

**GRAMMAR AND HISTORICAL MATERIALISM:
LINGUISTIC EDUCATION IN ITALIAN COMMUNIST
PARTY SCHOOLS (1947-1977)**

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I. Introduction

The Italian Communist Party created the most articulated and effective political school – and the only one in Italy – aimed at creating cadre leaders, in which the use of words plus the ability to reason and argue were indispensable qualities for those geared towards a political career, at either local or national level.

To this end, a system of party schools came into full effect after World War II, with the purpose of training militants in politics through a very elaborate process that bound the basis and direction of the party together in a relationship of mutual recognition. At a time when there was a return to democracy after the censorship and violence of the Fascist period, the Italian Communist Party had to convert the revolutionary aspirations that it had covertly developed into a new system of ideal values and references suited to the new political reality and slot it into every aspect of society in order to help reconstruct a country buckled by dictatorship and war.¹ In this context, the party school represented one of the most important sowing grounds, where the ICP (Italian Communist Party) carried out “its fundamental role as a ‘pedagogical’

¹ Giuseppe Carlo Marino, *Autoritratto del PCI staliniano 1945-1953* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1991), 40-45.

party”² and tried to gain the credibility of a mass political education that dealt with the quality of its members as well as the quantity.

In rendering the political school model operational, the ICP concentrated all the features of communist practice: organization, planning, discipline, collective life and methods of study. The school served as a laboratory where the ‘good comrade’ could be moulded, to be directed into the party bodies that were organised like a pyramid: central, local, sectional and cellular. To achieve such an ambitious goal, each detail was studied and rigorously arranged in a mosaic that had to restore the image of a party ready to provide the country with the best individuals for employment, particularly for the prestige of the party but also as lifeblood for a democratic Italy. For this reason, the organisational machinery also operated at full capacity in terms of training in and teaching of the basics of politics. The choice of students, the role of the principal and teachers, the lectures, the collective repetitions and the development of the programme were just as important as group life, the cohesion between students and respect for the regulations during the long period of attendance of the courses.

The aim of the schools was to create men (there were few women) who, through training and preparation based on strict rules, were able to speak in public, conduct a debate, solve tactical and political issues and attack or respond to political opponents. A course of action that in practice put into effect an operation that was appropriately defined as “mass discipline”.³ The schools, which from 1947 spread throughout the country, were to pursue the political and ideological advancement of the mostly uneducated militants, who had to attend courses lasting from six months to one year while staying in the residential institutions that offered free board, lodging and teaching materials.

II. Study Method

In the first decade of activity, the majority of students selected were from the working classes and illiterate. Clearly, therefore, schools tasked with educating workers and peasants in politics, or in any case people with a low level of education, had to face the first and unavoidable problem of teaching a basic study method to those who to all intents and purposes did not yet have one. An ordinary and elementary method was not enough, rather it was necessary to introduce a series of teachings that aimed to get

² Renzo Martinelli, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano. Il “Partito nuovo” dalla Liberazione al 18 aprile* (Torino: Einaudi, 1995), 188.

³ Guido Crainz, *Storia della Repubblica. L'Italia dalla Liberazione a oggi* (Roma: Donzelli, 2016), 29.

the students to study in order to understand, discuss, improve and elaborate convincing arguments even when faced with an external audience. A basic level of knowledge, acquired through the reading and studying of texts and handouts provided by the school, had to form part of a strategy that spanned from individual and collective study to the overall training of the student with a view to his subsequent political use. For this reason, the basics were indispensable in order to fill the theoretical deficit, but it was even more important how such knowledge was absorbed and processed so that it could become effective in terms of political action, that is, as part of the revolutionary prospect of change.

The initial concern of all school principals was the need to accustom students to studying, with an average of eight hours to be spent on books, especially in the form of repetition and discussion among the students. It was an undertaking that required a considerable effort on the part of those who only had an elementary school diploma, with obvious difficulties in understanding and using grammar and syntax correctly. Attendees had to learn to study and discuss collectively to overcome fears of not being up to the task and to find help and stimuli within the group, avoiding differences and inequalities that would be harmful to overall cohesion. For this reason, the so-called 'study brigades' were formed, which already in the choice of name identified the meaning inferred from the Bolshevik-style military organization, later borrowed by the Resistance: groups that recognised within themselves the common intent to help each other in the comprehension and discussion of the texts and themes addressed in class. The brigades opposed the bourgeois individualism that led to differentiations and competitions typical of the elitist schools and defined the communist solidarity and progressive method that led to the achievement of the same result for all students. In reality, the brigades had a hierarchical structure that served to maintain strict control, with the appointment of a leader who had the task of keeping the collective coherent, to act on problems that might arise during the courses and to direct discussion and debate with a care to avoid too many imbalances in the class.

III. Political Grammar and Italian Grammar

To understand how much the school system represented an advanced model of political education, it is necessary to consider the type of courses offered to the students, while also taking into account the fact that the number of enrolled students grew over time, going from the 200 selected in 1945-1946 to 2,500 shortly thereafter. The school taught study and work methods through theoretical lectures that took place initially over one or more months. These latter were based on a series of themes chosen by the

leaders and the school's principal, and examined collectively before finally being transformed into written tasks that were rigorously evaluated by the teachers both in terms of form and content.

In this way, the analysis of Marxist texts formed the basis of all the course programmes, both those for workers and farmers, and those for the heads of the federations and sections.⁴ To be good communists and above all capable leaders, it was essential to understand Marxist-Leninist theory in terms of a theoretical basis to be developed in the field of concrete politics and revolutionary action.

Marxism, which Palmiro Togliatti believed opened the door to change,⁵ provided the grounding for the political literacy of the communist masses.⁶ To this end, summaries and handouts were prepared that introduced the lectures aimed at transforming "Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy" into "the daily glue of all public and private behaviour".⁷ However, both leaders and teachers were aware that making the sacred texts of communism known to and learned by the students from the working classes was not something that could happen quickly, and they recommended very simple explanations with the use of parables and words understandable to anyone who had never held a book in their hand.

Historical materialism was not supposed to be a cold and mechanical doctrine but rather an organic subject that was to be used as a still-valid political manual. Marxist texts thus became waxen material that could be moulded to different situations in order to provide as homogeneous an education as possible to those who would be designated as the leaders of the future.

It is no coincidence that the most substantial lectures, often with contributions from representatives from the party leadership, which included Togliatti and Luigi Longo (just to mention the two most well-known names), concerned two issues: the history of the Communist Party of the USSR and the history of Italy. To get an idea of proportions, the first course included 45 lectures on the history of the Bolshevik party, 30 on the history of Italy and between four and nine on everything else. Studying the history of the Russian All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), as it was then called, was so

⁴ An interesting reflection on the reasons for the introduction and subsequent cancellation of the study of Marxism is given by Guglielmo Forges Davanzati in "La scomparsa del marxismo nella didattica e nella ricerca scientifica in economia politica in Italia", *Materialismo storico*, 1-2 (2016): 92-114.

⁵ Palmiro Togliatti, "Programma", *Rinascita*, 1 (1944): 8.

⁶ Domenico Losurdo, *La lotta di classe. Una storia politica e filosofica* (Roma; Bari: Laterza, 2013), 130-135, trans. by G. Elliot, *Class Struggle: A Political and Philosophical History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

⁷ Giuseppe Carlo Marino, *Eclissi del principe e crisi della storia. Apogeo e tramonto della democrazia rivoluzionaria nel XX secolo* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2000), 227.

central that detailed circulars were sent with an analytical study plan listing how the subject would be divided, the programme itself with a bibliography and the method of study to be used. After all, it was the teachers' task to unveil the reasons for the USSR's success, which was traced in its having gained power over both internal protest and the foreign imperialist coalition, as well as in the complete fulfilment of all the objectives of a socialist state. Hence the eagerness to study a reality that was considered a unique model and the driving force for the transition to communism.⁸

The USSR was the model of reference to study and imitate, but the history of the ICP and its development also deserved further study. Thus an important part of the programme was reserved for the role of the ICP, including all aspects of the fight against fascism and the problems of the organization, with an increase in lectures dedicated to the history of the labour movement and current politics in order to unite the past and present on a plotted course that would take into account the organizational structure, the cadres, the running of the different branches and the women's and youth organizations. It was a programme that was to strengthen the link between history and politics and transmit the basic theoretical principles needed to create class consciousness.

On this level, too, they came up against the obstacle of the poor acculturation of the majority of students who, without any studies behind them, struggled to follow the lectures and understand the texts. Which was why they decided to include the Italian language as a permanent subject on the courses, in order to also obtain better results in written tests. Italian grammar was integrated with the "grammar of the revolution"⁹ in an osmosis useful to a political culture in line with the needs of the time.

There was an interesting debate among the leaders on how to approach this education. They did not want to create barriers between the more and the less able students, but neither did they want to allow for a type of preparation that was lacking in the fundamentals from the start. Opinions were divided between language purists and political extremists, in a conflict that failed to converge in a single direction. Umberto Massola, one of the first teachers, proposed groups being formed "according to their degree of culture" in order to address elements of grammar and logical analysis:

⁸ Historiography is full of these themes, and only some of the main studies are mentioned here: Viktor Zaslavsky, *Lo stalinismo e la sinistra italiana* (Milano: Mondadori, 2004); Marcello Flores, *L'immagine dell'URSS. L'occidente e la Russia di Stalin* (Milano: il Saggiatore, 1990).

⁹ Sandro Bellasai, "La grammatica della rivoluzione. Note sulle scuole del PCI negli anni Quaranta e Cinquanta", *Annali Istituto Gramsci Emilia Romagna*, 6-7 (2002-2003), 117-148.

I think that in addition to introducing the study of grammar, it would be a good idea to devote from the beginning lectures to logical analysis, then naturally redress the deficiency of the students from the grammatical point of view, forcing them to study methodically, and then maybe we can push them further with a literary reading plan but without making it too intense.¹⁰

It was a way to make people understand why the grammatical rudiments were essential and needed to be achieved through a gradual and differentiated path. Felice Platone, a former collaborator of Gramsci's at the newspaper *L'Ordine Nuovo*, was even more convinced of this line of approach and felt that the Italian language course should form the basis for learning about and studying in depth general culture as well as the history of Italian culture:

It is clear that we need to divide the students into groups, however, I think that in all groups we need to introduce the history of Italian culture so that the students know the development of our culture and the function that intellectuals have played in history, as well as what Dante, Machiavelli etc. represent. This course should be accompanied by readings. A comrade leaving the course must have read some fundamental texts in order to be able to navigate a little in the field of literature. This can of course be done in different ways depending on the preparation of the students, but in my opinion it could also be done for those who have a lower cultural level, because this forces them to get used to studying using that particular method.¹¹

Discordant opinions were expressed by Sergio Gigli and Nino Gaeta, who were convinced that a goal that was too ambitious should not be set: the former warned against "studying Italian on too high a basis"; the latter feared that Italian lessons would end up taking time away from practical work. Likewise Paolo Robotti, who spent most of his life in Moscow, criticised the Italian language teacher at the central school in Rome for being "too busy with literature while the most important thing is to correct the grammar and style of the students' oral and written work".¹²

The attempt to reconcile the study of historical materialism with the rules of grammar reflected the aspirations, but also the difficulties, of a party that wanted to make language the vector for understanding and emancipation, in order to have the prospect

¹⁰ Fondazione Istituto Gramsci (from now on known as FIG), Archivio Partito Comunista (from now on known as APC), Fondo Mosca, Sezione quadri e Scuole di partito (from now on known as SqSp), "Verbale della riunione per la Scuola centrale", 18 February 1947, mf. 292/26.

¹¹ FIG, APC, Fondo Mosca, SqSp, "Verbale della riunione per la Scuola centrale, mf. 292/26.

¹² FIG, APC, Fondo Mosca, SqSp, "Relazione sulla chiusura dei corsi alla Scuola centrale quadri di Roma e alla Scuola centrale femminile di Milano", 26 April 1948, mf. 292/145.

of radical change in society. This hypothesis was also accepted by the students, as attested by the testimony of a worker from Ducati in Bologna who attended the Marabini Central School and who was ready to prove that Lenin's revolutionary theory "has to be bound even to the smallest things":

In fact, a comrade that has not yet understood the theory is forced to issue directives in a mechanical, parrot-like fashion and therefore not in a political way. I remember a few times I had addressed cells and committees like that, using words that I did not properly understand myself, and so as a result I did not know how to choose the means and comrades to complete the work that the Party had asked me to do.¹³

An eloquent example of how crucial its assimilation was considered even by students. In this regard, the final essays that were proposed to the students are particularly significant in order to understand the level of effectiveness achieved by the school. Here are a few explicative cases, with the Italian grammatical errors explained in square brackets:

B. [riportato solo cognome] afferma che "quì [qui] abbiamo imparato ad essere uomini. Per mé [me] il Partito voleva dire vagamente Giustizia e Libertà, ora invece so che il Partito deve essere qualcosa di più"; G. riconosce di essere "molto migliorato" per aver superato l'insofferenza alla disciplina; B. dimostra "di essere migliorato per aver capito che la modestia deve essere una regola per noi"; O. ammette che "abbiamo imparato cosa deve essere un comunista" sperimentando "l'affiatamento tra di noi raggiunto anche con le canzoni in coro"; S. scrive che "all'inizio del corso non sapevo esporre ed ora sono diventato un chiaccherone [chiacchierone]".¹⁴

(B. [surname only given] states that "here [accent left off] we have learned to be men. For me [accent added] the Party meant vaguely Justice and Freedom, now I know that the Party must be something more"; G. recognizes that he is "much improved" for having overcome his aversion to discipline; B. shows he "is improved for having understood that modesty must be a rule for us"; O. admits that "we have learned what a communist must be" by experiencing "the harmony between us which is also achieved through songs sung together"; S. writes that "at the beginning of the course I didn't know how to express myself and now I've become a chatterbox [wrong spelling]").

¹³ Fondazione Gramsci Emilia Romagna, the A. Marabini Istituto di Formazione Politica archive, end of course reports, "Importanza della Teoria", 1950, b. 2, issue. 3.

¹⁴ FIG, APC, Fondo Mosca, SqSp, Central School of Milan, "Verbale della riunione di cellula 'Eugenio Curiel'", 16 December 1945, mf. 350.

The correlation between the opinions of the teachers and the memories of the students shows how clear the objective to be achieved was, that is to have people able to politically direct a section, municipality or an organization. However, the path to reach that goal was much less linear and linguistic education that overlapped with the political one was an example of this. The attempt to reconcile the study of historical materialism with the rules of syntax reflected the approach of a party that devoted itself through every means to change while trying to keep the political and logical basics together.

IV. The New Course After 1956

The first phase of the political education of the cadres after the war gave way to a change of approach that can be identified with the second half of the 1950s, that is, a period of profound transformation within Italian society spurred by international events, with prospects of change on the political stage as well. It was during this period that the new Frattocchie school, called the Institute of Communist Studies and inaugurated on 9 January 1955, was opened in order to respond to the request for a new type of intermediate cadre, that is, a ground-level leader who worked in the sections that were far from the national leadership centres but who held key roles in the area. This shift could be explained by the ICP's sense of urgency to extend the activity and presence throughout Italy of people that were better equipped to respond to the tasks of organization and political mobilization, at a time when combativeness and preparation were required to counter political opponents and, especially, the communists' risk of isolation after the agreement between the Christian Democrats and the Socialist Party, who had become allies in order to create a centre-left government.

From these conditions came the desire to accelerate the process of political education in order to have cadres ready and qualified to respond to attacks and play active roles in local realities. Thus a new season for the schools began, with changes in teaching methods, programmes and teachers' activities. And, as a result, the words of politics also changed.

The temporal collocation that in little less than a decade offered a different national and international political scenario serves to explain the reasons for the adjustments to the communist education system. The critical period from the death of Stalin to the 20th Congress of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union), with the resultant blurring of the leading role of the USSR, met with inevitable repercussions not only within the ICP, but also within the party schools. The so-called "Italian way to socialism" that began in March 1956 to find a balance between the need to not repudiate the Soviet

model (relegated to the maintenance of international relations) and the search for greater autonomy,¹⁵ found a solid test bed in the schools' change of direction. The leaders felt that the time for imitating the Soviet schools was over and instead it was time to embark on a new course that was more focused on the formation of the individual cadre and less on collective study, which had inevitably resulted in the best people being eclipsed within the group. This need also arose from the recruitment of students who were no longer shaped by the experience of the Resistance and confinement, but who instead had a different profile, a higher level of education and in any case an identity that had to deal with the changed economic and social conditions, butting up against and then plunging into the climate of economic boom.

While in the first phase an extended education was essential to provide all students with the rudiments of Marxist-Leninist theory, the second phase was aimed at creating militants who were aware, ready and able to act in the field thanks to the preparation acquired in the schools, which focused on practice rather than theory. Mario Spinella, an authoritative figure in the communist leadership and director of the Institute of Communist Studies, warned the students "that the route is elaborated and implemented in a positive way only through a continuous and passionate effort to know the multifaceted reality of the economic, social and political environment in which we move", inviting them to draw from the classics of Marxism "the direction for research and the example of a changing and never schematic use of principles".¹⁶ Just from these reflections, a change of pace in the type of teaching was obvious. The 'sacred' Marxist-Leninist texts were no longer to be learned by heart for ideological elevation, but rather used as tools for understanding and applying the theories to practical political activity. A policy that allowed all forms of schematism to be overcome in order to have leaders capable of transforming the principles studied into action: the vanguard in political battles and, above all, in the various bodies scattered throughout the territories.

All the schools were to endorse the teaching of a general culture, particularly a scientific and secular one to facilitate the assimilation of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, in order to create open minds in which, as the leading intellectual Antonio Banfi said, "the thirst for research is both strength of character and willingness to act".¹⁷ For this reason, the individual student had to demonstrate readiness, autonomy and determination, and "find primarily within himself the energy to overcome the difficulties of study, develop

¹⁵ Donald Sassoon, *Togliatti e la via italiana al socialismo. Il PCI dal 1944 al 1964* (Torino: Einaudi, 1980), 190-200; Giuseppe Vacca, *Gramsci e Togliatti* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1991), 200-210.

¹⁶ Mario Spinella, "Progressi e limiti delle nostre scuole centrali", *Rinascita*, 7 (1956): 391.

¹⁷ *La funzione dell'Istituto di Studi Comunisti nell'attività educativa del PCI* (Roma: La Stampa moderna, 1955), 20.

his own working method and make continuous choices in the topics he deals with".¹⁸ The collective dimension remained in the specificity of a shared life, but individual study and care for the work of the individual became more and more important in a perspective focused on the selection of men (the number of women were still limited) useful to the communist cause.

It is evident that in this change, the so-called "Gramsci operation"¹⁹ returned to the forefront with the publication of Gramsci's *Notebooks* and the mass diffusion of his writings,²⁰ which led to the inclusion of the Sardinian thinker among the 'masters' to be followed in the much invoked work of mass political education.²¹ Even in the schools, Gramsci's thought "had to coexist with a wider confrontation between Marxist intellectuals and democratic forces that had different policies"²² in order to connote a cultural choice that was open to external stimuli and where the utilization of Gramscian teachings coincided with the profile of a combative activist prepared for the most difficult political battles.

Such a strategy also involved a different approach on the part of the teachers, who had to abandon their paternalistic and condescending attitude in favour of adopting a stimulating role for the students. Long and schematic lectures with the attendant repetitions to ensure no stragglers were left behind, were no longer wanted, instead what was required was a closer collation between the new programme and the work of the individual.

To this end, on every course the students had to produce a written essay on a subject agreed upon after having carried out an *ad hoc* seminar, which in fact replaced the final exam. These exercises, examined for both form and content, put the student to the test on a topical issue discussed in class and revised through periodic testing, with the aim of "better mastering the Marxist method of investigation"²³ and developing the student's own processing capacity.

¹⁸ Gastone Gensini, "Problemi ed esperienze della scuola di partito", *Rinascita*, 6 (1959): 417.

¹⁹ This definition comes from Giovanni Gozzini and Renzo Martinelli's *Storia del partito comunista. Dall'attentato a Togliatti all'VIII Congresso* (Torino: Einaudi, 1998), 501.

²⁰ For a reconstruction, see the section entitled "Togliatti e Gramsci" by Albertina Vittoria in *Togliatti e gli intellettuali. La politica culturale dei comunisti italiani (1944-1964)* (Roma: Carocci, 2014).

²¹ Nello Ajello, *Intellettuali e PCI 1944-1958* (Roma; Bari: Laterza, 1997), 85-90; Guido Liguori, *Gramsci conteso. Interpretazioni, dibattiti e polemiche 1922-2012* (Roma: Editori Riuniti University Press, 2012).

²² Fabio Pruneri, *La politica scolastica del Partito comunista italiano dalle origini al 1955* (Brescia: Editrice La Scuola, 1999), 418.

²³ "Una forma avanzata di studio: i seminari", *Scuola comunista*, 3 (1955): 4.

The teachers' evaluations were interesting as they pointed out that the students' essays were still permeated by "serious defects of descriptivism", by a "poor fusion" between theory and operational political work, and by "abstractness", so much so as to provoke discussions in the classroom and in study groups.²⁴ Students were reminded that the essays represented "a particularly favourable opportunity to conduct in-depth analyses of real and existing situations and problems", a premise for seeking strategies useful to "the Party's action".²⁵

Much more analytical was the activity that involved creative work, that is, the drafting of an individual research project with a local or national theme and chosen on the basis of personal interest. These were not just simple and banal summaries, but proper essays that demonstrated the students' preparation as well as their capacity to assimilate the books studied and to produce original work. The mastery of the subject and the language used, which demonstrated the deep commitment to the writing of the essays, could be seen and the best were then published by the party and circulated to other schools.

Something else that was new during this period was the introduction of the so-called "political hour", where students were called upon to read and discuss articles from the Party's daily paper, *l'Unità*, and the communist press in general, and compare them with government newspapers in order to understand and interpret current affairs through a collective discussion aimed at suggesting political orientations and work directives, together with strategies for the refutation of the theses of political opponents. Watchwords that expressed the party line were learned during these sessions and, at the same time, the main methods used by anti-communist propaganda were unmasked.

In order to prepare cadres for political activity that responded to real problems and untangled the complexity of the tasks required, specific courses of both a financial-political nature and with a political economy specialization were increased,²⁶ whose theoretical study was considered "the foundation of any solid Marxist preparation".²⁷ The rudiments of economics, which were also essential for the training of workers who had obvious shortcomings in this field, served to provide the most solid foundations for political engagement, even at the cost of having to learn formulas and definitions that were almost incomprehensible to an unqualified student. But awareness of the important theoretical

²⁴ "Per un più alto livello dei saggi di studio", *Scuola comunista*, 1 (1955):19-20.

²⁵ "Considerazioni sui saggi di studio degli allievi del 2° corso presso l'ISC", *Scuola comunista*, 2 (1955): 4-5.

²⁶ Istituto di Studi Comunisti, *Il marxismo e la metodologia dell'economia politica* (Roma: La Tipografia Moderna, 1956), 32.

²⁷ "Un corso di specializzazione sull'economia politica", *Scuola comunista*, 1 (1956): 1.

background that had to be gained spurred even the less prepared participants to study with zeal in order to show that they were able to complete the required tasks, a learning curve that also revealed their attachment to the party. Those who went to the school recognized the extent of the investment and felt proud to repay the trust placed in them.²⁸

Alongside Marxism-Leninism and economics, another subject that was considered essential education was introduced: logic. It was an education that was to strengthen the reasoning and argumentation skills of the students and their ability to control the political and social reality. In 1955, an elementary course in logic included six lectures aimed at “providing students with a contribution to the acquisition of the method of study and, at the same time, some essential concepts of dialectical and historical materialism”²⁹: a course borrowed from the Soviet schools, with the adoption of the Kondakov manual that focused on the three fundamental laws of logic (identity, contradiction and excluded middle). Promoted with the aim of making “concepts accessible even to those who have never studied philosophy”,³⁰ the lectures in logic often failed to achieve the desired result, instead they put the potential leaders to the test because they had to know how to reason and develop a critical awareness in order to master with authority the role assigned to them.

Grammar, economics and logic became a corollary to traditional studies, but in a short time they occupied the same position as a new and constantly growing sector: science. In a period of great scientific development, including the space race between the USA and the USSR, the subjects that were valued were those that, by assimilating the ongoing debate on the autonomy of science and the controversial relationships with politics, were in bed with the new proletarian science, as was happening in a Soviet Union faced with great strides in technological developments.³¹ The natural sciences – biology, geography and mathematics – were to help students abandon prejudices and to acquire knowledge useful to both themselves and the reality that surrounded them. In this vein, the lectures on the history and critique of science with the best teachers, who discussed the inevitable interweaving of the history of nature and the history of man in an open debate on the sources of knowledge and the relationship between spirit and nature, were of great importance. In adopting cultural developments with a desire not to lose contact with instances of modernization, the political schools showed a disposition to be attuned to a reality that was changing and needed new codes of interpretation.

²⁸ For a memoir on economics courses at Frattocchie, see Silvano Bozzo, *Cooperare per vivere. Appunti di economia sociale* (Genova: Ames, 2014).

²⁹ “Dalle nostre scuole e dai nostri corsi”, *Scuola comunista*, 1 (1955): 29.

³⁰ “Un manuale di logica”, *Scuola comunista*, 3 (1955): 26.

³¹ Francesco Cassata, *Le due scienze. Il “caso Lysenko” in Italia* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008).

V. The Lexicon of the New Party Official in the 1970s

Another 'break' in the way of conceiving and managing the party schools occurred in the 1970s, during a period in which the political geography of the country changed radically, with profound repercussions also on the communist-oriented educational system with regards to courses and programmes, and therefore also on linguistic education. There were many reasons for this change, but the central administrative role gained by the ICP was a defining influence, with the two-year '75-'76 period of growth constituting a driving force for the entire activity of the party. The results of the 1975 local elections, which saw the ICP win 33.4% of the votes thus enabling it to gain control of six regions and 29 provinces, together with those of the 1976 general election, which saw them peak at 34.4% despite a comeback from the Christian Democrats, reversed the position of a party that until then had been in opposition but could now transition to having government responsibilities. This prospect coincided with the need to equip the cadres for managerial duties, especially in the peripheral organisations, thereby boosting the project dedicated to the schools. In the seven years from 1972 to 1978, the school system was completed with the opening of seven communist studies institutes located throughout the country, including in the 'Mezzogiorno' (southern Italy), which had always suffered delays in this sector. The national school of Frattocchie maintained its role as a higher institute for the specialization of up-and-coming cadres, while the other institutes devoted themselves to the training of intermediate cadres. The leaders were aware that they had to train people capable of deciphering reality, understanding politics and responding to problems. In a word, governing: in the municipalities, in the local authorities, in the trade unions, in the sanitary and municipal establishments. Luciano Gruppi, who directed Frattocchie during the years of the enrolment boom, described the need to have a cadre that "knows what the State is, what the State budget is, what the laws are",³² echoing the urgency to establish schools equipped to fulfil this need.

The intense work of mobilization produced the desired results in just a few years. As the number of party members increased, so did the number of courses and students, reaching 20,000 attendants across the different schools in five years. The type of militant, who was no longer the peasant or illiterate worker of the previous periods, but instead a young professional – and often also a graduate – from the middle classes, and for whom the party found itself rethinking its educational approaches, changed considerably. A general education was no longer necessary, instead what was required was an

³² Paper by Luciano Gruppi, member of the Central Committee and director of the Istituto di Studi Comunisti Palmiro Togliatti, *Formazione dei quadri e sviluppo del partito*, minutes of the Fifth National Conference of the Party Schools Central Section, 1-2-3 December 1977 (Roma: La Tipografia Moderna, 1977), 29.

in-depth study of subjects and topics that would enable them to manage ongoing and concrete problems. The priority had changed: cadres were needed to prepare for a new kind of political commitment that coincided with the occupation of positions of power in local administrations.

Faced with such a massive number of leaders to recruit and train, new strategies for basic educational action and teaching were needed. The first fruitful result was the research and study texts framework needed to provide all schools with the administrative and organizational cognitive tools for militants – mostly young people – with little experience. For this reason, new texts and new handouts were required to teach how to manage, what means to use, how to decipher reality and which techniques were best to apply. In the five-year period from 1971 to 1976, tens of thousands of pamphlets were printed with a collection of the lectures, research books, seminars and guidance and study materials. To these were added the volumes in the various series edited in collaboration with Editori Riuniti with a total print run of 809,000 copies and a circulation of 765,000 volumes: an important testimony to the search for cultural hegemony that also permeated the educational system.³³ This copious publication contained condensed studies, theories, essays and words that represented the most direct and explicit proof of how in the politics of the ICP education was seen as a cultural mobilization that invested all the resources of the party, both financial and human, in a huge collective effort that flowed from the top down to the bottom.

Such a complex political plan corresponded to an equally complex scholastic structure in terms of the study programmes. The need to train activists who would then take on leadership roles in local administrations or organisations led the directors of the schools to refine their subjects of study, even adding seminars with specialists, monographic meetings and debates with attending experts, which included non-members who were invited in order to give even greater depth to the type of teaching. Gastone Gensini, who had been the director of Frattocchie from the end of the 1960s, maintained that it was essential to provide students with “tools that allow them to better understand reality, to read balance sheets, to interpret laws, to know their way around economic data”.³⁴ In essence, basic education on how to govern.

For this reason, the triad of philosophy/economics/history remained unchanged, but the number of courses dedicated to political economy increased, becoming the central axis of individual and collective study. The international economic crisis trig-

³³ Andrea Possieri, *Il peso della storia. Memoria, identità, rimozione dal PCI al PDS (1970-1991)* (Bologna: il Mulino, Bologna 2007), 155-170.

³⁴ Gastone Gensini, *Problema della formazione dei quadri nella attuale fase di sviluppo del partito, Formazione dei quadri e sviluppo del partito*, minutes of the Fifth National Conference of the Party Schools Central Section, 1-2-3 December 1977 (Roma: La Tipografia Moderna, 1977), 22.

gered by the oil shock that also hit Italy severely, together with the ICP's commitment to denouncing the failures of the capitalist system and to defending the great grassroots classes, fostered a "very strong demand to know the economic issues" which for the schools translated into "the need to implement specific courses that deal with economics, as well as define and expand the coverage of economic aspects in all the courses".³⁵ Economics, which until then had been considered a specialist sector, became a central part of the courses in its own right, approved by the students who considered the effort required to be proportionate to the prospects of employment in political activities that required an economic preparation as well as the ability to transform numbers and tables into political action.

VI. Linguistic Order: "Understand and Make Oneself Understood"

Although in a completely different historical and cultural context from the previous ones, linguistics once more occupied an important position, becoming an essential tool to achieve that articulateness which could be exhibited as the trump card of a good speaker. All the leaders insisted on the importance of using clear and precise language that could achieve "a degree of comprehensibility and therefore of political effectiveness".³⁶ To underline the central value attributed to linguistic education, experts in the field were invited to conferences and public debates in order to provide useful information for the schools. This was the case with the distinguished linguistic scholar Tullio De Mauro, who was called to speak at the National Conference of the Party Schools Section in 1977, in front of a large audience of directors, teachers and leaders. The scholar, who had already inspired his readers a decade earlier with his prophetic and never outdated *La storia linguistica dell'Italia unita*,³⁷ urged the communist audience to use language "as part of our conscience, as a tool to order and discipline our relationships with others and with the things we work on, with the society that we help to transform".³⁸ Teaching about language and the use of words became critical for a party that now had new po-

³⁵ Sergio Zangirolami, *Note sull'insegnamento dell'economia nelle scuole di partito, I problemi del partito e il ruolo dell'attività di formazione dei quadri*, minutes of the National Conference of the Party Schools Central Section, 9-10 April 1976 (Roma: Tipografia La Moderna, 1976), 34.

³⁶ Romano Viola, "Linguaggio chiaro e preciso", *La scuola di partito*, 1 (1976): 6.

³⁷ Vanessa Roghi, *La lettera sovversiva. Da don Milani a De Mauro, il potere delle parole* (Roma; Bari: Laterza, 2017), 123-150.

³⁸ Paper by Tullio De Mauro, University of Roma, *Formazione dei quadri e sviluppo del partito*, minutes of the Fifth National Conference of the Party Schools Central Section, 1-2-3 December 1977 (Roma: La Tipografia Moderna, 1977), 26.

litical and administrative responsibilities, responding to the need to “understand and make oneself understood”:

It is about reinforcing where there is – and promoting where there is not – care and sensitivity towards these issues, of knowing how to understand and make oneself understood. These things cannot be learned through theory. Only the experience of the struggle and of administration for and with the people, give and strengthen this care and sensitivity [...] In all courses there should be a careful and continuously revised exploration of the Italian social reality with regards to mass information, collective capacity for criticism and understanding, and ability with language.³⁹

The suggestion that De Mauro gave the course organizers and teachers was to respect “the awareness that the right to not understand is sacred and inviolable, because it is the first and indispensable step in the right-duty to understand and the right-duty to make oneself understood and to be understood”. From this point of view, the ability to critically evaluate words and above all information also became fundamental, indispensable to decoding society and how it was narrated, especially by the rival press, at a time when the role of political communication was becoming increasingly important.

From these premises emerged an experiment that offered the resources of the methodological regeneration to an actual programme of “linguistic education”. The Emilia Romagna Region, the ‘red’ territory par excellence and considered a laboratory of avant-garde politics, initiated a course in linguistics as part of the 150 hours dedicated to studying for the workers, the results of which were then discussed and imitated in other party schools.⁴⁰ From the answers to the questionnaires filled in by the workers who continued to attend the schools, there emerged a ‘hunger’ for linguistics understood not so much in terms of correct spelling and syntax, but as the development of argumentative abilities that would then prove useful in the work place or during political confrontation. From here began the new experiments conducted by Paola Zotti Notarantonio at the central school of Frattocchie, with sections of the lectures dedicated to language, both in its heuristic and cognitive uses (“the ability to order and analyse the experience”), and in its argumentative and emotional dimension (“the ability to intervene and transform the experience itself”).⁴¹ It was the students themselves who

³⁹ Tullio De Mauro, *Formazione dei quadri e sviluppo del partito*, 26.

⁴⁰ Raffaele Simone, *L'educazione linguistica per gli adulti. Un'esperienza della Regione Emilia Romagna per i corsi 150 ore* (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1976).

⁴¹ Paper by Paola Zotti Notarantonio, member of the Istituto di Studi Comunisti Palmiro Togliatti, *Formazione dei quadri e sviluppo del partito*, minutes of the Fifth National Conference of the Party Schools Central Section, 1-2-3 December 1977 (Roma: La Tipografia Moderna, 1977), 161.

asked for the linguistic tools to learn the ideal vocabulary and subject matter for dealing with – and resolving – the various problems, demonstrating how the appropriate use of language and the ability to express the meaning behind the issues with skill and mastery were essential requirements for a political career.

Using the right words and knowing how to organize ideas were the basic elements of a language that could contribute to the scientific vision of politics. “The objective to aim for,” the party school teacher explained, “is not so much simplicity or expressive poverty, a sort of linguistic Franciscanism, but rather a greater expository rigour”.⁴² Linguistic education therefore paved the way to integrating knowledge and mastery of the sectoral languages, to establishing a fruitful relationship between language and culture, and to guaranteeing adequate access to the various forms of knowledge. Even the students were aware that linguistic concepts should not only serve to overcome the difficulties of learning but should also be transformed into a “cognitive and operational tool to act in the extra-linguistic reality, a means of controlling social reality”.⁴³ Drawing a sort of line of continuity between Gramsci and Don Lorenzo Milani, the great Catholic educator, it was assumed that party schools could undo the existing tangle between social disadvantage and linguistic disadvantage, to render concrete the democratic and participatory project that aimed to “guarantee everyone the ability to speak and understand the common language of the governed and the governors”.⁴⁴

The mastery of words and reasoning proved to be an essential achievement for those who were called upon to direct the different administrative realities, whose education had to be based on a type of teaching able to “benefit from a very lively and concrete relationship between politics and theory that was never mechanically superimposed”.⁴⁵

In this way, the ring around a political education that replaced the primordial need for knowledge (in order to fill the literacy gap) with the provision of the means necessary to respond to the contingency of political activity, was completed. A journey in which the use of appropriate words and language was a legitimate part of a type of education that created a political culture. It is clear that on this journey, in terms of historical analysis, it is necessary to consider the different contexts and phases of discontinuity triggered by the dynamics of the political struggle that dictated impelling rhythms and deadlines, with inevitable reverberations even in the school system. But it is equally important to

⁴² Paper by Paola Zotti Notarantonio, 161.

⁴³ Paper by Paola Zotti Notarantonio, 161.

⁴⁴ Paper by Paola Zotti Notarantonio, 164.

⁴⁵ Gastone Gensini, *Problema della formazione dei quadri nella attuale fase di sviluppo del partito, Formazione dei quadri e sviluppo del partito*, minutes of the Fifth National Conference of the Party Schools Central Section, 1-2-3 December 1977 (Roma: La Tipografia Moderna, 1977), 8.

observe how political language has always represented an instrument of mobilization and recognition, capable of spanning different generations at different times. For this reason, the words that reverberated and resounded in the classrooms of the communist schools are a measure of the capacity of a party to take root and build an ideal political and human community.