

# Introduction

Basically there was only one problem, and they were completely agreed about it: to restore the authority of the State ... They were ready to make every concession for this, although in different degrees. Colombi talked in a lukewarm fashion of reforms. Tempesti, when it was his turn, wholeheartedly professed a reverence for the religious beliefs of his colleague. The crisis [of government] might prove useful, a good step along the road to normality. It didn't matter, although it was obvious, that to each this meant something different. The expression was the same and all that really mattered was that it should seem identical.<sup>1</sup>

In *The Watch*, Carlo Levi imagined this conversation between two prominent members of the broad anti-Fascist coalition governing Italy at the end of 1945: the ministers Tempesti (a fictional version of the Communist Emilio Sereni) and Colombi (representing Attilio Piccioni, an influential member of Christian Democracy's conservative wing). Responding to the resignation of Ferruccio Parri's government, which Levi saw as an end to the hopes for a profound renewal of Italian society that had inspired the Resistance, two groups at opposite ends of the Italian political spectrum were using the same vocabulary and expressing themselves in the same way. While their ideas were certainly very different, and their goals increasingly so, the words they used in common showed that these political opponents shared an understanding of what was meant by government.

Levi was an attentive observer of Italian politics, and when writing these pages in 1950 he must have been aware that within the space of a few years these similarities in linguistic usage had been profoundly affected by changes in the political climate; language had in fact been transformed from a medium of understanding between adversaries into an arena of bitter conflict. One of the most distinctive aspects of Italian political communication during the

most difficult years of the Cold War can be seen in the parties' employment of very similar terms and key concepts, with the aim of acquiring a monopoly of their 'correct' usage while suggesting that their adversaries were usurpers whose discourse was mistaken and misleading. Both the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and its detractors identified with the adjective 'democratic', and proclaimed the need to defend the fundamental guarantees of the Constitution from their opponents. Both sides claimed ownership of the symbols on which the identification of Italians with their fatherland had been established, and each accused the other of acting for foreign powers. Both the Communists and anti-Communists promoted their programmes as the only way of defending the universally desired peace, which their opponents sought to destroy by leading the world into a new war. The political programmes of both the PCI and the centrist forces in government were presented as the unique means of guaranteeing economic development and achieving wellbeing throughout society, as against the plans of their opponents which would only lead to abject poverty. In the sphere of political language, at least, the affirmation and defence of the traditional Christian spirit was a point of reference not only for those aligned with the Church, but also for representatives of the Marxist Left.

It could be argued, in line with Pocock, that the various political forces were simply using the 'conceptual vocabularies that were available'.<sup>2</sup> It should be borne in mind, in particular, that much of the linguistic material of the post-war period had been developed at a time when anti-Fascist cooperation seemed to be the potential basis for a new coexistence, before this language was put to work in a situation of national and international bipolar conflict marked by an unforeseen intensity.<sup>3</sup> In the wake of centuries of Catholicism embedded in social life, decades of Risorgimento mythology, the horrors of a war that nobody wished to see repeated, and finally the victory of the language of freedom and democracy that followed the downfall of Fascism, any political force seeking legitimacy in Italian society had no choice but to use this same language. It was introduced into opposing channels of communication that had of course been developed within completely different ideological frameworks.

This thinking can be further developed with reference to Angelo Ventrone's formulation, in which neither the Communists nor the anti-Communists recognised the right of their 'enemy within' to 'citizenship', understood as 'full membership of a community'. Each political party ended up 'insisting blindly on its role and ... presenting itself as the unique vehicle for the genuine interests of the national community, and for proper civic virtues': that collection of attitudes which provided the basis for people's way of life and their involvement in the fortunes of their community.<sup>4</sup> However, the 'civic virtues' of which each claimed a monopoly, and the frameworks for the contrasting programmes that distinguished them, were presented in a very similar fashion on both sides: both

the advocates of pro-Soviet Communism and their opponents attempted to address their message to all sections of the public right across Italy, by adopting a political vocabulary and a framework of references that were universally considered to confer legitimacy. With this in mind, it is clearly difficult in the Italian context to apply interpretative models that are based on a rigid distinction between 'propaganda', an activity generally carried out by undemocratic regimes or in situations where information is highly controlled, and the 'communication' practised in pluralist democracies.<sup>5</sup> The battle for the exclusive exercise of fundamental values and symbolic references is the most obvious indication of the 'climate of competition and war': each side wanting 'to impose their point of view' without leaving any room for other positions.<sup>6</sup> This resulted in the development of systems of communication and distinctive programmes that stood in clear contrast to each other and were in large part mutually impenetrable. However, the promotion of common references assisted the preservation of a fragile democratic experiment, offering Italian politics the solution of 'consensus democracy' that was to characterise the subsequent period.<sup>7</sup>

New avenues for understanding the nature of Italy's political system in the post-war period can thus be opened up by analysing the language that was developed around key terms by the political forces facing each other in the battle between Communism and anti-Communism, and by investigating the processes whereby 'republican citizenship' was developed and strengthened. This book offers solutions to some of the interpretative problems in this field, focusing its attention on a period of major conflict in Italian democratic life: this started with the exclusion of the PCI and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) from the government in May 1947, and came to an end with the elections of 7 June 1953. At this latter point both sides were forced to change their approach in the wake of the succession to Stalin, on the international front, and the internal backlash against the '*legge truffa*' (swindle law), as its opponents termed it: the electoral reform that would have made a winning alliance's position unassailable in the Chamber of Deputies. After a whole framework of reference points had been removed by the Second World War, Italy entered the most intense phase of its domestic Cold War when the proposals for political and group identification that characterised the subsequent period had been fully developed and disseminated throughout society. This context saw a definitive systematisation of the linguistic and symbolic material that the protagonists of political conflict were to make their own for decades to come.

Chapter 1 describes the organisational systems and methods used to develop and disseminate the party messages. It focuses on the most important networks and the material used to create and disseminate language, taking account of the interactions between the written and the spoken word, the constructed image and the photograph, and the outputs of political organisations and ordinary

non-party newspapers. Subsequent chapters explore the contrast between the messages formulated by the Communist offices for public communication and by their opposition, revisiting the full range of competing symbolic propositions, or 'political cultures' as Serge Bernstein called them, whose conflict is the essence of mass society politics.<sup>8</sup>

When we look at the PCI, there is no mistaking the most consistent feature of its worldview as presented by its *Sezione stampa e propaganda* (Press and Propaganda Section). At the heart of the Communist movement's identity was the interpretation of human development as a story of class conflict, based on an uncompromising enmity that was manifested in the struggle launched by the 'imperialist front' against the USSR and other countries ruled by Communist parties, according to the formulation that Andrei Zhdanov presented in September 1947 at the founding conference of Cominform in Szklarska Poręba. When it regained its legal status after the fall of Fascism, the PCI immediately demonstrated its allegiance to the value system shared by international Communism. The fundamental criteria of allegiance to or exclusion from 'civic virtues', which gave a political entity legitimacy in representing the Italian people, were articulated on the basis of a class-based and economic interpretation of political representation and struggle, following the canons of simplification and popularisation that had been used to disseminate Marxist-Leninist doctrine.<sup>9</sup> The differences between 'forces of democracy' and 'Fascist reaction' were presented in terms of a model in which the enemy of democracy was necessarily the enemy of the proletariat; the definition of 'peace' was closely based on Leninist teachings about the inevitability of an outbreak of war in the final crisis of capitalism, to the extent that even rearmament and strategies of aggression could be seen as elements of a peaceful policy if practised by the bloc of states that was depicted as the stalwart opponent of 'imperialism'. The symbols of Italian unification and national identity were viewed through an interpretative lens that reduced the national community to Italy's productive '*sane forze*' (healthy forces), understood as that urban and rural '*proletariato*' which the Marxist Left claimed only it could represent. The upper middle class and the '*padronato*' (bosses and landowners), by contrast, were accused of 'serving foreigners', because Italy's enemies were identified on the basis of their complicity with and defence of the interests of the '*capitalismo maturo*' of the most developed countries. In brief, the PCI leadership, gripped by an inflexible logic that divided society between the two realms of capitalism and socialism, offered an interpretation of the world based on a dualistic distinction between 'saviours' and 'conspirators'. The negative universe that Communist political culture identified appeared to be strongly cohesive and uniform: a shared hostility towards the socialist renewal of society generated a union of historically 'reactionary' cultural forces (the Catholic Church), the great powers of international

imperialism (the United States and its Western allies), and the ruling classes (Italy's '*grande borghesia monopolistica*', which in its time had provided the social foundations of Fascism).<sup>10</sup>

Between 1947 and the mid-1950s, however, while the nature of Italian 'republican citizenship' was being developed and consolidated, the largely unchanging class-based interpretation of the world was complemented by presentation styles and symbolic language that did in fact change over time. Analysis of the PCI's public self-presentation and political communication has generated various findings, but the picture has until now remained incomplete. There has been discussion, for example, of the Communists' error in allowing themselves to be 'dragged onto ground that was much more comfortable for the Catholics ... that ... of the direct clash between religious beliefs and myths', committed in 1948 and not subsequently repeated; their improved ability to use visual languages, abandoning the solemnity of Soviet and Fascist models in favour of a fresher style thanks to a mix of promotional artwork, cartoons and poster presentation; and their adoption after the defeat of April 1948 of a less 'political' language, intended to attract those Italians who were less engaged in the ideological debate.<sup>11</sup>

A deeper and fuller understanding can be achieved by considering how those responsible for Communist publicity and campaigning dealt with the gradual establishment of their distinctive programme as a 'subculture': a political culture characterised by active rejection of the dominant society and integration within this.<sup>12</sup> During the 1948 campaign, the political forces that had created the Democratic Popular Front presented the voters with a dynamic political programme that was built around the implementation of profound political and social changes. These innovations had to be presented to the voters as consistent with the main points of reference that offered legitimation in the eyes of Italian society, such as the rejection of authoritarianism on behalf of the recaptured democratic freedoms, national identity and even national pride, a guarantee of material wellbeing, and the preservation of a Christian morality and approach. At the same time, however, they appeared to be radical alternatives to the status quo: they were described in words and images that took their inspiration from the societies of Eastern Europe, providing models that offered the realisation not only of socialist ideals, but also of human life in its highest form.

The possibility that the PCI might rejoin the government faded away with the results of the first national elections, the government's survival despite the mass union demonstrations of the next few years, and the success of attempts at land reform, albeit partial. The party quickly adapted its communication to consolidating the role of 'permanent opposition' that it had been forced to assume. The issues that the PCI had addressed when developing a programme for the Popular Front became less important in this new situation. During the

early 1950s, the agencies responsible for developing its political communication dealt with the abandonment of Communist aspirations to govern by using simpler and more accessible imagery; the logic and strength of the message's argument were abandoned in favour of references that would allow the party line to be shared with increasingly broad sections of society, even when this led to a confusion of mutually contradictory driving ideas.

With the slowness that typified changes in linguistic register within the Communist world, the model of the Soviet Union and the 'new democracies', as the point of reference for the vocabulary used to describe the political action that the Communists intended to carry out in Italy, became the backdrop for an indefinitely postponed revolution; this was for discussion in the latter pages of the party newspaper as an enduring and crucial objective that was not, however, immediately achievable. The innovative potential of 'progressive democracy' lost its sense of immediate relevance, and was replaced by a defence of the pillars of 'formal democracy', such as the centrality of parliament and the constitutional guarantees of legitimate opposition, against creeping 'Fascism' or 'Christian Democrat totalitarianism'. The claim to fully represent the Italian national idea, which had underwritten reappropriation of the symbol of Garibaldi, was over time translated into an accusation by the government's opponents of its 'subservience to foreigners', especially after Italy's signature of the North Atlantic Treaty. The fight against 'imperialist' war began to be expressed in the symbolic imagery of anti-militarist and even religious pacifism, ideas that were theoretically alien to a movement that was proud of having taken up arms against '*bellicismo*' (warmongering) between 1941 and 1945, after the Axis powers had launched their attack on Russia. Similarly, the proposal for social transformation, at first to be realised by means of 'structural reforms', came to be expressed in a relentless criticism of capitalism's transgressions and of societies like the United States that represented its most advanced manifestation. However, an interest in the 'other America', and in some of the more interesting aspects of the American path towards modernisation, mean that the full picture has not been given by the recent description of the PCI's distinguishing position during the Cold War as an 'anti-Western political religion ... [and] basis for a ... separate citizenship'.<sup>13</sup>

When we set out to analyse Communist political communication, it is clear where our attention should be directed. During the post-war decades the PCI was a political actor with a strong organisational structure, within which the production of information and publicity was controlled from the centre by a specific *Sezione stampa e propaganda*; the party's systems for mobilising the general public have been well known, and their communication output has been clearly identifiable. The party's message was structured around symbolic and ideological material that had to be interpreted and expressed in specific ways.

By contrast, there are no such certainties when we examine anti-Communist political communication. To date, research that has addressed the clash between the Communists and their cultural and political adversaries in the immediate post-war period has done so in a reductive manner, singling out organised Catholicism and the Christian Democrats (DC) as the only significant elements of society that were hostile to the PCI. The unifying and mobilising role of Catholic anti-Communism has often been overestimated, or at least its pre-eminence has too easily been taken for granted; in the transmission of images and ideas, not enough consideration has been given to the political value and success enjoyed by publications such as the ordinary newspapers and more lightweight weekly magazines, which had no formal affiliation to political parties or religious institutions. In short, the phenomenon of hostility towards Communism, even within the narrow field of research on Cold-War Italy, proves to be far more complex than has been thought.

'Anti-Communism' thus refers not so much to a distinct ideological position as to a more general negative attitude adopted by some very diverse political cultures and intellectual figures, often in dispute with each other. We can identify the common factors within these 'anti-Communisms', starting with their particular target, the political, social and cultural experiment generated by the October Revolution, and the feature whereby a diametrical opposition to Communism and all its aspects – the 'enemy' – led to the confirmation of identifying traits of their own political 'family'.<sup>14</sup> Above all, this book will show how anti-Communist publicity and campaigning agencies, at least at the point when the Soviet threat seemed to be particularly real and imminent, formed a genuine network in which politically oriented bodies and organisations both drew on and influenced ideas circulating within other cultural arenas. From 1948 onwards, the powerful Catholic communications network functioned not only as a vehicle for attacks generated by the dogmatic rejection of Communism that the Church had previously developed: it was also an important disseminator of material produced in non-religious environments, from André Gide's *Return from the USSR to I Chose Freedom* by the Ukrainian refugee Victor Kravchenko, and of references to the 'productivist' attitude that the American government wanted Europe to adopt in its reconstruction. Christian Democrat and liberal or conservative publications, for their part, played a key role in disseminating the principal ideas of left-wing anti-Communism, which were by no means lacking in harsh criticism of the capitalist production system.

Within the diverse spheres of Italian anti-Communism, these exchanges of material were sometimes underpinned by jointly held convictions and distinguishing references that were positive rather than just negative. The support of the secular press for the Church's battle against Communism is well known: this support, notwithstanding dwindling interest, remained firm

throughout the 1950s. Conversely, Catholic culture had to come to terms with the population's growing interest in a diluted and seemingly apolitical version of the affluence of the 'American dream'. This idea was spread by media channels quite different from those traditionally charged with the construction of political identity, but its success had important consequences, including the distinct weakening of Catholic criticism directed at the 'individualism', capitalist 'materialism' and Protestant 'immorality' of the United States, for the sake of unity against the shared danger of Communism. To summarise, during the mobilisation campaigns of the immediate post-war period the messages of the anti-Communists were the vehicle for an amalgamation of symbolic and linguistic references whose focal point was their polar opposition to Communism. The defence of Italy's religious practices and traditional standards, the spirit of national belonging conceived in opposition to an enemy both external and internal, and a 'Western' style of economic development taking its cue from the 'Americanisation' of everyday life: these became the reference points in the cultural universe of evolving moderate and conservative opinion.

The existence of these shared features of anti-Communist stances in Italy should not lead us to overestimate their unifying power. Divisions emerged in the area of public communication, where normally cracks and disagreements between political allies were papered over. In 1948, the urgency of the threat and the gravity of the choice facing the electorate had helped to generate an anti-Communist front, fuelled by the acquisition of fresh information on the Soviet and Eastern European regimes and assisted by the capacity of Catholic organisations to distribute material. The formation of a governing coalition had had the battle against Communism as its unifying feature; when these anti-Communist groupings were faced with making positive policy choices, some fundamental cultural differences emerged. Those closest to the Curia and the hardline Church lobby continued to press for a programme built on traditional religious standards, making it difficult for the DC to offer a distinguishing programme that was less tied to militant Catholicism. Concerns about world peace, and particularly about the outbreak of a new 'hot' war in Korea, heightened the tensions between those who saw rearmament as a guarantee of security and those who wanted to persist with seeking dialogue with the 'enemy'. The growing strength of radical right-wing opposition to the government was accompanied by a distinct hardening of the positions held by newspapers such as *Il Tempo* in their criticism of its softness towards the Marxist Left. During the 1950s it was these rifts, more than the simple distribution of votes in the 1953 elections, that helped to make the PCI's political marginalisation impossible.

The language that characterised anti-Communist political cultures during the formative years of mass democracy in Italy was thus very heterogeneous, and like the language of Communism it experienced its most widespread use in Italian society during a period of political tension that has never been

equalled since. In the immediate post-war period, however, with the consolidation of the political system that emerged after Fascism, both Communists and anti-Communists developed a repertoire of references that continued to characterise the public discourse of Italian politics up to the crisis of the 1990s and then beyond. Between 1994 and 2008, Silvio Berlusconi addressed moderate and conservative voters with ‘calls to arms’ that evoked the return of the ‘red peril’ even as the PCI was being dissolved: their success can only be understood by recognising the crucial importance of the battle between Communism and anti-Communism, at the very start of the Italian republic, in determining identities and patterns of electoral behaviour.<sup>15</sup> The continuities were destined to survive even the biggest changes to the system and priorities of the political agenda.

### Notes

- 1 C. Levi, *The Watch*, trans. J. Farrar (London: Cassell, 1952; first published in Italian as *L'orologio*, Turin: Einaudi, 1950), p. 291.
- 2 J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 3.
- 3 On this complex topic, see the ideas developed from a transnational comparative perspective in T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Heinemann, 2005).
- 4 A. Ventrone, *La cittadinanza repubblicana: come cattolici e comunisti hanno costruito la democrazia italiana (1943–1948)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2nd edn, 2008), pp. 9–12.
- 5 On the definition of propaganda developed in the classic studies of mass communication, from the early works by H. D. Lasswell onwards, see T. Glander, *Origins of Mass Communication Research during the American Cold War: Educational Effects and Contemporary Implications* (London: Routledge, 2000), and for its application in the Italian context see G. Mazzoleni, *La comunicazione politica* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 3rd edn, 2012). A less rigid definition of propaganda as a discourse aimed at persuasion of the masses, more useful in specific political and social contexts such as Italy, has been put forward in G. S. Jowett and V. O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (London: Sage, 6th edn, 2015). However, it should be acknowledged that in common English parlance the word ‘propaganda’ generally has negative connotations, evoking the intended manipulation of the audience, more so than when it is used within an Italian sentence. In this book, therefore, the Italian edition’s ‘propaganda’ and adjective ‘*propagandistico*’ have generally been translated as ‘publicity’, ‘communication’, ‘campaigning’, ‘public relations’ or other formulations. The exception relates to official titles, and in particular the ‘*Sezioni stampa e propaganda*’ of political parties, where the convention of translating these as ‘Press and Propaganda’ sections or offices has been followed.
- 6 C. Ottaviano, ‘Manifesti politici e dintorni: Persuadere e comunicare in Italia’, in C. Ottaviano and P. Soddu (eds), *La politica sui muri: I manifesti politici dell'Italia repubblicana, 1946–1992* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2001), pp. 12–15. For further discussion, see various essays in A. Baravelli (ed.), *Propagande contro: Modelli di comunicazione politica nel XX secolo* (Rome: Carocci, 2005).

- 7 On the model of 'consensus democracy', see the debate between A. Lijphart (*Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) and *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2nd edn, 2012)) and G. Sartori (*Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) and *Teoria dei partiti e caso italiano* (Milan: Sugarco, 1982)). For recent thinking on the particular nature of 'consensus democracy' in the Italian republic, see R. Gualtieri (ed.), *Il PCI nell'Italia repubblicana (1943–1991)* (Rome: Carocci, 2001), and S. Fabbrini, 'De Gasperi e la "giuntura critica" del periodo 1948–1953: L'Italia dell'immediato dopo-guerra tra due modelli di democrazia', *Ricerche di Storia Politica*, 11:1 (2008), 53–64.
- 8 Bernstein described a 'political culture' as 'a comprehensive vision of the world and its evolution ... [that] in a simplified form penetrates the mass following of the group that claims to belong to a particular political culture ... A system of representations based on a particular view of the world ... which is expressed by means of a coded discourse, symbols and rites'. S. Bernstein, 'L'historien et la culture politique', *Vingtième Siècle*, 35:1 (1992), 69–71.
- 9 See F. Andreucci, *Il marxismo collettivo: socialismo, marxismo e circolazione delle idee dalla Seconda alla Terza Internazionale* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1986), pp. 201–7.
- 10 For further thinking on this topic, see the interpretation offered by D. I. Kertzer, *Politics and Symbols: The Italian Communist Party and the Fall of Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).
- 11 For discussion of these themes see G. Vecchio, 'Il conflitto tra cattolici e comunisti: Caratteri ed effetti (1945–1958)', in *Chiesa e progetto educativo nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra (1945–1958)* (Brescia: La Scuola, 1999), p. 449; E. Novelli, *C'era una volta il PCI: Autobiografia di un partito attraverso le immagini della sua propaganda* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 2000); M. Dondi, 'La propaganda politica dal '46 alla legge truffa', in A. Mignemi (ed.), *Propaganda politica e mezzi di comunicazione di massa tra fascismo e democrazia* (Turin: Abele, 1995), p. 186.
- 12 See A. Pizzorno, *Le radici della politica assoluta e altri saggi* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1993), pp. 121–3.
- 13 A. Guiso, 'L'Europa e l'alleanza atlantica nella politica internazionale del PCI degli anni '50 e '60', in P. Craveri and G. Quagliariello (eds), *Atlantismo ed europeismo* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003), p. 217.
- 14 R. Pertici, 'Il vario anticomunismo italiano (1936–1960): lineamenti di una storia', in L. Di Nucci and E. Galli della Loggia (eds), *Due nazioni: Legittimazione e delegittimazione nella storia dell'Italia contemporanea* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003), pp. 263–334.
- 15 For discussion of the continuity of anti-Communist discourse in Italian politics, see A. Mariuzzo, 'Continuità e discontinuità del discorso anticomunista nella Seconda Repubblica', in S. Colarizi, A. Giovagnoli and P. Pombeni (eds), *L'Italia contemporanea dagli anni Ottanta a oggi*, vol. 3: *Istituzioni e politica* (Rome: Carocci, 2014), pp. 457–70.