

A Sketch of Anti-Revisionism in Italy

Part 1: The 1960s – Vigorous growth

A hundred flowers seemed too have bloomed on the Italian ML scene in the 1960s. The traditional regionalism of Italian politics was mirrored in the fragmented nature of radicalism in Italy, and was no less true of the anti-revisionist experience. The early emergence of a self-declared Italian Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) did little to unify the movement in which it seemed every city had its own group develop.



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The existence of arguably the largest and most developed of communist parties in Western Europe, a party with a history of armed resistance and mass electoral support, whose political line was subject to internationally distributed polemical criticism by the Chinese party, complicated the political environment. Internal critics of the Italian leadership had no need to draw upon the *Renmin Ribao* editorial 'Differences between Comrade Togliatti and Us'¹. The more substantial article 'More on the Differences between Comrade Togliatti and US'² was subtitled, 'Some Important Problems of Leninism in the Contemporary World'. It opens with:

At the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party of Italy Comrade Togliatti launched an open attack on the Chinese Communist Party and provoked a public debate. For many years, he and certain other comrades of the C.P.I. have made many fallacious statements violating fundamental tenets of Marxism-Leninism on a whole series of vital issues of principle concerning the international communist movement.³

The Italians were no less forthright in their criticism of the Chinese critique of 'The Italian way' accusing the Chinese comrades of being "dogmatists and sectarians who hide their opportunism behind an ultra-revolutionary phraseology"⁴. The Italian leader Togliatti said the Chinese "lacked a sense of reality".⁵ He rejected what he called the simplistically revolutionary interpretation of Marxism offered in the criticism from the CPC.

In a real sense, the decisions taken in 1948 election had abandoned any thought of a "revolutionary seizure" of power for the Italian communist party. The PCI leadership was more moderate than their base of two million supporters in the post-war years. The PCI, with nine million votes proved to be a stabilising force in the face of mounting social tensions and grass root radicalism, particularly in the summer of '48 after the attempted assassination of Togliatti.

¹ <http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sino-soviet-split/cpc/togliatti.htm>. 'Differences between Comrade Togliatti and Us' December 31, 1962.

² *Hongqi* (Red Flag), Nos. 3-4, March 4, 1963

³ <http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/MTOG63.pdf>

⁴ Luigi Longo, "The Question of Power", *L'Unita*, January 16, 1963

⁵ Togliatti, "Let Us Lead the Discussion Back to Its Real Limit", *L'Unita*, January 10, 1963.

The terms of the Polemic on the general line of the international communist movement were discussed in detail and at length, but in summary the attitude of the anti-revisionists was that the Italian party's political strategy epitomised the modern revisionists that throw overboard the most elementary principle of Marxism-Leninism, the principle of class struggle, and all they want to retain is the Marxist-Leninist label, "robbing Marxism-Leninism of its revolutionary soul". These criticisms were before the Italian and Spanish Communist Party (PCE), spearheaded the overtly reformist Euro-communist phenomenon in the 1970s. In 1963, the Chinese Party argued:

"An ideological thread alien to Marxism-Leninism runs right through the Theses for the C.P.I. Congress and Comrade Togliatti's report and concluding speech at the Congress. Along this line, they employed the same language as that used by the social-democrats and the modern revisionists in dealing both with international problems and with domestic Italian issues. A careful reading of the Theses and other documents of the C.P.I. reveals that the numerous formulations and viewpoints contained therein are none too fresh, but by and large are the same as those put forward by the old-line revisionists and those propagated from the outset by the Titoite revisionists of Yugoslavia."⁶

Togliatti strove to contain the Italian left's enthusiasm for Mao's China and he sided energetically with the CPSU as the Sino-Soviet split widened. The PCI never officially broke with Moscow but did have a process of gradual distancing and grew more autonomous to the point of denouncing the repression of the Prague Spring of 1968 and further revising their tenets and practice from promotion of "polycentrism" to the development of "Eurocommunism" in the 1970s onwards. There was some sympathy for the Chinese viewpoints within the Italian party, but never a section large enough to successfully challenge *from the Left* the existing leadership and its political line.

Militants were resentful of Togliatti's revisionist rhetoric and pragmatic opportunism. However, the effectiveness of this challenge has been limited by its lack of organization. There was a heterogeneous current of opposition which has taken different forms in different centres. Opposition within the revisionist Italian CP represented anti-revisionist tendencies rather than a single pro-Chinese faction; it was at work partly clandestinely and partly in the open. One of the centres of the movement was Padua, where four prominent Communists were expelled from the party for publishing the first of three anti-revisionist pamphlets. The dissidents there issued a statement calling for the formation of a new "revolutionary movement or party. So the first avowedly Maoist -inspired organisation emerged in Padua, with their own journal *Viva il Leninismo!* The group's name reflecting the polemical anti-revisionist politics in an article published by the CPC. The group was associated with Vincenzo Calo and Ugo Duse, began the "public" rebellion in August 1962.

There was local anti-revisionist agitation in such areas as Milan, Genoa, Sardinia and Naples. Other forums of opposition emerged in the "Italian-Chinese Friendship Association" founded in clear opposition to the PCI-controlled friendship organisation. Within five months the association was reported to have a membership of 18,000 in 16 centres; it held a national conference, and spread its influence through a pro-Chinese monthly bulletin sent by mail to party militants. Pro-Chinese sentiment was seen strong within the Communist youth organization, the FGCI (where two Communist youth clubs in Rome issued an anti-

⁶ <http://www.marx2mao.com/Other/MTOG63.pdf>

revisionist pamphlet). Both Rome and Milan saw bookshops specializing in pro-Chinese publications.

The Italian Communist Party, the largest in Western Europe, has repeatedly come out in favour of Moscow against Peking and, in particular, welcomed the nuclear test ban agreement. When the Central Committee met in July 1963 it gave a warning that the acceptance of the Chinese theses would condemn the communist parties either to stagnation or to extremist adventures; at the same time it reiterated its faith in the Italian road to socialism and in united fronts as a means of advance in Western Europe. The leaders denied that there is any "Chinese wing" or crisis in the Party, although they claimed that the Chinese are using elements outside the Party to further their subversive activities and that in some branches the Chinese theses have been heatedly debated.

The PCI, in response, tried to divert the open criticism into the channels of controlled debate. In the May-June issue of the party review *Critica Marxista* a Paduan dissident, Giorgio Tosi, entered into controversy with ex-Partisan and member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies on the PCI list, Luigi Longo on the PCI's peaceful road to socialism -- which he roundly denounces as "a reactionary utopia." Longo, who, in 1964, after the death of Palmiro Togliatti, became secretary of the PCI, travelled to Padua to lay down the party line at a local Communist "discussion"; the *Unita* report claims he was successful. The promised "ideological debate" would not be allowed to get out of control.

Italian interest in China was stimulated by '*Le Divergenze tra il compagno Togliatti e noi*' (Differences Between Comrade Togliatti and Us) published in 1963 by the CCP. It was a response to the Tenth Italian Communist Party Congress. Then, Italian leader Togliatti had directly criticised the Chinese party for its positions against de-Stalinisation, and its arguments on the politics within the international movement.

Reill distils the essence of the Chinese argument to a question: "short but sweet, here it goes: Divergenze asked the accusatory question: Italian communists, what have you done since the war?"⁷

Where was today the equivalent of the "glorious history of struggle"? Old and young proved receptive to a return to revolutionary politics, to reinvigorate Italian communism practice and to recapture that energy and momentum that partisan communism had embodied a generation earlier. The post-war history of cooperation and peaceful coexistence with political struggle and progress seen increasingly restricted to the parliamentary arena was criticised. This reverberated with veterans of the Partisan resistance – e.g. Giuseppe Regis and Luciano Raimondi – as well as younger activists schooled in the teachings of Marx and Lenin.

"Just as 'Old Guard' Partisans responded with interest to Divergenze's call to reinstall Italian communism with the revolutionary values they had fought for during World War Two, baby boomers framed their Maoism with the rites and rituals of their spiritual parents, the Partisans." even to the extent of emulating the practice of "partisan weddings"⁸

In 1963 the Milan publishing house, *Edizioni Oriente* (Eastern Editions) was established by ex-Partisan Giuseppe Regis, his wife Maria Arena (who worked as a translator in Beijing 1957-1961) and Mireille De Gouville, after a trip to China. The publishers translated and distributed Maoist texts which played a very important role in dissemination of ideological

⁷ Reill, Dominique Kirchner, "The Little Red Book in Italy and Yugoslavia" in Cook, A (2014) *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History*. Cambridge University Press p188

⁸ Reill 2014: 194

viewpoints from China. Giuseppe Regis had demonstrated organizational skills and was undoubtedly well-known within governmental circles in Beijing acting during 1958-1960 as a functionary of the PCI Trade and the only director of an overseas company for the export-import with China. Reill draws attention to Regis' explanation that their interest in China was a direct consequence of their experience in Italy's resistance movement and their disillusion with Cold War European Socialism⁹ interest in China grew because of its political nature, this involved many intellectuals, writers, journalists and some universities (Venice, Milan, Rome and Naples). The magazine *Wind Europe*, the daily *Il Manifesto*, the friendship organisation 'Organization Italy-China organized trips to China', all contributing to a cultural environment favourable towards the People's Republic of China.

There were pro-China sentiments evident in organisations and publications outside of the strictly anti-revisionist tradition. Best known were **Quaderni Rossi**, a periodical published by an extremist break-away faction of the PSIUP (Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity) and **Classe Operaia**, a periodical produced by some 600 dissidents with Trotskyite and pro-Chinese leanings.

Ritorniamo a Lenin!

Among the voice that emerged among the clamour was that of the Rome-based faction behind the journal ***Ritorniamo a Lenin!*** (Let Us Return to Lenin), which describes itself as an "internal opposition bulletin." But tinges of Trotskyism were evident.

Domestically, *Ritorniamo a Lenin!* called for the creation of a new revolutionary front, composed of dissident Communists and socialists, which would eventually become a new Communist Party pledged to seek the dictatorship of the proletariat. Abroad, the group looks to coordination with similar factions and the creation of a new Revolutionary International, headed by the Chinese—but not controlled by them. Unusual for first wave anti-revisionists, the *Ritorniamo a Lenin!* militants were not only anti-revisionists; they are also anti-Stalinists. They do, indeed, make it clear that they have been inspired and encouraged by the Chinese challenge to the Soviet party. Thus their bulletin claims that "pro-Chinese interventions in the local sections of the PCI and the PSI are becoming ever more numerous; pro-Chinese groups are being formed everywhere; pro-Chinese publications are appearing in all the cities of Italy." But this allegiance was far from unconditional. Whereas the Chinese insist that "to repudiate Stalin completely is in fact to negate Marxism-Leninism" *Ritorniamo a Lenin!* accused Khrushchev of having perpetuated "Stalinist degeneration" and of having made the dead dictator a scapegoat "in order to preserve the essence of Stalinist policy a reformist and bureaucratic idea of revolution, which has led to the theory of revolution by stages, and hence to the internal suppression of proletarian democracy and the external policy of peaceful co-existence, with the resulting sabotage of revolutionary movements, as in Spain, Greece and China itself."

The initial defence of Stalin obscured the criticism of Soviet practice that represented in maturing Maoist critiques, a rupture with the past positions and practice associated with Stalin. The avenue opened up in the Polemic by the Chinese was from the left, and the criticism of *Ritorniamo a Lenin!* was that the anti-revisionist movement could not simply defend the experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat, to try and preserve and simply replicate the Soviet experiment, enshrined in a dogmatic defence of Stalin (as Enver Hoxha

⁹ Reill :190 [Footnote 7]

was to do), but rather to reflect on the period and the actions of the revolutionaries and bring forth alternative approaches, much more obvious with the start of the Cultural Revolution, in the building of socialism as occurred in China under Mao.

“The Chinese comrades' struggle against Khrushchev's revisionism has been accompanied by the exaltation of Stalin, and this is self-contradictory, because what they are fighting is the whole Stalinist policy, the Stalinist idea, continued by Khrushchev in a partly different form. . . .The overcoming of their present theoretical limitations in this respect . . . will stimulate the struggle of revolutionary vanguards for the formation of Marxist-revolutionary movements and eventually of a new Revolutionary Communist International.”¹⁰

This stand leads logically to the complaint in another article that "the Chinese comrades continue to lean on the support of old Stalinists in the USSR and various other Communist parties, to whom they are united by common opposition to Khrushchev, but with whom they have nothing in common as regards their program and the revolutionary struggle." The article suggests that the main reason for such "remnants of opportunism and lack of understanding" lies in (the Trotskyist perspective?) "the Stalinist intellectual and political formation" of the Chinese leaders; the latter, it is hoped, will come to realize that Stalinist bureaucracy can only be over-come by "effective proletarian democracy . . . and the fullest liberty for all tendencies and parties which are unconditionally dedicated to the defense of the Workers State.

The emergence in 1964 of the newspaper, *Nuova Unità* (New Unity) by **the Movimento Marxista-Leninista Italiano**, in opposition to the better known Communist Party daily, *L'Unità*, proclaimed the need to abandon the party of Togliatti and build a new revolutionary party .The well-known anti-revisionist, Jacques Grippa, visited Italy for talks in Milan with the staff of the new antirevisionist monthly *Nuova Unità*. This was like a seal of international recognition. Its' national convention, held January 1966 attracted over one thousand observers and adherents.

An attempt to consolidate the various Maoist groups collectively, saw the publication of "Proposal for a Platform of Italy Marxist-Leninists" rally a core of a militants around *Nuova Unità*, that became the publication of the "**Partita Comunista d'Italia Marxist-Leninist**" founded in Leghorn. The Congress of Trustees of the Party Comunista of Italy (Marxist-Leninist) was held from October 14 to 16 1965. The executive of the new party comprises, in addition Frangioni, Dinucci, Pesce, and Balestri. The congress elected as secretary 45-year-old Pisan a pharmacist, a former guerrilla commander and a dissent member of the PCI, Fosco Dinucci.

The choice of Livorno as the birthplace of the new party was symbolic, determined by the fact that the first Communist Party of Italy was founded by Togliatti in Livorno on 21 January 1921. The leadership of PCD'I was taking a "historic task" to rebuild a "new and conscious edge, which aims to reorganize the proletariat and the popular masses" through the foundation of the true revolutionary party. And decided to structure the PCD'I as a "small PCI", with cells, federations and steely democratic centralism. October 1966, saw one hundred delegates at its first National Congress in Livorno. The argument it used was a familiar one. The Congress in a statement said that the Communist Party of Italy has degraded into a revisionist Party. Under the banner of "peaceful evolution," it has tried to

¹⁰ Ritorniamo a Lenin! (Rome; Sept. 30, 1963)

undermine the revolutionary consciousness of the working class and make them renounce their historic mission. Therefore, it is necessary to found a new Party.

In Rome, a national congress was held, that of many regions, from Lombardy to Sicily, was attended by delegations. The members of the Milan group, Giuseppe and Maria Regis were at the congress in Rome but did not enter into the new organisation, which was symptomatic of the division within the anti-revisionists trends.

Oswaldo Pesce and Dino Dini, members of the Political Bureau visited China during the Cultural Revolution in August 1968, meeting for “very cordial talk” with Chairman Mao and present on the occasion were Comrades Chou En-lai, Chen Po-ta, Kang Sheng, Chiang Ching and Yao Wen-yuan. The obligatory banquet for the delegation and “Comrade Kang Sheng and Comrade Yao Wen-yuan had a very cordial conversation with the Italian comrades” reported Peking Review. The meeting was immortalized in a photo where you saw the two Italian representatives together with Chinese leaders. Official Chinese media reportage of such foreign delegation was essentially sparse in detail, restricted to little more than arrival and departure and that dinner was enjoyed by all. The party leaders were on several occasions invited to Tirana.

The Italian party promoted its politics in a style adopting Chinese political practices and iconography; General Secretary of the Party Fosco Dinucci “had pointed out to all Party militants the task of studying continuously and conscientiously Mao Tse-tung's thought, “the creative Marxism-Leninism at the highest level in the present era, and the permanent guide to revolutionary action.”

The weekly *Nuova Unità*, January 20 1968, stated that all Party members were reading the ‘Little Red Book’ of Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-tung and have distributed it widely among the Italian people and workers, studying Quotations chapter by chapter, and the Italian edition of Chairman Mao's other works, and were called upon to report regularly on the development and experience in the campaign of studying Mao Tse-tung's thought.

The Second National Organizational Work Conference that year called on the entire Party to study “Chairman Mao’s works conscientiously and apply Chairman Mao's teachings to the revolutionary practice in Italy.” “The Party should make all-out efforts in this because so long as it grasps Mao Tse-tung's thought it can defeat imperialism, revisionism and the reactionaries.”¹¹

Still within the movement the experience was of dissent groups, often city-based, factional in character and competing vanguards in the making. There were differences in organisational form and operation before embracing the terrain of strategic political lines and ideological clarification regarding relationships to the existing PCI, mass line and what constituted in practice revolutionary anti-revisionism, and the consequences following the shared indictment, along with the Chinese party, of the “Italian road to socialism”.

The PCd'I (ml) may have had some localised strength, both active and militant, yet it still did not constitute a serious alternative to the hegemony of the PCI in the Italian labour movement. 1967 was the year of greater expansion of PCd'I: At its peak (around 1966-68) the party comprised around 20,000 members active in over 100 locations around Italy. It was

¹¹ Dinucci is quoted in *Peking Review* *14, 1968.

to be the largest group of the extreme left at that time. The organisation had added to its founding members (the old communists militants, often with a partisan past) a significant number from the newly radicalised student movements of the late Sixties.

However the PCd'I (ml) entered a downward path in October 1968 following a rupture among the Central committee leadership that has subsequently been represented as a struggle between the black line and the red line. Simplifying the argument, a group headed by Fossco Dinucci and Pesce were accused of politically favouring a dogmatic "liturgy of the Little Red Book" that was inconsistent and opposed operating on the principles and practice of the mass line.

They were all in tune with their understanding of Mao. For militants from the PCI, Maoism was often taken as a simple continuation of Stalinism. Those new militants, having forged their previous militancy in student movements or where militants were present within a number of different cultural and political criticism, were more inclined often raised against dogmatism of elderly comrades and cast a critical eye on the work of the Soviet Union, including that of the Stalinist period. The main issue that divided the two generations of militants was on the role of Stalin. It was evident that there were some who came from a long militancy in the PCI had become Maoists just because Mao was against the Soviet Union in Khrushchev and re-evaluated Stalin. These were drawn to the Albanian Comintern orthodoxy. However after the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the inspiration of mainly younger militants was from the politics of the Polemic and the developments within China: this beginning to better understand Mao, to learn and study Mao Tse-Tung Thought, and Mao took a different role in context of the international communist movement.

Osvaldo Pesce, the first leader of PCd'I and then the next "black line", says: "We were certainly somewhat 'dogmatic, and I admit that I was also personally be, but was it just the fight against the betrayal of the PCI? Was it just the fight against the betrayal of Soviet Union? This was the [...] core was to do away with imperialism and capitalism, have a new world, different, where a being is equal to all others."¹²

Their political opponents, the Peruzzi-Gracci grouping, favoured the activism and the mass movement implications of the Cultural Revolution. The young militants were attracted to the other Mao, namely Mao of the Cultural Revolution, Mao says that "Bombard the headquarters." Be critical of the Party. But the issue did not end here, the Cultural Revolution was an element of rupture:

*"Mao says," to continue the tradition and make communist communism must break with the leadership, we must break with the structure of party rebel is unfair, that is necessary to rebel against capitalist tendencies that breed in the socialist society. We need in need to make a Cultural Revolution, in ideas, in one's conscience."*¹³

The Cultural Revolution was interpreted as an invitation to move towards a direct democracy and practice at the level of mass to establish relationships, actual democracy in which, through the practice of criticism and for self-criticism, those relationships become

¹² Niccolai, Roberto (1998) *When China Was Near. The Cultural Revolution and the Italian Far Left in the '60s and '70s*, Pisa e Pistoia, Biblioteca Franco Serantini e Centro di Documentazione di Pistoia

¹³ Ditto Niccolai (1998)

increasingly real. Pesce points out that " democracy in the sense of multi-party, or institutional forms of bourgeois democracy, I believe that Mao had no interest. " Angiolo Gracci –the leader of the "red line" – argues that "the intellectualism, competitive ambitions leadership meant the Marxist-Leninists split on ideological and theoretical issues on principle, each positioning itself as the best interpreter of "right thinking" by Mao Tse-tung, Lenin, Stalin and so on.

After an initial period when two PCd'I (ml) advertised themselves, Peruzzi founded the newspaper "The Party" while Dunucci retained the use of "New Unity" / *Nuova Unità*. There were further poles of attraction: Duse and Calò established **the League dei Marxist-Leninisti** "and the magazine" *Il Comunista* "were founded with its headquarters in Milan. *Il Comunista*, had rejected the self-declared leadership of Dinucci's PCI (ML):

"It is mistaken from the standpoint of principle because the setting up of a Marxist-Leninist party presupposes at least essential lines of a policy, a strategy and tactics that have been worked out while these have always been absent in *Nuova Unità* and are still absent today even after the proclamation of the party. The repetition of the general theses worked out by the Albanian Workers' party or the Chinese comrades does not mean that one is a Marxist-Leninist nor does it offer any revolutionary prospects to the Italian masses."

As in debates reflected elsewhere among European Marxist-Leninists, Ugo Duse regarded the creation of the PCd'I (ml) as premature. However arguing that the Italian working class should be seen as integrated in the "system" and that revolutionary advance lay in the Third World, he advanced a minority reading of Chinese policy that had emerged and developed elsewhere in the European movement and found expression in the Danish grouping around Gotfred Appel. The focus on advance in the Third World as a precursor to advance in the industrialised nations was read into Lin Biao's call for the world countryside to surround the imperialist cities. The Italian attempt to raise volunteers to fight in Vietnam met with no success.

The majority of the organisation was unwilling to dismiss the revolutionary potential in Italy and participated in the creation of the ML Federation, leaving a small core with Duse in a group that underwent further divisions. Among them was a pro-Lin Biao breakaway in Brescia in 1970 maintaining the line of the encirclement of cities from the countryside. This lasted a few years and was associated with (the future Italian senator) Elidio de Paoli. The Regis-led group was first in Lombard of many pro-Chinese movements that were to coalesce in the "**Federazione dei Marxist-Leninisti d'Italia**", which among others, saw the Sicilian group "Il Proletario" join.

Its founding congress in Milan July 1966, comprised a nuclei of young activists from the MLLCI's youth organisation, Communist Youth league (ML), the Communist Action group headed by Luciano Raimondi, some previously non-aligned Marxist-Leninists and those close to the publication "*East*".

The Federation held its first Congress towards the end of 1967 and published a paper called "*Proletarian Revolution*".

Federation of Marxist-Leninist Italy criticised the PCD'I for its bureaucracy, said to derive from the fact that almost all members of the new Communist Party came from the PCI bringing *its* way of doing things and practices with them.

Rejecting the organising principles of democratic centralism, the federation had arose out of attempts to strengthen the common theoretical and mass activities of what were various dissipate groups of activists.. It sought to develop, through a synthesis process, a revolutionary organisation that would resolve differences in the existing ideological and political lines. A common approach on the importance of revolutionary consciousness, a focus on immediate action and a shared internationalism was insufficient and could not hide the tensions as some advocated lessons and inspiration drawn from Castro and the Cuban revolution and Che Guevra as important elements to integrate with Maoist uninterrupted revolution.

After August 1966, with the explosion of the activities of the student-dominated Red Guard in China's 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution',

“All of a sudden, interest in Mao's thought exploded from the relatively limited meetings of the Maoist political parties, and now included a myriad of participants, most under the age of thirty, who responded to the idea of liberation” from old hierarchies, old injustices, and old hypocrisies.”¹⁴

What shaped the ultra-leftism of western Maoists' radicalism was an activism, emboldened by the purity of principles and receptive to the call for “Struggle-criticism – transformation”, that embraced the spirit of “dare to think, dare to speak, and dare to act” emulating from reports on China's Cultural Revolution.

There was the sweeping exaltation of all things Chinese inspired by the dynamic radicalism of the Cultural Revolution and the understanding of what was happening in China, generated commitment and political practice from disputatious students of ideological interpretation to the supporters and partisans of organised armed militancy.

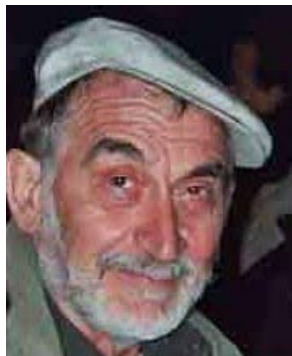
Pro-Chinese sympathisers in Italy were frequently young students and other intellectuals as was the case in much of Western Europe. The Italian Marxist-Leninist movement reflected the Maoist line in China, whether attacking Liu Shao-Chi's “How To Become a Good Communist” to following the twists and turns of the domestic struggle in China throughout the 1970s.

While all groups would acknowledge and emphasis the need for the unification of ml groups all over Italy, the impetus for dialogue and initiative to stimulate dialogue and discussion floundered on basic disagreements let alone the merits of the movement for the liberation of South Tyrol, and the later struggle of the Red Brigades. Although in San Marino the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), San Marino, was created in 1968 in association with the CPI (ml). They participated in the parliamentary elections in 1969 (gaining 1.24%) and in 1974 (0.8%, that is 121 votes).

The **Marxist–Leninist Revolutionary Party of Italy** (*Partito Rivoluzionario (marxista-leninista) d'Italia*) was founded in August 1968 by Luciano Raimondi and with Giuseppe Mai

¹⁴ Reill 2014:191

as secretary following a split from the Federation of Marxist-Leninist Communists of Italy. It was short-lived dissolving in June 1970. Mai went onto become managing director of UCI (ml)'s newspaper up until July 1971.



Giuseppe, who started back in the Young Communist League had been repeatedly arrested (and in 1968 for taking part in the street clashes, in 1973 as a former editor of "Serve the People" and in 1981 was for taking part in an extremist organization of terrorist purposes). In 1983, he emerged as a member of **CARC - Committees to Support Resistance for Communism**, founded his own publishing house. In 1985, he was again accused of extremism, and spent a year in prison.

There was another PCI (ML), founded after a split at the end of 1968 by Vincenzo Misefari, formerly Editor of *Nuova Unità*. Another former PCI (ML) leader, Osvaldo Pesce, broke away in 1970 to form the Organization of Marxist-Leninist Communists.

Among other groupings in Italy's many-splintered ultra-left one might mention as significant the Union of Italian Communists (Marxist-Leninist) better known by its publication *Servire il Popolo* (*Serve the People*).

Union of Italian Communists (Marxist-Leninist) (*Unione dei Comunisti Italiani (marxisti-leninisti)*) was founded in Rome on 4 October 1968. It published the newspaper, *Servire il popolo*. The main leaders of UCI (m-l) were Aldo Brandirali, Enzo Todeschini, Angelo Arvati and Enzo Lo Giudice. After an internal split at the end of 1970, the main group of the leaders moved from Rome to Milan.

UIC(ml) "actually fashioned themselves as members of China's Red guard; they practiced "self-criticism" sessions; they marched into the countryside intent on "serving and teaching the peasants; they instilled in their members a strict observance of party hierarchy and order; and they concentrated their efforts on educating "pioneers" by introducing Maoist teachings into day care centres and afterschool programs."

In addition to be inspired by the thought of Mao Tse-tung, the Union was seen for many years as represented the Stalinist line more consistently practiced in Italy. **Aldo Brandirali** oversaw the so-called "democratic centralism", with the decision centre (represented mostly by Brandirali) not for nothing called himself the "core of steel" that had to be tempered "by the fire of class struggle" in order to lead the Union to the foundation of the "great, glorious and correct" Communist Party (ML) Italian.

The aspirations of the party expressed in its publications "Program of the Revolutionary Government" published in the book "Thesis project for the founding congress of the PC (m-l)." Edizioni Serve the People, 1972.

On 15 April 1972 the UCI (m-l) was transformed into Italian (Marxist-Leninist) Communist Party (Partito Comunista (marxista-leninista) Italiano), and even participated in elections and received 85,000 votes.

The PC (m-l)I had a front organization amongst Italians in West Germany, called Union of Italian Migrant Workers (Federazione Italiani Lavoratori Emigrati – FILE). FILE also maintained relations with the KBW – Communist League of West Germany (Kommunistischer Bund Westdeutschland). West German state security estimated the membership of FILE to be 1200 people, and it dissolved in 1974.¹⁵



The PC (ML)I was dissolved in 1978. Aldo Brandirali, on his travels to the right, became a supporter of the Catholic organization "community and liberation". Some of his ex-comrades stayed left and participated in the less rigorously centralised, *Autonomia Operaia*.

Like in other European countries, the student movement briefly erupted in 1967/68. It is impossible to list all the Italian revolutionary groups that flowered in this period because some did not exist longer than one semester and although expressing a high level of abstraction theory they were able to win some students and some professors, but had no relationship to the working classes. Ideological coherence was not reflected in organisational longevity.

The MS ("Student Movement" or Movimento Studentesco)

The Trento University strike and police repression of anti-Vietnam war demonstrations were the activists' background to the students' critique of the existing education system issued in the 'Manifesto for a Negative University'. It was a political challenge to the new sociology diplomas that would be radicalised as the protestors increasingly came to use workerist rhetoric and symbols, and widen their criticism to outside society. Among this fertile argumentative melee new publications and groups emerged.¹⁶

The editors of a new magazine included two future founders of the *Brigate Rosse*, Mara Cagol and Renato. In late 1968 the entire board joined the Maoist PCd'I (ml) only to leave the party as part of the more activist 'Red Line' (Linea Rossa) faction.¹⁷

The *Student Movement* (of the University of Milan, later renamed simply MS). The founders of this group, including M. Capanna and S. Toscano, L. Cafiero, refused to join existing organizations mls and arose largely independent of existing ML organisations, but were soon capable of mobilising large numbers particularly for anti-fascist demonstration. Following the bombing of Milan's Agricultural bank in December 1969, some 50,000 protested on 31 January 1970 against the bombing.

¹⁵ According to Wikipedia entry

¹⁶ The distinction between PCs (ml) and Pcd'I (ml) or between UCI (ml) and Federation ml of Italy, between the acronyms and tangle of names and lines of the late sixties and early seventies is documented (in the Italian language) and explored for the maoist universe in Italy has its "planets and meteors" in Roberto Niccolai, *When China Was Near*.

¹⁷ For a sympathetic appraisal of the future direction of the Red Brigade leadership see "Strike One to educate One Hundred"

On December 12, 1969, a bomb exploded in the Piazza Fontana in the centre of Milan. This act of terror initiated a decade of political terrorism in Italy: the so-called “Years of Lead”.

The Milan bomb was left in a bank and killed about twenty people. It was originally blamed on anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli. This accusation was vigorously contested in anarchist circles, and by the Maoist Student Movement which was popular among the students



of Milan's universities. They judged the bombing to have the hallmark of a fascist operation.

Their evaluation of the event eventually proved correct, but only after many years of difficult investigations. The atrocity carried out by the neo-fascists of Ordine Nuovo (manipulated in part by elements of the secret service) was part of “the strategy of tension” devised by the extreme Right to contribute to a mood of panic in which strong law and order administration – possibly military intervention – would be welcomed by the Italian public.

Neo-fascist Vincenzo Vinciguerra later declared the bombing to be an attempt to push the Italian state to declare a state of emergency, in order to lead to a more authoritative state.

Later it emerged that this terror “Strategy of Tension” was part of a wider conspiracy by elements of the secret state codenamed, OPERATION GLADIO.

The political unrest – seen as the danger of 'internal subversion'- was widespread, and the far right were often used by elements within the “secret state” in Italy, active in a “strategy of tension”, to create chaos as a pretext, a justification for repression; "creating a situation of such tension as to require military intervention".

Gladio was part of a Europe wide network of “stay behind” cells established under N.A.T.O. auspices to resist a supposed Soviet occupation of Western Europe and as in Italy, they were involved in terrorism and coups d'etat in Greece, Turkey and Belgium.

This was all made public as the result of a lone magistrate's inquiries into the slaying of three police officers by a car bomb in 1972. The bombers were members of Gladio. They had even used Gladio explosives. One of the bombers, Vincenzo Vinciguerra, has claimed that the fascist group thought responsible 'Ordine Nuovo' ('New Order') was a secret service invention. All this is examined in Swiss historian Daniele Ganser's 2005 study, *NATO's Secret Armies: Operation Gladio and Terrorism in Western Europe*.

Italy's left-wing organisations continued to be blamed for bombings carried out by right-wing terrorists. Fascist "black terrorists," such as 'Ordine Nuovo' and the Avanguardia Nazionale, were, in the 1980s-90s, found to be responsible for several terrorist attacks. The Red Brigades

carried out assassinations against individuals, but weren't responsible for any indiscriminate bombings. The Red Brigades killed socialist journalist Walter Tobagi, and, in their best known operation, kidnapped and assassinated Aldo Moro, president of the Christian Democracy, who was trying to include the Communist Party in the government through the 'Compromesso Storico' ('Historic Compromise')

December 12, 1969 a few hours after the fascist bombing in Milan, a large police operation intended to strike at the most radical political groups, among these the Union of Italian Communists (Marxist-Leninists) (UCIML) which in the days following was subject to dozens of raids, detentions, arrests, and seizures of homes and propaganda materials including a police search in Rome on December 14 of the UCI's Rome headquarters. In January there was a split in the organisation as it was preparing for the congress that would see it transform from a mere "union" into a full-fledged "party".

The attack upon the revolutionary left in Italy was not limited to state surveillance and harassment. As *Serving the People* - the organ of the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), Italian, previously UCI (ml)- reported throughout Italy the long wave of 1969 workers and student were protesting, clashing with the police in the streets and in the factories. escalating street actions e.g. the riots that lasted several hours: barricades were erected in the city centre, shops looted and police battled on the occasion of the strike in Turin, and Valdagno Maestro and the student demonstrations between October 1967 and June 1968 and in the area of Crotona in Calabria in a peasant revolt 1967.

Unsurprisingly action condemned by the CPI as initiated by irresponsible individuals who had nothing to do with the labour movement. However, even setting aside the political armed struggles and right-wing terrorism, Italy in the early 1970s was a time of intense crisis and resistance with reports carried in the left wing press

"...the Committee against the high cost of living has called the workers to fight in the roadblock that has found solidarity of many other people, involvement was such that they arrived the police who tried to bludgeon to release the block but were rejected by the determination of young people ... thanks to these agitations the increase has not yet been applied ... a small victory against the evil government policy"

Figure 1"-200 Workers carry a roadblock against the rising bread ... rejected a provocation by the police ...

In the winter of 1971, the fascist aggression on parties and trade unions of the Left became daily news. The chronicle of what happened in January 1971, reproduced from the weekly newspaper, *Serve the People*, the organ of the Union of Italian Communists (Marxist-Leninist), noted in the southern city of Bari

January 6, 1971: Four students of the revolutionary left are attacked by a gang of fascists armed with sticks and chains and then assault, devastating the UCI headquarters (ml) stealing £40,000 and two red flags. The police did not intervene.



January 9, 1971: assaulted in broad daylight of activists of the Anti-Imperialist and Anti-Fascist Committee. The police, to prevent an organized response, raided the headquarters of the firm Italia-Albania

Sunday, January 10, 1971 the main entrance of the headquarters of the UCI (ml) was fire-bombed.

January 12, 1971 attack by a team of well-known fascist thugs armed with sticks against two young comrades reported that several fractures to the hands and legs.

January 16, 1971 the response of the left is an event organized by the Anti-Fascist Committee

January 17, 1971 at 20.00 Fascists in Bari respond in their own way: storm the headquarters of the Union of Italian Communists (ml) devastate unhinging doors and furniture they then set fire to it.

The next decade was to be equally challenging for the young Maoist movement but ultimately prove destructive as it was subject to changing political developments both near and far throughout the 1970s.