

The Origins of the Left-Wing Terrorism in Italy after 1968¹

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The crisis of the Italian Republic in the 1970s, which produced the large amount of both left- and right-wing terrorist organizations, had its roots not only in the events of the revolutionary year of 1968, but also in the overall development of the Republic and society after the Second World War. Italy was governed mainly by the western-oriented Christian Democracy (*Democrazia cristiana*; DC) and its leader Alcide De Gasperi, thus leaving among the malcontents not only the defeated Fascists, but also many of the communist partisans who wanted to continue fighting and establish the socialist regime based on the Soviet pattern. However, the Italian Communist Party (*Partito comunista italiano*; PCI) under the leadership of Palmiro Togliatti respected — unlike the Greek communists — the division of the spheres of influence, in order to prevent the civil war. The partisans reluctantly obeyed, but many of them still considered the stance of the PCI treason. Togliatti's party accepted the state and its institutions, but merely as a method to oppose the system and it remained loyal to Stalin.²

For more than twenty years after the war, the country had been ruled by the DC governments (either solely or in the coalition), while the PCI had been put aside into opposition. The post-war period is often referred to as an *economic miracle*, an era of sudden and fast prosperity. The investments of the Marshall Plan and the participation on the European integration project brought a rapid growth of the Italian industry and improvement of the living standards (e.g. the use of television and the flowing water had become common in every household). While industry in the big northern cities (Milan, Turin, and Genoa) developed quickly, the other branches of the Italian economy, however, remained quite primitive. The non-existence of the unions in the factories also meant very hard working conditions, which consequently led to massive disaffection and protests.³

1 This study has been published within the research project Program rozvoje vědních oblastí na Univerzitě Karlově č. 12, „Historie v interdisciplinární perspektivě, podprogram Evropa a (versus) svět: Interkontinentální a vnitrokontinentální politické, ekonomické, sociální, kulturní a intelektuální transfery“.

2 JUDT, T., *Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945*, New York 2005, p. 208.

3 GINSBORG, P., *A History of Contemporary Italy 1943–1980*, London 1990, pp. 213–216.

The permanent presence of the DC in the government and the economic growth caused strong connections between politics and business; the Christian Democracy became a synonym for the state. In the twenty years following the Second World War was its position seriously shaken only once. In 1960, the new government of Fernando Tambroni was to be founded on the deputies of neo-Fascist Italian Social Movement (*Movimento sociale italiano*; MSI). The society did not accept the neo-Fascists in power only fifteen years after the war and started long and numerous demonstrations.⁴ Several violent clashes occurred with the police, especially in Genoa and Reggio Emilia. After three months in service, Tambroni was forced to leave and his government resigned.

Only three years later, another precedent was broken. The Italian Socialist Party (*Partito socialista italiano*; PSI) ended its alliance with the communists in 1956, after the Soviet occupation of Hungary. In 1963, the DC and its Prime Minister Aldo Moro were ready to initiate an open cooperation with the PSI in the new center-left government project.⁵

The death of Palmiro Togliatti in 1964 led to further changes in the ideology of the PCI. The party abandoned the extreme left position and the strong Cold War rhetoric (which was to be seen clearly in 1968, when the PCI expressed disapproval of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia).⁶ The PCI accepted the system of the Italian Republic and confined itself to fighting against the DC governments in the limits of parliamentary democracy. This was, however, a great disappointment for the amount of arising left movements that aimed to gain support in the planned revolutionary struggle.

In the 1960s, the situation at the universities changed utterly. Within the new generation, which was born during or after the war, the demand for education strongly increased. The universities responded to these requests and the number of students multiplied several times; the capacities of the buildings and classes, as well as the number of the professors, were not sufficient any more.⁷ This was one of the reasons for the strong tensions at the universities that soon led to the radicalization of the students and their call for change.

The young people fighting for the change were driven by several different reasons. Apart from the insufficient working conditions in the factories, complicated situation at the universities and political inheritance of the Second World War, there were also reasons of international or even universal character.

Many people were in opposition with the ideology of the Cold War and its consequences. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and the involvement of the United States in Vietnam in particular were the main points of discussions. The sympathies of those so-called New Left movements lay elsewhere — with the Third World lead-

4 WEINBERG, L. — EUBANK, W. L., *Neo-Fascist and Far Left Terrorists in Italy: Some Biographical Observations*, in: *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (October 1988), p. 534.

5 GALLI, G., *Storia del socialismo italiano: da Turati al dopo Craxi*, Milano 2007, p. 247.

6 AGOSTI, A., *Storia del Partito Comunista Italiano: 1922–1991*, Roma–Bari 1999, p. 138.

7 DRAKE, R., *Italy in the 1960s: A Legacy of Terrorism and Liberation*, in: *South Central Review. Rethinking 1968: The United States & Western Europe*, Vol. 16, No. 4 — Vol. 17, No. 1 (Winter 1999–Spring 2000), p. 70.

ers, Ho Chi Minh, Mao Zedong, Fidel Castro and many others. They emphasized the equality of all humans and supported the African Americans or women fighting for their rights. They kept in touch with similarly thinking groups from France, Federal Republic of Germany, but also from the USA or the countries from behind the Iron Curtain.⁸

Nevertheless, the inspiration came also from more dangerous places. The Latin American guerrilla fighters became extremely popular as they did not hesitate to oppose the global imperialism. Ernesto “Che” Guevara became a legend already during his lifetime and a martyr after his execution in 1967. The *Manual of urban guerrilla*, written by Brazilian revolutionary Carlos Marighella, was published in Italian by Giangiacomo Feltrinelli.⁹ Colombian fighting priest Camillo Torres became a symbol close especially to the Italian strongly Catholic milieu. The internal rules and the emblem of Uruguayan terrorist organization Tupamaros (*Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional — Tupamaros*) were directly adopted by several Italian militant groups. The terrorist practices were soon transported to Italy, too.

The New Left movement started to gain ground in Italy during the 1960s, when the magazines criticizing the Soviet politics were published. Among the first was the influential journal *Quaderni rossi* (Red papers), first published in 1961, or the revue *Classe operaia* (Working class), founded in 1963.¹⁰ “Here the authors developed new interpretations of classical Socialist theory and established a basic framework for their criticism of Italian society and the *Old Left* (the PSI, the PCI, and the unions).”¹¹

As well as in many other countries, the center of the protests lay at the universities. The traditional student organization UNURI (*Unione nazionale universitaria rappresentativa italiana*) lost its credibility as it was under strong influence of the political parties. It was replaced by an autonomous student movement which sought to solve the problems through general discussion in the plenum.¹² The newly established student organizations were also involved in the occupation of the universities which began in January 1966 in Trento.

Among the leaders of the movement was also Renato Curcio, a young Catholic Socialist student. Along with his friend and colleague Mauro Rostagno, he founded the commune of the free education, inspired by the principles of the Frankfurt School. They wrote the Manifest for a Negative University (*Manifesto per una università negativa*), in which they presented their concept of a free institution, independent from a state and run only by the students themselves. Curcio was engaged in an extra-parliamentary Communist Party of Italy (*Partito comunista d’Italia*) and after 1968 he worked for Veronese journal *Lavoro politico*. In 1969, his anti-institutional feelings

8 DELLA PORTA, D., *Terrorismi in Italia*, Bologna 1984, p. 83.

9 GRANDI, A., *Giangiacomo Feltrinelli. La dinastia, il rivoluzionario*, Milano 2000, p. 469.

10 PISANO, V. F., *The Dynamics of Subversion and Violence in Contemporary Italy*, Stanford 1987, p. 36.

11 KLIMKE, M. — SCHAROTH, J. (eds.), *1968 in Europe. History of Protest and Activism 1956-1977*, New York 2008, p. 86.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 88.

and his will to fight against the system became even stronger and together with his wife Margherita Cagol and several other colleagues from Trento, he moved to Milan to get involved in the alternative, newly created unions in the factories.¹³

For the past few years, Curcio had already been in touch with Raffale De Mori, the leader of Unitary Committee of the Base (*Comitato unitario di base*; CUB), a new type of the workers' union in Pirelli that was supposed to spread the idea of proletarian equality and justice. Similar unions were also constituted in other major North Italian enterprises, like *Sit-Siemens*, *Alfa Romeo* or *IBM*, where they were called Study Groups (*Gruppi di studio*). Curcio and his colleagues were determined to use the new unions as basic platforms for reaching their aims. The Red Brigades later admitted the key role of the factories' alternative unions in the forming of the terrorist groups. "The students' fights of 1968, considered a *detonator* by some, a *dynamic element of the process of formation of the modern proletariat*, produced as their primary effect the diffusion of the new forms of fight into the factories, the violent and illegal forms."¹⁴

The changes in the political course of the PCI were more observable after the rise of Enrico Berlinguer.¹⁵ In 1969, he was elected Deputy National Secretary of the party and three years later became the Secretary. Berlinguer fundamentally changed the approach of the party, abandoned the revolution as their aim and tried to transform the PCI into a modern left-wing democratic party. He also preferred the peace with the DC to continual animosity. He proposed to the politicians of the Christian Democracy the "historic compromise" (*compromesso storico*), the unprecedented plan of cooperation of two major political parties in order to secure the stability of Italy. The politicians of the DC did not approve these proposals, but President of the party Aldo Moro supported this idea and its realization in the 1970s.¹⁶

Even though he was relatively popular as a politician, among the groups of the extra-parliamentary opposition Enrico Berlinguer was considered as somebody who betrayed the interests of the working class.¹⁷ Trying to find a common ground with the DC, whose representatives had symbolized the institutions of the state for more than twenty years, the Secretary of the Communist party lost his credibility and became a 'part of the system'. In the early 1970s, the PCI lost influence over the extra-parliamentary opposition and to a certain degree also the contact with it.

Although the groups of the New Left abandoned the alliance with the PCI, their main enemies were the managers of the big factories, the institutions of the state

13 CURCIO, R., *A viso aperto. Intervista di Mario Scialoja*, Milano 1993, p. 47.

14 Soccorso rosso, Brigate Rosse. *Che cosa hanno fatto, che cosa hanno detto, che cosa se ne è detto*, Milano 1976, p. 35.

15 Enrico Berlinguer was descended from an aristocratic family from Sardinia and his personal style was markedly different from that of his predecessors. He abandoned the PCI's friendly policy towards the Soviet Union and along with the secretaries of French Communist Party (PCF) Georges Marchais and Spanish Communist Party (PCE) Santiago Carrillo created the concept of eurocommunism in the late 1970s. GINSBORG, P., op. cit., p. 374.

16 BARBAGALLO, F., *Enrico Berlinguer*, Carocci 2006, pp. 183ff.

17 FRANCESCHINI, A., *Mara, Renato e io*, Milano 1996, p. 79.

and the neo-Fascist groups.¹⁸ In 1969, the number of the violent attacks effectuated by the radical right movements reached 148, while there were only ten on the side of the radical left. The left wing attacks had not become more numerous until 1977.¹⁹ The most brutal attack of this time happened on December 12, 1969, at Piazza Fontana in Milan. The explosions at the National Agrarian Bank killed seventeen people and injured eighty eight. Even though the origins of the massacre lay quite clearly on the extreme right, the police accused the anarchists.²⁰ One of them, the taxi driver Giuseppe Pinelli, was arrested and three days after the explosions fell from the window at the police station and died. His death was claimed to be a suicide but a significant part of the society did not believe this explanation; the massive demonstrations against the state system followed, for the government was linked with the extreme right-wing terrorists in the eyes of the protestants.

The decision of the left wing activists to start organizing the terrorist operations was not caused by the explosions at the Piazza Fontana; most of the groups were already founded.²¹ Yet, the neo-Fascist attacks undoubtedly contributed to the escalation of violence and to the radicalization of the future terrorists.²² According to Marica Tolomelli, the terrorist activities in Italy were not the “exemplary cases, but rather the strategies of deterring violence as a form of the action”.²³

GIANGIACOMO FELTRINELLI AND THE GAP

The editor Giangiacomo Feltrinelli had an essential influence on the beginnings of the Left-wing terrorism in Italy. This wealthy solitary radical had his contacts all over the world — he often travelled to Cuba and South America, Africa and also the lands of Eastern bloc (especially the German Democratic Republic, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, probably having his own house in Prague).²⁴ He published in Italian the texts and speeches of Fidel Castro or Ho Chi Minh, Mao Zedong's *Little Red Book*, and

18 Not only the MSI, but also extreme right movements such as the National Vanguard (*Avanguardia nazionale*) or the New Order (*Ordine nuovo*).

19 With 216 left-wing and 168 right-wing attacks. DELLA PORTA, D. — ROSSI, M., *Cifre crudeli: bilancio dei terrorismi*, Bologna 1984, p. 18.

20 BISCIONE, F. M., *Una modalità della lotta politica in Italia 1969-74*, in: GHEZZI, C., (ed.), *Brescia: Piazza della Loggia*, Roma 2012, p. 30.

21 Although their bloodiest attacks were still not effectuated. PANVINI, G., *Ordine nero, guerriglia rossa. La violenza politica nell'Italia degli anni Sessanta e Settanta (1966-1975)*, Torino 2009, p. 97.

22 NOVELLI, D. — TRANFAGLIA, N., *Vite sospese. Le generazioni del terrorismo*, Milano 2007, p. 39.

23 TOLOMELLI, M., *Di fronte alle BR e alla RAF: Percezioni sociali a confronto*, in: *L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni settanta, vol. III. Partiti e organizzazioni di massa*, Roma 2001, p. 426.

24 Feltrinelli was a personal friend of the Cuban president Fidel Castro, on his journeys he met the leaders of the Third world — Kwame Nkrumah, Sékou Touré or Ben Barka. In 1967 he was almost arrested in Bolivia as a Soviet agent. FELTRINELLI, C., *Senior Service*, Milano 1999, pp. 223-224, 311-314.

Carlos Marighella's *Manual of urban guerrilla*. Feltrinelli dreamed of a united force of the communists to start the world revolution — unlike many of the Italian extra-parliamentary oppositions, he did not exclude the Soviet Union and the countries of Warsaw pact from his plans.²⁵ He supported the students, the workers, and the potential future terrorists in many ways. In 1970, Feltrinelli founded the paramilitary Groups of Partisan Action (*Gruppi d'azione partigiana*; GAP)²⁶ and broadcasted a radio channel of the same name. Through this illegal Radio GAP he informed the workers about the dates and places of the demonstrations, about the strikes, and the coordination of the actions. He also financially and non-financially supported the newly created terrorist or activist groups, especially the Workers' Power (*Potere Operaio*) and the Red Brigades. He helped them by providing false passports, smuggling the weapons for them, and by showing them how to create explosives. Moreover, he published their manifestos and let them participate in the Radio GAP programmes.

Among others, he cooperated with some old Stalinist members of the PCI like Pietro Secchia and the legendary partisans, such as Giambattista Lazagna.²⁷ His trust in the PCI was shaken, however, when Enrico Berlinguer gained power. Since 1969 onwards, he considered them to be a part of the system, which he fought against. After the attacks at Piazza Fontana, Feltrinelli became extremely paranoid, suspecting either the neo-Fascists or the old aristocracy to prepare a coup d'état. He began to fear for his own life and ceased his public actions.

On 15 March 1972, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli was found dead under the transmission tower in Segrato near Milano. He was trying to place the explosives on the tower and thus cause the blackout in the part of Milano where the congress of the PCI took place. It was anticipated that Enrico Berlinguer would become the Secretary of the party and Feltrinelli wanted to interrupt that event violently, but the explosives blew up early and killed him before he managed to set them up.²⁸

Feltrinelli's death gave to the groups of the extra-parliamentary Left new reasons to continue the fights, as none of them believed the official story and suspected the secret service of murdering him. He became a martyr of the movement and a symbol of the oppression by the state. With his death many revolutionary groups lost their international contacts, that he had secured, and also financial and material incomes.

THE CONTINUOUS STRUGGLE

The Continuous Struggle (*Lotta continua*; LC) was founded in 1969 along with the journal of the same name. The journal, which had been released daily since 1972, became

²⁵ DELLA PORTA, D., *Terrorismi in Italia...*, p. 87.

²⁶ The GAP referred to the partisan tradition; he considered his actions only an interruption of the fights that ended on 25 April 1945.

²⁷ GRANDI, A., op. cit., p. 423.

²⁸ Feltrinelli was one of the few among the left wing terrorists who preferred the explosives. The bombs were usually considered the weapons of the neo-Fascists who used them frequently.

registered and it formed the legal framework of the organization, while most of the members were working for the illegal background. This kind of organizational structure was popular among the French New-Left movements and was adopted by several Italian groups.²⁹

The LC was led by a charismatic writer and journalist Adriano Sofri and among its prominent figures was a student activist from Trento, Mauro Rostagno. After the explosions at Piazza Fontana in December 1969 in Milano and the death of the anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli, the LC promised the revenge on the investigator of the case, inspector Luigi Calabresi. He was found shot on May 17, 1972, in front of his house; the responsibility was taken by Adriano Sofri personally.³⁰ The LC continued being active until 1976 — when the organization was dissolved at its third national congress in Rimini. Some of the radicals, nevertheless, kept on fighting in newly founded Front line (*Prima linea*; PL).

The LC was not important only for its terrorist activities; it was much more influential as an activist movement involved in organizing the strikes and demonstrations. However, its credit was high and when it turned to action, it received appropriate publicity. The LC did not share the hatred for the PCI with the movements of the Italian New Left and supported the PCI's ambitions to enter the government.³¹

WORKERS' POWER

The Workers' Power (*Potere operaio*; PO) was originally based on the intellectual force; it was founded in September 1969 and the leaders of the organization were the university professors, especially Toni Negri and Carlo Fiononi. The PO followed the activities of *Quaderni rossi* and *Classe operaia*, while Negri and others were active in those movements, too. As well as the LC, the PO also published a journal with their manifestos, ideas and description of events from their point of view. Fiononi was very close to Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, who financed the PO's activities and who was trying to coordinate them with other groups' actions.

In September 1971, the conference of the PO took place in Rome where Fiononi (being convinced by Feltrinelli to do so) initiated the founding of a subversive section of the organization — it was named the Illegal Work (*Lavoro illegale*).³² It was meant to have two parts — the political one, whose administration was carried out by a political activist and student leader Franco Piperno, and the military part, secured by a terrorist Valerio Morucci (later very active within the Red Brigades).³³

The Illegal Work committed the attack against the house of Mario Mattei, the prominent member of the neo-Fascist MSI, in April 1973. They set the building on

29 FASANELLA, G. — FRANCESCHINI, A., *Che cosa sono le Brigate rosse*, Milano 2004, p. 50.

30 BOBBIO, L., *Lotta continua. Storia di una organizzazione rivoluzionaria*, Roma 1979, p. 98.

31 NERI, S. (ed.), *Verso la lotta armata. La politica della violenza nella sinistra radicale degli anni Settanta*, Bologna 2012, p. 165.

32 PANSA, G., *Storie Italiane di violenza e terrorismo*, Roma-Bari 1980, p. 24.

33 MORUCCI, V., *La peggio gioventù. Una vita nella lotta armata*, Milano 2004, p. 51.

fire that seriously injured Mattei and killed his two sons. Some of the intellectuals of the PO tried to deny that the murder was constructed under their framework but their declarations were not trustworthy.

The PO itself was dissolved only two months later, in June 1973, due to long and serious difference of opinions between the two major leaders — Toni Negri and Franco Piperno. Some of the members (especially Negri) founded an activist group called the Workers' Autonomy (*Autonomia operaia*), some participated in organizing the Front Line in 1976, and others (Valerio Morucci, Adriana Faranda) joined the Red Brigades.³⁴

OCTOBER 22 GROUP

The revolutionary movement October 22 Group (*Gruppo XXII Ottobre*) was founded in Ligurian capital Genoa on October 22, 1969. Genoa was along with Milan and Turin one of the centres of the protests after 1968 and was widely known for the strong representation of the left-wing oriented activists.³⁵ The October 22 Group was an example of a geographically exclusive, but still very influential movement. No other significant terrorist organizations operated in Genoa in the period of existence of this group, neither did they operate in any other Italian city. The organization was constituted before the incident at Piazza Fontana in December 1969, but the explosions undoubtedly escalated the preparations for the bloody attacks that were to follow.³⁶

Regardless of its limitations, the October 22 Group maintained the contacts with the other organizations, especially the Red Brigades and Feltrinelli's GAP.³⁷ It was led by Mario Rossi and among the other leaders there were Giuseppe Battaglia and Augusto Viel. After several terrorist attacks, they effectuated their most famous action in March 1971 — the murder of the security guard Alessandro Floris, who was carrying a wallet full of money.³⁸ The October 22 Group planned this operation in order to finance the organization — the aim was not the murder itself, only the robbery. Nevertheless, this homicide became the beginning of their end. Soon afterwards, the main personalities of the movement were arrested and condemned to prison. The

³⁴ TOLOMELLI, M., *Terrorismo e società. Il pubblico dibattito in Italia e in Germania negli anni Settanta*, Bologna 2006, p. 71.

³⁵ Genoa was for the communists a symbol since the Second World War as it was involved in the Resistance enormously. In 1960, the strongest protests against the Tambroni government took place in Genoa, on the occasion of the sixth congress of MSI which should have taken place in this city. Organizing the congress of a neo-Fascist party in Genoa was taken as an insult.

³⁶ GALLI, G., *Storia del partito armato 1968–1982*, Milano 1982, pp. 5–20.

³⁷ Feltrinelli once helped Augusto Viel — after the murder of Alessandro Floris and arrest of Mario Rossi, Feltrinelli took him to Prague and hid him. However, according to Feltrinelli's biographer Aldo Grandi this was not very probable; more likely he only kept him in his house and sent the postcards from Prague in his name. GRANDI, A., op. cit., p. 472.

³⁸ SPIEZIE, A. et al., *30 anni di BR. Le Brigate Rosse nei racconti di Ansonio Andreassi, Giuliano Ferrara, Severino Santiapichi. La cronologia dei fatti e la lista delle vittime*, Roma 2001, p. 35.

main prosecutor Mario Sossi became one of the most hated figures among the extra-parliamentary opposition and he was kidnapped by the Red brigades two years later as an act of vengeance for the October 22 Group.

POLITICAL METROPOLITAN COLLECTIVE

After Renato Curcio and his wife Margherita Cagol moved to Milan, they joined the alternative unions CUB in Pirelli. Curcio soon met a political activist Corrado Simioni, who worked in the student-workers' collective and invited Curcio for the lectures. Together, they rented an old theater in via Curtatone where they invited all the personalities of the revolutionary movements from Milan — thus the Political Metropolitan Collective (*Collettivo politico metropolitano*; CPM) was founded. The access to the CPM was not limited — anybody who wanted to join could simply do so without any controls.³⁹

The CPM was very heterogeneous. There were representatives of the unions, such as Raffale De Mori or Curcio from Pirelli, Corrado Simioni from Mondadori and Mario Moretti from Sit-Siemens.⁴⁰ From Trento, there were the student leaders of the 1968 protests named Duccio Berio and Vanni Mulinaris, as well as the representatives of the Catholic organizations Young laborers and Young students (*Giovani studenti* and *Giovani lavoratori*) Franco Troiano, Giorgio Semeria and Maurizio Ferrari.

Renato Curcio and Corrado Simioni were appointed leaders of the movement. Curcio was a brilliant speaker, very popular among the CPM's members. Simioni remained in the shadows — he was quiet and intelligent, with many contacts among the *Black Panthers* in the USA or the French revolutionary groups *Vive la revolution* or *Gauche proletarienne*. Simioni also worked on his own projects, especially the group of the left-wing radicals, who escalated the violence at the demonstrations, burned the cars etc. They were called the Red aunts (*Zie rosse*) because of the strong representation of women within the group. Another Simioni's secret group was called the *Superclan*, the abbreviation of the word *superclandestini*. While CPM took part mainly in the discussions and manifestations, the *Superclan* should have served as an effective group.⁴¹

The *Superclan's* biggest operation was the bomb attack at the United States' embassy in Athens on 2nd September 1970, during which, nonetheless, died merely the two terrorists themselves. This event brought discord into the CPM, for neither Cur-

39 CURCIO, R., *A viso aperto. Intervista di Mario Scialoja*, Milano 1993, pp. 48–50.

40 Mario Moretti was one of the leaders of the Study Groups (Gruppi di studio) in Sit-Siemens and also founder of the Commune at Piazza Stuparich where he tried to establish the completely centrally-organized life. He later became the leader and the key figure of the Red Brigades. MORETTI, M., *Brigate rosse: una storia italiana. Intervista di Carla Mosca e Rossana Rossanda*, Milano 1994, pp. 11–14.

41 Italian journalist Giorgio Bocca named the *Superclan* „maybe the most exemplary case of a diffused irresponsibility in the New Left in these times.” BOCCA, G., *Noi terroristi. 12 anni di lotta armata ricostruiti e discussi con i protagonisti*, Milano 1985, p. 38.

cio nor other leaders knew about this Simioni's private project. Moreover, Simioni originally proposed to Curcio's wife Margherita Cagol to do the job. After that, Curcio did not share his plans with Simioni; he founded the Red Brigades, in which Simioni was not included. Then, Simioni (along with Vanni Mulinaris, Duccio Berio and other members of the CPM) abandoned the milieu of the revolutionary groups in Milan and his further activities became secret.⁴²

THE GROUP OF THE APARTMENT

Apart from the big cities in Northern Italy, another center of the extra-parliamentary opposition was basen in the region of Emilia Romagna, specifically in the town Reggio Emilia. Here, few young members of the PCI began to ponder the alternatives of the revolutionary struggle. For this purpose they rented a spacious flat in via Emilia San Pietro; that is why this group is called the Group of the Apartment (*Gruppo del appartamento*).⁴³

The Group of the Apartment was founded in the summer of 1969 by the young communists who wanted to oppose the line of Enrico Berlinguer. The regional organization of PCI offered to pay the rent for the Apartment for them but they refused. The Apartment's leader Alberto Franceschini was afraid that the party was trying to get the group under their control. Soon after that the split with the PCI became inevitable and the members of the Apartment were either expelled or left without any support.⁴⁴

The Apartment was opened to anybody who wanted to join. At first, its programme was only to organize the lectures, discussions and political debates. The flat was very large, allowing anyone to sleep over, and the leaders collected the money to pay the rent.

Franceschini contacted the old veterans of the Communist Resistance who agreed to teach them how to use the weapons. Selected members of the group went regularly to the mountains where they were trained in the guerrilla techniques.⁴⁵ The partisans regarded the Group of the Apartment as their successors who could continue the fight that was interrupted in April 1945. Alberto Franceschini described the scene when an old partisan had given him a gun symbolizing their fight for the communist society.⁴⁶

Furthermore, Franceschini invited the speakers from the other New-left move-

42 Corrado Simioni later moved to Paris where he founded a language school named Hyperion. He was still suspected of involvement in the terrorist operations, especially those of the Red brigades under the leadership of Mario Moretti. Simioni himself denied it multiple times. MEADE, R., *The Red Brigades. The Story of Italian Terrorism*, London 1990, p. 224.

43 PERGOLIZZI, P., *L'appartamento: Dal Pci alla lotta armata*, Reggio Emilia 2006, p. 44.

44 CLEMENTI, M., *Storia delle Brigate rosse*, Roma 2007, p. 14.

45 The participants on the partisan training were chosen carefully — there were more than one hundred people who attended the meetings in the Apartment, including the spies of the PCI. Therefore, it was dangerous to admit openly that they are being trained. Some of the theoretic courses about using the guns were despite that held directly in the Apartment. PERGOLIZZI, P., op. cit., p. 86.

46 FASANELLA, G. — FRANCESCHINI, A., *Che cosa sono le Brigate rosse*, Milano 2004, p. 40.

ments to the Apartment, such as Workers' Power or Continuous Struggle. He found mutual interests with CPM's leader Renato Curcio and they agreed on further cooperation. In the summer of 1970, the CPM organized a meeting of the left-wing revolutionary groups from whole Italy, for which Franceschini found a hotel in a small village Costaferrata in the district of Reggio Emilia.⁴⁷ About one hundred people from different groups stayed at the hotel for two days, discussing the possibilities of the unification. Curcio and Simioni (it happened before the split and Simioni's departure) proposed the creation of a legal organization that would publish a journal. Secretly, it would concentrate on the fight in the factories — intimidating the bosses, burning the cars, and escalating the demonstrations. Not all of the attendants of the meeting agreed but in the end the majority approved founding of the organization and a journal named the Proletarian Left (*Sinistra proletaria*). The name and the structure were adopted from the French movement of the same name (*Gauche proletarienne*).

THE RED BRIGADES

The Proletarian Left operated mostly in Milan and Alberto Franceschini with few other members of the Group of the Apartment moved there. After Simioni's secession, Curcio, Cagol, Franceschini and some others of the Proletarian Left thought about moving to another level of the armed opposition — to a completely clandestine organization. It was named after the Garibaldi Brigades, the legendary partisan units from the Communist Resistance: the Red Brigades (*Brigate rosse*). Its symbol, a red star, referred to the Red army and the Viet Cong, but most of all the Uruguayan guerrilla group *Tupamaros*.

Originally, the Red Brigades confined themselves to burning the cars of the most hated bosses and the sabotage operations.⁴⁸ After they became well-known, several people from other groups joined them, such as Pietro Morlacchi or Mario Moretti.⁴⁹ Both of them became soon the prominent members of the organization and with Curcio, Cagol and Franceschini, they participated in its leadership. In March 1972, the Red brigades commenced another phase of their history — the first kidnapping took place.⁵⁰ The purpose of the kidnapping was to build reputation and to frighten the high-level managers, while the intention was not to injure the kidnapped ones.

⁴⁷ GALLINARI, P., *Un contadino nella metropoli*, Milano 2006, p. 73.

⁴⁸ These operation were based on the wide silent support which they got from the workers. MANCONI, L., *Terroristi italiani. Le Brigate rosse e la guerra totale 1970–2008*, Milano 2008, p. 54.

⁴⁹ Moretti left the CPM before the Proletarian Left was founded.

⁵⁰ Idalgo Macchiarini, one of the directors in *Sit-Siemens*, was chosen as the target of the first kidnapping. He was judged by the “people's trial” and found guilty — despite of that “temporarily released”. He was photographed before the Red Brigades' flag with the text: “Macchiarini Idalgo, the Fascist director of Siemens, judged by the Red Brigades. The proletarians have taken the weapons. For the managers, the beginning of the end has come.” CLEMENTI, M., op. cit., p. 38.

The members of the organization remained living a normal life as long as possible. After they became wanted by the police, they usually passed to illegality, which meant that they had to hide and have false identities. The massive passes to illegality happened after 1972. The Red Brigades were financially independent, they were not funded by the sponsors similar to Giangiacomo Feltrinelli. They were given money by the members, who did not pass to illegality and still worked, and from the robberies. The robberies were often effectuated by new members and served also as a test of their loyalty.

The Red brigades were (in comparison to other movements) very well organized and could remain active even when most of its members were arrested (unlike for example the October 22 Group).⁵¹ The organization was guided by the National Direction (*il Nazionale*),⁵² and after its spread from Milan to other major Italian cities, it divided into the „columns”. Apart from Milan, there were the columns of Turin, Venice, Genoa, and later also Rome and Naples. Every column consisted of two or three brigades and a brigade had circa five members. Big changes in the structure did not occur until 1974.

During this year, the Red Brigades started to advance a new policy. Their new political manifest was named the „Attack at the Heart of the State” (*attacco al cuore dello Stato*). The organization abandoned the policy of fights in the factories and aimed at the politicians and the state institutions. Their first action of this kind was the kidnapping of the prosecutor Mario Sossi, who led the trial against the October 22 Group. Despite the fact that he was released after thirty-five days of being captive, the Red Brigades got the nation-wide publicity and became the most famous and effective terrorist group in Italy.

In 1974, Renato Curcio and Alberto Franceschini were arrested and Margherita Cagol was shot a year later. The management of the organization devolved to Mario Moretti and his supporters who wanted to escalate the violence in Italy.⁵³ The number of attacks rose and so did the number of victims. The violence culminated in 1978 during the „Spring Campaign” (*la campagna di primavera*) and the kidnapping and murder of former PM Aldo Moro. The transformation of the organization was not caused only by the personal changes within the National Direction, it was also connected with the changes in the society.⁵⁴

After five years of its existence, the student-workers' movement began to diminish. The activist groups that were not based primarily on terrorism (Workers' Power or Continuous Struggle) lost their importance or ceased to exist. The Red Brigades, the

51 This situation happened in May 1972 when about thirty terrorists of the Red Brigades were arrested. The leaders, however, escaped and could continue in the organization's activities.

52 Its members were Renato Curcio, Margherita Cagol, Alberto Franceschini and Pietro Morlacchi. Morlacchi broke down psychically in 1972 and moved to Switzerland; the National Direction only had four members after that.

53 CATANZARO, R., *The Red Brigades and Left-wing Terrorism in Italy*, London 1991, p. 107.

54 Moretti himself did not overestimate his own impact on the structural changes within the organization. MORETTI, M., op. cit., p. 89.

most significant terrorist group, had to turn from operating in the factories to brutal and perfectly organized actions. According to their structure, a new type of the terrorist organizations appeared, such as the Armed Proletarian Cores (*Nuclei armati proletari*), founded in 1974, or the Front Line (1976). They followed the new line, even though they were not as radical as the Red Brigades.⁵⁵

As the terrorists became more brutal, they were abandoned even by the part of the society that previously sympathized with them, and came into isolation. Although the terrorist activities continued until late 1980s, they lost their revolutionary potential.

ABSTRACT

THE ORIGINS OF THE LEFT-WING TERRORISM IN ITALY AFTER 1968

The study deals with the establishment and development of the Left-wing terrorist groups in the first years of their existence in 1968 — 1974. The beginnings of terrorism are put in context of the social situation in Italy in the end of 1960s (the formation of the extra-parliamentary opposition and the situation in the tertiary education) and of the political history of the post-war Italy (the relations of the Christian Democracy and the Communist Party of Italy). The study also deals with the characteristics of the most important terrorist groups: the Groups of Partisan Action of the editor Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, the Workers' Power, the Continuous Struggle, the October 22 Group, and also the Group of the Apartment and the Political Metropolitan Collective, whose members formed the Red Brigades. These groups are characterized by their position in the student-workers' movement, ideological or organizational specifics, particular actions and their demise or transformation in the end of the defined period.

KEYWORDS

Terrorism, Extra-parliamentary opposition, Red brigades, Italy, New Left, Years of Lead

ABSTRAKT

PŮVOD LEVICOVÉHO TERORISMU V ITÁLII PO ROCE 1968

Studie se zabývá vznikem a vývojem levicových teroristických skupin v prvních letech jejich existence mezi léty 1968 a 1974. Počátky terorismu jsou uvedeny do kontextu společenské situace v Itálii na konci šedesátých let (vznik mimoparlamentní opozice a situace v terciárním vzdělávání) i do politický dějin poválečné Itálie (vztahy Křesťanské demokracie a Komunistické strany Itálie). Radikalizaci násilných hnutí rovněž ovlivnily bombové útoky extrémně pravicového původu a strach z možného neofašistického převratu. Studie se dále zabývá charakteristikou a nejvýznamnějších teroristických skupin, jimiž byly Skupiny partyzánské akce milánského nakladatele Giangiacoma Feltrinelliho, Dělnická síla, Nepřetržitý boj, Skupina 22. října, a dále Skupina z bytu a Politický metropolitní kolektiv, jejichž členové zformovali Rudé brigády. Tyto skupiny jsou charakterizovány svým postavením ve studentsko-dělnickém hnutí, ideologickými nebo organizačními specifiky, konkrétními akcemi i svým zánikem či transformací na konci vymezeného období.

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Terorismus, mimoparlamentní opozice, rudé brigády, Itálie, Nová levice, Olovená léta

⁵⁵ CLEMENTI, M., op. cit., p. 142–143.