how for the Chinese leader, China would not experience a phenomenon similar to de-Stalinisation; ‘recognising that Mao made mistakes [...] does not mean starting a campaign of demaioisation’.<sup>22</sup> The end of the *dazhebaos* and the appearance in public of the five top leaders of the Chinese Party and State a few days later were seen by the *L’Osservatore Romano*, as

<sup>20</sup> Ugo Stille, ‘La volta cinese coinvolge Est e Ovest’, *Corriere della Sera*, 1 December 1978.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Sviluppi della situazione politica nella Repubblica popolare di Cina’, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 27–28 November 1978.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Nuove indicazioni sugli sviluppi della situazione politica in Cina’, *ibid.*, 30 November 1978.



well as by the Christian democratic newspaper *Il Popolo*, as a go-slow on the 'campaign of "revision"' that he was steering from the bottom up; what was now more important was to defend the unity of the ruling group.<sup>23</sup>

In the following days, when Deng's turn came to speak, it was not heavily analysed by the Italian press. More attention was given, ten days later, to the conclusions of the Plenum which upheld the reformist wing. The balance of power—said *La Stampa*—had shifted in favour of Deng, while it was significant that Chen Yun, 'an opponent who has never been purged', was appointed the new Party Vice-President. 'The new promotions,' Jacob wrote, 'have significantly altered the balance of forces, as they involve personalities close to Teng Hsiao-ping'. The Plenum's concluding communiqué, moreover, stated 'that economic construction must take precedence over any political problems' and even 'that "the raging class struggles waged by the masses are practically over". By way of turning over a new leaf on internal conflicts'.<sup>24</sup>

Likewise *il manifesto*—voicing the opinions of a wing of the communist left that had sympathised with the Cultural Revolution—highlighted the CCP's severe censuring of that phase, adding, however, that the CC refrained from overplaying its hand. Deng's intention was to foster 'a climate of calm to work towards the goal of "socialist modernisation"'. Interestingly, *il manifesto* spoke of 'the line of Hua Kuo-feng and Teng Hsiao-ping', almost as if to downplay the magnitude of the turnaround taking place and the hegemonic role attained by Deng.<sup>25</sup> More explicit in this sense was *La Nazione*, according to which 'Deng's reformist faction is strengthened in Beijing', since the newly elected members of the Central Committee 'are almost all political victims of the "Cultural Revolution" and the "Gang of Four"'.<sup>26</sup> Deng's victory, therefore, also entailed a significant turnover at the top.

<sup>23</sup> 'Fine della campagna di "revisione" in Cina', *ibid.*, 3 December 1978; 'Cina: il gruppo dirigente ostenta ritrovata concordia', *Il Popolo*, 3 December 1978.

<sup>24</sup> Alain Jacob, 'Pechino: il Comitato centrale sancisce il nuovo corso cinese', *La Stampa*, 27 December 1978.

<sup>25</sup> p.v. [Pietro Veronese?], '*Il Quotidiano del popolo* definisce la rivoluzione culturale "il decennio in cui il nostro paese fu colpito dalla sciagura"', *il manifesto*, 27 December 1978.

<sup>26</sup> 'Si è rafforzata a Pechino la fazione riformista di Teng', *La Nazione*, 24 December 1978.

#### 4 THE RESUMPTION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA'S REINTEGRATION INTO THE WORLD MARKET

The change was also significant because it marked a dramatic shift in foreign policy. As Westad notes, Deng and his people were 'convinced that they could develop Mao's tenuous opening to the United States into a de facto alliance that would [...] improve China's security and provide access to the technology China needed'.<sup>27</sup> It is no coincidence that 'the new leader's first challenging act on the international scene' was 'the conclusion of a real alliance with the United States', which brought 'to completion the rapprochement that had been underway for years'.<sup>28</sup> Henry Kissinger recalled that for Deng the PRC could 'progress economically only in a relaxed international atmosphere for which good relations with the United States were the essential precondition'.<sup>29</sup>

On 16 December 1978, on the eve of the opening of the Plenum, US President Jimmy Carter and Chinese President Hua Guofeng announced the official resumption of diplomatic relations. The Carter administration also reaffirmed the 'one China' principle, already recognised by Nixon during his 1972 visit to Beijing. Now, in a joint communiqué, the US recognised the government of the People's Republic 'as the sole legal government of China' and made it clear that Taiwan was 'part of China'. Naturally, the re-establishment of diplomatic relations paved the way for economic cooperation.<sup>30</sup> Since a first bilateral trade agreement had been signed with the EEC in April<sup>31</sup> and a few months later, in August, a peace treaty had been signed with Japan, this was a comprehensive reintegration of the PRC into the world economy and the international community.

In Italy the news was given the greatest prominence. In *la Repubblica*, the radical daily recently founded by Eugenio Scalfari, Terzani pointed out

<sup>27</sup> Westad, 'The Great Transformation: China in the Long 1970s', 75–76.

<sup>28</sup> Pons, *La Rivoluzione globale*, 356.

<sup>29</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 836.

<sup>30</sup> Zhiquan Zhu, "Una sola Cina" nelle relazioni trilaterali fra Pechino, Washington e Taipei', <https://www.dinamopress.it/news/una-sola-cina-nelle-relazioni-trilaterali-fra-pechino-washington-e-taipei/> [accessed 1 September 2024]; Guido Samarani, *Contemporary China. Dalla fine dell'Impero a oggi*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2017), 305.

<sup>31</sup> See Harish Kapur, *China and the EEC: The New Connection*, (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), 37, 47–59.

that the agreement took place 'under the conditions set by Beijing'.<sup>32</sup> In *Corriere della Sera*, Stille specified that the initiative was taken personally by Deng who, on the eve of his speech, summoned the US head of mission in Beijing to propose 'a project for the immediate "normalisation"' of relations between the two countries, which obtained Carter's approval. For Stille, the resounding acceleration was linked to the imminence of the US-USSR summit, prior to which it was in China's interest to build an axis with the United States and in the United States' interest to strengthen its own position, but there was also, on the Chinese side, the intention 'to consolidate Deng's leadership with a great international success'.<sup>33</sup> In the same newspaper, the correspondent Piero Ostellino argued that, with the US-PRC agreement, 'one era in the history of international equilibrium closes and another one opens'; 'the new Chinese strategy tends [...] to break the "bipolar" character [...] of world equilibrium, in favour of a "multipolar" equilibrium', which also opens up new scope for Western Europe. The predictable Soviet discontent was commented on with satisfaction.<sup>34</sup>

In *l'Unità*, Alberto Jacoviello, who had previously come into conflict with the newspaper's management for his pro-Maoist stance,<sup>35</sup> was of the same opinion: 'Traditional world balances have changed'. As for the reason for the turnaround, Jacoviello linked it to China's readiness 'for economic, commercial and military contacts with the West on a different basis than in the past'. On the US side, the entente showed that the forthcoming agreement with the USSR on the limitation of strategic weapons 'in no way implies a return to the "bipolar" relationship'. Rather, 'a "tripolar" game is likely, which promises to be extremely complex'.<sup>36</sup> For *Rinascita* too, the US-PRC rapprochement was 'a fundamental episode' in the 'game being played on a world scale', which would have 'profound consequences', starting with the emergence of China as a possible 'third

<sup>32</sup> Tiziano Terzani, 'Alle condizioni poste da Pechino', *la Repubblica*, 17–18 December 1978.

<sup>33</sup> Ugo Stille, 'Da Capodanno Cina e Stati Uniti avranno relazioni diplomatiche', *Corriere della Sera*, 17 December 1978.

<sup>34</sup> Piero Ostellino, 'Gli eredi di Mao aprono la muraglia', *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Clara Galzerano, 'L'ala "filo-cinese" del Pci (1970–1980). Conflitti all'interno del partito e sulle pagine de "l'Unità"', *Pandora Rivista*, 24 December 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Alberto Jacoviello, 'Cina e Stati Uniti allacciano pieni rapporti diplomatici', *l'Unità*, 17 December 1978.

“axis””.<sup>37</sup> In *l'Unità* Emilio Sarzi Amadè, himself considered one of the PCI's ‘pro-Maoists’,<sup>38</sup> further broadened the terms of discourse: ‘There are certainly not just two “worlds”, as one would prefer [on the Soviet side], and in all probability there are no longer even just three worlds, as the Chinese theory postulates today, but the worlds are at least as many as there are pieces on the geopolitical chessboard’.<sup>39</sup> For his part, Boffa went even further: the Sino-American dialogue marked ‘the end of the so-called “bipolar” hegemony’, but ‘the attrition of the old alignments threatens to be replaced by the simple and terrible game of the powers’, with their shifting alliances; yet ‘it would be a tragic gamble’ to believe that global problems could be tackled ‘by pitting peoples against each other, instead of organising [...] their efforts in concert’.<sup>40</sup> In short, the former Moscow correspondent appeared to be aware of Soviet concerns and was indeed in tune with them, probably expressing the prevailing feeling among the PCI leadership itself.

Likewise the aforementioned Collotti Pischel spoke explicitly of a ‘Sino-US alliance with a specific anti-Soviet function’: for Beijing the resumption of relations is a ‘victory’; for the US it is the ‘natural outcome of the line supported by Brzezinski’ of ‘close coordination’ with China to the detriment of the USSR. In fact, it is now the Soviet Union that is ‘surrounded’.<sup>41</sup> Writing in *La Stampa*, Frane Barbieri adds: ‘The narrow American-Soviet bipolarity was coming to an end, no longer able to cover all the ferment of an increasingly diversified world. The triangle now formed does not put an end to the games; rather it opens them up, extending them over the entire international chessboard’. What had happened was ‘a turnaround that leads China to sweep across the world politically’, ‘pursuing its four modernisations and seeking to qualify itself as the Third Worldist anti-power’.<sup>42</sup>

The announcement of Deng's trip to the USA, scheduled for January 1979, confirmed this. Alberto Ronchey wrote in *Corriere della Sera*: China's move is a ‘great leap out’, whereby ‘xenophobia is reversed into xenophilia’, and the United States is asked to consider the PRC the ‘most

<sup>37</sup> Massimo Loche, ‘La Cina, terzo “polo”?’, *Rinascita*, 22 December 1978.

<sup>38</sup> Galzerano, ‘L’ala “filo-cinese” del Pci’.

<sup>39</sup> Emilio Sarzi Amadè, ‘Il rapporto tra la Cina e il resto del mondo’, *ibid.*, 30 December 1978.

<sup>40</sup> Giuseppe Boffa, ‘Stati Uniti e Cina’, *l'Unità*, 19 December 1978.

<sup>41</sup> Enrica Collotti Pischel, ‘China: avanti (adagio)!’, *Il Messaggero*, 19 December 1978.

<sup>42</sup> Frane Barbieri, ‘Il triangolo è chiuso’, *La Stampa*, 17 December 1978.

favoured nation'. In order to pursue the 'four modernisations', 'China is now looking for the Western *New Learning*'.<sup>43</sup> The columnist almost seems to be hinting at the start of a real systemic convergence: a version of the 'Chinese way' that would be very popular in following decades.

To the geopolitical implications of the agreement with the United States the observers therefore added economic ones. 'China's entry in force in world trade,' wrote *La Nazione*, 'could give [...] further impetus to the renewal of the international division of labour, with the emigration from the West of industrial production involving the lowest technological skills'. This was 'a challenge that has to be taken up'.<sup>44</sup> In short, the new Chinese move had global consequences, anticipating that 'reshuffled' and increasingly interconnected world market that would emerge clearly in the 1990s. In this case, the 'Shock of the Global' is evident and effective.

*Il Sole 24 Ore*, the financial and economic newspaper of Confindustria, reported on the conditions set by the Chinese Minister of Foreign Trade for collaboration with foreign businesses,<sup>45</sup> while various newspapers dwelt on China's relations with Italian companies. Not long before, trips to China by Confindustria President Guido Carli and Foreign Trade Minister Rinaldo Ossola had already laid the foundations for important economic exchanges.<sup>46</sup> Immediately after the Chinese change of direction, Vittorio Merloni, chairman of Confindustria's Foreign Trade Committee, who had travelled to China with a delegation of entrepreneurs, spoke of new opportunities opening up for Italian companies.<sup>47</sup>

## 5 THE RETURN OF PROFIT AND THE SUGGESTION OF THE YUGOSLAV PARALLEL

One week after Deng's speech, the Chinese government launched its first economic reform, introducing, albeit 'on an experimental basis, a system that directly links the material interests of the management and workers of industrial companies to the results achieved. The companies [...] that have fulfilled their contracts [...] will have the right to withhold from the

<sup>43</sup> Alberto Ronchey, 'La Cina nell'ora del "gran balzo fuori"', *Corriere della Sera*, 27 December 1978.

<sup>44</sup> Pietro Armani, 'Riequilibrare gli scambi (ora c'è anche la Cina)', *La Nazione*, 31 December 1978.

<sup>45</sup> 'Con la Cina si collabora così', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 20 December 1978.

<sup>46</sup> Alberto Statera, 'All'assalto di Pechinograd', *L'Espresso*, 5 November 1978.

<sup>47</sup> 'La Cina sta avviando l'industrializzazione', *La Nazione*, 21 December 1978.

profits a sum equal to five per cent of the total payroll' to use 'for the improvement of collective services', starting with workers' housing, and for 'production bonuses'. To *Il Sole 24 Ore*, China 'seems to be moving towards a model similar to the Yugoslav one', implying a relative financial autonomy by enterprises and 'worker participation in [their] management'.<sup>48</sup>

The daily *la Repubblica* also saw a return to profit and elements of self-management.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, *il manifesto* published the article by ANSA correspondent Ada Principalli: 'While everybody agrees on the objectives of an "accelerated modernisation"', there is however a 'reluctance on a part of the people [...] to accept the consequences entailed by such "modernisation" [...]. The "innovators" are therefore fighting for a global "modernisation", on all levels', from the legal to the cultural. In this sense, 'Chinese "dissent" is acquiring peculiar characteristics', with 'a function of "promotion" rather than "opposition"', and 'the political class is obliged to mediate the tensions'. 'The question always comes back to the same point: the troubled events [...] of the last twenty years could have been avoided if the people had been called upon to decide. But evidently this does not displease everyone and the authors of the *dazibao* continue to paste up their posters undisturbed.'<sup>50</sup> In short, the ordinary Chinese favour Deng's reforms.

In the meantime, however, some 'posters' called for Western-style 'freedom of economic initiative'.<sup>51</sup> On 29 December, a student strike was held, and a group of young people demonstrated in Tiananmen Square; shortly before, a mass assembly had impeached some protagonists of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>52</sup> In the following weeks, it was Deng himself who urged there be no deviation from the main objective, and there were forceful calls to avoid 'the excesses of an "anti-cultural revolution"'.<sup>53</sup> Beijing was cleared of posters, but the 'Wall of Democracy' was left intact.<sup>54</sup> To achieve the four modernisations, Deng reiterated, 'strict respect for law and order' was essential.

<sup>48</sup> 'Le aziende cinesi dal '79 saranno associate ai profitti', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 21 December 1978.

<sup>49</sup> 'Anche per i cinesi ora c'è il profitto', *la Repubblica*, 21 December 1978.

<sup>50</sup> Ada Principalli, 'A Pechino si parla della "via jugoslava"', *il manifesto*, 21 December 1978.

<sup>51</sup> 'Cina: libera concorrenza?', *Avvenire*, 23 December 1978.

<sup>52</sup> 'Primo sciopero attuato in Cina', *La Nazione*, 30 December 1978.

<sup>53</sup> 'Fermo richiamo in Cina alla disciplina di partito', *ibid.*, 22 March 1979.

<sup>54</sup> 'Pechino ripulita dai *dazibao*. Intatto "il muro democratico"', *ibid.*, 2 April 1979.

Part of the press read such stances as 'hitting the brakes',<sup>55</sup> but in reality it was only a settling down. The PRC would continue on the path opened up by its new leader: that 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' would also make extensive use of market instruments.

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<sup>55</sup> 'Colpo di freno in Cina', *ibid.*, 13 April 1979.

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# Towards a New Economic Supranational Interdependence. 13 March 1979. The European Monetary System (EMS) Comes into Force

*Giovanni Scirocco*

*Translated by Mariangela Palazzi-Williams*

## 1 THE CONTEXT

After the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system, in April 1972 the member states of the European Economic Community (EEC) attempted to contain fluctuations between currencies by signing an agreement which attracted the backing of Great Britain, Ireland, Denmark and Norway. The agreement provided for fluctuation margins of 2.25% between European currencies and of 4.5% against the US dollar. However, the so-called European monetary snake, as it was termed, lasted only a few months, primarily due to the weakness of the Italian lira and of the British pound, problems further aggravated in the autumn of 1973 by the oil

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crisis triggered by the embargo enforced by the Arab member countries of the OPEC in retaliation for Western support of Israel during the Yom Kippur War.

The following summer, Italy was forced to seek an international loan, which included the transfer of part of the Bank of Italy's gold reserves as collateral.<sup>1</sup> However, the vicious circle of devaluation-inflation-recession that ensued in Italy between 1974 and 1975 made some political and economic operators more 'hesitant to give up altogether the use of devaluation of the national currency as a decompression valve and more inclined to call for greater symmetry in international coordination'.<sup>2</sup>

The problems connected with the crisis of the international monetary system were addressed at the first meeting of the G6 (later to become G7), held in Rambouillet from 15 to 17 November 1975. However, it was not until January 1977 that in his speech at the European University Institute in Florence, Roy Jenkins, the then President of the European Commission, proposed to establish a European Monetary Union. The project was subsequently taken up at the end of that year by French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, who jointly envisaged the creation of a fixed exchange rate system with limited fluctuation bands, a monetary fund consisting of 20% of central banks' reserves to deal with possible crises, and a common account currency (the ECU).

Although there were some initial differences of opinion between France and Germany (the former was in favour of a basket of the various currencies, the average values of which were to be used to calculate the bands, while Germany preferred adoption of the mark as the currency of reference), the proposal was carried forward in the following months, just as Italy was entering one of the most traumatic periods in the Republic's history, one that saw the formation of a 'national solidarity' government led by Giulio Andreotti with the external support of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), and the simultaneous kidnapping (and subsequent murder) of the president of the Christian Democratic Party, Aldo Moro.

<sup>1</sup>The affair led to a bitter clash between the Minister for budgetary responsibility at the time, the Socialist Antonio Giolitti, and the Minister of the Treasury, Ugo La Malfa, which resulted in the resignation of the last named.

<sup>2</sup>Salvatore Rossi, *La politica economica italiana 1968-1998*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1998), 44-45.

## 2 NEGOTIATIONS

Negotiations to allow Italy to join the EMS were led by Andreotti,<sup>3</sup> with the Treasury Minister Filippo Maria Pandolfi and the Minister for Foreign Trade Rinaldo Ossola enjoying the technical support of the Bank of Italy, represented by Governor Paolo Baffi. The talks took the form of a series of summits (7–8 April 1978, Copenhagen; 6–7 July, Bremen) while, as far as internal economic policy was concerned, Pandolfi was at the same time drawing up a plan (actually written by Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa, then head of the monetary markets division of the Bank of Italy) outlining a series of reforms, ranging from public administration to labour costs, tying them closely to the monetary integration project.<sup>4</sup>

In the meantime, pressure was mounting within the EU for Italy to join the EMS from the outset.<sup>5</sup> On 14 July the Council of Ministers approved Italy's participation in the project, whereupon the Italian Communists immediately started to voice their misgivings, misgivings that would gradually become more explicit.<sup>6</sup> After the summer recess, a new Council of Ministers, held on 28 November, confirmed the Italian position, but it still did not take into consideration the British refusal to take part in the EMS,<sup>7</sup> a decision which was announced the following week and undoubtedly

<sup>3</sup> See Daniela Preda, 'Il ruolo di Giulio Andreotti nella nascita dello EMS', in Francesco Lefebvre D'Ovidio, Luca Micheletta (eds), *Giulio Andreotti e l'Europa*, (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e letteratura, 2017), 197–231.

<sup>4</sup> See the report of 26 April 1978 from the American ambassador in Rome, Gardner, to the Secretary of the Treasury, Blumenthal, concerning a long discussion with Pandolfi in which the latter, after outlining his plan, expressed perplexity at Schmidt's 'ambitious' position, 'and one which Italy could not support [...] given the disparity of inflation rates within Europe' (Carter Cables <https://wikileaks.org/plusd/>, accessed 14 December 2020). The plan was then presented in early September (see the text in *Mondo economico*, 9 September 1978). For a critique of the plan, which highlights the reductiveness of its analysis, see Piero Craveri, *La Repubblica dal 1958 al 1992*, (Milan: Tea, 1995), 799.

<sup>5</sup> See statements by the Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, François-Xavier Ortoli, reported by Natale Gilio, 'Se non sconfigge l'inflazione l'Italia va fuori dall'Europa', *La Stampa*, 22 May 1978.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Luciano Barca, 'Dietro le manovre sul sistema monetario europeo. Se vince la legge del marco pesanti colpi per l'Italia', *l'Unità*, 5 November 1978 (on the copy of the article in the Archivio Barca at the Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Milan, there is a handwritten annotation by Barca himself, then in charge of the PCI's economy: 'The article provoked protests from Napolitano to Berlinguer').

<sup>7</sup> See Antonio Varsori, *Dalla rinascita al declino. Storia internazionale dell'Italia repubblicana*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2022), 399.

weakened Andreotti's stance at the key European Council in Brussels on 4–5 December. On that occasion Andreotti managed to secure a wider fluctuation band for the Italian lira as well as credit at favourable rates of interest, but failed to gain approval for a reform of the Common Agricultural Policy or an increase in regional development funds.<sup>8</sup>

The outcome of the Brussels summit caused several observers to express their perplexity at the Italian accession to the EMS<sup>9</sup> and initially even Andreotti seemed to prefer to postpone Italy's participation for at least six months.<sup>10</sup> However, his initial reaction was met by an immediate objection by Republican leader Ugo La Malfa, who threatened to withdraw his own party from the government, thus jeopardising its majority,<sup>11</sup> as well as by disagreements within the Christian Democrat parliamentary group itself.

At the same time, pressure from France and Germany on the Italian government and on Andreotti personally<sup>12</sup> continued unabated. On 12 December Andreotti therefore proposed that the Council of Ministers invite the Chamber of Deputies to join without further delay: 'Since there is no time for a new round of meetings with the parties, I trust that they will understand that the new fact has arisen and they will not want an image of division over Italian Europeanism to be held against us'.<sup>13</sup>

### 3 THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

In his report to the Lower Chamber, Andreotti skilfully entwined the domestic and the international picture, arguing that the creation of a European monetary system was part of a strategy that would on the one hand counteract stagnation and atrophy in European integration, and, on the other, serve to combat unemployment within a framework of

<sup>8</sup> See Antonio Varsori, *La Cenerentola d'Europa. L'Italia e l'integrazione europea dal 1946 ad oggi*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2010), 325–326.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, 'Parla il professor Monti. "Ha prevalso il realismo. Non eravamo preparati"', interview by Paolo Glisenti, *Corriere della Sera*, 6 December 1978.

<sup>10</sup> See Giulio Andreotti, *I diari degli anni di piombo 1969–1979*, (Milan: Solferino, 2021), 677. Minister Ossola was also of the same opinion: see the interview with Natale Gilio, *La Stampa*, 8 December 1978.

<sup>11</sup> 'La Malfa: usciamo dalla maggioranza se il governo non accetta lo SME', interview by Luigi La Spina, *Corriere della Sera*, 7 December 1978.

<sup>12</sup> See Andreotti, *I diari degli anni di piombo*, 678–679, on the subject of the telephone calls received by Giscard and Schmidt.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. See also the interview with Aldo Rizzo, 'Perché credo nello SME', *La Stampa*, 9 January 1979.

community solidarity, a problem that was closely linked to Europe's industrial restructuring. The alternative would be the strengthening of protectionist tendencies and the resurgence of economic and therefore political nationalism or—another potential outcome to be avoided—the creation of a two-speed Community, where Italy would play a distinctly minor role.

In the ensuing debate<sup>14</sup> one of the first and most significant speeches was by Luigi Spaventa, an economist belonging to the Independent Left parliamentary group. His strongest criticism was that Andreotti had underestimated the technical aspects of the issue (and the consequent costs) in focusing exclusively on the political dimension. The risk was of setting up a currency area in which stability of the exchange rate was pursued at the expense of boosting employment and incomes; it would benefit German exports, which would enable Germany to avoid repeated revaluations of the Mark. Ultimately such a scenario would result in a sacrifice by weaker member states, especially in the absence of effective regulations or reciprocal obligations. Spaventa urged all convinced pro-Europeans to fight for alignment of budgetary policies rather than for a single European currency; alignment was a more suitable means of controlling public spending and fairer for the Community at large.<sup>15</sup>

Spaventa's speech brought a forceful rejoinder from Altiero Spinelli, his fellow group member and historical leader of the federalist movement. For Spinelli, the EMS was actually too weak since any monetary policy, in order to develop, had to be matched by a correspondingly strong economic policy and overarching political programme. However, the EMS did mean getting back to work on the stranded 'construction site' of economic and monetary union—from which angle, though still a modest achievement, participation could only be viewed favourably.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See [https://legislature.camera.it/\\_dati/leg07/lavori/stenografici/sed0383/sed0383.pdf](https://legislature.camera.it/_dati/leg07/lavori/stenografici/sed0383/sed0383.pdf) [accessed 20 September 2024].

<sup>15</sup> See also Spaventa's 'Queste ragioni sconsigliavano un ingresso affrettato', *Rinascita*, 15 December 1978. Spaventa's caveats were taken up to a large extent, for the PCI, by Giorgio Napolitano, who, however, was keen to stress the importance of the fact that 'although moving from different positions, all the political and social forces that identify with the values of the Constitution have gradually also embraced the values of democratic Europeanism, freed from Cold War distortion and manipulation'. Andreotti was keen to stress this aspect in the letter he sent to Jenkins on 15 December, at the end of the affair: see Luciano Barca, *Cronache dall'interno del vertice del PCI*, vol. II: *Con Berlinguer*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2005), 766.

<sup>16</sup> See Altiero Spinelli, *Diario Europeo 1976–1986*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 1992), 231–236.

As far as the general theme of this book is concerned, the only members of Parliament who made any reference to the context of globalisation were, on opposite sides of the political spectrum, Liberal leader Giovanni Malagodi and Democratic Party of Proletarian Unity MP Lucio Magri.

The elderly Liberal politician began by explaining that the creation of an area of monetary stability, albeit flexible, was essential to the achievement of objectives such as the promotion of investments, measures against inflation and unemployment, and integration with the dollar (and yen) areas; he went on to emphasise its significance in countering the neo-protectionist tendencies that threatened to hinder the expansion of intra-community and world trade. He pointed out that Italy was a country in the midst of major industrial and economic transformation, but lacking natural resources, which it was forced to buy, before processing them and selling the resulting products on the European and world markets. Failure to be part of a system of relative stability would therefore expose the country to serious risks of speculation.

According to Magri (in a speech that La Malfa described as 'brilliant and abstract'), the strategy underlying 'operation EMS' meant that a country like Germany would aim to use its technological and export capabilities to promote industry in developing countries, especially in sectors where cheap and unorganised labour could profitably be used to produce primarily goods destined for re-importation into industrialised nations, following a restructuring process that had long been the preference of multinationals around the world. This broad-ranging project (based on dismantling marginal companies, concentrating finances and production, and gradually liquidating entire industrial sectors) needed a strong European currency, especially in its transitional phase. But the main players in this strategy (according to studies by economists such as Samir Amin and André Gunder Frank)<sup>17</sup> could not be 'frontier countries', i.e. economically weak countries such as Italy, which were destined to be sacrificed on the altar of competition with the new emerging industrial areas. To Magri, the alternative to this development model, with its new type of 'plantation economy' (in which sectors of processing industry, from electrical appliances to cars, took the place of rubber or coffee, while ensuring

<sup>17</sup> For an analysis of their positions see Giovanni Scirocco, 'Ongoing discussion: Globalisation and Time-turning', in Jean Beaumont, Alfredo Canavero (eds), *Globalization, Regionalization and the History of International Relations*, (Milan: Unicopli; Victoria: Deakin University, 2005), 161–181.

the ‘metropolises’ a high level of surplus value, above all thanks to low labour costs) was to go in for long-term global planning of the manufacturing reconversion process; aided by public investment, combined research and industrial policy should seek to develop new production sectors (for example, in the fields of alternative energy, IT and the agri-food industry) and to find ‘new and more rational ways of meeting real needs and enabling even the social sectors which do not produce goods to make a true and efficient contribution to the country’s wealth and progress’.

The debate ended with the presentation of an agenda signed by Christian Democrat group leader Galloni, approved by the representatives of various parties: DC, PRI, PSDI, PLI, SVP, MSI and National Democracy (DN); the Socialists abstained,<sup>18</sup> while the Communists voted against. The European Monetary System actually came into force on 13 March 1979 and lasted until 1992, when Italy was forced to leave it by a new monetary crisis.<sup>19</sup>

#### 4 CONSEQUENCES AND INTERPRETATIONS

The most obvious consequence of Italy’s accession to the EMS was the crisis of government triggered on 27 January 1979 by the PCI pulling out of the coalition that had hitherto formed the majority.<sup>20</sup> (A decision to this effect had already been taken towards the end of November.)<sup>21</sup> This forced

<sup>18</sup> For the socialist position, see Andrea Saba, ‘Lira nello SME: la fretta cattiva consiglia’, *Avanti!*, 24–25 December 1978 and Daniele Caviglia, ‘Craxi e la Banca d’Italia. Un rapporto difficile tra necessità di governo e vincoli internazionali’, in Antonio Varsori, Gennaro Acquaviva (eds), *Craxi e il ruolo dell’Italia nel sistema internazionale*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2022), 131–146.

<sup>19</sup> For these developments, see Roberto Gualtieri, ‘L’Europa come vincolo esterno’, in Piero Craveri, Antonio Varsori (eds), *L’Italia nella costruzione europea. Un bilancio storico (1957–2007)*, (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2009), 329; Mauro Campus, ‘Il governo del “vincolo esterno”: interazione, compatibilità e limiti del sistema economico italiano nella crisi degli anni Settanta’, in Bruna Bagnato, Massimiliano Guderzo, Leopoldo Nuti (eds), *Nuove questioni di storia delle relazioni internazionali. Studi in onore di Ennio Di Nolfo*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2015), 289.

<sup>20</sup> The final decision was taken at the two leadership meetings of 11 and 17 January 1979. For the proceedings, see Barca, *Cronache dall’interno del vertice del PCI*, 769 and Berlinguer’s statement, ‘Perché il PCI esce dalla maggioranza’, *l’Unità*, 27 January 1979.

<sup>21</sup> See Gerardo Chiaromonte, *Le scelte della solidarietà democratica*, (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1986), 136–138; Giorgio Napolitano, *Dal PCI al socialismo europeo. Un’autobiografia politica*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2006), 144.

the Andreotti government to resign, thus putting an end to the ‘national solidarity’ interim.

Over and above this, Italy's entry into the European Monetary System certainly represents a case of ‘external constraint’<sup>22</sup> (the need for which was explicitly maintained at the time by authoritative commentators such as Alberto Ronchey,<sup>23</sup> and by Pandolfi himself in his speech to the Chamber of Deputies on 10 October 1978) but contained some unusual features, such as a tug-of-war between politics and technocracy, and fragmentation within those two worlds.

In particular, Baffi (flanked by his close collaborator Mario Sarcinelli, but on the whole isolated from the rest of Bankitalia's leadership) had many misgivings, not so much about the political significance of joining, but about the timing and manner; he feared its effects on an economy like Italy's, which was beset by inflation and considerable regional differences in terms of productivity and wealth.<sup>24</sup> Future Nobel Prize winner for Economics Franco Modigliani also expressed strong reservations in an article<sup>25</sup> published by *Corriere della Sera* on 1 December 1978, an article which, in fact, he wrote in tandem with Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa, as he would reveal years later in his autobiography.<sup>26</sup>

Baffi's position was also shared, on a different level, by that well-informed advisor to the Bank of Italy, Federico Caffè, who pointed out the serious issues affecting the Italian economy, its relative underdevelopment and the persistence of social inequalities in particular,<sup>27</sup> ‘the solution to

<sup>22</sup> See Kevin Featherstone, ‘The Political Dynamics of the “Vincolo Esterno”: the Emergence of EMU and the Challenge to the European Social Model’, in *Queen's Papers on Europeanisation*, 6, 2001; Guido Carli, *Cinquant'anni di vita italiana*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1993), 6; Paolo Peluffo, ‘Un vincolo interno per il vincolo esterno’, *Limes*, 4, 2020.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Verso la moneta europea. L'Italia dentro o fuori?’, *Corriere della Sera*, 3 September 1978; ‘L'Europa vi manda a dire’, *Corriere della Sera*, 7 December 1978.

<sup>24</sup> See his hearing on 26 October 1978 before the Senate Finance and Treasury Commission and his conversation on 6 November with ambassador Gardner. On this point, see also Beniamino Andrea Piccone, ‘Paolo Baffi, Governatore della vigilanza’, Introduction in Paolo Baffi, *Parola di Governatore*, (Turin: Arago, 2013), XXXVII–XXXVIII; Alberto Baffigi, ‘Paolo Baffi: la moneta europea e il crepuscolo degli esperti’, *Moneta e credito*, 301, March 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Franco Modigliani, ‘I pro e contro per l'Italia’, *Corriere della Sera*, 1 December 1978.

<sup>26</sup> See Paolo Peluffo (ed), *Avventure di un economista. La mia vita, le mie idee, la nostra epoca*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1999), 245–248.

<sup>27</sup> See his article ‘Nuovo traguardo l'economia interna’, *Il Messaggero*, 21 May 1978.



which ended up being seen as an automatic “by-product” of meeting the conditions for realistic participation in the EMS’.<sup>28</sup>

In reality, membership of the EMS proved not only to be *The Advantage of Tying One’s Hands*,<sup>29</sup> but in time played ‘a central role in stabilising the social relations of Italian capitalism’,<sup>30</sup> and becoming a ‘quasi-juridical constraint’ (or a self-imposed ‘community constraint’ as La Malfa termed it),<sup>31</sup> ‘motivating and orienting the country’s political decisions in favour of ever more stringent economic and monetary integration within Europe, in the direction that, following the impetus given by the Delors Report, would end with the Maastricht Treaty’.<sup>32</sup>

According to Rainer Masera, initially head of the Study Service and subsequently Central Director for Economic Research at the Bank of Italy, the decision to join the EMS was the fundamental choice that changed Italian monetary policy: it imposed stricter fiscal discipline which prompted both a reduction of inflation and the alignment of Italian labour costs with those of its European partners.<sup>33</sup> Within a few years, the monetarist change

<sup>28</sup> Alberto Baffigi, ‘L’integrazione europea come una questione di “social choice” nel pensiero di Federico Caffè’, *Ricerche di storia economica e sociale*, 1–2, 2016, 183–208.

<sup>29</sup> As Pandolfi stated on 15 July 1978 during an interview with Gardner, ‘tying Italy to a European monetary network would provide a highly visible external constraint which would force policy-makers to keep the economy in step with the rest of Europe’. See Francesco Giavazzi, Marco Pagano, ‘The Advantage of Tying One’s Hands: EMS Discipline and Central Bank Credibility’, in Georges de Ménil, Robert J. Gordon (eds), *International Volatility and Economic Growth: The First Ten Years of The International Seminar on Macroeconomics*, (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science Publishers B.V., 1991), 303–330.

<sup>30</sup> Francesco Petrini, ‘La politica antinflazionistica è la politica europea e viceversa. L’adesione italiana al sistema monetario europeo’, in Lorenzo Mechi, Daniele Pasquinucci (eds), *Integrazione europea e trasformazioni socio-economiche. Dagli anni Settanta a oggi*, (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2017), 55. See also Marcello De Cecco, *Il Sistema monetario europeo e gli interessi nazionali*, in Paolo Guerrieri, Pier Carlo Padoan (eds), *L’economia politica dell’integrazione europea*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 1988), 155; Rossi, *La politica economica italiana 1968–1998*, 46.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Italy’s attachment to the EMS did not take the form of a search for an external constraint, or rigour of economic and monetary policy imposed on us by other countries: rather, it had the quality of a community constraint, that is, of a constraint that we ourselves, participants in the European Community, accepted and created for ourselves’, speech delivered on 4 February 1979 at the Teatro Nuovo in Milan, later *L’avvenire che ho voluto*, (Rome: Ed. della Voce, 1979), 178–184.

<sup>32</sup> Giandomenico Piluso, ‘Una scelta per l’Europa, una scelta per lo sviluppo? La Banca d’Italia, il Piano Pandolfi e lo Sme (1977–1979)’, *Italia contemporanea*, April 2022, 306.

<sup>33</sup> See Rainer S. Masera, ‘La politica monetaria negli anni del Sistema monetario europeo’, in Gennaro Acquaviva (ed), *La politica economica italiana negli anni ottanta*, (Venice: Marsilio, 2005), 65–67.

of direction was completed by the ‘divorce’ of the Bank of Italy from the Treasury (1981).<sup>34</sup>

What was achieved, however, was an ‘incomplete and semi-conflictual stabilisation’,<sup>35</sup> a sort of ‘passive revolution’;<sup>36</sup> for, due to the Italian lira’s wider margins of fluctuation than other currencies, Italy maintained a growth model based on competitive devaluation, which essentially favoured small, not very technologically advanced companies on the one hand, while achieving only a limited reduction in the public debt on the other.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See Eugenio Gaiotti, Salvatore Rossi, ‘La politica monetaria italiana nella svolta degli anni Ottanta’, *ibid.* 313–315.

<sup>35</sup> Michele Salvati, *Occasioni mancate: economia e politica in Italia dagli anni ’60 ad oggi*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2000), 61.

<sup>36</sup> Campus, ‘Il governo del “vincolo estremo”’, 291–292.

<sup>37</sup> See Emanuele Felice, *Ascesa e declino. Storia economica d’Italia*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2015), 291–292.

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# The Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant Accident. 28 March 1979. The Debate about Nuclear Energy

*Lucia Bonfreschi*

*Translated by Emma Mandley*

The Three Mile Island nuclear power plant accident in March 1979 rekindled the debate about nuclear energy in Italy and reached a wide public. For the pro-nuclear lobby, it was a point of no return as it gave a ‘rational’ stamp to opponents of nuclear energy. For anti-nuclearists it confirmed that nuclear energy was not only a safety issue, but reflected a political option, i.e. the choice of a development model. The accident highlighted the global dimension of the nuclear issue and helped reignite anti-nuclear protests.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

While in the 1950s and 1960s various Western governments—including Italy<sup>1</sup>—were already pursuing plans for producing energy from electro-nuclear plants, by the early 1970s the use of this energy source had become the subject of a wide-ranging debate among scientists and specialists in a number of countries. Not only concern about the finite nature of non-renewable resources,<sup>2</sup> but above all the 1973 oil crisis contributed to opening Western eyes to the fact that the wide availability of the main energy source used in their economies—oil—could no longer be taken for granted, prompting them to revisit the idea of nuclear energy as a partial substitute at least. In the face of this overriding question of energy supply, various governments began to set about diversifying their energy sources and increasing the energy independence of their own countries. In general, they saw nuclear power as the source that would satisfy both these ends: the implementation of nuclear programmes was therefore accelerated.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, from the beginning of the decade anti-nuclear movements grew stronger in the USA and in various West European countries.<sup>4</sup>

In Italy too a debate arose in the early 1970s over the question of nuclear energy, although this was still confined to specialist circles. The oil crisis drove the Italian government to increase the production of nuclear energy. This goal was one of the principles behind the National Energy Plan (PEN) approved by the Italian government in 1975, which foresaw the construction of twenty electronuclear plants by 1985, in addition to the three already operating on Italian soil.

To tackle the issue of choosing sites to build the plants on and how in practice the authorities would decide on their location, Law 393 was passed in 1975, setting out rules for the siting of nuclear plants.<sup>5</sup> Amid

<sup>1</sup> Andrea Candela, *Storia ambientale dell'energia nucleare. Gli anni della contestazione*, (Milan-Udine: Mimesis, 2017), 174.

<sup>2</sup> Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, William W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*, (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

<sup>3</sup> Andrew S. Tompkins, *Better Active than Radioactive! Anti-Nuclear Protest in 1970s France and West Germany*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Helena Flam (ed), *States and Anti-Nuclear Movements*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Silvio Labbate, 'I difficili anni Settanta: l'Italia e la questione energetica', *Italia contemporanea*, 281, August 2016, 231–252.

general indifference from Italian society, the production of electrical energy deriving from uranium was accepted by all parties in Parliament—with minor variances—as a lifeline to compensate for the shortage of oil.<sup>6</sup>

In 1976, work began on the construction of the Montalto di Castro plant (in north Lazio), spurring the beginnings of an Italian anti-nuclear movement.<sup>7</sup> The groups taking part were a mixed bag, from local residents and farmers to intellectuals who spent their holidays in the area, from extreme left collectives to various environmental associations. In the context of this protest, which was soon joined by another against the plant being built in Caorso (province of Piacenza), two main political ‘heads’ of the Italian anti-nuclear movement came into being: the League for Alternative Energy and Anti-Nuclear Opposition (LEALA), led by representatives of the Radical Party (PR), which later became the Italian branch of Friends of the Earth (AdT); and the Committee for Control over Energy (CCSE), composed of so-called techno-scientific dissidents, in other words scientists—especially physicists—and militants from both the old and the new Left.<sup>8</sup>

Partly as a result of this movement, the debate about nuclear power reached a wider public and opponents of nuclear energy began to make themselves heard in some sectors, both political (such as the Socialists) and societal (such as the unions UIL and CGIL). When Parliament discussed the energy plan in September 1977, it reduced the number of nuclear plants that would be built to twelve. In 1978, progress to achieve the PEN objectives stagnated; at the same time, the anti-nuclear movement began to weaken as a result of internal division: this is shown by the fact that the Montalto protests faded away in the face of promises and assurances from the government, the regional authorities and ENEL (at that time, Italy’s statutory corporation for energy supply).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Gianluigi Della Valentina, *Storia dell’ambientalismo in Italia. Lo sviluppo insostenibile*, (Milan-Turin: Bruno Mondadori, 2011), 131.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Catia Papa, ‘Energia, democrazia, sviluppo: il movimento antinucleare in Italia (1976–86)’, *Meridiana*, 98, 2020, 241–254.

<sup>8</sup> Roberto Della Seta, *La difesa dell’ambiente in Italia. Storia e cultura del movimento ecologista*, (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2000), 40–43.

<sup>9</sup> Giorgio Falcioni, “‘Fermate i lavori’ dicono a Montalto”, *Avvenire*, 10 April 1979.

## 2 THE HARRISBURG ACCIDENT: THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION

On 28 March 1979, reactor n. 2 of the electronuclear plant at Three Mile Island (TMI; in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) suffered a malfunction in the primary cooling system resulting in an increase in the core temperature, which triggered the emergency cooling system. At this point a human error led to a steam bubble being created which prevented the system from functioning properly. Result: partial meltdown of the core.<sup>10</sup> Not only was radioactive gas (xenon-133) released into the atmosphere, but for several days it was feared that the amount of radioactive gases might increase and even that fusion of the core could expand to the point where it would collapse into the underlying terrain. In a few hours, news of the accident was travelling around the world: it was front-page news for weeks in American newspapers and for days in the European press, reigniting the debate about nuclear energy.

The accident made its mark in the Italian press too, focusing Italian public opinion on the issue of nuclear energy production. In previous years, while the scientific debate around nuclear energy had involved the circulation of information on an international level, anti-nuclear protest had mostly been concerned about the construction of individual plants. This was often very local in nature, despite attempts by some groups—especially the Friends of the Earth—to ally with international movements and protests. The US accident showed how issues, debates and protests relating to the nuclear question now had a global significance. It was no coincidence that in April 1979 extensive press coverage was given to the views of Barry Commoner, a scientist from Washington University (Missouri) and a leading American anti-nuclear activist, while he was in Italy for a series of lectures.<sup>11</sup> The accident happened, moreover, at precisely the time when the President of the Republic was dissolving the Chambers and announcing early new elections, to take place on 3 and 4 June: the sudden unpopularity of the nuclear option would have an impact on the positions of some parties in the electoral campaign, especially the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), which

<sup>10</sup> Giovanni Maria Pace, 'L'incidente provocato anche da un errore dei tecnici di Three Miles', *la Repubblica*, 1 April 1979, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Egan, *Barry Commoner and the Science of Survival: The Remaking of American Environmentalism*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

faced challenges from small parties such as the Radical Party (PR) and Proletarian Democracy (DP), which were openly lining up to block the construction of new plants. In addition, to take nuclear energy opposition to a European level, various environmental and ecological groups (including the radicals) went to Brussels to support the German Grünen candidacy at the first direct election for the European Parliament held between 7 and 10 June.<sup>12</sup>

The TMI accident permanently changed the terms of the Italian public debate, making it a 'watershed between two eras'.<sup>13</sup> The most direct and obvious consequences of the accident were that opposition to nuclear energy was 'scientifically' legitimized (in the sense of being based on concrete evidence) and that favourable views, on the other hand, were now being called into question: the journalist Gianfranco Ballardini, who had written a book a few months earlier that was decidedly critical of nuclear energy—*Morire per l'ENEL*—was one who claimed that the accident in Pennsylvania represented a real 'crisis of credibility for the pro-nuclear camp'.<sup>14</sup> From various quarters it was pointed out that an allegedly impossible accident according to the 'Rasmussen Report'—named for the nuclear physicist Norman C. Rasmussen, who oversaw the commission of inquiry that published the report in October 1975—had in fact occurred. The 'bible' of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) stated that fusion of the core was a risk that was only imaginable over a very long period and with many reactors operating. This was hardly a minor issue: the fact that expectations outlined in the report commissioned by the NRC had been shown to be untrustworthy raised questions about the scientific authority of calculations used by nuclear energy supporters and gave a rational stamp to the objections of those who were more cautious about nuclear power. The journalist Alfredo Todisco expressed this view very clearly: in 1973–1974, in *Corriere della Sera*, he had warned against the nuclear option's consequences for the safety of the population and the environment.<sup>15</sup> 'after Harrisburg, scepticism about the (not always

<sup>12</sup> Arturo Guatelli, 'Gli ecologi preannunciano un'offensiva "europea"', *Corriere della Sera*, 4 April 1979.

<sup>13</sup> Giovanni Battista Zorzoli, 'La sicurezza è un obiettivo, non un dato acquisito', *l'Unità*, 1 April 1979.

<sup>14</sup> Gianfranco Ballardini, 'Perché è impossibile la sicurezza "totale"', *Corriere della Sera*, 3 April 1979.

<sup>15</sup> Paolo Pelizzari, 'Socialisti e comunisti italiani di fronte alla questione energetico-nucleare 1973–1987', *Italia contemporanea*, 259, June 2010, 237–261, 238–239.



disinterested) assurances of those who insist on the complete reliability of atomic power plants is borne out by the facts: it is not *emotional*.<sup>16</sup>

Discussion of the emotional versus rational nature of the anti-nuclear position was extremely pertinent in the debate that the TMI accident had reignited and brought to the attention of Italian public opinion. So much was clear from the fact that those called upon to represent the different positions were 'experts' (generally scientists, physicists and geneticists) putting forward 'scientific' arguments. However, this was not only a matter of scientific legitimization, but also—even more pertinently—of political legitimization.

### 3 'DO NOT ALLOW YOURSELVES TO BE GUIDED BY YOUR EMOTIONS'

The fact that the TMI accident had given a 'rational' stamp to opponents of nuclear energy emerged from the way in which various newspapers with a wide circulation—from moderate-liberal to left-wing—highlighted safety fears about introducing nuclear plants. While *Corriere della Sera* alternated between articles of alarm and others of reassurance about the Italian situation, it seemed that the main argument in favour of building nuclear power stations was no longer their safety, but the need for this source of energy at a time when the supply of oil was once again threatened by the Iran crisis. Rome's daily newspaper, *Il Messaggero*, entrusted the debate primarily to 'experts' from the various organizations appointed to study or manage production of nuclear energy: it featured the very reassuring views of the National Committee for Nuclear Energy (CNEN), as well as those of the laboratory chiefs responsible for radiation analysis at the National Institute of Health, authors of a much discussed report which opposed nuclear power plants and discouraged substantial recourse to nuclear energy.<sup>17</sup> *Il Messaggero* published the views of Gianni Mattioli and Massimo Scalia, two physicists from the University of Rome La Sapienza, DP activists and among the founders of the CCSE. Their main argument was that the issue of electronuclear plant safety, which could not be absolutely guaranteed even theoretically, was being decided within the Italian political and administrative system: the problem was aggravated in a

<sup>16</sup> Alfredo Todisco, 'Un colpo al mito della sicurezza', *Corriere della Sera*, 30 March 1979.

<sup>17</sup> Dido Sacchettoni, 'La sicurezza è in Italia, un calcolo delle probabilità', *Il Messaggero*, 5 April 1979, 18.

country like Italy 'where every major public enterprise is conducted through bribes and subcontracting'.<sup>18</sup> The two physicists also introduced another theme, central to the views of left-wing opponents of nuclear power: underlying the nuclear option was the choice of a specific development model which merited more public debate: this was a political rather than a technical choice, which could not be delegated to a few university professors and experts in the organizations appointed to build the power stations.

The right-wing and conservative press gave less space to the accident, placing more emphasis on the problem of energy supply and pointing out that the US President, Jimmy Carter, had certainly not turned away from the nuclear solution, despite the accident. The liberal-conservative *il Giornale nuovo* played down the accident's impact, stressing the emotive nature of anti-nuclear campaigns<sup>19</sup> and upending the arguments of those who feared nuclear energy: indeed, 'looking at it rationally' the TMI accident confirmed 'the efficiency of the safety systems' that had been set up.<sup>20</sup> Yet when public opinion came to evaluate the circumstances, according to the reporter Mauro Lucentini, rationality did not prevail, because of 'people's fear of the invisible power of radioactivity' and 'interests that were ideologically exploiting ecology'.<sup>21</sup> Lucentini even predicted that the Harrisburg accident would open the door to a new era, in which peaceful opposition to atomic weapons would merge with 'anti-atomic ecologism'.<sup>22</sup>

An appeal 'not to allow yourselves to be guided by emotions'<sup>23</sup> was also issued by the Christian Democrats: the Christian Democracy (DC) had always been in favour of the nuclear solution and the party's organ, *Il Popolo*, reflected that position, repeatedly arguing how experts had kept the situation under control in Harrisburg. Yet in the Catholic world, support for the DC's pro-nuclear position was far from united. *L'Osservatore*

<sup>18</sup> Gianni Mattioli, Massimo Scalia, 'Parliamo prima di sicurezza', *Il Messaggero*, 6 April 1979.

<sup>19</sup> Giancarlo Masini, 'Preallarme atomico in Pennsylvania', *il Giornale nuovo*, 31 March 1979.

<sup>20</sup> Mauro Lucentini, 'Carter non rinuncia all'energia nucleare', *il Giornale nuovo*, 4 April 1979.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. The right-wing weekly magazine *Il Borghese* took a much more sarcastic view of anti-nuclear positions; cf. Silvio Marengo, 'Un patto col Diavolo', *Il Borghese*, 22 April 1979, 975-977.

<sup>22</sup> Mauro Lucentini, 'La psicosi antinucleare minaccia i piani militari degli Stati Uniti', *il Giornale nuovo*, 8 April 1979.

<sup>23</sup> Luca Lauriola, 'Centrali nucleari più sicure', *Il Popolo*, 3 April 1979.

*Romano*, the voice of the Vatican, was very cautious in its assessment of the accident, while *Avvenire*, the Italian Catholic bishops' daily newspaper, warned that it was impossible to dismiss as 'laughable hysteria' the 'feelings of anguish' that sprang from the hasty adoption of atomic energy; with an invitation not to underestimate the dangers of the pro-nuclear option, it implicitly backed reassessment of the whole nuclear plant construction programme.<sup>24</sup> The paper published articles by Virginio Bettini, editor of *La nuova ecologia*, and involved in the anti-nuclear movement, who reported various accidents that had happened even in Italy: 'minor accidents that have been kept under wraps, which by no means allow us to hope for a clean and peaceful accident-free nuclear future even in our own country'.<sup>25</sup> Bettini cited and supported the views of Commoner, who had for years been publicly advocating a transition to the production of solar energy, through an integrated system of photovoltaic panels, along with ethanol for automotive transport obtained from biomass.<sup>26</sup> The weekly magazine *Famiglia Cristiana*, whose mid-1970s' print circulation was over 1.5 million,<sup>27</sup> also came out against installing new power plants with 'inadequate safety features', linking the environmental problem to the moral plane, in other words to questions of consumption, savings and the existential dilemma around being and having.<sup>28</sup>

Opinion among the Progressives and Communists was much more cautious about condemning nuclear energy, attempting to limit the issue to the question of safety for the power station workers and residents in neighbouring areas. *La Repubblica* interviewed Umberto Colombo, the new CNEN president, and Felice Ippolito, a well-known supporter of the nuclear programme in the 1960s, who indefatigably argued for a nuclear energy source.<sup>29</sup> *L'Unità*, the PCI newspaper, also dragged its feet when it came to pronouncing on nuclear energy, mostly focusing on what was happening across the ocean rather than concerning itself with the debate in Italy. It published cautious articles that deplored the 'wars of religion' breaking out over nuclear energy and reiterated the need to 'live with

<sup>24</sup> Massimo Infante, 'È stato un campanello d'allarme', *Avvenire*, 3 April 1979.

<sup>25</sup> Virginio Bettini, 'Pennsylvania: si estende la nube radioattiva', *Avvenire*, 31 March 1979.

<sup>26</sup> Virginio Bettini, 'Un miliardo di dollari nel "mausoleo" atomico', *Avvenire*, 4 April 1979.

<sup>27</sup> Giovanni Gozzini, *Storia del giornalismo*, (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2000), 271.

<sup>28</sup> Adriano Sansa, 'Una scelta suicida', *Famiglia Cristiana*, 29 April 1979.

<sup>29</sup> Colombo: "Nuove fonti alternative" and Ippolito: "Occorre vigilanza", *la Repubblica*, 1 April 1979.

technology'.<sup>30</sup> Above all, *l'Unità* was against identifying political with technical fields; it rejected the definition of nuclear energy as 'right-wing' and solar energy as 'left-wing'. 'No, the world of energy generation is not so clear-cut: the biggest suppliers of solar technology (or cogeneration, as in the case of FIAT's TOTEM micro-cogenerating unit) are the largest nuclear engineering companies and the great electronics monopolies'.<sup>31</sup> In other words, nuclear energy should not be completely discarded, but approached with caution. This was the position reiterated in the high-profile communist monthly *Rinascita* by Giovanni Battista Zorzoli, an engineer at the Politecnico in Milan, who refocused the nuclear question on the need to create a structure for analysing plant safety and overseeing plant management in Italy, independent of political and economic entities: it was, in short, necessary to undertake a radical review of the existing arrangements, in which responsibility for safety was in the hands of a branch of the CNEN (involved in the construction of electronuclear plants) while the National Institute of Health was marginalized.<sup>32</sup>

The very cautious position taken by the communist press reflected the dilemmas besetting the PCI leadership. Although some Communists, such as Laura Conti and various local sections,<sup>33</sup> had been criticizing the move towards nuclear energy since 1975, over the years the official position of the PCI had continued to be substantially in favour of the nuclear solution,<sup>34</sup> attempting to balance the need for safety with employment prospects. The protests against the Montalto plant had paved the way for party criticism of both the 'fully nuclear' approach and the lack of guarantees concerning worker safety and environmental protection. In early 1979 a resolution passed by the Communist leadership emphasized the need to rapidly reform and strengthen the bodies accountable for safety and protection of the environment.<sup>35</sup> The TMI accident, which made nuclear energy more unpopular, reinforced this tendency to criticize the management of power stations. In early April, the communist Central

<sup>30</sup> Zorzoli, 'La sicurezza è un obiettivo, non un dato acquisito'; Felice Ippolito, 'Convivere con la tecnologia', *l'Unità*, 3 April 1979.

<sup>31</sup> Ino Iselli, 'Per Commoner la sola speranza è il sole', *l'Unità*, 5 April 1979.

<sup>32</sup> Giovanni Battista Zorzoli, 'Meccanica di un incidente nucleare', *Rinascita*, 15, 20 April 1979, 7–8.

<sup>33</sup> Candela, *Storia ambientale dell'energia nucleare*, 195–200.

<sup>34</sup> Grazia Pagnotta, 'Il rapporto con la cultura ecologista e con gli ambientalisti', in Silvio Pons (ed.), *Il comunismo italiano nella storia del Novecento*, (Rome: Viella, 2021), 549 ff.

<sup>35</sup> 'Il PCI chiede la verifica del programma energetico', *Corriere della Sera*, 9 April 1979, 7.

Committee's economic planning commission approved a strongly worded communiqué calling on the government to set up a committee of inquiry 'to verify safety guarantees for Italian nuclear plants within three months' and to establish whether the nuclear plants planned by Parliament were actually necessary.<sup>36</sup> The criticisms put forward did not, however, substantially modify the communist position on a national level, as would be plain when the PCI nominated Ippolito as a candidate for the European elections in June 1979.

Criticism of the safety of electronuclear plants also came from various trade unionists, who had already raised doubts in previous years about the sector's large shortcomings in relation to environmental safety and had supported the need to implement national nuclear legislation, introduce an effective energy-saving policy and give priority to all types of renewable sources. In 1979 the most critical were Enzo Mattina, general secretary of the Federation of Engineering Workers (FLM), and Giorgio Benvenuto, general secretary of the Italian Labour Union (UIL), who both thought it necessary to consider a new energy plan and to launch a 'wide debate' about energy issues.<sup>37</sup> Yet the unions did not completely close the door on nuclear energy and refused to enter into a 'war of religion' against it.<sup>38</sup>

The PSI seemed receptive to anti-nuclear feeling,<sup>39</sup> partly because of the fear that a potential ecological force in politics would steal votes from among its own electorate.<sup>40</sup> From 1977 onwards, *Mondoperaio*, the monthly magazine targeting socialist intellectuals, had published articles emphasizing the need for safety in the production of nuclear energy.<sup>41</sup> During parliamentary debates about the PEN in September 1977, some socialist intellectuals had supported a 'call for a nuclear moratorium', to last at least three years—but this was not accepted by most communist intellectuals.<sup>42</sup> The socialist position was beginning to fragment: some local sections and regional committees took a stand against nuclear power;

<sup>36</sup> 'Il PCI chiede la verifica del programma energetico'.

<sup>37</sup> Piero V. Scorti, 'E adesso, dagli USA, la Seveso nucleare', *Avanti!*, 1–2 April 1979.

<sup>38</sup> Paolo Glisenti, 'Benvenuto: evitare "guerre di religione" sull'energia nucleare', *Corriere della Sera*, 10 April 1979.

<sup>39</sup> 'Nuove polemiche del PSI sulla centrale di Montalto', *Corriere della Sera*, 4 April 1979.

<sup>40</sup> Luigi Nicolini, 'I partiti di fronte alla sfida nucleare', *Mondoperaio*, 9, 1977, 30–32.

<sup>41</sup> Giorgio Nebbia, 'I conti sbagliati del programma nucleare', *Mondoperaio*, 10, 1976, 67–75; Luigi Nicolini, 'Programma nucleare: un'ipoteca sul nostro futuro', *Mondoperaio*, 3, 1977, 89–91.

<sup>42</sup> Pelizzari, 'Socialisti e comunisti italiani', 243.

even some national leaders of the PSI began to talk about a ‘different model of development’.<sup>43</sup> The TMI accident put new heart into the most critical Socialists, notably Aldo Aniasi, former mayor of Milan and an MP, who proposed allocating the capital funds earmarked for building nuclear plants to alternative sources. Aniasi and other critics reiterated how the socialist proposal for a ‘law of popular initiative’ to establish a nuclear moratorium and create an alternative plan was wholly justified; this proposal would be ‘broadly welcomed by the population’ and was thought to be a basis for mobilizing the people.<sup>44</sup>

It was no coincidence that Aniasi was responsible for the local government sector of the national PSI directorate. After the TMI accident, opposition to nuclear energy grew up again at a local level, in communities affected by the building of new power stations, where mayors and councilors were mouthpieces for citizens’ anxieties. In Montalto di Castro, the mayor Alfredo Pallotti—despite belonging to the small Italian Republican Party (PRI), which supported nuclear power—confirmed that he would do all he could to get work on the plant suspended while the local council voted to request a moratorium until 1982.<sup>45</sup> Opposition to nuclear power had now spread throughout Italy, as shown by more than twenty thousand people taking part in the Rome protest march organized by the CCSE in May 1979; at this same time, some polls revealed that opposition to nuclear energy was beginning to penetrate deep into Italian society.<sup>46</sup>

#### 4 A POLITICAL CHOICE

For the genuine anti-nuclearists—found among the radicals, the New Left and the Manifesto group—nuclear energy was a political as well as a technical option. The nuclear solution primarily amounted to the choice of a development model and had a radical impact on the quality of life. Opposition to nuclear energy was thus a challenge to change society and for the whole Left represented a fundamental issue, the future battleground involving not only economic but also civic and cultural, perhaps

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 250.

<sup>44</sup> P.V.S. [Piero V. Scorti], ‘Energia: un taglio agli sprechi è meglio di 14 centrali nucleari’, *Avanti!*, 3 April 1979.

<sup>45</sup> “Farò il possibile per fermare la centrale”, *Corriere della Sera*, 6 April 1979.

<sup>46</sup> Candela, *Storia ambientale dell’energia nucleare*, 235.

even institutional choices.<sup>47</sup> However, these groups divided over the arguments to be used against the nuclear solution, as well as over identifying contacts among the organizations of the nuclear movement.

The New Left and the Manifesto group offered the CCSE political backing and published its appeal for an active moratorium to be applied to the PEN, launched the day after TMI.<sup>48</sup> Their arguments reflected the views of Commoner, who had provided the theoretical framework for a Marxist interpretation of the anti-nuclear position. They believed that nuclear power stations represented the 'subjugation of the agent to technology', that is to say the use of technology to 'reinforce current power relationships'.<sup>49</sup> Their view was that the energy crisis was laying bare a crisis in the whole model of Western development, which was based on the elimination of the workforce and increasing capital investment in the production process; this growth model should be replaced by an entirely different model whose social priority should be everyone's right to education and work, in other words everyone's right 'not only to seize the means to develop their own creative potential, affirm their own individuality, live their own subjective life, but also to participate responsibly in choices about what should be produced, how it should be produced and for whom it should be produced'.<sup>50</sup> For this reason, opposition to nuclear power was not a 'green' battle but a 'red' one, crucial for the whole of the Left.<sup>51</sup> However, assessments of the positions taken by the so-called historical Left (the PCI and PSI) did not coincide: while *il manifesto* applauded the evolution of these parties' positions, *Lotta Continua* was much more sceptical and described the PCI request for 'democratic control' over nuclear safety as mere demagoguery.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Jean Fabre, 'Scelte di fondo per la sinistra', *Argomenti radicali*, 12–13, April–September 1979, 34–40; M.N. [Michelangelo Notarianni], 'L'occasione nucleare', *il manifesto*, 16 May 1979.

<sup>48</sup> G.D.T., 'Nube atomica in Pennsylvania. 1 milione di persone barricate nelle case. La guardia nazionale prepara l'evacuazione. È l'Hiroshima del tempo di pace', *il manifesto*, 31 March 1979; '1 milione di persone chiuse in casa in attesa dell'evacuazione', *Lotta Continua*, 31 March 1979.

<sup>49</sup> Marcello Cini, 'Convivere con la tecnologia. Ovvero, fidarsi degli esperti: ricevere dépliant pubblicitari invece di criteri di scelta, istruzioni per l'uso invece che informazioni. Le prediche del dopo Harrisburg', *il manifesto*, 19 April 1979.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> G.R., 'Per un pianeta', *il manifesto*, 15 May 1979.

<sup>52</sup> 'L'unica sicurezza è la demagogia', *Lotta Continua*, 4 April 1979.

Meanwhile, the anti-nuclear stance of the radicals, who had already proposed an abrogative referendum regarding Law 393 in December 1978, was voiced by AdT, affiliated with the PR,<sup>53</sup> whose criticisms of the nuclear solution were echoed in the left-wing weekly magazine, *Panorama*. Although they too thought that the nuclear option would increase the economic gap between wealthy and poor countries and that in wealthy countries it would absorb most of the financial and intellectual resources, inhibiting progress in other sectors, their arguments did not hark back to a Marxist stance but took a mainly anti-authoritarian line. The AdT pointed out the political consequences that the nuclear choice would have, by concentrating power in the hands of a 'narrow technocratic elite' and increasingly driving the militarizing of society (to safeguard power station stability and control the plutonium cycle): a devastating outcome in terms of curbing civil rights and the authoritarian transformation of the State.<sup>54</sup> In May 1979, they decided to counter the Rasmussen report by a scientific response, appointing the American company MHB Technical Associates to conduct an investigation into the safety of the Caorso nuclear reactor.<sup>55</sup>

Criticisms made by the anti-nuclear lobby were therefore not confined to energy policy. While some supporters of nuclear power did recognize that nuclear plant safety issues and the risk-benefit debate should be addressed 'clearly and democratically, providing the population with all the information in an appropriate way',<sup>56</sup> opponents of the nuclear solution who came from a Marxist political background went back to their suspicions of the alleged 'neutrality of science' and accused government powers not only of being undemocratic as regards energy decisions but also of having deliberately concealed 'the truth from the people'.<sup>57</sup>

Criticisms of the neutrality of science were made mostly by the Manifesto group, who saw an intrinsic and direct link between science and industry, between research and capital: 'identical instruments and planning hypotheses, a common desire for power and for divorce from the

<sup>53</sup> Lucia Bonfreschi, 'The Green is the New Red? A Libertarian Challenge: The Radicals and the Friends of the Earth Italy, 1976–1983', *European History Quarterly*, 3, 2022, 373–400.

<sup>54</sup> "Energia dolce per l'Europa", *La tartaruga*, n.d. but April–May 1979, 6–7. On the argument that the construction of the power stations would seriously constrain liberty, see also Stefano Rodotà, 'Rischi nucleari: scelgo il sabotaggio', *Panorama* 17 April 1979.

<sup>55</sup> Bonfreschi, 'The Green is the New Red?', 389.

<sup>56</sup> Ippolito, 'Convivere con la tecnologia'.

<sup>57</sup> Aniasi (PSI): "Smentite le accuse di catastrofismo", *Corriere della Sera*, 3 April 1979.



majority of mankind, a common authoritarian programme of expropriation'. Science and the middle classes were dominated by an 'exploitative and biased mindset, focusing on set goals and detached from any context'; this exploitative mindset held an inherent danger of 'ecological catastrophe', a 'violent and devastating process that is invading ordinary life, the body and the psyche of every human being'.<sup>58</sup>

A wider spectrum of people criticized the 'honesty and reliability of information provided by the entities responsible for nuclear development', both technical and political.<sup>59</sup> In the view of Aurelio Peccei, one of the founders of the Club di Roma, 'acceptance on faith of the nuclear solution' had come about not only without any public consultation but often also in contempt of Parliament's prerogative, posing 'grievous consequences both morally and politically'.<sup>60</sup> *Corriere della Sera* complained several times that journalists found themselves up against 'a mixture of secretiveness and vagueness'.<sup>61</sup> Socialist spokespeople repeatedly speculated that economic and political interests lay behind the unreliability of the pro-nuclear lobby's theories: 'the Harrisburg accident, impossible to overlook (although attempts have been made to play it down), has blown apart the code of silence established by political powers and syndicates operating in the sector'.<sup>62</sup>

While in the USA the Harrisburg accident was seen as one of the principal events causing 'mistrust of industry and government with regard to their commitment to community health and safety',<sup>63</sup> in Italy the accident was also taken as an opportunity to suggest, albeit in a hazier and more fragmented way, that political parties and institutions could not be trusted to promote the public good. Whereas in 1975 ratification of Law 393 had prompted some intellectuals and politicians to talk about the top-down and hierarchical implementation of the law and whereas in 1977 claims

<sup>58</sup> Michelangelo Notarianni, 'La pace atomica', *il manifesto*, 31 March 1979.

<sup>59</sup> Luigi Nicolini, 'E se il dramma si ripettesse a Caorso?', *Avanti!*, 3 April 1979; Nicolini was secretary of the Centro Socialista di Politica Agraria and close to Italia Nostra.

<sup>60</sup> Aurelio Peccei, 'Che cosa insegna il caso di Harrisburg', *Corriere della Sera*, 3 April 1979.

<sup>61</sup> Franco Foresta Martin, 'Quanti misteri attorno a quell'atomo', *Corriere della Sera*, 5 April 1979.

<sup>62</sup> Raffaele Rinaldi, 'Morire per l'atomo?', *Mondoperaio*, 5 May 1979, 145.

<sup>63</sup> Raymond L. Goldsteen, John K. Schorr, *Demanding Democracy after Three Mile Island*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), 191.

were made for the right to popular participation in decision-making,<sup>64</sup> after TMI some voices interpreted nuclear power as a paradigm of a conscious and intentional lie by scientists, technical experts and politicians, to the detriment of the people. This was epitomized in the 1979 book by Dario Paccino, *La trappola della scienza. Tutti vivi a Harrisburg*, which sprang precisely from the new issues which the accident in the USA had introduced into the Italian debate.

Moreover, the TMI accident turned the spotlight on the spread of anti-nuclear protest in Europe and the USA, which had begun as ‘nimby’ protests in the early 1970s, but by the middle of the decade had already created transnational networks to facilitate the exchange of scientific expertise and protest practice.<sup>65</sup> The global dimension of anti-nuclear protest had thus been fomented by some of the protagonists of the protests themselves. This was clear in 1979 when Commoner visited Italy and called on Italy to follow the American and German example of consultation or hearings at a scientific, industrial and social level.<sup>66</sup> The Italian debate after the US accident showed how some parts of the press also seized upon this global dimension: several newspapers devoted articles to debates, protests and the positions of various governments—from Germany to Japan, from Sweden to Switzerland and France—in the awareness that Western democracies were experiencing the same dilemmas and having to deal with anti-nuclear protests that had an increasingly transnational character.

The US accident had wide repercussions on the Italian debate: for the pro-nuclear lobby, it was a point of no return, in terms of the loss of their scientific credibility. For various reasons, the Italian nuclear programme had already slowed down by 1977 and never took off again: in the 1980s its opponents’ positions were also strengthened by more support from political forces within Parliament. The Chernobyl accident in April 1986, which resulted in renewed protest focusing on an ‘anti-nuclear’ referendum, buried the Italian nuclear programme once and for all.

<sup>64</sup> Giorgio Nebbia, ‘Risposta agli avvocati dell’avventura nucleare’, *Mondoperaio*, 5, 1977, 85–89.

<sup>65</sup> Jan-Henrik Meyer, “Where do we go from Wylh?” Transnational Anti-Nuclear Protest targeting European and International Organizations in the 1970s’, *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 1, 2014, 212–235.

<sup>66</sup> Peccei, ‘Che cosa insegna il caso di Harrisburg’.

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# The Rise of Thatcherism. 3 May 1979. Italian Reactions to Conservative Politics and Neo-liberalism in the UK

*Laura Ciglioni*

*Translated by Emma Mandley*

In December 1979, at the end of his mission as ambassador to London which had begun more than four years earlier, Roberto Ducci's final report set out a picture that was somewhat gloomy, marked by 'mixed feelings' about what had been accomplished, and above all by an awareness of the diminished 'political influence of the United Kingdom' on the international scene. Ducci observed, however, that if it was no longer 'worth saying a Mass' for London, it surely still merited 'a Hail Mary or two' and it was certainly true that political events in the country in those years had not 'lacked interest'. Indeed, in a nation where 'the unchanging calendar of recurring annual events' gave 'the impression that everything' was 'invariably foreseen', things had happened 'which nobody could have expected'. Among these, without any doubt—noted the ambassador—was

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‘the end of an economic system inspired by Keynes and the beginning of a system inspired by Friedman’.<sup>1</sup>

The idea that a radical about-turn, after years of ‘rampant Labour’,<sup>2</sup> was occurring in the UK and that this change of direction was indissolubly linked to the name of the new Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, had in fact already been developing for some months in the Italian public debate—perhaps not with the crisp lucidity that characterized Ducci’s final thoughts, but with increasing awareness and, in many cases, a certain amount of dismay. The ‘Iron Lady’ seemed determined to bring to fruition ‘the most drastic innovations introduced’ in the UK ‘since the end of the war’,<sup>3</sup> notwithstanding the very precarious context of the British economy. Thatcher—as described in some parts of the Italian press—was acting like the ‘Joan of Arc of neo-liberalism’.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, after her victory in the elections of May 1979, it only took a few months for ‘the Maggie whirlwind’ to become a fairly familiar—and polarizing—figure in the pages of Italian newspapers. This was particularly significant considering that only four years earlier, when she rose to leadership of the Conservative Party in February 1975, Thatcher’s victory had been mainly a surprise and an unknown quantity.

<sup>1</sup> *Una missione a Londra (luglio 1975–gennaio 1980)*, 27 December 1979, official communication from Roberto Ducci at the Italian Embassy in London to the Diplomatic Advisor to the President of the Italian Republic, Archivio storico della Presidenza della Repubblica (ASPR), Ufficio Affari Diplomatici, b. 125.

<sup>2</sup> Luigi Forni, ‘La frusta della lady di ferro’, *La Nazione*, 31 December 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Giorgio Porro, ‘Il ruggito di Maggie’, *Il Messaggero*, 17 May 1979.

<sup>4</sup> Mario Ciriello, ‘La Thatcher ha già ridotto le imposte’, *La Stampa*, 28 August 1979. On the category of ‘neo-liberalism’ and its relevance for British history—in particular on the debate about the ‘meaning and validity’ of the term itself, the conceptual ‘tensions’ within the ‘vast body of work on neo-liberalism’, the varieties of approaches associated with this notion and, at the same time, the need to delimit its use—see Aled Davies, Ben Jackson, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite (eds), *The Neoliberal Age? Britain since the 1970s*, (London: UCL Press, 2021), 1–71. On the ‘origins’ of the term and its use in ‘European debates over political economy’ during the 1970s, see Daniel Rodgers, ‘The Uses and Abuses of “Neoliberalism”’, *Dissent*, 1, 2018, 79–80.

# 1 THE 'SUBURBAN LADY': FROM 'COOKING THE DINNER TO CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP'<sup>5</sup>

Thatcher's success in the voting that decided the Tory leadership in 1975 sparked considerable interest in the Italian press.<sup>6</sup> It was an unexpected development in many aspects. Firstly, no one had predicted Thatcher's 'overwhelming' victory or the 'total collapse'<sup>7</sup> of the party's old guard. Secondly, the fact that it was a woman who had achieved such a result, not least in a party perceived as being strongly traditional in this respect, even known for its 'rigid antifeminism',<sup>8</sup> undoubtedly contributed to the surprise. After all, Thatcher was, on the whole, a little-known leader, and disparate information and opinions about her circulated in the Italian public debate. Some newspapers presented her as a cultured, poised and beautiful woman,<sup>9</sup> some even as a former model, as a hobby, now trying to combine politics and family,<sup>10</sup> and others as an 'energetic and dogged housewife' who had gone through the party like a 'bulldozer'.<sup>11</sup> Many pointed out her scant experience in foreign policy and even her 'non-existent international standing'.<sup>12</sup> The most obvious manifestation of these doubts was difficulty and caution in determining the new leader's attitude to the EEC: committed Europeanism or Victorian narrow-mindedness?<sup>13</sup> Probably some of the British press's assessments also had a bearing on such initial judgements (this was true, e.g. of *The Economist*, which

<sup>5</sup> Franco De Giorgi, 'Una donna alla guida dell'Inghilterra?', *Gente*, 24 February 1975; *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 12 February 1975.

<sup>6</sup> For Italian interest in Thatcher's election, see Giulia Bentivoglio, *The Two Sick Men of Europe? Britain and Italy Between Crisis and Renaissance (1976-1983)*, (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2018), 137 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Edgardo Bartoli, 'Margaret Thatcher leader dei conservatori', *Corriere della Sera*, 12 February 1975.

<sup>8</sup> 'Il nuovo leader tory è "Margie" Thatcher', *Avvenire*, 12 February 1975.

<sup>9</sup> E.G., 'È una donna bella e colta l'erede di Heath', *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 5 February 1975.

<sup>10</sup> De Giorgi, 'Una donna alla guida dell'Inghilterra?'.

<sup>11</sup> 'La Thatcher ce l'ha fatta', *La Voce Repubblicana*, 12 February 1975.

<sup>12</sup> Bartoli, 'Margaret Thatcher leader dei conservatori'. See also 'Margaret Thatcher succede a Heath nella direzione del partito', *L'Osservatore Romano*, 13 February 1975.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, 'Una donna per la regina', *La Discussione*, 17 February 1975; 'I Conservatori rinnovano', *La Voce Repubblicana*, 12 February 1975.

predicted that with Thatcher leading the Tories, Labour would be in government for another twenty-five years).<sup>14</sup>

However, in this framework of uncertainty, one fact appeared clear to most Italian commentators: Thatcher's victory was the sign of a grave crisis afflicting the Tories.<sup>15</sup> Heath, in particular, now seemed a worn-out figure. The vote for Thatcher was therefore interpreted as a response to an urgent desire for change, with more or less negative connotations. While the leading financial daily *Il Sole 24 Ore* thought that by choosing Thatcher the Tories had sought to avoid the spectacle of a divided party, but also to avert the risk of a lacklustre leadership,<sup>16</sup> *La Voce Repubblicana*—newspaper of the Italian Republican Party (PRI), a small, lay party at the time in government with the Christian Democracy (DC)—saw it as a 'reductive response', rooted in the 'nostalgic prudence of an isolationist petty bourgeoisie'.<sup>17</sup> In any case, the step taken by the Conservatives still seemed to lead to unknown territory.<sup>18</sup>

Even with these reservations, it seemed to some long-standing correspondents and commentators on British affairs that Thatcher's victory signalled a fundamental break: in other words the 'end of old-style Conservatism' with its 'paternalistic procedures' and its 'Olympus of the great and the good'—in short, the end of the 'old boys' club'.<sup>19</sup> A perception—or hope—began to grow that Thatcher would turn the Tories into a party of the people,<sup>20</sup> far from the 'lofty world' of the aristocracy: a positioning that Heath had already partly represented, but that Thatcher, the grocer's daughter, seemed fully to embody.

<sup>14</sup>Edgardo Bartoli, 'La seconda regina d'Inghilterra', *Corriere della Sera*, 4 February 1975; 'La vittoria di Margaret Thatcher segna una svolta dei conservatori', *il Giornale nuovo*, 12 February 1975.

<sup>15</sup>'Il congedo da un leader', *Corriere della Sera*, 8 February 1975. See also Paolo Filo della Torre, 'I tories in crisi cercano il successore di Heath', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 6 February 1975.

<sup>16</sup>Paolo Filo della Torre, 'Margaret Thatcher da oggi al posto di Heath', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 12 February 1975; Paolo Filo della Torre, 'La Thatcher ce l'ha fatta', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 13 February 1975. See also Filo della Torre, 'La vittoria di Margaret Thatcher segna una svolta dei conservatori'.

<sup>17</sup>'I Conservatori rinnovano'.

<sup>18</sup>Luigi Forni, 'Margaret Thatcher a capo dei conservatori britannici', *La Nazione*, 12 February 1975.

<sup>19</sup>Bartoli, 'Margaret Thatcher leader dei conservatori'. See also Eugenio Galvano, 'Adesso c'è un'altra Margaret nel futuro politico dell'Inghilterra', *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 11 February 1975.

<sup>20</sup>'Margaret Thatcher', *Secolo d'Italia*, 12 February 1975.



Above all, the questions about Thatcher's personality and doubts about her political future could not conceal another fact that, just a few days after the election, seemed to have been largely recognized in the Italian debate: her victory marked a sharp swerve to the right for the British Conservatives. Even for those who thought her success heralded a change that was mostly about style, rather than policy,<sup>21</sup> or the many who considered her to be a token candidate 'obviously manipulated' by more experienced, 'higher calibre' Tories,<sup>22</sup> there was not much doubt that she was positioned on the right of the party. One relevant factor was her noted proximity to 'free-market Conservatives' who supported monetarist theories,<sup>23</sup> especially exponents at the forefront of this tendency, such as Keith Joseph—although questions remained in the Italian debate as to how pretextual such alliances were.

In any event, the extent to which Thatcher represented innovation and a rupture with conservative tradition would very quickly become a political battleground and an issue of legitimacy (or illegitimacy) among the Tories themselves—and so it would remain for a very long time.<sup>24</sup>

The issue was registered in the Italian debate too, though with a different slant: it provided an opportunity for political cultures to gauge where they stood vis-à-vis this British novelty.

In some quarters, for instance in the Catholic camp, this turn to the right, although perceived as 'very emphatic', was regarded with a degree of caution and a tendency to play it down: Thatcher would not necessarily be 'less attentive to the country's problems'.<sup>25</sup>

To a certain extent, even the extreme Right, as expressed in *Secolo d'Italia*, was cautious about describing the new leadership as a radical change, seeing 'Thatcher the warrior' as heir to Disraeli,<sup>26</sup> that is to say reflecting a vision of the Tories as a 'one-nation party', but fired with greater determination.

<sup>21</sup> 'Il nuovo leader tory è "Margie" Thatcher'.

<sup>22</sup> Paolo Filo della Torre, 'Il "cadavere" di Heath fa gioco a Wilson', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 7 February 1975.

<sup>23</sup> Eric J. Evans, *Thatcher and Thatcherism*, (London-New York: Routledge, 2013), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Ben Jackson, Robert Saunders, Introduction: 'Varieties of Thatcherism', in Ben Jackson, Robert Saunders (eds), *Making Thatcher's Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17–18.

<sup>25</sup> 'Una donna per la regina'.

<sup>26</sup> 'Margaret Thatcher'. The break with Heath was perceived as much more definitive by the right-of-center daily *Il Tempo*: see the articles by Antonio Perrini on 4, 5 and 12 February 1975.

Conversely, there was a much harsher reaction from the Left to the ‘milk snatcher’,<sup>27</sup> who was regarded as ‘everything that was most entrenched’ that the Tories could muster ‘in terms of reaction’.<sup>28</sup> The Socialist Party newspaper *Avanti!* wrote of a ‘counter-revolution’ directed against the forces of collectivism, consisting of a strict anti-inflationary policy, a relaunch of the market economy, and reaffirmation of the values of law and order.<sup>29</sup> In this case, especially in the communist press, the alliance with the right of the party, especially with Joseph, was considered a key element.<sup>30</sup>

However, in the end a fairly reassuring perspective seemed to emerge in the Italian interpretation of the British situation. In papers with very different leanings, from the DC’s weekly *La Discussione* to Italy’s leading daily *Corriere della Sera* to the communist newspaper *l’Unità*—as well as those newspapers that thought the new leader would only effect a change of style or was, ultimately, just a ‘duplicate’ of Heath<sup>31</sup>—there arose the conviction that in order to govern the country, Thatcher would be forced to move towards the centre. This conviction came partly from the appointment of her first shadow government, which did indeed bring together Conservatives of different leanings, including various Heath supporters and exponents of the centre and centre-left of the party.<sup>32</sup> However, other factors also had a bearing on Italian perceptions: the difficult plight of the British economy, which seemed to leave limited room for manoeuvre, as well as past experience of Heath’s government which, in its confrontation with the unions, had been forced to give up on its most radical measures. But other more deeply rooted convictions also had an impact: since the 1929 crisis—wrote *Corriere della Sera*, for example—‘parsimonious public

<sup>27</sup> Antonio Bronda, ‘La signora ruba-latte’, *l’Unità*, 16 February 1975. Thatcher gained the nickname ‘milk snatcher’ in the early 1970s when, as Secretary of State for Education in the Heath government, she had abolished free milk in schools for children over seven years of age: see Eric J. Evans, *Thatcher and Thatcherism*, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Antonio Bronda, ‘Primo compleanno del governo Wilson’, *Rinascita*, 7 March 1975.

<sup>29</sup> Gino Bianco, ‘La svolta dei “tories”’, *Avanti!*, 13 February 1975.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. See also Antonio Bronda, ‘Lotta di correnti fra i conservatori’, *l’Unità*, 7 February 1975; ‘Margaret Thatcher eletta a maggioranza leader conservatore’, *l’Unità*, 12 February 1975.

<sup>31</sup> Giorgio Porro, ‘Una donna il leader dei conservatori’, *Il Messaggero*, 12 February 1975.

<sup>32</sup> Evans, *Thatcher and Thatcherism*, 17.

spending' no longer seemed 'likely anywhere': 'austerity' could only be, in short, a 'paper tiger'.<sup>33</sup>

Italian reactions thus reflected some of the new aspects, but above all many of the uncertainties of the situation, as well as Thatcher's weak position in her own party in 1975. Her candidacy had succeeded more because she picked up the anti-Heath vote than 'because she offered', at the time, 'alternative politics'. In fact, the profound evolution of the views she had been privately forming—to the point where she could 'adumbrate a new conservative philosophy', with encouragement from her friend and ally Joseph, and partly within the Centre for Policy Studies—had not until that moment been clearly manifested in her political conduct.<sup>34</sup>

## 2 THE UK ENTERS THE 1980s

The importance of the British general elections in May 1979—held a few weeks before the Italian general election scheduled for early June and the first vote for a European Parliament—could not have been more clearly highlighted in the Italian public debate. The interest was in some ways unusual—as was noted at the time—unlike the 'half-hearted' attention the Italian press generally paid to politics across the Channel.<sup>35</sup>

There were several reasons for this interest: not only was the UK now part of the EEC, but the outcome of the elections in May 1979 seemed to have a more general and far-reaching importance. The 'British malaise' seemed in many ways to be 'also European', and certainly Italian. This malaise sprang from the weariness and 'frustrations' of the middle classes, faced with taxes, strikes, underperforming public services and terrorism;<sup>36</sup> as well as very deeply felt 'regional nationalisms' and, above all, the problems of an economy caught between inflation and unemployment.<sup>37</sup> But there was more: the battle being fought out on British soil was seen as the most politicized election since 1945, a decisive struggle concerning not

<sup>33</sup> Alberto Ronchey, 'Chi ha paura di Margaret Thatcher?', *Corriere della Sera*, 14 February 1975.

<sup>34</sup> David Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher. A Life and Legacy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 20–25.

<sup>35</sup> Renzo Cianfanelli, 'Quanti rimproveri per Callaghan', *Corriere della Sera*, 25 April 1979.

<sup>36</sup> Giuliano Ragno, 'Incertezze nel voto britannico', *Avvenire*, 3 May 1979.

<sup>37</sup> Cianfanelli, 'Quanti rimproveri per Callaghan'.

only the future of the welfare state<sup>38</sup> but also other issues which would be crucial in the next decade: the fate of détente, the definition of a European political identity, the prospect of an ‘almost permanent’ energy crisis, the challenges of technology and the revitalization of industry, the ‘ongoing processes of destabilization in the Third World’.<sup>39</sup> All these problems seemed to be converging towards a fundamental confrontation developing in reaction to the crises of the 1970s, including the debates between ‘dirigisme’ and ‘neoliberalism’<sup>40</sup>—or between class ‘collaboration’ and ‘conflict’,<sup>41</sup> depending on the point of view. In this context, questions were being asked in Italy about the future of the cross-party consensus which had been a feature of British politics.<sup>42</sup> The UK, in short, seemed the first European country to be entering the 1980s.<sup>43</sup>

In many respects, however, Italian reactions to the election results confirmed their perceptions of four years earlier. Once again, the scale of Thatcher’s success, which guaranteed the Conservatives a large majority, was partly unexpected: until the last moment, the polls had suggested points of uncertainty and some Italian observers were betting on the two main parties being in difficulty, on the liberals doing well and therefore on a coalition government. As for Thatcher’s personality, while her determination and status in the party was no longer really in doubt, she was nevertheless not considered a popular leader, even compared with the defeated James Callaghan. Indeed, there was a fairly widespread view in Italy, especially on the Left, that the election represented a vote against the government rather than a conservative victory.

All these points went to confirm the prevailing spontaneous reaction in the Italian debate: although the results of the vote undoubtedly indicated a decisive shift to the right in London, bolstering ‘manifestations of a neo-liberalist wave’ in Europe,<sup>44</sup> it was not expected that the UK government would radically change its line. Thatcher’s ‘reforming zeal’—so it was believed—would end by coming up against the scale of the UK’s

<sup>38</sup> Renzo Cianfanelli, ‘Il giorno del dilemma elettorale inglese’, *Corriere della Sera*, 4 May 1979.

<sup>39</sup> Ludovico Garruccio, ‘Margaret in testa’, *La Nazione*, 4 May 1979.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Daniel Singer, ‘I due errori di Callaghan’, *il manifesto*, 5 May 1979.

<sup>42</sup> Cianfanelli, ‘Quanti rimproveri per Callaghan’.

<sup>43</sup> Garruccio, ‘Margaret in testa’.

<sup>44</sup> Fausto De Luca, ‘Il ciclone Maggie soffia solo su Londra?’, *la Repubblica*, 6–7 May 1979.

problems<sup>45</sup> and ‘harsh social realities’,<sup>46</sup> which left no room for radical changes. Here much weight was given to Heath’s political trajectory, and to the perceived strength of the British unions, who were ‘lying in wait’ for Thatcher.<sup>47</sup> ‘With how much water’—asked *Avanti!*—‘will Thatcher have to dilute the wine of her “demagogy” in order to govern?’<sup>48</sup>

These views were not all that different from those expressed by ambassador Ducci in the weeks before the elections. In a report concerning Thatcher’s ‘political philosophy’, he clearly described her radical newness, her ‘crusading tones’, her rejection of ‘Heath’s progressive dirigisme’ as well as the Conservatives’ determination to create ‘a “society of incentives” extolling private initiative and market forces, in line with the teachings of Hayek and Friedman’. However, Ducci doubted whether the country’s production and social structures would stand up to the proposed ‘new way’ and concluded that, in a party that was still very divided, ‘taking on the responsibilities of government’ would force ‘the Conservatives to bend to inevitable compromises’ and perhaps to find a ‘middle way’ more suited to the country, after two years of radicalizing the political battle.<sup>49</sup>

These widespread beliefs were naturally articulated and expressed in different ways in the Italian public debate. Within a field of opinion ranging from the centre to the right, there was a tendency to reiterate that Thatcher would not bring about the catastrophe predicted by those on the left, nor was there any need to ‘fret about the *riflusso conservatore* (conservative turn)’.<sup>50</sup> The influential *Il Sole 24 Ore* even proclaimed—taking a line that it would long maintain—that Thatcher needed to govern with ‘tact’.<sup>51</sup> Finally, *Il Tempo* made it clear that the Tories should not be identified with the radical Right or with the interests of the ‘privileged classes’:<sup>52</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Marcello Gilmozzi, ‘Netta vittoria dei conservatori’, *Il Popolo*, 5 May 1979.

<sup>46</sup> Alberto Ronchey, ‘Lo zelo di Maggie’, *Corriere della Sera*, 5 May 1979.

<sup>47</sup> Carlo Bassi, ‘La Thatcher ora deve governare’, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 6 May 1979.

<sup>48</sup> Gino Bianco, ‘Quanta acqua metterà nel vino della sua demagogia?’, *Avanti!*, 6–7 May 1979.

<sup>49</sup> ‘La Signora Thatcher e la sua filosofia politica’, 13 March 1979, Roberto Ducci to Foreign Minister Arnaldo Forlani, in ASPR, Ufficio Affari Diplomatici, b. 125.

<sup>50</sup> Vittorio Citterich, ‘Questa donna perché ha vinto’, *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 5 May 1979.

<sup>51</sup> Carlo Bassi, ‘La Thatcher ora deve governare’, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 6 May 1979.

<sup>52</sup> Emanuele Bonfiglio, ‘Una donna a Downing Street’, *Il Tempo*, 5 May 1979.

the British example could even chart a course for the Italian middle classes to follow, against any form of 'leftism' and shifting the DC to the Right.<sup>53</sup>

On the extreme Right, a more radical position was taken by *Secolo d'Italia* and *Il Borghese*, which celebrated Thatcher's victory as part of a wave of right-wing successes in Europe and a sign of hope, especially important in view of the European vote to come. The secretariat of the Italian Social Movement-National Right (MSI-DN) was perhaps the only Italian party to express 'complete satisfaction' with the outcome of the British vote.<sup>54</sup> However, even in the MSI-DN, despite differing views within it, there was tendency to emphasize those aspects of British Conservatism that were considered most consistent with the Italian party's culture and its proposed policies:<sup>55</sup> stress was placed not only on the battle against class-dominated trade unionism, state welfare systems and clientelism, or renewal of anti-communism, but also on the maintenance of public order and even on social 'solidarism'.<sup>56</sup>

On the Left, it was mostly the press associated with the Italian Communist Party (PCI) that played down the impact of the British vote. Thatcher's election would not herald—declared *l'Unità*—either the 'end of the world as we know it' or the 'introduction of a new individualist and utilitarian language', nor did it entail a victory of monetarism over Keynesian thought.<sup>57</sup> If anything, the defeat of the Labour Party was an indication of something else: the two approaches, not only the conservative 'revolution-restoration' but also the reforming approach adopted by Labour, had both reached a 'point of stalemate'.<sup>58</sup> Significantly, the Tories' vision was regarded as 'reverting to the past', a return to recipes that had already been causes of conflict in the years of the great economic crises,<sup>59</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Elio Fazzalari, 'L'esempio inglese', *Il Tempo*, 8 May 1979.

<sup>54</sup> 'L'Italia deve mettersi al pari con l'Europa', *Secolo d'Italia*, 5 May 1979. For *Il Borghese*, see Aldo De Quarto, 'A colloquio con "Super-Maggie"', 13 May 1979.

<sup>55</sup> Gregorio Sorganò, *La scoperta della destra. Il Movimento sociale italiano e gli Stati Uniti*, (Rome: Viella, 2019), 84–87.

<sup>56</sup> C.M., 'L'Inghilterra sceglie la destra', *Secolo d'Italia*, 5 May 1979.

<sup>57</sup> Antonio Bronda, 'Signora Thatcher e adesso che ha vinto?', *l'Unità*, 10 May 1979.

<sup>58</sup> Leonardo Paggi, 'Crisi laburista e intransigenza "tory"', *Rinascita*, 11 May 1979.

<sup>59</sup> Enrico Berlinguer also talked about a 'return to the past'—in an interview in November 1980—with reference to the UK's response to a structural economic crisis later followed by Reagan in the USA. According to Berlinguer, this approach could create problems for the European forces of the Left, especially in terms of rearmament policies, but he did not judge it likely to 'present a hegemonic plan or a long-term vision', as the failures of the British Conservatives were demonstrating at that very moment: Antonio Tatò (ed), *Conversazioni con Berlinguer*, (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1985), 205.

an anachronism.<sup>60</sup> This does not mean that there was no serious concern in the PCI about London's change of direction: in fact this was clearly outlined in party leadership meetings at that time.<sup>61</sup> In the internal debate, the increasingly conflicted attitude towards the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) emerged too, especially fears as to Craxi's leadership and 'manoeuvrings', into which they read an alignment with the neoliberal tendencies of European Conservatives.<sup>62</sup>

On the whole, the left-of-centre newspaper *la Repubblica* seemed to have hit the mark when it pointed out that in Italy there had been much emphasis on the importance of the British elections on a global and European level, but that no one seemed prepared to draw conclusions closer to home, still less to call it a victory or a defeat. In Italy, 'officially' there were no 'Conservatives' (and those who were 'abhorred the name', the newspaper added contentiously). On the Left, on the other hand, no one wanted to go into 'mourning': they had already declared a 'third way', which was 'theoretically more advanced than the British approach to reform'.<sup>63</sup>

Were all reactions consistent with these lines of thought in the Italian context? In truth, views would change substantially in just a few weeks. Initially, it was only highly circulated *La Stampa* that was prepared to declare that a historic change of direction had occurred in London, the beginning of ten years of Tory government that would change the face of the UK,<sup>64</sup> before long, however, the perception grew in the Italian public debate that it was not just a change of direction across the Channel, but 'an aggressive movement' involving 'problematic' structural changes.<sup>65</sup> In a few months, an impression began to spread that Thatcher's politics were

<sup>60</sup> Paolo Spriano, 'Come giudichiamo questi 10 anni', *l'Unità*, 11 November 1979.

<sup>61</sup> See the contributions made by Giancarlo Pajetta and Enrico Berlinguer to the meetings of the Directorate on 9 May and 5 June 1979, respectively, in Fondazione Gramsci, Archivio Partito Comunista Italiano (APC), Direzione, mf. 7906 and mf. 7907.

<sup>62</sup> See *Riunione della Direzione del 3 ottobre 1978, seduta pomeridiana*, FG, APC, Direzione, mf. 7812.

<sup>63</sup> De Luca, 'Il ciclone Maggie soffia solo su Londra?'.

<sup>64</sup> Mario Ciriello, 'Grande vittoria dei conservatori. La Thatcher già a Downing Street', *La Stampa*, 5 May 1979; Mario Ciriello, 'Varato il governo Thatcher. È Heath il grande escluso', *La Stampa*, 6 May 1979.

<sup>65</sup> Renzo Cianfanelli, 'La Thatcher annuncia la riduzione delle tasse', *Corriere della Sera*, 16 May 1979.

harsh, almost 'reckless',<sup>66</sup> and implied a sort of 'almost religious fanaticism',<sup>67</sup> with the potential to create marked social conflict: the influence of Friedman's thought seemed clear. By mid-June, two events in particular—the Queen's Speech and the new Budget by the Chancellor of the Exchequer—made it clear that Thatcher was determined to keep her electoral promises and was planning a government (from which Heath was excluded) devoid of the moderation that everyone had expected. Some policies which were harder than predicted, like the abolition of price controls and Thatcher's attitude to the EEC, took on a paradigmatic appearance.

Again, faced with this change—promptly highlighted by the Italian embassy in London in the first half of June<sup>68</sup>—reactions differed in the Italian political landscape. The communist press, as well as organs such as *la Repubblica* and the news magazine *L'Espresso*, observed that Thatcher was proposing demagogic solutions that lacked clarity,<sup>69</sup> distinguished by an 'abstract ideological' approach,<sup>70</sup> existing in a sort of 'stratosphere'<sup>71</sup> and destined to fail.

The PSI, despite having perceptively grasped the 'rollercoaster of economic ultraliberalism' that Thatcher was offering,<sup>72</sup> seemed to be mostly interested, at that point, in interpreting the crisis in the British Labour Party. However, there was no shortage of critical rumblings within the party and calls to learn lessons from the British vote—in other words, not to 'push things too far', to take into account the 'revolt against bureaucratic statism' and the 'meddling state', and to construct a 'modern,

<sup>66</sup> Adriana Cerretelli, 'Il primo bilancio di Margaret Thatcher', *Relazioni Internazionali*, 23 June 1979.

<sup>67</sup> Paolo Filo della Torre, 'E lo Stato restò con un pugno di mosche', *L'Espresso*, 5 August 1979.

<sup>68</sup> See *Regno Unito. Bilancio dello Stato*, 12.6.79, telegram from Roberto Ducci to the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, in Archivio Storico Istituto Luigi Sturzo (ASILS), Archivio Giulio Andreotti, Gran Bretagna, b. 469; 'La politica estera del governo Thatcher: modalità e protagonisti', 19 July 1979, R. Ducci to Minister of Foreign Affairs A. Forlani, in ASPR, Ufficio Affari Diplomatici, b. 125.

<sup>69</sup> Antonio Bronda, 'Mrs. Thatcher dà l'assalto anche alla posta', *l'Unità*, 24 July 1979.

<sup>70</sup> Vincenzo Visco, 'E Londra toglie ai poveri per dare ai ricchi', *L'Espresso*, 1 July 1979.

<sup>71</sup> Barbara Spinelli, 'Cosa fa Lady Thatcher? Per ora sta sbagliando tutto', *la Repubblica*, 20 June 1979.

<sup>72</sup> Gino Bianco, 'I laburisti analizzano la loro crisi', *Avanti!*, 14 June 1979.



pluralistic and self-governing Western socialism'<sup>73</sup>—through which emerged the changes Craxi's leadership had conferred on the PSI.

Some change of tone was also evident in the DC press. In *La Discussione*, for instance, the idea seemed to be taking shape, albeit cautiously and with caveats, that what had 'already been called a neoliberal revolution' was 'inevitable': certainly, it would have been better to talk of 'neo-individualism', but the UK had to be given credit for the 'courage of its innovation'.<sup>74</sup> On the whole, however, the reaction of the DC to the changes taking place in the UK seemed to consist mainly of watching and waiting. Seriously weighed down with worries connected to domestic terrorism, at that time the party did not pay particular attention to British affairs in its internal discussions; it was not until Reagan's election that it would begin to appraise more earnestly a phase that seemed 'full of unknowns' on the international level.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, in the context of government policy, in 1979 first Giulio Andreotti and then Francesco Cossiga were busily dialoguing with Thatcher through summit meetings, and taking soundings on her politics, especially in the European arena—however much the British government itself was expecting the Italian representatives' main interest would be 'to hear first-hand about HMG's economic policies'.<sup>76</sup>

In the summer of 1979, these widespread perceptions about the UK situation had already begun to coalesce in Italy. Many conclusions about Thatcher's actions, especially in the moderate press, were left pending, in anticipation of a winter that was expected to be difficult. Concerns were nevertheless growing on many sides: one example was the puzzlement and almost incredulity that seeped out of the pages of *Il Sole 24 Ore*, which feared more risks for the UK: government rebellion, popular insurrection

<sup>73</sup> The statements, respectively, by Vincenzo Balzamo and Claudio Martelli, are in: 'Il successo dei "tories" inglesi preoccupa le sinistre in Italia', *Il Tempo*, 6 May 1979.

<sup>74</sup> Sagittarius, 'La Thatcher riserva agli inglesi la cura dell'efficienza', *La Discussione*, 25 June 1979.

<sup>75</sup> Speech by Secretary Flaminio Piccoli to the Directorate, 21 January 1981, in ASILS, Archivio DC, Direzione Nazionale e Giunta esecutiva, sc. 44, f. 584.

<sup>76</sup> *Visit of the Prime Minister to Rome, 4th-5th October 1979*, M.J. Vile to Private Secretary, 26 September 1979, in British National Archives (TNA), PREM 19 series, PREM19/88, Italy (MT's visits to Italy; Anglo-Italian Summits) (Part 1). For the meeting between Andreotti and Thatcher in June 1979, see Antonio Varsori, 'Giulio Andreotti, Margaret Thatcher e le relazioni italo-britanniche negli anni Ottanta', *Ventesimo Secolo*, 47, 2020, 41–45. For the two countries' policies in the European context in 1979, see Giulia Bentivoglio, *The Two Sick men of Europe*, 158–162.

and ‘collapse’ in response to the Thatcher ‘steamroller’.<sup>77</sup> At the tail end of the year, news from London reported drastic new measures: the UK was seeing the first effects of liberalizing capital movements and an ‘exceptionally far-reaching’ 17% hike to the minimum interest rate.<sup>78</sup>

While it is true that, in the early stages of her first mandate, Thatcher was actually ‘far from being in command of her cabinet’ and not without some doubts,<sup>79</sup> in the Italian debate the prevailing view, at the end of 1979, seemed to be that her ‘conviction politics’ were already becoming clearly apparent.

### 3 THE TWO SICK MEN OF EUROPE

Edgardo Bartoli, a long-standing correspondent in the UK for *Corriere della Sera* and later special correspondent for *la Repubblica*, would write at a distance of almost thirty years from 1979, in a book devoted to ‘Italian Anglomania’, that after the Second World War ‘the old England’ had gradually and ‘steadily’ changed, until it was completely revolutionized by the Thatcher whirlwind, to the extent that it remained Thatcherite in subsequent decades. Indeed, ‘in some respects’ it then possibly ‘became even more’ Thatcherite, in the years when the ‘global standardization of appearances’ at last broke through into what had long been ‘the stronghold of diversity’.<sup>80</sup>

What was the Italian view in 1979 of the early phase of this tumultuous, long process of transformation—only partly identifiable with the Iron Lady’s political trajectory, of course? And how perceptive was it? There was certainly no lack of awareness in Italy of some of the fractures created by Thatcher’s programmes and political style, and therefore of the UK’s early ‘entry into the 1980s’, even in discussions intended for a wide public. Indeed, in Italy there was a strong conviction at all levels that the election of Thatcher marked above all—as has been noted—‘a reaction against the Keynesian model and trade union power’; understanding, however, often

<sup>77</sup> See, all in *Il Sole 24 Ore*: Carlo Bassi, ‘La sterlina come il calabrone’, 13 July 1979; Carlo Bassi, ‘La Thatcher sta forse esagerando con i tagli alla spesa pubblica’, 24 July 1979 (including the above citation); Carlo Bassi, ‘Procede velocemente in GB il piano di “denazionalizzazione”’, 26 July 1979.

<sup>78</sup> Antonio Bronda, ‘Tasso di sconto al 17% in Inghilterra’, *l’Unità*, 12 December 1979.

<sup>79</sup> Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher*, 28–30 and 118–26.

<sup>80</sup> Edgardo Bartoli, *Milord. Avventure dell’anglomania italiana*, (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2007), 183–184.

stopped there, as such an interpretation failed to fully grasp the crisis of the existent model or indeed to imagine alternative paradigms.<sup>81</sup>

For many Italian political cultures, both on the Right and the Left, the importance of ideology undoubtedly played a significant part in these dynamics, when it came to grasping what was new or understanding its overall impact. Similarly important were the distorting lenses and worry about the Cold War that bulked large in 1979—from the future of détente to concerns about rearmament and the fate of the EEC: they filled most of the space devoted to international politics on the Italian horizon, and this went for the British situation too.

Perhaps more influential than anything else, however, was a dual cultural perspective. On the one hand, there was a certain Italian tendency to project predicaments and dynamics rooted in their own reality onto the British situation. Particularly revealing in this sense was the widespread expectation, in both 1975 and 1979, that there would continue to be a search for the ‘centre’, a cross-party consensus or even an era of coalition governments in British politics. The conviction—common at all levels in Italy, from the press to diplomatic circles<sup>82</sup>—that Italy and the UK shared many problems at that time and that they really were the two ‘sick men of Europe’ probably contributed to reinforcing such perceptions in the difficult circumstances of the second half of the 1970s.

However, the two countries were regarded as suffering from very different types of ‘sickness’. The greater underlying stability and above all the dynamism of the UK political system seemed only too obvious to Italians. Thatcher’s election in itself reinforced in Italy an image of the UK as a country able to deal with healthy alternation and pragmatic efficiency in the management of government—while conversely ‘from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, Italy was a major presence in the British political debate, especially in connection with the theme of national decline’.<sup>83</sup>

On the other hand, Italian culture was characterized by a rooted and long-standing trait, a sort of perceived cultural ‘distance’ from the UK, mirrored by an equally significant history of Anglophilia: both were

<sup>81</sup> Guido Formigoni, ‘La globalizzazione dall’ideologia alla storia: l’impatto italiano della crisi sistemica degli anni ’70’, in Mauro Ceruti, Guido Formigoni (eds), *(S)confinamenti. Esperienze e rappresentazioni della globalizzazione*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2020), 86–91.

<sup>82</sup> *Una missione a Londra (luglio 1975–gennaio 1980)*.

<sup>83</sup> Ettore Costa, ‘“Like Romans Becoming Italians”: Italy as the Negative Paradigm for British Decline in the Language of the Press and Denis Healey’, *Modern Languages Open*, 1, 2018, 1–17.

fostered by the perception of an underlying difference, as though reflecting the Anglo-Saxon island's separateness from many of the key events in South-Central Europe's history.<sup>84</sup> The rhetoric of the two sick men, one more chronically sick than the other, certainly laid bare such perceptions. This 'filter' probably contributed to the difficulties the press and Italian political cultures had in interpreting the full impact of the results of the 1979 British elections in relation to their own reality, as *la Repubblica* reported. Instead, it reinforced the tendency to project the vote for or against Thatcher onto a global plane: while certainly interesting, that was further away after all, and remained blurred—at least for the moment.

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<sup>84</sup> Eugenio F. Biagini, 'Angofilia e storiografia', in Agostino Giovagnoli, Giorgio Del Zanna (eds), *Il mondo visto dall'Italia*, (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2004), 55–70.

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# The First International Elections in History. 10 June 1979. Identity, Europeanization, and Political Systems

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## 1 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS AND THE ‘SHOCK OF THE GLOBAL’

The major transformations triggered by the crises of the 1970s, coupled with the growing demand for participation emerging from within civil society, prompted Europe’s ruling classes into a rethink of the political system of the European Community. The monetary imbalances that followed the US government’s decision to abandon the gold-dollar exchange standard and the 1973 oil shock occurred at a time in which the EC was expanding its membership to include three new countries—Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark—while the planned accession of a fourth country, Norway, was rejected in a referendum. Monetary and commercial tensions

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between the three main centres of economic power in the West (the US, the EC and Japan) led, between 1971 and 1973, to the system of fixed exchanges being abandoned and, in turn, to difficulties defining new rules of global governance for the post-Bretton Woods environment. A complex phase of transition had begun, the impact of which would be felt across the entire decade and whose uncertain trajectory posed a challenge to the political actors and ruling classes that sought to interpret it. The European response to the monetary disorder would lead to the creation of the European Currency Unit (ECU) and European Monetary System (EMS),<sup>1</sup> instruments designed to safeguard European economic stability.<sup>2</sup> The year 1974, meanwhile, saw the establishment of the European Council, which met for the first time in Dublin in March 1975, as the governments of the EC member states sought to coordinate among themselves and reach common solutions to the international economic and financial crisis—in much the same way as with the Rambouillet summit, held later the same year, which saw participation of the world's six leading industrial nations (four of which were EC members).

These pressures did not lead to any major projects for new treaties. They did, however, see Europe's institutions enter into a phase of greater dynamism, directed in particular at strengthening communication between European citizens and institutions and building, as a matter of urgency, a common European home, capable of addressing the serious international challenges in as united a way as possible. In response to a demand for democratization that, arising globally from the 1960s, had inevitably impacted upon the European Community too, the EC sought to strengthen the role of both parties and Parliament, until then largely relegated to the margins of the European system of governance. In the first half of the 1970s, the confederal parties of Europe's three major political families (the Socialists, Liberals and Christian Democrats) were formed and the foundations laid for the direct election of the European Parliament<sup>3</sup> which, after a series of postponements, was finally slated to take place in 1979.

<sup>1</sup> See Horst Ungerer, *A Concise History of European Monetary Integration from EPU to EMU*, Westport, Quorum Books, 1997. With regard to the effects on the EC of 'monetary disorder', see Mark Gilbert, *Surpassing Realism: The Politics of European Integration since 1945*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 200), 128–133.

<sup>2</sup> See Roberto Di Quirico, *L'euro ma non l'Europa. Integrazione monetaria e integrazione politica*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2007), 108–114.

<sup>3</sup> See Simon Hix, Christopher Lord, *Political Parties in the European Union*, (New York: MacMillan Education, 1997).

As the first direct elections approached, Italy's citizens and ruling classes both displayed a high level of confidence in the European project. A significant factor in this was the conviction that the instabilities associated with the 'shock of the global' could only be addressed in a unified manner, particularly in an Italy reeling from a currency crisis that had caused a severe loss of confidence in the Italian economy (both nationally and internationally), and embroiled in a profound political and institutional crisis that had required the adoption of emergency solutions.<sup>4</sup> Just prior to the 1979 European elections, the 'national solidarity' phase (1976–1979) came to an end—a truly exceptional period of Italian political history, which had seen an unprecedented development: the Italian Communist Party (PCI) being involved in the government's political decision-making process, through a parliamentary dialogue no longer based around a traditional confrontation between majority and opposition. While never actually participating in the executive, the PCI had been involved in government planning, initially in return for assurances of a non-hostile vote to the (DC-only) Andreotti government, later joining the majority on a purely emergency basis, following the kidnapping of Christian Democrats (DC) chairman Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades (BR).<sup>5</sup> Broad differences remained between the political parties, however, and it was significant that the question that would eventually bring this period to a definitive end revolved around what European-level response to find to the instabilities of the international monetary system.

One first statistic to consider in relation to the European elections in Italy in June 1979 was the high turnout, with 85.65% of Italian electors voting, even though political elections had been held just a week before. Italian voter turnout was well above the European average (61.99%), as well as the French (60.71%) and German figures (65.73%), and was second only to Belgium and Luxembourg (respectively 91.36% and 88.91%). The profound crisis that Italy found herself in was not one of voter participation—either nationally or at European level.

The results saw the DC poll 36.45%, while the PCI dropped below 30%. The other party of the Italian Left, the Italian Socialist Party (PSI),

<sup>4</sup> Salvatore Rossi has referred to an 'aborted stabilization' that collapsed during the second oil shock of 1979, but that was also heavily impacted by the 'non choices' of the Italian ruling classes throughout the decade. See Salvatore Rossi, *La politica economica italiana dal 1968 a oggi*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2020), 35–52.

<sup>5</sup> See Guido Formigoni, *Storia d'Italia nella guerra fredda (1943-1978)*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2016), 482–518.



registered 11.03%, while the 5.45% share collected by the neo-fascist party, the Italian Social Movement (MSI), made it the largest of the country's right-wing parties. While the results represented a variation compared with the outcome of the national elections of one week earlier, they essentially confirmed existing power hierarchies.

A second significant element to consider is the cross-party Europeanist orientation of the Italian political parties. All the parties participating in the elections, from the far Left to the far Right, defined themselves as Europeanists and viewed 1979 as a decisive turning point in European history. Even forces that had initially been hostile to the process of integration for political or ideological reasons found themselves viewing the elections in broadly positive terms. In addition to the parties' positions on the European question within the context of the Cold War, a major factor in this positive appraisal was the growing impact of the difficulties caused by the global crisis. For the Italian ruling classes, Europe represented the only possible path towards resolving the country's domestic problems.

## 2 THE DC PROPOSES A 'EUROPEAN CONSTITUENT'

These first European parliamentary elections were administered by the fifth Andreotti government, which was formed in March 1979 as the result of an agreement between the DC, Republicans and Social Democrats, after the PCI had withdrawn from the parliamentary majority, spelling the end of the phase of national solidarity. The new executive, which tendered its resignation after failing to secure the confidence of the Senate, would be the last of the seventh parliamentary term of the Italian Republic, which was brought to an early end by President Pertini. Speaking to the Council of Ministers in the wake of the European elections, the outgoing Prime Minister expressed his satisfaction with the results, particularly the election of two cabinet members (Christian Democrat Dario Antoniozzi and Republican Bruno Visentini). The outcome of the elections, he asserted, 'showed that the government inspired not hostility, but appreciation, in the electorate',<sup>6</sup> while the high level of voter turnout represented a 'badge of honour' for Italy.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Acs, Pcm, Consiglio dei ministri, verbali delle adunanze. Minute (1944–1996), from 28 March 1979 to 27 July 1979, minutes of 16 June 1979.

<sup>7</sup> Giulio Andreotti, *I diari degli anni di piombo*, (Milan: Solferino, 2021), 722 (10 June 1979).

This pro-government reading of the results aside, Andreotti also stressed the importance of voter turnout in legitimizing the new European Parliament. Although it had not increased its powers of intervention or broadened its sphere of competence, the introduction of direct election promised to radically alter the Parliament's relative influence within the European Community's institutional structure.

The Christian Democrats, who commanded a relative majority in Parliament, had on a number of occasions emphasized the importance of these developments. Looking forward to the elections, the party's in-house newspaper *La Discussione* published a series of columns under the title 'Verso il 10 giugno'. DC strategy sought to paint the European Popular Party (EPP) as the most authentically Europeanist of the confederations. Presenting the historical basis for this claim, figures such as Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman and Alcide De Gasperi were invoked in a sacred pantheon of Christian democrat politics as part of well-worn 'founding fathers' rhetoric.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, the historic leader of the French socialists, Guy Mollet, was depicted as a saboteur of the unification process.<sup>9</sup> The European Popular Party, however, did not just have history on its side. Of all the parties in competition, the newspaper noted, the EPP was the only one participating in all nine member states under a single, shared symbol:

With the first direct European parliamentary elections two and a half months away, the political panorama of the European Community, in effect, comprises only one party using the same symbol in all nine countries. A letter 'E' underneath a semi-circle of twelve stars, one for each of the Christian Democrat parties of the EPP.

This, it was suggested, was no minor consideration. Curating the European side to its political symbolism would allow the party to present itself to the European masses in a unified and immediately recognizable manner, proposing a supranational identity that was crucial for the process of Europeanization of peoples. No other group had 'succeeded in achieving a similar degree of cohesion', it was opined. The question was not, however, simply one of mere symbolism. The EPP represented itself as a

<sup>8</sup> See Guglielmo Zucconi, 'E se ci decidessimo a pensare europeo?', *La Discussione*, 26 March 1979, and Sereno Pignagnoli, 'L'Europa è nata perché tre cattolici nel '45 hanno detto: mai più guerra', *La Discussione*, 11 June 1979.

<sup>9</sup> See Zucconi, 'E se ci decidessimo a pensare europeo?'.

‘true party, notwithstanding its federal structure, not a mere coordinating body, like that of the Socialists’.<sup>10</sup> The other parties, meanwhile, were dismissed as either marginal, e.g. the Liberals, or else incapable of organizing a group, e.g. the Communists.<sup>11</sup>

Another important question in relation to party organization was the degree of homogeneity between parties from different nations. The Italian parties accused one another of presenting themselves in European confederate containers that lacked internal coherence and homogeneity. The DC leaders, in particular, leant heavily on this point, underlining the internal cohesion of the EPP<sup>12</sup> and arguing that there was ‘far more distance between the socialism of the French *autogestion* and German social democracy’. There was a conviction that DC leaders such as ‘Strauss and Tindemans [cohabited] much more easily than Mitterrand and Schmidt’,<sup>13</sup> two leading figures of the European Left, perceived as promoters of two different visions of socialism. Essentially, the argument ran, although differences were inevitably present in all groups, they were much more evident within the other parties.<sup>14</sup>

As the most Europeanist of the confederations in terms of history, structure and political cohesion, the EPP would, it was argued, logically be the best equipped to spearhead the forging of a European Community capable of addressing the new international challenges. In connection with this objective, the introduction of a directly elected Parliament needed to mark the beginning of a ‘constituent’ legislature, whose task would be primarily ‘pedagogical’—that of fostering ‘popular awareness’ within Europe.<sup>15</sup> Within the context of European integration, such a mission was attributed revolutionary importance. The European Parliament, it was proposed, could be ‘an ideological constituent, the crucible of a new

<sup>10</sup> Alfredo De Poi, ‘Il Partito popolare europeo è il primo partito continentale’, *La Discussione*, 19 March 1979.

<sup>11</sup> See the interview by Gennaro Schöen with Father Giuseppe De Rosa, ‘I punti-forza del programma dei dc (popolari) europei’, *La Discussione*, 4 June 1979; Zucconi, ‘E se ci decidessimo a pensare europeo?’.

<sup>12</sup> Conversation with the regional secretary of the DC in Piedmont, Giuseppe Giordana, ‘Il Ppe si batte per fare dei Nove una federazione di Stati’, *La Discussione*, 21 May 1979.

<sup>13</sup> De Poi, ‘Il Partito popolare europeo è il primo partito continentale’.

<sup>14</sup> Similar interpretations (with the roles reversed) were also given by the other parties. See, for example, the articles published in the Socialist Party newspaper *Avanti!* on 8 January 1979.

<sup>15</sup> See the interview with the European parliamentary candidate and editor of the newspaper *Avvenire*, Angelo Narducci, ‘Il fermento cristiano può far lievitare l’idea comunitaria’, *La Discussione*, 21 May 1979.

European culture', tasked with bringing about a 'genuine European cultural revolution' through the elaboration of new ideas. 'We do not know if the elections of early June will produce the Robespierres, Saint-Justs and Dantons of the European revolution, but for the good of Europe, we must hope so'.<sup>16</sup>

The analogy drawn with the French revolution was not accidental. There was a strongly rooted conviction that the elections of 1979 heralded a new beginning in European history: 'On 10 June Europe will not be born; it will begin to be born'. A process of Europeanization of the masses would arise that would lead inexorably to the disappearance of the nations: 'Sooner or later, the history of the fatherlands shall have to surrender to the voice and history of Europe, whose representatives, from the very first sessions, shall be able to proclaim: '[W]e, in the name of the people of Europe ...'.<sup>17</sup> In this new European dawn, reaping the fruits of the historical journey it had accomplished, the members of that 'new breed',<sup>18</sup> the European Parliament, were expected to play a pioneering role.

### 3 THE 'POLO LAICO': EUROSOCIALISM AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF EUROPE

The positions of the parties of the Polo Laico—whose existence was more notional than an actual reality<sup>19</sup>—inevitably reflected the individual formations' views on the Italian domestic situation. Post-election analyses were thus coloured to a significant degree by a focus on national issues: the Liberals, for example, argued that a significant factor in their success at the European elections was their clear and unequivocal opposition to the governments of national solidarity, which they had controversially dismissed as a 'free-for-all'.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Sagittarius, 'Da Strasburgo non si aspettano leggi o leggine ma le idee', *La Discussione*, 18 June 1979.

<sup>17</sup> Zucconi, 'E se ci decidessimo a pensare europeo?.'

<sup>18</sup> See the article by the secretary-general of the Christian Democratic group at the European Parliament, Giampaolo Bettamio, 'Il parlamentare europeo appartiene a una nuova razza', *La Discussione*, 21 May 1979.

<sup>19</sup> For an analysis of the difficulties faced by this political and cultural project, see Ernesto Galli Della Loggia, *Credere, tradire, vivere. Un viaggio negli anni della Repubblica*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Paolo Farneti, 'L'Europa nasce moderata', *Il Mondo*, 22 June 1979.

On the eve of the vote there was substantial agreement regarding the elections' historical importance. In the Socialist Party organ *Avanti!* on 8 June, the majority of the articles not only underlined their significance, but even claimed that the Socialists had been the first to recognize this. Similarly, on voter turnout, the newspaper argued that, unlike the other formations, the PSI had always indicated broad participation as its 'primary objective'.<sup>21</sup> Not only were the Socialists, *Avanti!* contended, the most Europeanist of the parties, they were also the most homogeneous and cohesive group at EC level, qualities that set them apart from the Christian Democrats and the EPP in particular, whose claims to being the first European party were written off as 'artifice and misrepresentation'. The judgements proffered on the other parties were equally dismissive: in spite of their efforts, the Communists were paralysed by their own isolation, while the 'intermediate parties' were reduced to playing an exclusively national game.<sup>22</sup>

Comparison with the Communists was especially significant, insofar as the situation in the European context was diametrically opposed to the national picture. In Europe, the Socialists were able to present themselves as 'the only force for change and democratic progress inspiring the peoples of all nine countries of the EEC'.<sup>23</sup> Unlike an insubstantial 'Eurocommunism', Eurosocialism was presented as the 'winning choice for Progressives', although the definition proposed by party secretary Bettino Craxi, in truth, focused on aspects of method and the importance of an ongoing process of revision, more than on any clearly identifiable content:

What is meant by Eurosocialism is the attempt over these years of socialist revisionism by the various parties, to varying extents and not by all, to update the experiences of these last few decades. A process of alignment and revision that has seen the various policy platforms grow significantly closer.<sup>24</sup>

The Socialists blamed the negative outcome of the vote mainly on abstention, claiming that the progressive parties at the European level had been worst hit by the phenomenon. This analysis was explicitly laid out in

<sup>21</sup> Carlo Ripa di Meana, 'Un programma per 250 milioni di cittadini', *Avanti!*, 8 June 1979.

<sup>22</sup> 'L'Europa dei popoli si fa con un successo socialista', *Avanti!*, 8 June 1979.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> 'Rafforzare con il voto socialista la realtà democratica dell'Europa', *Avanti!*, 9 June 1979. Article reproducing a press conference given by the PSI secretary, Bettino Craxi.

a series of articles in *Avanti!*, as well as in the liberal weekly periodical *Il Mondo*. However, in a close reading of the results, the political scientist Paolo Farneti argued that, while abstention certainly penalized the forces of the European Left and favoured the moderate Right, the reasons for this lack of success had profound roots. In reality, the electorate rewarded the traditional Europeanist forces (the DC and liberal democrats), while failing to be convinced by Eurosocialism. More precisely, Eurosocialism achieved success within the Left, but was not sufficiently competitive at the European Community level. Although in Italy, Farneti added, the progressive parties broadly performed in line with expectations, the vote ended up performing ‘a prophylactic function for the Left’, in the sense of ‘containment and defence, not a function of initiative’.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, at what was a historic moment and a huge step on the path towards democratization of the European institutions, the European Left found itself forced to act defensively and to completely rethink its strategies.

#### 4 1979: TURNING POINT FOR A PCI FACING INTERNAL OPPOSITION AND EUROPEAN ISOLATION

After its withdrawal from the government of national solidarity, the Communist Party reverted to its traditional role as the party of opposition. The European elections were a moment of symbolic importance within this repositioning process, given that national solidarity had finally come to an end over a crucial European question, namely the communist vote against Italy joining the European Monetary System. The PCI had effectively decided to withdraw its support from the government in connection with one of the key tools devised by the EC in response to the global crisis. National solidarity had, it was noted, ended ‘with a debate over the problems posed by globalization’.<sup>26</sup>

Just days before the European Parliament election, the PCI party newspaper set out the reasons that had led it to take the decision. Defending the party from the accusation of ‘false Europeanism’, the European Member of Parliament Carlo Galluzzi argued:

<sup>25</sup> Farneti, ‘L’Europa nasce moderata’.

<sup>26</sup> Agostino Giovagnoli, *La Repubblica degli italiani, 1946-2016*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2016), 100.

We have always been in favour of economic unification and thus also of European monetary unification. The fact is that there are two ways of conceiving the process of monetary unification: the first is a subaltern model that envisages the process of monetary unification as administered by the richest nations, with the poorest countries forced to comply or be marginalized. The second, envisaging a balanced development of Europe, aims to combine the introduction of measures for managing currency fluctuations with a struggle against inequalities, pursued through the appropriate reallocations of resources and the review of European agriculture, regional and social policies; as well as the establishment of a new relationship with the dollar area. We did not vote against the EMS, but rather against a certain conception of the EMS.<sup>27</sup>

From the point of view of the Communists, the instruments adopted not only would not solve the crisis, but would worsen internal divisions within Europe. The global crises had not only exacerbated pre-existing tensions and disparities, but had also posed new challenges that marked the end of the system established in the post-war period. In this sense the 1979 elections were not an opportunity to express Europeanist convictions, but rather a turning point in terms of the direction the new Europe should take. One of the peculiarities of the Italian situation was that there was a unanimous cross-party political consensus in favour of the European Community. The question at stake was, therefore, the content of the unification process. In an interview conducted a few days after the vote, one of the historical leaders of the PCI, Gian Carlo Pajetta, stressed how in Italy, unlike other countries, 'there was no competition to see who was the most European, no conflict between Europeanists and champions of national sovereignty. All the parties are pro-European, all of them believe it useful to increase the powers of the Parliament'. There was profound divergence, on the other hand, as to 'what should be the role of our continent in the world'.<sup>28</sup>

The vote against the EMS was based on a rough and ready division of Europe into wealthy and poor nations, pitting the Europe of the bourgeoisie, multinationals and the forces of conservatism against the proletariat and the forces of progress. The same reading was rigidly projected

<sup>27</sup> R.C., 'Anche domenica si decide come uscire dalla crisi. Intervista con il compagno Galluzzi candidato al Parlamento europeo', *l'Unità*, 8 June 1979.

<sup>28</sup> Giuseppe Boffà, 'Battere le forze conservatrici europee per garantire gli interessi dell'Italia', *l'Unità*, 7 June 1979.

onto the international arena. In the days preceding the vote, *l'Unità* published a series of articles and analyses in which it presented what was at stake in the elections:

The terms of the confrontation are clear: to decide whether Europe will become the Europe of the workers or the Europe of the powerful; a Europe that wishes to play a key role in the world and treat all peoples and states with equal dignity, or a Europe beholden to large multinational corporations and international economic interests.<sup>29</sup>

Building a fairer, more equal European Community, socially, economically and in terms of relations between member states was thus at the heart of the Communists' election campaign. As party secretary Enrico Berlinguer declared explicitly, 'we are going to Europe to combat the plan to divide it into two, at the very moment in which they claim to want to unify it. The South abandoned and the North developed'.<sup>30</sup> The party employed the same argument on a national scale, asserting that defending Italian interests meant first waging a battle within the European institutions to protect the country's depressed areas (of the 20 poorest regions in the EC, 17 were Italian).<sup>31</sup> The Communists' primary focus was, however, above all on the role Europe should play in the new world of global crisis. It redeployed the paradigm used to describe the European situation on a global scale: Europe needed to take upon itself the task of tackling the disparity between the North and South of the world and supporting the battles of the Global South for a New International Economic Order.<sup>32</sup> The European federalist Altiero Spinelli, standing as a candidate for the PCI, argued that this was not a traditional confrontation between Right and Left, but rather between two emerging camps: the 'innovators, that is those who wish to proceed along the EC path; and the immobilists,

<sup>29</sup> 'Tutto il partito mobilitato per il voto di domenica', *l'Unità*, 8 June 1979.

<sup>30</sup> U.B. 'Con un forte PCI peserà di più la sinistra nelle lotte e nelle decisioni in Europa', *l'Unità*, 8 June 1979.

<sup>31</sup> Boffa, 'Battere le forze conservatrici'.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, 'Da un'Europa rinnovata un contributo decisivo per la distensione e la pace', *l'Unità*, 6 June 1979; R.C. 'Anche domenica si decide come uscire dalla crisi'; interview with Giorgio Amendola 'Agricoltura e Mezzogiorno al primo posto della nostra iniziativa a Strasburgo', *l'Unità*, 9 June 1979.



comprised of forces distant from one another, like the Labour Left and the Right of the DC'.<sup>33</sup>

This line of thought—more flexible and markedly less rooted in the squabbles of domestic politics—had the advantage of marginalizing the question of the party's isolation, an issue that was particularly delicate for the PCI. On the one hand, there were internal fractures within the communist world (with the French PCF, in particular); on the other, the party's difficulty in building solid relations with the European socialists.<sup>34</sup> The situation had become even more evident with the emergence of the confederate parties, which Spinelli defined, a little surprisingly, as 'fictions'—artifices that masked the profound distances existing between the various national parties.<sup>35</sup>

The election results were described in concerned, sombre tones. No previous assembly had ever shifted so far to the Right: 'We had envisaged that Europe would be neither red nor pink. It is, in fact, iron grey'.<sup>36</sup> The European Parliament, prevalently moderate and conservative, thanks to the superior organization of the European bourgeoisie, had been born 'weak'. Eurosocijalism had failed and had not succeeded in seizing the opportunity to build a united front of the popular classes.<sup>37</sup> Reacting to this scenario, most close readings of the vote re-framed the European picture in conventional political terms. Rebutting Spinelli's arguments, Renato Sandri, among the PCI's principal experts on foreign policy, reasserted the validity of the Right-Left axis for the future of the continent. The Europe that had won had showed it had a precise 'plan' of its own, radically different from the communist one: 'neo-liberalism', 'greed towards the Third World' and 'serious reservations about détente in Europe and the world'.<sup>38</sup> This, predicted Sandri, was where the PCI needed to emerge from its isolation and work together with the socialist forces to build an alternative idea of Europe.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Altiero Spinelli, 'Un parlamento che potrà contare per cambiare le strutture della Cee', *l'Unità*, 9 June 1979.

<sup>34</sup> See Michele Di Donato, *I comunisti italiani e la sinistra europea. Il Pci e i rapporti con le socialdemocrazie (1964-1984)*, (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> Both Spinelli and Pajetta use this expression in the interviews quoted. Among many others in a similar vein, see Lucio Lombardo Radice, 'Nell'interesse della democrazia europea', *l'Unità*, 8 June 1979 or, alternatively, for Il Manifesto group, 'Partiti europei o partiti nazionali? Ciò che unisce e ciò che divide i 410 deputati di Strasburgo', *il manifesto*, 10 June 1979.

<sup>36</sup> R.R. 'Visto dall'Europa', *l'Unità*, 12 June 1979.

<sup>37</sup> 'Una prima valutazione', *l'Unità*, 11 June 1979.

<sup>38</sup> Renato Sandri, 'È possibile un progetto europeo della sinistra?', *Rinascita*, 22 June 1979.

## 5 THE 'EURODESTRA': THE MSI IN SEARCH OF POLITICAL LEGITIMIZATION

Traditionally denied constitutional legitimacy,<sup>39</sup> the Italian Social Movement (MSI) viewed the European elections as an opportunity to redefine its role and escape from political and ideological marginality. The party's efforts to free itself from its domestic situation of structural subordination began to take shape in 1978 with the 'Eurodestra' project, whose objective was, according to party secretary Giorgio Almirante, to 'join up, in a single supra-national force, all of the movements and parties of the European minority Right', with the aim of 'arriving at the creation of a European nation that is united, strong and future-oriented'.<sup>40</sup>

Views on the EC were positive within the party. The European political landscape presented a number of aspects that were looked on favourably by party leaders, including communist isolation, the prospect of membership being extended to the Mediterranean area (with the imminent entry of Greece and, subsequently, of Spain and Portugal), and the decisive victory of the Conservatives in the UK. The MSI approached the question primarily through a national lens. The party's principal adversary was, unquestionably, the Christian Democrats, whom it dismissed as the only centrist European party that was not anti-communist, and accused of having 'marginalised itself' as the result of its refusal to adhere to the European Democratic Union (an attempt to create a structural link between the PPE, the British Conservatives and the Gaullists in France)<sup>41</sup> and of representing the 'regime of clientelism and state paternalism; the regime of gradual surrender to communism; the regime of inertia towards terrorism'. Unlike Italy, the European Right was neither marginal nor isolated, but successful.<sup>42</sup> The MSI argued that these elections were 'the first truly

<sup>39</sup> See Piero Ignazi, *Il polo escluso. Profilo storico del Movimento sociale italiano*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 1998).

<sup>40</sup> 'Il Msi-Dn per un'Europa libera ed antimarxista', *Secolo d'Italia*, 7 June 1979.

<sup>41</sup> See Wolfram Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of the European Union*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 315–316.

<sup>42</sup> On the attempts to dialogue with Conservatives, in particular with the US Republicans, see Gregorio Sargonà, *La scoperta della destra. Il Movimento sociale italiano e gli Stati Uniti*, (Rome: Viella, 2019).

free [elections] in Italy', because they finally allowed citizens to 'vote according to conscience, without blackmail [...] ungovernability, fear and clientelism'.<sup>43</sup> The party's leaders saw the European political sphere as offering the party un hoped-for opportunities, an analysis that, though rudimentary, was politically effective: in southern Europe (unlike the north), the centrist forces were in constant dialogue with the Communists, making the Right the only legitimately anti-communist force. Free from the artificial constraints that held it back within the national arena, the MSI, they contended, would be able to establish itself and operate effectively.

As a right wing it comprised a peculiar blend of nationalism and Europeanism, based both on a new European 'take' on national tradition and on a revisitation of the myth of 'Europe-as-nation' that had previously circulated in the 1950s. Seeking to invoke a common ethical and civil heritage, it referenced the 'ideal world of Dante and Machiavelli, Goethe and Schiller, Descartes and Pascal' and the moral world of 'Mazzini and Gentile, Drieu La Rochelle and Brasillach', while also citing the federalist Carlo Cattaneo and the 1932 and 1942 conferences organized by the journal *Critica fascista*. Its declared aim was the construction of a new identity for 'European man' rooted in the recovery of a 're-awakened "historical memory"' of the antique Roman and Christian world. The EC, it argued, had hitherto been the result of 'steps that had been almost exclusively technical', and there was thus a need to intervene in shaping 'a European conscience' based on the above-mentioned touchstones.<sup>44</sup>

The Europe that needed to be built would be a political Europe, a 'supranational power' capable finally of resolving 'in political terms that which seems impossible in terms of economic profit',<sup>45</sup> a social Europe whose people would be represented in a Parliament that would act as a 'training ground for a European political will and legislation'.<sup>46</sup> The global challenges had further revealed the urgent need to find a solution to the crisis afoot that was political and not merely technical. The very idea of Europe, the MSI believed, was 'a right-wing idea, inasmuch as it was in opposition to a Left that spelt, and spells, subjection of man to historical

<sup>43</sup> 'Con l'Europa che va a destra domenica più voti al Msi-Dn', *Secolo d'Italia*, 8 June 1979.

<sup>44</sup> Nino Tripodi, 'L'Europa delle coscienze', *Secolo d'Italia*, 10 June 1979. Republication of the speech by the editor of the MSI's official newspaper to the party's national council on 14 January 1979.

<sup>45</sup> Nino Tripodi, 'L'Europa politica', *Secolo d'Italia*, 7 June 1979.

<sup>46</sup> 'Rafforzare il Msi-Dn per un'Europa sociale', *Secolo d'Italia*, 7 June 1979.

determinism, to collectivisms and to the massification of material and of economic need within legislation'.<sup>47</sup>

As we have noted, in the party mindset this conviction was embodied by the myth of a Europe-nation—a vision offering a syncretic blend of Nationalism and Europeanism, in which Benito Mussolini, for example, could be presented as 'a great European'. Commenting on the elections, *Secolo d'Italia* republished the editorial of the first issue of the magazine *Europa Nazione*, founded by Filippo Anfuso in 1952, which called for the formation of a 'European man' and the 'ascent of the European Nations towards a European Nation; through, that is, the yielding of the Nation to the principle of a European community expressed in another larger Nation, whose possible future characteristics and qualities we shall seek to delineate'.<sup>48</sup>

In adopting this approach, the MSI thus sought to present itself as the principal national interlocutor of the conservative majority emerging from the elections. In Admirante's view, the elections had demonstrated that antifascist prejudices had fallen away, opening up a 'path for the MSI-DN's definitive entry as the only Italian party into the area of the European, western, global Right'.<sup>49</sup> For the MSI Europe thus came to represent a hope for legitimation and a stage on which it could establish its credentials as a fully European Western Party—credible, useful and reliable.

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<sup>47</sup> Tripodi, 'L'Europa delle coscienze'.

<sup>48</sup> Filippo Anfuso, 'La Patria europea', *Secolo d'Italia*, 10 June 1979.

<sup>49</sup> Giorgio Almirante, 'La carta vincente', *Secolo d'Italia*, 12 June 1979.

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