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Young Partisans and “Ragazzi con la maglietta a strisce”. Communist Youth in Italy between the Resistance and July 1960. A Gender and Generational Study. PhD Project*

The thesis deals with Communist youth in Italy between 1943 and 1960. The main aim of the research is to explore the change in the political identities and behaviour of Italian young radicals between the Resistance War and the late 1950s. To do this, the topic is approached from different angles, in an attempt to overcome the barriers between political, social and cultural history.

The first chapter focuses on the history of Communist youth organizations between 1943 and 1960. Through an extensive analysis of Party documents, the chapter illustrates the organic allegiance of these networks to the Communist Party, on the basis of the Leninist principle of “democratic centralism”. The crisis of this top-down relationship between the “adult” Party and its youth organizations in the aftermath of 1956, and the subsequent emergence of youth dissent within the Party, is extensively analysed. Through a comparison with the youth organizations of the French Communist Party, the chapter endeavours to investigate whether (or to what extent) the developments in the Italian Communist youth networks were the result of specific decisions of the Italian leadership or whether they should be seen as the fulfilment of external Soviet directives.

The second chapter focuses mainly on Communist pedagogy for young people. It deals with the educational ideas of some of the most prominent Communist thinkers (most notably, Antonio Gramsci), and the way in which they were put into practice within the Party – in its publications for young people, and in the schools for prospective cadres. Through an examination of the Party magazines for young people, the chapter stresses the increasing difficulty faced by Italian Communists in dealing with the diffusion of commercial mass culture. Even though in principle the latter was ideologically described as an American Trojan horse that corrupted the minds and souls of the younger generations, in practice Communist youth magazines drew largely on the design and the style of commercial weeklies to reach a wider audience.

The third chapter deals with the gendered content of Communist youth policies. Through an analysis of different issues (namely, the fact that until 1957 girls had to be part of separate youth branches; the priority given to marriage and family over work as the defining elements of girls’ lives; the daily activities organised for girls, including cake baking and beauty competitions) the chapter outlines the female role models put forward in the Communist movement. It stresses the significance of the change that took place in the late 1950s, when

* Supervisors: Prof. Christopher Duggan, Dr. Matthew Worley. *Editors’ note:* “Il ragazzo con la maglietta a strisce” means “The boy with a striped t-shirt” and is the title of the autobiography of Fausto Bertinotti, one of the leaders of the Rifondazione Comunista, published in 2005.

the importance of work as a precondition for girls' independence was eventually acknowledged within the Party. In the light of the "specific" content of Communist policies for girls, the masculine, virile, patriarchal essence of the "universal" Communist youth policies is also discussed.

In the fourth chapter, the emergence of different generations of Communist militants is analysed. The category of "political generation" is here defined as a group of young people who enter the public arena for the first time at a specific political conjuncture, which ends up influencing their idea of militancy and their political identity in the long term. On the basis of an analysis of the political biographies of different groups of militants, it is suggested that three generations of young Communist militants can be distinguished in this period: the generation of Antifascism, who entered the Party during World War II or during its aftermath; the generation of the Cold War, which was politically socialized at the height of the East-West confrontation; and the post-1956 generation, who shared a more "liberal" political – and cultural – mindset, more similar to that of the radical students and workers of 1968.

Based on an extensive research involving a wide range of sources (documents of the Party and the National archives; youth magazines; sociological surveys; autobiographies and memoirs; interviews with former young Communists), the thesis aims to offer an original contribution to our understanding of the processes of cultural and political change among Italian youth after World War II. Moreover, it endeavours to highlight some crucial (and unresolved) dilemmas for Italian Communists in dealing with cultural modernization and the spread of commercial, consumption-based mass culture.

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