

Divergenze parallele. Comunismo e anticomunismo alle origini del linguaggio politico dell'Italia Repubblicana (1945–1953), by Andrea Mariuzzo, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2010, 284 pp., €14.00, ISBN 978-88-498-2516-9

In *Divergenze parallele*, Andrea Mariuzzo chronicles the battle fought in post-war Italy between the left-wing parties and the anti-communist front to usurp national symbols and to extend the semantic field of a range of words in order to make them fit their own political agenda. This fierce 'semantic war' over symbols and concepts which constituted Italians' cultural horizon fundamentally shaped the political language of the Republic and the mentality of citizens, with far-reaching consequences for both the solidity of the democratic institutions and the Italian people's sense of belonging. The book depicts two fronts that tried to make their partisan interests appear fully consistent with those of the nation, and presented the opponent as a traitor, consequently delegitimising each other. The research is primarily based on the party press, printed propaganda, and archival documents.

Chapter 1 discusses structures and techniques of propaganda in post-war Italy, focusing on the propaganda offices of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Christian Democrats (DC), the anti-communist press and the impressive propaganda apparatus set up by the Catholic Church, particularly in the run-up to the national election of 18 April 1948.

Chapter 2 analyses how the PCI and the Church competed in the field of moral and religious values. Catholic propaganda successfully presented the PCI to public opinion as a materialistic and anti-Christian party. The PCI, on the other hand, tried to cast itself as the party that truly embodied the fundamental message of Christ, also reviving the idea of Jesus as the 'first socialist', which had traditionally belonged to the workers' movement.

Chapter 3 examines the ideological struggle that took place around the concepts of freedom and democracy. While initially advocating the implementation of the rather ambiguous 'progressive democracy' (*democrazia progressiva*) or 'actual democracy' (*democrazia sostanziale*), the PCI soon cast itself as the champion of democracy *tout court*. The communists' idea of democracy, however, essentially did not match Western-style democracy, thus shaping a distorted concept of democracy thereafter shared by millions of Italians. Having identified themselves with the very idea of democracy, communists tended to regard the DC governments as fascist governments. A defining moment in this respect was the struggle for the *legge truffa* (also dubbed the *legge Acerbo*), in 1953. Around the same time, the PCI began the struggle for the implementation of the Constitution, which was going to become one of its most distinctive political commitments throughout the republican period. The anti-communist press replied to communist propaganda by accusing the PCI of seeking to establish a dictatorship modelled on the Eastern European regimes, and popularised terms such as 'totalitarianism' and 'coup d'état'.

Chapter 4 describes the use of national symbols and characters of the *Risorgimento* by the DC and the PCI in order to legitimise themselves as national parties and prove their commitment to national interests. An important side effect of this propaganda strategy was that the opponent was invariably described as 'foreign', a pawn of the Russians or of the Americans respectively. This certainly did not help to reduce mutual distrust between Italians of opposing political factions.

Chapter 5 shows how both the PCI and the anti-communist front tended to present the international confrontation between communism and capitalism as principally a competition over what social and political model was able to ensure plenty of goods to their respective citizens. Mariuzzo provides a negative answer to the question of whether this constituted an endorsement of well-being by the two principal Italian political parties. In this respect, Mariuzzo

points out that even the anti-communist front did not welcome unconditionally 'the American way of life'.

As Mariuzzo acknowledges, the work initially started life as part of a PhD thesis. This has certainly influenced its structure, leading to a certain lack of coherence. For example, chapter 5, which, to paraphrase the title of D'Attore's famous 1991 study, deals with the American Dream and the Soviet Myth, does not completely fit with the book's research framework, which is primarily concerned with the shaping of the political language of the Italian Republic. Another problem is the absence of a conclusion, which would have helped to bring the book's many interesting threads together. The book contains much interesting information and considerations and it is one of the most complete examinations of the motifs of communist and anti-communist propaganda in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Those interested in the issue of propaganda in post-war Italy will thus find it well worth reading. At the same time, they will not help but notice that most of the sources analysed by Mariuzzo have already been examined and discussed by other authors, especially as far as the PCI is concerned (Andreucci 2005; Bellassai 2000; Novelli 2000). Mariuzzo duly quotes them all. Consequently, the most original and innovative parts of the book are those dealing with the content, symbols and style of anti-communist propaganda. In this respect, Mariuzzo broadens considerably the field of investigation, including little known magazines, such as *Traguardo*. However, he does not provide figures concerning the circulation and distribution of these magazines, which makes it hard to determine how influential they were.

With regard to the principal conclusions of the book, Mariuzzo seems largely to concur with both Angelo Ventrone (2008) and Ernesto Galli Della Loggia (2003). He agrees with the former that the promotion by the DC and the PCI of common cultural reference points such as peace, freedom and democracy, even when they were intended in a different way, contributed to the development of what turned out to be, in spite of everything, a rather solid democratic system. He shares with the latter the view that the PCI, by equating democracy and anti-fascism, championed a partially distorted idea of democracy.

References

- Andreucci, F. 2005. *Falce e Martello. Identità e linguaggi dei comunisti italiani tra stalinismo e guerra fredda*. Bologna: Bononia University Press.
- Bellassai, S. 2000. *La morale comunista. Pubblico e privato nella rappresentazione del PCI (1947–1956)*. Rome: Carocci.
- D'Attorre, P. P., ed. 1991. *Nemici per la pelle. Sogno americano e mito sovietico nell'Italia contemporanea*. Milan: Franco Angeli.
- Galli Della Loggia, E. 2003. *La morte della patria. La crisi dell'idea di nazione tra Resistenza, antifascismo e Repubblica*. Rome–Bari: Laterza.
- Novelli, E. 2000. *C'era una volta il PCI. Autobiografia di un partito attraverso le immagini della sua propaganda*. Rome: Editori Riuniti.
- Ventrone, A. 2008. *La cittadinanza repubblicana. Come cattolici e comunisti hanno costruito la democrazia italiana (1943–1948)*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Gianluca Fantoni
University of Strathclyde
gianluca.fantoni@strath.ac.uk
© 2013, Gianluca Fantoni

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13532944.2013.813670>