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The *école barisienne*: a cultural and political endeavour after 1968

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The '*école barisienne*' refers to a group of intellectuals, active between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1980s, who brought their academic and political activity together in order to bring the cultural heritage of Italian communism up to date and to construct a new theory of the revolution. Interpreting the student movement of 1968 as the historical agent of a social and political revolution, their intention was to transform the Italian Communist Party (PCI) into a '*partito-società*' ('party-society') that could take hold of the new generation's demand for democracy and overturn the hegemony of Christian Democracy, understood as the '*partito-Stato*' ('party-state'). This article retraces the life of this intellectual grouping, from the education of its proponents, marked by the Southern Question as a national question, through to the demise of their project. Specifically, it examines the relationship between the research activity of the *école*, highlighting some significant analytical categorisation used in its historiographical output, its political activity, and the national position of the PCI.

Keywords: Italian Communist Party; PCI; Marxist historiography; *école barisienne*; political cultures; Italian South; Puglia.

The *école barisienne*

From the end of the 1960s until the early 1980s, a group of intellectuals who were members of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) attempted to regenerate communist culture and rethink how the party functioned. The transition to socialism; the relationships between socialism and democracy, between hegemony and pluralism, and between the PCI and society; the political role of intellectuals: these were the central issues for their elaboration of theory, which they combined with activism.

This cultural and political endeavour, championed by scholars at the University of Bari, involved historians, philosophers, sociologists, lawyers and economists: Franco De Felice, Giuseppe Vacca, Mario Santostasi, Biagio De Giovanni, Aldo Schiavone, Giancarlo Aresta, Luigi Masella, Giuseppe Caldarola, Franco Cassano, Franco Botta, Giuseppe Cotturri, Pietro Barcellona, Francesco Fistetti, Luciano Canfora, Marcello Montanari, Arcangelo Leone De Castris, and others. Sharing the same concerns and their interpretation of the student movement of 1968 as a 'social revolution', they engaged in collaborative work and constituted 'a community of learning and practice' (Blasi 2007, 6–7). When their initiative acquired national recognition, the descriptions '*scuola di Bari*' (school of Bari) and '*école barisienne*' came into use. The French epithet, although coined by the radical left in a spirit of irony, became a shared term that was accepted by the protagonists themselves, as it implicitly awarded them recognition for making a cultural mark of national importance.

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The reference point for the *scuola* was Gramsci: his interpretative keys and his reading of Marxism, which had questioned the reduction of historical materialism to economic determinism, giving a new importance to the interaction between structure and superstructures in historical processes. New thinking on Gramsci's theoretical contribution became part of the history of the 'new party' which had placed the PCI's mission within the system of Italy's democratic constitution. In other words, it became part of the 'Italian path to socialism', which was consistent with a conception of the international workers' movement that allowed for 'unity in difference'.

This article provides a brief account of the trajectory of the *école*, from the years of its proponents' development through to the demise of their project, highlighting the interrelationship of scholarly research and political practice. With regard to the breadth and complexity of the issues addressed by its multidisciplinary studies, the field of enquiry has been restricted to historiography. By means of indicative research into the analytical themes and categories that were favoured, attention is specifically drawn to the relationship between this developmental activity of Italian Marxist historiography and the position of the PCI.

This investigation has made use of the publications linked to the *école*, the documentation of Bari's PCI federation, and the party's press.

The years of development

In the period after the Second World War, the 'new party' took on an essentially rural form in Puglia, linked to the agricultural labour of the region. With '*la terra a chi la lavora*' ('the land to its workers') as its slogan, it became the cultural and political unifier and reference point for the poor masses in the countryside.

In the early 1960s, when the region was a focus for policies aimed at the Italian South that were based on a strategy of establishing areas of industrial development, Bari experienced 'a supercharged economic miracle': a boom for the city within Italy's boom (Amendola 1997), which radically altered its social and economic system. Both the province and the city as its capital were the stage for an intense struggle, which was an expression of the conflict either generated or accentuated by development. This period of change and tension coincided with the political shift to the centre-left; this was in process within the *comune* of Bari from July 1960 onwards, ahead of the shift at the parliamentary level (Vetta 2012, 38).

The province of Bari, and Puglia in general, became a frontier for the PCI in the South; it was a testing ground for achieving the alliance between workers and peasants, along the lines of the Gramscian programme. This approach required a revision of members' political education and of the political strategy, and a restructuring of organisational arrangements. Essentially, it involved working through, at the local level, the political position that had been indicated at the national congress as early as 1956; this had widened the concept of the 'revolutionary historical block' to take in social and political components that had been external to Marxist theory. This reworking had in fact met resistance within the leading group and among the higher ranks of the PCI in Bari, who were predominantly of peasant extraction. As a result they were neither ready to deal with the emergent urban issue nor happy to revise the terms of the class struggle; this meant abandoning the economistic and protest-based approach they had followed until then in order to oppose the ruling parties over administration of the area.

It was in this period that the proponents of the *école*, who came after the generation that had established the 'new party', had their education and training. Their commitment to politics had been shaped in the period that included the debate over de-Stalinisation, the Soviet invasion of Hungary, the clash within the international labour movement between the Soviets and the Chinese,

and also the reformism, following the 'economic miracle', that accompanied the Socialists' entry into government.

Having attended the 'Orazio Flacco' *liceo classico* in Bari, Franco De Felice and Giuseppe Vacca finished their university studies in Law at the beginning of the 1960s. De Felice graduated in Labour Law with a dissertation on workers' earnings in agriculture, an early approach to research topics that he was to develop as a historian in the 1970s (De Felice 1971, 1979); Vacca graduated in Philosophy of Law with a dissertation on Benedetto Croce and was supported in his research by Biagio De Giovanni, who was also to play a role in the *école*. With their degrees completed, both worked as editors for the Laterza publishing house, where they met, among others, Donato Barbone, Mario Santostasi and Giovanni Papapietro, who at that time was in charge of the Communist Federation of Bari's Cultural Committee, and a councillor for the *comune*.

This group of intellectuals had a communist orientation, and some of them had already joined the PCI in Bari, whose position they criticised. Vacca's contribution immediately after the local elections of 1962 was therefore significant. The PCI vote had gone down from 19.1 to 16.8 per cent, and the PCI's provincial leaders attributed this drop to the electorate's hopes for the centre-left, the anti-communism that was widespread in the city, the clientelistic practices of the Christian Democrats (DC), emigration, and errors of communication during the electoral campaign.[1] Vacca's analysis was quite different, and was summarised in a letter to *Rinascita*, the PCI's political and cultural review. He traced the fall in votes to a lack of understanding of the changes wrought by development, and urged 'a rigorous self-criticism', and 'a self-criticism rather than a *mea culpa!*' (Vacca 1962), by which he meant an examination of the party that was not limited to quantitative data but analysed the social and economic dynamics in operation in the area, both in each district and as a whole.

The young intellectuals who moved between the university, the Laterza offices and the PCI headquarters found a reference point in Alfredo Reichlin, who was appointed as PCI regional secretary in Puglia in September 1962.

Reichlin had been replaced as editor of *l'Unità* because of political disagreements over the centre-left, which he thought was 'the consequence of the advent of neo-capitalism, as it has been termed', and believed should be opposed by offering a different model of development (Reichlin 2010, 37). His analysis thus ran counter to the position then favoured by Palmiro Togliatti and Giorgio Amendola, which endorsed opposition '*di tipo particolare*' ('of a particular kind', meaning on a case-by-case basis) to the centre-left. After his editorship of the party's national daily newspaper Reichlin played a part in editing *Cronache meridionali*, and was then sent to Puglia with the task of facilitating the reworking of the 'Italian road to socialism', strengthening the cultural and theoretical aspects that supported this and working it through in the local environment.

During the years of Reichlin's secretaryship, which lasted until 1968, 'the adjustment in approach took place with a caution that was perhaps excessive', influenced both by concerns about not compromising the links with the traditional 'red' areas of rural Puglia and by uncertainties about modifying a model of regional development that until then had had land reform as its focus (Masella 1989, 432–433). It was difficult to revisit a cultural tradition and a tradition of struggle that identified the historical subject of development as the agricultural worker, and the sector driving Puglia's economy as agriculture.

By contrast, Reichlin made major changes to the style of leadership, employing the Gramscian idea of the party as a 'collective intellectual'. On the one hand, he gave preference to greater collective partnership in the development of the party line, applying a dialectical approach to 'democratic centralism'. On the other, he overhauled the ruling group, promoting the intellectuals. As a result Papapietro was elected provincial secretary in Bari, for example, and became part of the

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regional secretariat, while Vacca was allocated management of the regional committee on cultural issues.

The involvement of the intellectuals, like the publication of the political and cultural review *Puglia*, issued fortnightly from January 1963 to April 1964, represented an attempt to resurrect the Leninist and Gramscian connection between theory and practice.

Reichlin was a spur to the formation of the *école* group, with which he had the friendship of Vito Laterza and Diego De Donato in common, as well as a leaning towards Pietro Ingrao's position on grass-roots political activism (Blasi 2007).

After Togliatti's death, Amendola and Ingrao had come to represent opposing analytical positions and strategic approaches. Amendola, who regarded Italian capitalism as capable of reducing social and economic imbalances, envisaged the PCI as potentially part of the government and believed it could resolve the contradictions within the centre-left. Ingrao, by contrast, proposed action from below in order to create new models of democracy and development, and with this aim pressed for the idea of 'democratic centralism' more as a method than a principle. He thus called for external publicity for the internal debate, with the idea that democracy within the PCI needed to provide an example of what democracy would be like within socialist society.

This position was linked to a decentralisation of the party, with the call for greater independence for local bodies. The concept of the party favoured by Ingrao envisaged that the leading groups away from the party's centre would bring 'practical struggle' and 'theoretical research' together, in such a way as to themselves become '*political* bodies' that were creative and proactive (Ingrao 1964), rather than being relegated to the role of mere conduits for the slavish transmission of the party line from the top to the lower levels.

The PCI's national congress of 1966, the stage for the resolution of this internal conflict, registered the defeat of Ingrao's left-wing grass-roots activism. The choice of continuity was an attempt to neutralise opposition, which the social conflict of the late 1960s was to resurrect in radical forms.

Theory and practice: from coalescence to action

In Bari, the student movement of 1968 was the expression of an international phenomenon: a generational conflict characterised by anti-authoritarianism, wider engagement in politics, and the practice of decision-making in mass assemblies rather than rule by party power. In Bari specifically, it was also marked by the Southern Question, which had taken on new aspects with the Italian 'economic miracle' and the industrialisation of the South by means of 'development centres'. So much was this the case that in the development of the student movement in Bari, readings of Lorenzo Milani and Marcuse were added to those of Gramsci, Gaetano Salvemini and Tommaso Fiore.

The student protest brought the differences over 'democratic centralism' to the centre of the debate within the PCI, as it did the differences on the relationships between the party and society, and between socialism and democracy. The very same questions, albeit in different terms, marked the 'Prague Spring', which at that time was accusing Soviet communism of degeneration. It was no coincidence that the essay by the Czechoslovakian philosopher Kosík on 'Our current crisis' (1968), which addressed the issue of the socialist state's bureaucratisation and gave intellectuals a leading role in its regeneration, was published in Italy by Editori Riuniti, a publishing house close to the PCI, with a preface by Vacca.

The *école* group formed around the questions that the student movement and events in Czechoslovakia had raised afresh. It shared the analysis by Rossanda (1968), who saw broader involvement in politics and the establishment of mass decision-making as a process that was to

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modify both the traditional organisational forms of the parties and the institutions of the democratic state. Moreover, in the light of condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the group believed that the PCI might be capable of managing the Italian transition to socialism in an independent manner (Vacca 2009), with the result that even intellectuals such as De Felice and Santostasi, not previously members, joined the party. The two-year period of 1968–1969 was thus a watershed in the delineation of a cultural and political project, combining scholarly activity and political militancy, which proposed to regenerate the culture of the PCI and the way it functioned, in order to make it the mouthpiece for the emerging social demands.

In regard to the polarisation of positions within the PCI, the national congress of 1969 endorsed the restatement of the party's unifying role and its revolutionary function. There was a rejection of support for the spontaneity and radicalism of the youth movement, and an intention to direct its energies and demands for social change into conventional channels for reform. This stance heightened the conflicted position of Bari's communist students, who had become 'leaders of a mass movement, committed to raising within the party once again the issues emerging from the student struggles, rather than men of the party required to steer the mass movement' (Aresta 1973, 329).

One indicator of the extent of the student movement's impact on the PCI in Bari was the enrolment figure for the PCI's youth association (FGCI): membership dropped from 5,246 in 1968 to just 1,160 in 1969 (PCI 1972). Most of them passed into the ranks of the far-left Marxist-Leninist *Partito Comunista d'Italia–Linea Rossa* (PCd'I).

The same period saw the formation of the *Il manifesto* group within the PCI. The expulsion of these dissidents divided the grass-roots activist left, leaving within the party people like Ingrao and Reichlin who were against schism, and leaving the intellectuals of the *école* within the party in Bari.

In a report to the PCI national secretary Luigi Longo, Papapietro, the secretary in Bari, emphasised the great support that intellectuals in the local party had given to prevention of the incidences of factionalism linked to *Il manifesto*. He stated that this matter had served to strengthen their allegiance to the party: 'to make them feel more strongly the need to work intensely and critically, but with the spirit of Communists, within its ranks.'[2] In other words, the *école* group, although critical of the national political line, regarded the party's unity, its revolutionary and unifying function, as more important; this distinguished it from the extremist positions on its ideological heritage held by the groups of the far left.

In December 1969, at the instigation of De Felice, who was then in charge of the Bari Federation's working group on education, and Vacca, who chaired the cultural committee, the 'Palmiro Togliatti' section was established within the university of Bari with both academic staff and students as its members. Its name restated the reference to the tradition of the 'new party', and its aim was to channel the enthusiasm of student protest, asserting the hegemony of the PCI within this.

The first phase of the university section's activity was characterised by the organisation of assemblies and conferences: launching an exchange between students and workers, and developing thinking on the contradictions of the capitalist system starting with those between education, training, and their devaluation in the world of work.

This sort of activity in some ways evokes the contemporaneous British phenomenon of the 'History Workshops'. From 1967 onwards, Raphael Samuel and other socialist academics at Oxford's Ruskin College were involved in a series of public events, such as conferences and seminars, at which they discussed their work and related this to political issues. This practice, which was subsequently to stimulate much critical interest,[3] did not in fact influence the activities of the *école*. Besides, these ventures were different, because the British movement's project had been stimulated by the use of individual and collective memories as sources for political history. However, they had features in common, such as their origins in the climate of 1968, the

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relationship between present and past, and the link between political initiatives and academic research. They thus constitute two different but concomitant expressions of the relationship between a demand for wider popular engagement in politics and the work by intellectuals on the development of a mass awareness of history.

The *école*, however, was characterised by the activism of the PCI. As a result, the university section in Bari was transformed in the early 1970s into 'a fighting body', in order to meet head-on the vanguards of the students and extreme left groups, on both the cultural and political fronts (De Felice 1973). With this in mind, faculty cells were established in order to thoroughly entrench the party in the university, which became a launch pad for its involvement in protest action by agricultural and industrial workers.

The activity of the university section contributed to both the renaissance of Bari's FGCI, with its management allocated to the intellectual members, and the involvement of young people in the managing bodies of the provincial party.

One event that illustrates the positive results achieved by the PCI in Bari occurred in 1972, in the context of the defeat of the extreme left in the national elections of May and the subsequent conservative shift within the Italian government, which saw the Socialists replaced by the return of the Liberals. Immediately after the vote, 125 members of the PCd'I, mostly teachers and students, including Giuseppe Acquaviva, Giancarlo Aresta and Biagio Salvemini, put their signatures to a document that requested their return to the fold of the PCI in the light of a 'profound self-critical review'.[4] (PCI–Bari 1972). This document, which was given coverage in *l'Unità* (Pirandello 1972), was followed by many other applications to the PCI by young people who had been active within groups on the extreme left.

Enrolment in Bari's FGCI, newly on the increase from the beginning of the 1970s at the same time as the activity by the university section, registered a distinct increase to 1,884 members at the end of 1972 and continued to grow until the middle of the decade (PCI 1975, 1979).

As a complement to the action taken within the party, Bari's intellectuals were involved in intense cultural and research activity. The link between theory and practice, the methodological prerequisite of the *école*'s existence, was closely correlated with the relationship, in Marxist historiography, between past and present. This was neither Croce's 'contemporary nature of history', whereby history is always contemporary as it results from the research of the historian, nor the *nouvelle histoire*'s reciprocal relationship between past and present, which emphasises how the former survives in the latter, inasmuch as it consists of both continuities and transformations, and how our understanding of the past is in continuous evolution. In Vacca's 'heuristic primacy of the present' and De Giovanni's 'overturning of historiographical eras' there was a conceptual and political tension which located the present as the dominant element. Similarly, De Felice, when interviewed for an article in *Rinascita* on ten communist historians,[5] attributed a significance to the relationship between past and present that was essentially political; he saw the task of Marxist historiography as 'the delineation and comprehension of the present, meant not in the broadly pragmatic sense but as a phase of the class struggle' (De Felice 1974).

The contemporary nature of the past linked to revolutionary teleology should therefore not be confused with the political use and abuse of history, since the aim was to update the heritage of Italian communism and the way the party functioned, developing a new theory of revolution.

The reorganised De Donato publishing house, founded with financial support from the PCI, became the publishing workshop for the Bari group from the early 1970s. Here, many contributors to the publisher Laterza came together with a project aimed at the Gramscian 'intellectual and moral reform' of the country (Di Bari 2012, 69). In some ways the scholarly output published by De Donato can be compared with that of the *New Left Review*, which at the beginning of the 1960s

had gathered together a group of Marxist intellectuals. However, these experiences were different, in that the activity of the *école* lay within the PCI, while that of the British publication did not mix theory with political practice, was not connected to the Communist Party of Great Britain, a marginalised force within the British system, and took a critical position on the revisionism of the Labour Party, that is on the development of a political culture of Marxist origins that had attained power. Having stated these differences in function, aims and context, parallels nevertheless emerge from scanning the De Donato catalogue and the contents of the *New Left Review*, two publishing vehicles for contemporary western Marxism.

From 1973 onwards, the PCI in Puglia also published a monthly magazine covering culture, politics and news, *Nuova Puglia*, which took up where the periodical promoted by Reichlin ten years earlier had left off.[6]

That same year, a branch of the Istituto Gramsci was set up in Puglia at the instigation of De Felice and Vacca, who had meanwhile become part of the PCI's Central Committee. In line with the founding principles of the national institute, this had the purpose of preserving documents, books, and political and cultural material, in order to promote the study and promulgation of communist thinking and history. The institute put on seminars and national conferences, including one on 'Togliatti and the South' in 1975 (De Felice 1977).

The Southern Question

With Reichlin as secretary of the PCI in Puglia, the limitations and slow development of the regional party had been attributed to the 'failure to see the new content that lies within the old wrapping', and to 'the inability to grasp the close link between the old backwardness that persists and modern forms of capitalist development' (Reichlin 1965).

The need to analyse the local territory had been the spur to a rejuvenation of the party's cultural heritage, which found its first published expression in an anthology of Gramscian writings on the 'Southern Question', issued in 1966 and edited by Franco De Felice and Valentino Parlato.

In this volume's introduction, the Gramscian reading was distinguished from traditional liberal ideas about the South. The Southern Question, viewed as an agrarian and peasant issue, which is to say as the effect of social and contractual relationships in rural areas, became a national question: being a necessary contradiction within the Italian economic system, it could be resolved not by taking 'a capitalist path', through reformism, but by its linkage with the creation of the socialist state. De Felice and Parlato further developed Gramscian thinking, emphasising how the Southern Question had been accentuated after the Second World War with state capitalism, meaning the increased presence of the state in the economy and society. Consequently, it was a crucial aspect of the struggle for the transition to socialism (De Felice and Parlato 1966).

Reichlin had therefore launched a reflection among Bari's intellectuals that started with an analysis of the local context and led to a revision of the PCI's approach to the South, which was promoted and pursued by him in his role leading the Committee on the South between the 1960s and 1970s. By means of a series of conferences he pressed for a revision of the analysis of the Southern Question, an updating of the party's position in terms of its political programme, and the identification of functional organisational tools for the development of the approach to the territory and the establishment of the party within centres of development: modern large-scale agricultural businesses, factories, and urban districts (Reichlin 1974).

This shift in position was marked by the involvement of the *école*, as can for example be seen in Vacca's analysis of the changes that had taken place in the production system and in Puglia's

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society: an analysis that aimed to identify tools for organisation and for struggle that were suitable for the characteristics taken on by agricultural and industrial workers (Vacca 1973a).

The redevelopment of the approach posed the Southern Question as a national issue, in terms of economic development and the democratic nature of the state. The analysis in fact regarded the policies of subsidy and assisted development, which involved special intervention and industrialisation through specific centres, as effective in maintaining both the subordination of the South to the North and support for the forces of government. In this sense, the Southern Question was also a problem of democracy; to put it another way, a deterministic relationship was identified between its resolution and reform of the state.

For an alternative development of the South, linked to the territory's resources and capable of overcoming the dualism between city and countryside, the PCI's approach proposed, first of all, administrative decentralisation, with powers to plan and spend awarded to local authorities.

A contribution to this debate on the Southern Question and on the renewal of the Communist programme came from the first collective work of the *école*: a book edited by Vacca, *PCI, Mezzogiorno e intellettuali: dalle alleanze all'organizzazione* (1973b). This volume, which was discussed in the PCI's national daily paper (Occhetto 1973), focused on the relationship between the party and the student movement, as well as on the current contradictions of the South; these were examined through the lens of the youth question and the role of the university, giving particular attention to the situation in Bari.

In this collection, importance was given to the 'simultaneous operation of the categories of backwardness and development' in southern regions, demonstrating how their subordination to the North was 'a type of bridge thrown between the present and the past' (De Giovanni and Schiavone 1973, 182). It was argued that industrialisation had not altered the role of the South in the economic system. As a result the relaunch of the anti-capitalist struggle, a condition for overcoming the Southern Question, had to be combined with the recovery of Marxism, 'not as a philological operation, but as an entirely political one' (De Felice 1973, 79).

At the organisational level the case was made for the unionisation of the student movement, seen as a new historical agent of class struggle whose activity should extend beyond education to embrace more general issues. The party leadership was to link this to worker protest using the slogan '*diritto allo studio, diritto al lavoro*' ('right to study, right to work'). The policy proposal in the volume diverged from the PCI's national position over the relationship between the party and students, as the intention was to create open forms of participation. An example of this was the plan for a 'democratic student league' without ideological allegiances, with a programme based simply on three distinguishing ideals: democracy, anti-fascism and internationalism (Caldarola 1973).

The inclusive concept that the *école* championed was an expression of the plan to create the '*partito-società*' (party-society). To this end, the party had to recognise pluralism and allow open participation in its organisations, including involving elements that either were outside the Marxist-Leninist tradition or interpreted this in radical terms.

The creation of the 'party-society' was linked to an approach to implementing the transition to socialism, which consisted of 'an unceasing and novel development of democracy' (Vacca 1977a, 157–174). Socialism would thus become the result of the progressive widening of popular engagement with formal political institutions, until public space and political space were juxtaposed. It was envisaged that there would be an enrichment of the representative bodies prescribed by the Italian constitution with various forms of democracy at ground level, such as school and factory councils with rights that complemented the operation of local government and the national parliament. Direct democracy at the grass roots, administrative decentralisation and increase in

parliamentary powers, in brief, were three objectives for the modernisation of democracy, or in fact for the resolution of the Southern Question.

The *école*'s position continued to find an echo in the views of Ingrao, among the PCI's leaders at the national level. He regarded the grass-roots politics of the late 1960s as a demand for an expansion of democracy in terms both quantitative (establishment of the regions with locally determined constitutions, referenda to annul legislation, lowering of the voting age to 18) and qualitative. He related the emergence of this demand to the crisis of what he called the 'Fiat model', meaning the resurrection in the post-war period of neo-capitalist policies alongside Keynesian measures, which can otherwise be described as the spread of state intervention in the economy in order to guarantee social control (Ingrao 1988). On the basis of this analysis, economic reform and reform of the state were interdependent, and the creation of the 'party-society' was the tool required to dismantle the 'party-state', meaning Christian Democracy, which had control of the levers of production policy.

The *école* and the strategy of 'historic compromise'

At the end of 1973 the new national secretary of the PCI Enrico Berlinguer gave shape to the strategy of the 'democratic alternative' by proposing the 'historic compromise', which was greeted with confusion, incomprehension and resistance in the margins of the party, as was seen in the case of Puglia (Vetta 2014).

The *école* group came to this encounter armed with the approach they had developed, which illustrated the effectiveness of 'progressive democracy' and gave substance to the 'Italian road to socialism'. This can be seen in the research trajectory followed by Vacca, who published several studies with De Donato that updated the implications of Marxism (Vacca 1969, 1970, 1972) and in 1974 wrote the book *Saggio su Togliatti e la tradizione comunista*. In this, Vacca highlighted how the tradition of Italian communism was a development of Leninist revolutionary theory located within a particular context and historical period. He described 'progressive democracy' as '*a political form that is simultaneously intermediate and transitional*: intermediate, and not just transitory, because it is *institutionally* defined and not ephemeral; but at the same time *transitional*, because it can already hold within it processes of socialist transformation of the economy and the state' (Vacca 1974, 396).

On the basis of this thinking on the connection between democracy and socialism, Berlinguer's proposal initially had the support of the *école*, who assumed that its content was rather different to that actually envisaged by Berlinguer himself. The Bari group, Vacca recalled later, interpreted it 'as a conscious reworking of the strategy of mutual siege with the DC, the outcome of which should have been the PCI's passage into government' (Di Bari 2012, 161). Confirmation of this comes in a speech by Vacca to the Bari PCI federation, in which he described as 'sectarian' the interpretation of the historic compromise as 'meeting the DC half-way', seen as the theoretical prerequisite for a summit meeting.[7]

Thus, on one side, Berlinguer, conscious of the international constraints, had as his aim the democratic legitimation of the PCI by means of collaboration in power with the DC. On the other, the *école* believed that such alliances would result in the integration of the PCI in a parliament-based mediation, necessarily perpetuating DC leadership. This view was strengthened by the updating of Gramsci's legacy, starting with De Felice's work *Americanismo e fordismo*, which identified the state capitalism of the post-war period, including the inter-relationship between management of the economy and rule of the masses, as a new form of 'passive revolution' (De Felice 1972).

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In the mid-1970s, moreover, Franco Cassano started to develop his '*teorema democristiano*' (theory regarding the DC), initially by examining the city of Bari; this became a book at the end of the decade. He offered an interpretation of the historical role of the DC that differed from both the traditional Marxist view, which placed it as subordinate to the immediate interests of the ruling classes, and the liberal-radical view, which instead saw it as an expression of a state bourgeoisie independent of the private bourgeoisie, having the objective of consensus as well as profit. Cassano regarded both these approaches as corrupted by an 'instrumentalist' conception of the state. By contrast, he highlighted 'the active nature of DC mediation' between private and public, attributing to the DC the function of reproducing capitalist relations or, put another way, the function of guarantor of the perpetuation of the system through the 'social democratic compromise'. The DC was thus simultaneously 'a mass party and party of government by Italy's ruling classes'. It managed social needs through the welfare state, the control of which allowed it to maintain its central position within the political system, and at the same time it was the political expression of the financial and economic elites (Cassano 1979).

In the light of this portrayal of the DC as the party of state, the involvement of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) in the government at the beginning of the 1960s could be located within the Italian tradition of '*trasformismo*', and following Gramsci's analytical system could be interpreted as a 'passive revolution'. In other words, the Socialists had been integrated within the government in a subordinate position, with the purpose of absorbing some elements from its programme and reducing its support.

The 'strategy of attention' towards the PCI espoused by Aldo Moro was thus regarded by the *école* as a democratic and moderate project of 'passive revolution'. At the start of 'national solidarity', Vacca imagined that the DC would on the one hand increase its social welfare action, and on the other would break up industry-wide protest movements by measures that favoured particular groups, omitting to make any change at the level of the state (Vacca 1977b). Subsequently, De Felice also offered this interpretation (2003),[8] identifying what he described as Moro's 'metapolitical model' as an intention to broaden the basis of support for the state and simultaneously reaffirm DC hegemony.

The *école*, however, opposed governments of 'national solidarity' because the PCI, on the basis of agreement to a moderate programme, would be implicated in the responsibilities of the majority without being included in government, and thus without any democratic legitimation. In addition, collaboration with the DC, as a solution imposed from above, contradicted the *école*'s proposal to develop democratic institutions from below.

Essentially, Berlinguer had an awareness of the international constraints, while the Bari group favoured the analysis of the national context. As a result of this conflict, immediately after the two governments of 'national solidarity', formed between 1976 and 1979, Leone De Castris criticised the Berlinguer project, commenting that 'the contradictions had emerged of a line that paid almost too much attention to the experiences in other countries, for example Chile, rather than to our own country's particular conditions and social processes' (Boldrini 1981).

Among the Bari intellectuals a position took shape that was critical of 'austerity', the idea that Berlinguer put forward as the essence of a development model based on public consumption, an alternative to the system characterised by waste, squandering and individualism (1977).

While 'austerity' reflected an interpretation of capitalism that still expected it to encounter crisis, and that was unable to appreciate the development of a model of industrial society different from the Fordist and Keynesian, by the early 1970s De Felice had already updated the Gramscian analysis by noting that mass consumerism was transforming society. His thinking (2003) came to identify a change in the model regarding the creation of national identity and belonging for the

masses: within the 'militarised model', imposed by governments in the post-war period and based on the reproduction of Cold War international opposition within the Italian system, there was a progressive development in the 1960s and 1970s of an 'acquisitive model' which expressed the acceptance by the masses of the capitalist system and their participation in the affluent society.

According to De Felice, the referendum on divorce had given 'voice and political form' to the 'acquisitive model' (2003, 173). This interpretation in some ways matched the analysis by Pasolini, who explained the outcome of the referendum in terms of an anthropological change in the middle classes, among which 'the values of the hedonistic ideology of consumption and of the consequent modernistic American-style tolerance' had been confirmed (Pasolini 1975, 51–52). Thus for De Felice austerity was not representative of the desire of the masses to acquire consumer goods, and the fact that these masses identified the PCI as their political point of reference accentuated the contradictions within the party (De Felice 2003, 204–205).

On the basis of these reflections, condensed in the analysis of the mid-1970s, the dominant position within the *école* was that 'austerity' was extraneous to the processes of society's modernisation.

With the national profile that the activity of the *école* had gradually acquired came criticism. This was voiced by national leaders who supported Berlinguer's approach, from Amendola to Napolitano, who were afraid of a repetition of the *Il manifesto* affair; by the trade unionists who had been accused of economism, including Bruno Trentin who described them as '*baro-marxisti*', meaning Marxists from Bari in the sense of counterfeit Marxists; and finally by the circles of the extreme left (Blasi 2007).

The demise of the *école*'s political and cultural project

The crisis for the *école* started with the Communist advances in the national elections of 1976. The PCI's growth in fact reduced the likelihood of any revision of the party structure. Moreover, from 1977 onwards divisions emerged within the Bari group over analysis of the governments of 'national solidarity', and of the falls in Communist Party membership and its vote (Blasi 2007, 119–123).

The early 1980s, finally, marked a change of epoch, and with this the demise of the *école*'s project. The end of the social and political phase of the 1970s, the consolidation of neo-liberal philosophy, the process of personalisation of politics, the waning of political activism and the crisis of the PCI all made the objective of regenerating communist culture, in order to change the way the party functioned, part of a bygone era.

There was no one definitive event that ended the life of the *école*, but this occurred somewhere between 1978, when the university section ceased its activity, and 1983, when the De Donato publishing house closed in financial difficulty. During this five-year period there were various emblematic transitions, from the coup d'état in Poland, when Berlinguer declared that the 'driving force' of the Soviet model of society was exhausted, to the group's final publications (Blasi 2007, 15–20, 53–63).

The collective work on *Il partito politico e la crisi dello Stato sociale*, fostered by the *Centro di studi e iniziative per la riforma dello Stato* (CRS), at that time part of the PCI, has been identified as the final piece of work that can be attributed to the *école* group (Ingrao et al. 1981). Ingrao's book *Tradizione e progetto* (1982), by contrast, which reviews how the PCI responded to 1968 without changing its methods of political involvement and without making concessions on the cultural level, has been seen as symbolic of how the party bypassed the issues raised by the student movement that were current throughout the 1970s.

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The demise of the *école* did not mean the end of political commitment by its erstwhile participants. Among these, Papapietro was elected to the European Parliament in 1979, Santostasi was appointed secretary of the PCI's Bari Federation in 1981, Vacca was elected to parliament in 1983, and De Felice worked in the national office of the Istituto Gramsci and edited the journal *Passato e presente*, which carried on from the series of the same name that had been published by De Donato from 1979. However, these individual trajectories never came together again as a collective project.

In conclusion, the *école barisienne* was a cultural and political endeavour that contributed to a renewal of Italian Marxist historiography by means of an intense scholarly production. Permeated by Gramscian teaching, the historians linked to this experience asked themselves questions about modernisation rather than backwardness, and about periods of transition rather than continuities; they re-examined the connection between democracy and socialism, and investigated the economy-state-society paradigm while paying attention to the interconnections between the national and the international (Masella 2014). At the same time, they showed a propensity for multidisciplinary comparison and for methodological and theoretical innovations introduced by other historiographies, mixing in a productive exchange with international scholars, as can be seen in the De Donato publication catalogues. Certainly, it was a historiography that resisted the influence of the international political context, and that was not conducive to the re-interpretation of the history of the PCI starting with the link with the Soviet Union: this was only revisited after the conclusion of the Cold War, the dissolution of the party, and the end of the First Republic.

The activity of the *école*, in spite of its aims, did not in fact have any impact on the PCI party line. The project to create a kind of osmosis between party and society, and to develop the representative bodies with elements of grass-roots democracy, proved not to have an influence within a party in which continuity and the defence of organisational structures as they had been historically established left very little room for manoeuvre. It is, however, true that the project to construct the 'party-society' was established on the basis of a dubious interpretation of 1968 as the affirmation of an anti-capitalist revolutionary movement. This is also how the simultaneous mobilisations of rural and urban proletariats were understood, while they can instead be interpreted as the struggle for access to consumption and the affluent society (Taviani 2001, 311–313). It was only at the start of the 1980s that Leonardo Paggi noted the tendency of political parties to strengthen their central power to the detriment of representation (Ingrao et al. 1981), a theory taken up again by recent research that traces the process of formation of the 'state-centric party' back to the 1960s, with the progressive weakening of the parties' presence in the territory (Ignazi 2012).

A recent debate has also explained the recovery of Marxism in the 1960s and its rapid decline in the decade that followed by reference to the 'crisis of the subject', with its implications for the nation-state, the party and the international labour movement (Vacca 2015). These processes rendered the objective of the *école* redundant; its trajectory should not be interpreted as failure, but rather as the petering-out of a particular path in the political field. Conversely, its theoretical tools were to remain as an inheritance for the historiography and political culture of the Italian left of communist origin.

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Notes

1. See the 'Verbale del Comitato federale e della Commissione federale di controllo', dated 1962, Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del PCI: mf. 501, 224–240.
2. See the 'Lettera a Luigi Longo', by Giovanni Papapietro, dated 1969, Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del PCI: mf. 307, 1893–1898.
3. Timothy Mason described the experience of the History Workshops, in which he was one of the main participants, in the journal *Passato e Presente* (Mason 1985) edited by Franco De Felice. More recently, the History Workshops have been described as precursors to 'Applied History' and the discipline of 'Public History'.
4. See 'Lettera di adesione alla Federazione di Bari del PCI da parte di un gruppo di militanti del PCd'I', dated 1972, Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del PCI: mf. 52, 827–833.
5. The historians interviewed for the survey held in 1973 by *Rinascita* on the topic of 'Marxist historical research in Italy' were Rosario Villari, Giuliano Procacci, Ernesto Ragionieri, Giorgio Mori, Leonardo Paggi, Renato Zangheri, Enzo Santarelli, Franco De Felice, Gastone Manacorda and Paolo Spriano (Cecchi 1974).
6. The monthly *Nuova Puglia*, produced by the PCI's regional committee in Puglia, was published from April 1973 until July 1976, and then for a further year starting in April 1977.
7. See 'Verbale del dibattito al Congresso provinciale della federazione del PCI di Bari', dated 1975, Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del PCI: mf. 226, 664–680.
8. De Felice's posthumous volume (2003), edited by Luigi Masella, contains the essays published in 1995–1996 in two volumes of the *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, edited by Francesco Barbagallo (Turin: Einaudi).

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Italian summary

La definizione di *école barisienne* indica l'attività di un gruppo di intellettuali che, fra la fine degli anni Sessanta e l'inizio degli anni Ottanta del Novecento, combinarono ricerca scientifica e attività politica per aggiornare il patrimonio culturale del comunismo italiano e per dare forma a una nuova teoria della rivoluzione. Interpretando il movimento studentesco del 1968 come agente storico di una rivoluzione sociale e politica, s'intendeva trasformare il Partito comunista italiano (PCI) in un 'partito-società' capace di intercettare la domanda di democrazia della nuova generazione e di rovesciare l'egemonia della Democrazia cristiana (DC), intesa come 'partito-Stato'. Il saggio ripercorre la vicenda di questo sodalizio intellettuale, dalla formazione dei loro promotori, segnata dalla questione meridionale come questione nazionale, fino all'esaurimento del loro progetto. Nello specifico, si evidenzia il rapporto fra l'attività scientifica dell'*école*, sottolineando alcune categorie analitiche significative della sua produzione storiografica, quella politica e la linea nazionale del PCI.

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