

Community, Place, and Cultural Battles: Associational Life in Central Italy, 1945-1968

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## ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is an exploration of associational life in central Italy, an examination of organizations that were central to the everyday experience of tens of thousands of Italians at a time when social, economic and geographical transformations were upending their everyday lives, 1945-1968. This dissertation examines facets of these transformations: the changing shape of cities, increasing mobility of people, technological changes that made possible new media and new cultural forms, from the perspective of local associations. The many lively groups, the cultural circles and case del popolo of central Italy were critical sites where members encountered new ideas, navigated social change, and experimented with alternative cultures. At the same time, these organizations themselves were being transformed from unitary centers that expressed the broad solidarity of the anti-fascist Resistance to loose federations of fragmentary single-interest groups. They were tangles of intertwined politics, culture, and community, important sites in culture wars and political battles between the Christian Democratic government in Rome and the defiant Leftist opposition that had a stronghold in central Italy. This history of associations is also a history of postwar Italian democracy: highlighting the struggles of ordinary Italians to participate in public life through the associations they constructed and defended, illuminating attempts to organize and control civil society or squelch the autonomy of local groups, and uncovering the ways that demands for democratic participation were dynamic, continuously recast to encompass new meanings of participation.

## ***Table of contents***

Table of figures .....	iv
Introduction.....	1
PART 1: Rebuilding, defending, and democratizing associational life, 1945-1960..	19
Liberation: from clandestine struggle to the light of the sun .....	20
Collective spaces and democratic life.....	24
Re-occupying the case del fascio .....	28
Reconstruction, city planning and new case del popolo .....	30
Planning and building the Casa del popolo Corazza .....	31
Construction of the casa del popolo as construction of community.....	37
Regulating and organizing associations: ENAL and ARCI, 1945-1959 .....	41
From OND to ENAL .....	43
Regulation and privilege .....	47
Dissatisfaction with ENAL .....	52
The movement to democratize recreation.....	61
The foundation of the Italian Recreation and Culture Association, ARCI.....	64
The Case del popolo and “Armored Democracy” .....	78
Eviction from the Casa del popolo of Crevalcore .....	88
The trial of the Kings of Crevalcore.....	95

The memory of Fascism.....	100
Conclusions .....	107
PART 2 : New prosperity and new roles for cultural associations, 1960-1968.....	108
Town planning and local associational life.....	111
Corticella and the Casa del popolo Tosarelli .....	116
Building the new Casa del popolo .....	123
Youth and new expectations .....	132
Conclusions .....	138
Partisans for a “Cinema Libero” .....	140
Expanding access to Film .....	144
For a ‘Cinema Libero’ .....	155
The Cineteca Nazionale ARCI.....	160
Good films.....	162
Reactions from local circles .....	171
Conclusions .....	173
The problem of television: reawakening the critical conscience .....	176
The problem of television .....	183
Television and democracy.....	188
The Group for the Study of Audiovisual Instruments and the Public .....	196

Conclusions .....	209
Conclusions .....	211
Bibliography.....	219
Archival sources .....	219
Published sources .....	219

## ***Table of figures***

Figure 1. Enrico Pasquali, The Bar of the Casa del popolo of Crespellano.....	50
Figure 2 ARCI-affiliated circles in Emilia Romagna, 1959 .....	76
Figure 3. Total human and economic costs of political persecution in Bologna .....	85
Figure 4. Police forces enforcing the eviction from the Casa del popolo of Crevalcore August 3, 1954.....	93
Figure 5. Map of Corticella in 1948, illustrating the main roads and features.....	119
Figure 6. Map of Corticella in 1969, demonstrating the extensive new development of the area.....	120
Figure 7. “Here the Casa del popolo will rise”.....	123
Figure 8. The theater of the Casa del popolo of Medicina.....	148
Figure 9. Cinema activities in the Province of Bologna .....	166
Figure 10. Watching television in the casa del popolo. ....	177
Figure 11. “Do not turn off the television, but observe and judge” .....	196

## ***Introduction***

This dissertation examines associational life in the *case del popolo* and ARCI circles of Bologna and the surrounding province, from 1945 to 1968. I argue that these associations were sites where the everyday practices of tens of thousands of members and sympathizers of the communist and socialist parties shaped a leftwing subculture that was heterogeneous, unpredictable, and very dynamic. The histories of these associations are not coterminous with the histories of political parties or movements. Through careful examination of the construction, reconstruction and continuous adaptation of these associations, I demonstrate their continued importance in a period of rapid social, economic, and cultural transformation.

The *casa del popolo* was a model for structuring the spatial location of workers' organizations dating back to the nineteenth century foundations of the workers' movement in Italy. It was a common development in the rural towns of central Italy, where there were rarely any spaces for popular entertainment or sociability, and where peasant farmers and landless laborers yearned for a space where they could discuss their problems, formulate political demands and simply be together. Similarly, in urban neighborhoods, workers organizing political movements, adult education, and recreational activities in their hard-won free time, dreamed of having a place of their own outside their cramped apartments. The oldest centers of



the movements for democracy, organized labor and socialism in late nineteenth-century Italy had initially found meeting spaces in *osterie*, *cantine*, and other drinking spaces. Perhaps the most important criteria for these spaces were that they were open to the public, open during hours outside the work schedule, located in neighborhoods or near workplaces, outside of factories and outside of churches. But more than just the space available to those with little means, the *osterie* were established spaces of popular social life free from the hierarchical controls of church, local elites, and employers. In Bologna, for example, the Osteria ed Cipuloni was home to the Veteran's Circle and the Circolo Pisacane while Café Pinci housed the Popular Society for Education, Liberty and Welfare that met from the 1870's into the early 20th century.<sup>1</sup> Such informal meeting spaces allowed for debate and discussion, but were inadequate for some of the growing ambitions of the groups that began within those spaces. Workers wanted to assemble libraries, create schools, and have access to more stable, permanent spaces for long-term initiatives reflecting their own priorities, not those of the church or elite-sponsored charitable groups. Other centers of aggregation available to the working class were mutual aid societies (*società di mutuo soccorso*), organizations to address problems of unemployment, old age, widows, illness, orphans, or other urgent social needs, long before such services became part of welfare provided by the State.<sup>2</sup> These societies later took on programs for education, founding

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1 Maurizio Degl'Innocenti, *Geografia e istituzioni del socialismo italiano, 1892-1914*, 1983. On similar uses of cafés and drinking establishments in other European contexts see W. Scott Haine, "'Cafe Friend': Friendship and Fraternity in Parisian Working-Class Cafes, 1850-1914," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27, no. 4 (1992): 607–626. Robert Goodrich, "Confessional Drinking: Catholic Workingmen's Clubs and Alcohol Consumption in Wilhelmine Germany," in *Histories of Leisure*, ed. Rudy Koshar (New York: Berg, 2002), 233–252.

2 Luigi Tomassini, *Associazionismo operaio a Firenze fra '800 e '900: la società di mutuo soccorso di Rifredi, 1883-1922* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1984). On French examples, see Patricia R Turner, "Hostile Participants? Working Class Militancy, Associational Life, and the 'Distinctiveness' of the Prewar French Labor Movement," *The Journal of Modern History* 71, no. 1 (1999): pp. 28–55. On the displacement of mutualistic societies by twentieth-century insurance and welfare systems see Timothy

the Popular Universities, and cultural activities like bands and choirs.<sup>3</sup> But as the workers' movements grew stronger, groups encountered ever greater resistance to their presence on the part of landlords and local elites, who attempted to suffocate the movements by denying organizers meeting spaces. The solution at which many socialist groups throughout Europe arrived was to construct a building, a *casa del popolo* or "house of the people", to house all the various workers' organizations, where they could maintain offices and ample meeting spaces, in relative freedom from outside interference.<sup>4</sup>

The case del popolo housed various types of workers' organizations in one all-purpose building: political parties, labor unions, free clinics, amateur theater groups, consumer cooperatives, adult education programs, women's groups, and sports leagues, to name a few. Thus the casa del popolo could claim to offer something for everyone: not only the ardent party activists, but also the less committed; not only the men, but also the neighborhood women and children. These shared spaces privileged intersections between political platforms and the everyday needs and aspirations of the local community, which informed the ways that political demands were interpreted and explained locally, with reference to concrete and immediate

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Alborn, "Senses of Belonging: The Politics of Working-Class Insurance in Britain, 1880 – 1914," *The Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 3 (2001): 561–602.

3 Gramsci's comments on the Popular Universities demonstrate however, the sometimes difficult relationships between such groups and political movements. See Antonio Gramsci, *Scritti politici*, ed. Paolo Spriano (Roma: Editori riuniti, 1973), 23–24. On the development of cultural groups allied with the socialist movements in Germany, see Vernon L. Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture: Socialist Labor in Imperial Germany* (Oxford University Press, 1985). and Guenther Roth, *The Social Democrats in Imperial Germany* (Arno Press, 1979).

4 Luigi Arbizzani et al., *Storie di case del popolo: saggi, documenti e immagini d'Emilia-Romagna* (Casalecchio di Reno: Grafis, 1982). Maurizio Degl'Innocenti, ed., *Le case del popolo in Europa : dalle origini alla seconda guerra mondiale*, vol. VII (Firenze: Sansoni, 1984). Franco Borsi, *La Maison du peuple, sindacalismo come arte*, 1978.

needs.<sup>5</sup> Housing all these activities in the same place also functioned to integrate members of various groups socially, creating the conditions for the kinds of multiple informal social interactions that could link neighbors and community members. Most importantly, the *casa del popolo* was a space outside the church, outside of religious authority, and outside private homes, open to the public.

In the 1920s, as the fascists outlawed political parties and trade unions, the fascist party suppressed, replaced, or took over workers' organizations under the auspices of the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro (OND). Many of the *casa del popolo* became *case del fascio*, through violence or by more or less coerced persuasion.<sup>6</sup> Bringing the workers' associations to heel, if not completely blotting them out, was an important tactic in limiting the possibilities of opposition to the regime, depriving the resistance of logistical centers and also of popular social centers from which to build sympathy and solidarity.

This study picks up the history of workers' associations and *casa del popolo* after World War II, a moment in which the re-establishment of these groups was a part of a wider effort to overcome the legacy of the fascist era, restore the traditions lost by the rise of fascism, and especially to rebuild and re-imagine democracy under the new Italian Republic. Popular desire to resume recreational and cultural activities in local clubs dovetailed with communist strategies to transform the Italian Communist Party (PCI) into a mass party with a strong presence in the institutions of civil society. Through the 1950s, those activities were fairly rudimentary: workers gathered in their clubs to talk to each other, read the newspapers, listen to the radio, and drink

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5 Dario Gaggio elegantly demonstrates how Tuscan peasants' everyday living conditions became grounds from which to build political claims in "Before the Exodus: The Landscape of Social Struggle in Rural Tuscany, 1944 – 1960," *The Journal of Modern History* 83, no. 2 (2012): 319–345.

6 Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

some wine. The establishment of the democratic Republic of Italy may have formally guaranteed such civil liberties, but this dissertation explores how a dense complex of regulations, profoundly conservative bureaucratic controls, and the open hostility of the Christian Democratic government made the effective exercise of those freedoms in local associations all but impossible. Thus associations were part of a critical challenge of preserving local autonomy and civil liberties, a process which was not completed with the ratification of the constitution but which was in fact a protracted battle over decades. This battle was fought in debates in parliament, in power struggles between city administrations and the central government, in polemics in newspapers, and most importantly for this study, on the ground, in the confrontations between club organizers and members and the local representatives of state authority: prefects, police, and state bureaucrats.

In this context, in which it was understood as necessary to defend groups, in order to preserve the role of workers' circles as the spaces in which new cultural challenges could be examined, criticized, and cultural policies elaborated, a national organization, the Italian Recreational and Cultural Association, ARCI was founded. The founders of ARCI were socialist and communist party members and intellectuals shaped by the Resistance. They began ARCI in 1957 with a core of 300 circles, predominantly from central Italy. These founders conceived ARCI as an organization that could support independent groups, protecting the autonomy of circles from the State. Moreover, they hoped ARCI could serve as the engine for the creation of a renewed national popular culture, by developing democratic alternatives to the existing circuits of distribution and organization of mass culture. In the 1960s, as new cultural demands and new social movements challenged the established parties and trade unions, ARCI leaders searched for new modes of communication with the local branches, new roles for intellectuals in an anti-

hierarchical culture, and tried to formulate new politics of culture and free time, as orthodox interpretations of working class culture seemed to lose relevance.

By following these associations from their reconstitution in 1945 through the rapid shifts and reorganizations of the following two decades, this dissertation highlights the ways ordinary people attempted to organize themselves locally to give voice to their demands and desires, as their ambitions to share in governing nationally were thwarted. I pay close attention to the individuals involved, attempting to identify them, to uncover how they understood and explained their participation in building and maintaining their groups. The term that they most frequently invoked was “democracy”. Thus one of the main threads through this study is an interrogation of these claims by associations to be the guardians of democracy. What was democratic about these associations? Were they “schools of democracy” or were they just places to play cards and drink wine? Were those functions mutually exclusive or somehow synergistic? With the arrival of the 1960s, which brought new ways of living and particularly new technology, associations became sites where entirely new demands and aspirations were voiced. How did these new demands change the ways people participated in associational life? How did their definition of democracy change in the era of television and consumerism?

It is worth noting that the rich associationism that I have examined in Bologna is precisely the same that Robert Putnam noted in his first work correlating associational life and democracy, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, before moving his gaze to the United States to apply the same hypotheses in the more well-known *Bowling Alone*.<sup>7</sup> Putnam’s approach borrowed from Alexis de Tocqueville to explain the connection between

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<sup>7</sup> Robert D. Putnam, Robert Leonardi, and Raffaella Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

civic virtues, which Putnam argued were developed through participation in voluntary associations, and functioning democratic institutions. While my observations of the cooperation and reciprocity that participation in the case del popolo and circles could foster sometimes appear to support Putnam's claims, I do not share his optimism that they should always do so. Indeed, I also discuss examples in which the presence of strong associations appears to be destabilizing, pitting members fiercely attached to their local groups against the state, in conflicts that sometimes erupted into insurrectionary violence; this can hardly be considered a reinforcement of "civic virtue". In the 1950s, when the elected Christian Democratic government was ostensibly going about the work of stabilizing Italy as a Western democracy, its attempts to repress the rich associational life in central Italy drew out its worst, undemocratic characteristics. The social relations that produce associational life are messy, complex, and unpredictable: associations can open possibilities for participation but also close them, they produce conflict as often as they resolve it, without necessarily finding compromise or resolution.

This dissertation examines in particular the case del popolo and ARCI circles in the city and province of Bologna. Why Bologna? In large part, my choice to draw examples from Bologna was guided by the quantity and quality of primary source material available there. In 1959, there were 450 ARCI circles in the province, out of a total 1112 in the entire region of Emilia Romagna.<sup>8</sup> But more importantly, Bologna and its surrounding areas have a tradition of lively popular engagement in cooperatives, unions, workers' associations and other secular organizations alongside a strong tradition of participation in socialist movements since the late

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<sup>8</sup> Arrigo Morandi, "Relazione Morandi sul convegno regionale A.R.C.I. (Emilia)" (UISP: Archivi ARCI, Box 1959, Bologna, 1959).

nineteenth century and electoral support for the communist party after World War II. Bologna has historically been at the center of what has been identified as the “Red Belt”, the “Red Heart” of Italy, the central regions that constituted the historical stronghold of the communist party.

Explaining the political and economic difference of Emilia Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria and parts of Le Marche, from the rest of the peninsula and locating the origins of that difference has been the objective of a rich body of work by political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists and historians. The concept of political subcultures has dominated such research, following a tradition that emerged in the 1960’s from a Bolognese think tank on contemporary Italian politics and society, the Cattaneo Institute, of study of the “red” communist and “white” Catholic zones of Italy in the work of Giorgio Galli and Giordano Sivini, among others.<sup>9</sup> Until the political upheavals that eroded the traditional parties in the early 1990s,<sup>10</sup> these areas were characterized by high degrees of consensus for one party and the presence of a network of structures, “collateral” organizations that socialized voters: communities, parishes, case del popolo, etc. Carlo Trigilia further honed those approaches by defining the principle historical and territorial characteristics, thus providing a theoretical framework that guided many future studies of political subcultures.<sup>11</sup> But as such research was concerned chiefly with the outcomes of those processes of socialization for electoral and party politics (and later for the implications for

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9 G Galli et al., *Comportamento elettorale in Italia: una indagine*, ed. Giorgio Galli (Bologna: Il mulino, 1968). Giordano Sivini, *Sociologia del Partito comunista italiano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1968).

10 The contemporary persistence or obsolescence of territorial political subcultures has in fact, become an object of debate among many of the scholars concerned with subcultures, Mario Caciagli, “Subculture politiche territoriali o geografia elettorale?,” *Società Mutamento Politica* 2, no. 3 (2011): 95–104. and Francesco Ramella, “Still a ‘Red Subculture’? Continuity and Change in Central Italy,” *South European Society and Politics* 5, no. 1 (2000): 1–24. Francesco Ramella, “Society, Politics and Territory in Italy: What Is Left?,” *South European Society and Politics* 15, no. 2 (June 2010): 309–314.

11 Carlo Trigilia, *Le subculture politiche territoriali* (Milano: Fondazione Feltrinelli, 1981). In English, John Agnew provides a good overview of Italian political subculture literature in John A. Agnew, *Place and Politics in Modern Italy* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 115–120.

economic organization<sup>12</sup>), researchers were less interested in the everyday workings of the associations that they viewed as secondary to political parties than the general historical trends that produced political subcultures.<sup>13</sup>

This field of sociological research has however, furnished scholars of many disciplines with a useful category of inquiry, to be further complicated and expanded by research on specific local subcultures and enriched by new theoretical approaches. Most importantly, the attention to territorial political subcultures underlined the importance of geographical specificity beyond a North-South dichotomy in research on Italy, and hinted at a deeper significance of organizations like the *casa del popolo*, a cue that I have certainly picked up in this dissertation.

Historians of the Italian left have similarly tended to note the presence of a richness of associations in “red zones”, but generally fail to interrogate in any depth what exactly those groups were doing. *Casa del popolo*, ARCI and workers’ circles occasionally make a brief appearance in histories of the Italian Left, as the scene of meetings or events, as instrumental to larger socialist movements. The *casa del popolo* in particular has attracted some attention from

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12 Much of the scholarship on territorial political subcultures, following the work of Arnaldo Bagnasco on the “Third Italy” turned to the effects of political subcultures on economic organization Arnaldo Bagnasco, *Tre Italie: la problematica territoriale dello sviluppo italiano* (Il Mulino, 1977); Carlo Trigilia, “Small-Firm Development and Political Subcultures in Italy,” *European Sociological Review* 2, no. 3 (1986): 161–175., Arnaldo Bagnasco and Charles F. Sabel, *Small and Medium-Size Enterprises* (Pinter, 1995). and Arnaldo Bagnasco and Carlo Trigilia, *Società e politica nelle aree di piccola impresa: il caso della Valdelsa* (F. Angeli, 1985).

13 An exception is Mario Caciagli, who paid closer attention to the collective historical experiences that aid the development of political cultures, while treating electoral outcomes as secondary, an important indicator but an epiphenomenon of political culture. In his estimation, rather, it is the values and beliefs, myths, rituals, symbols and languages, social practices and organizational structures that produce a complicated mix of opinions and behaviors that make up political culture, and approach defined in Mario Caciagli, “Approssimazione alle culture politiche locali. Problemi di analisi ed esperienze di ricerca,” *Il politico* 2, no. 146 (1988): 269–292. and more recently restated in Caciagli, “Subculture politiche territoriali o geografia elettorale?”.



scholars of the early socialist movement, before World War I.<sup>14</sup> Such studies often situate the *casa del popolo* as the monumental expression of gains made by the workers' movement, as the disenfranchised working class moved from furtive political debates in the *osterie* to their own headquarters. This exclusive focus on the period before 1914 gives the sense that *casa del popolo* are an old-fashioned phenomenon, suited to older socialisms. But if *casa del popolo* were simply a concretization of the struggle towards mass suffrage, the entry of groups that were hitherto considered subversive into participation in political life, why were they still being built in the 1960s? Why do many still exist today?

In histories of the Italian left after World War II, the designation of ARCI circles and workers' associations as flanking organizations of the PCI has resulted in an undeserved dismissal of these groups, excluded from consideration in favor of the policies of the PCI as the privileged source of information on the left. Stephen Gundle dedicates a few pages to ARCI and its role in engaging critically with cultural transformation, but only as a foil to what he identifies as the PCI's failure to recognize and respond to critical cultural changes, which is his principle concern.<sup>15</sup> The underestimation of the everyday practices of thousands of party members and sympathizers and even local leaders of the political parties, who used local associations for meeting spaces, informal socialization and games, follows the lead of the PCI leadership. The events surrounding the evictions of *casa del popolo* in the mid-1950s, which I discuss in Chapter 3 are included in Giovanni Gozzini and Renzo Martinelli's tome on the history of the PCI only

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14 In Italy, Degl'Innocenti, *Geografia e istituzioni del socialismo italiano, 1892-1914*. and also Margaret Kohn, *Radical Space: Building the House of the People* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003). For a variety of European examples see Maurizio Degl'Innocenti, *Le case del popolo in Europa: dalle origini alla seconda guerra mondiale*.

15 Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow: the Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943-1991* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000).

because PCI leadership appeared momentarily concerned for the fate of the associations, when they presented an opportunity to criticize the heavy-handed anticommunism of the Christian Democratic government.<sup>16</sup> Because cultural and recreational organization was not a priority among the policy-makers at the top tiers of party leadership, historians relying on mainly on party archives similarly dismiss the significance of clubs and circles.

One of the goals of this study is to rescue workers' associations from this fate, to save the neighborhood circle, the workers' bar, the evening class for adults "from the enormous condescension of posterity", to quote E.P. Thompson.<sup>17</sup> In so doing, I look not at what was said or written about associations by party leaders but instead, insofar as possible at the associations themselves, their goals and projects, the narratives they constructed about themselves and their attempts to insert their stories into wider historical trends. That is not to deny that the PCI had a strong hand in workers' associations: case del popolo were often erected with support from local PCI federations, and the presence of PCI headquarters in these social hubs was consistent with party leader Palmiro Togliatti's strategies of conquering a place for the party in the institutions of civil society, even as it was excluded from government. But as the PCI floundered to address popular culture, popular cultural life went on for hundreds and thousands of party members and sympathizers, meeting regularly in their bars and circles to watch the television that their local PCI Federation had urged them *not* to buy.<sup>18</sup> Such sites, I argue, are just as much a part of the history of the left as the events that unfolded in PCI headquarters in Via Botteghe Oscure in Rome.

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16 Paolo Spriano, Renzo Martinelli, and Giovanni Gozzini, *Storia del Partito comunista italiano, Volume VII: Dall'attentato a Togliatti all'VIII Congresso* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1998).

17 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Vintage Books, 1963).

18 I will discuss this in Chapter 6. On the prohibition on television, see Aldo Volpi, *La Casa del popolo Corazza. Una ricerca dell'ARCI di Bologna* (Bologna, 1976).

Notwithstanding the substantial overlap of membership between workers' associations and the political parties of the left, I have attempted to explore the associations and their members in their own right, to uncover what drew individuals together to found these groups, what they said they wanted out of their membership and what they attempted to do through the groups. I resist an instrumentalist view of associations as funneling support to political parties. It is my hope that this study will stand alongside the literature on leftwing subcultures, to inform a more complex understanding of the role of associations in constructing those cultures.

Following the lead of other historians in what is now a second generation of history of the everyday,<sup>19</sup> I attempt to use associations as a lens through which to view the lived experience of members, constructing neither an institutional history nor a narrative of the formation of a class or a subculture.<sup>20</sup> I attempt maintain a sensitivity to *case del popolo* as locations of everyday practices, as spaces in which ordinary people developed pragmatic approaches to the challenges of their rapidly changing lives, in ways that often predated solutions formulated by political parties or local governments. In the course of this narrative, I touch on important themes that relate to issues of a red subculture: the persistence of the rubric fascism/antifascism, of concepts like the "values of the Resistance" or of narratives that mirror Soviet representations of history, that emerge from the ways that ordinary people explained events.

One of the drawbacks of this method is that it is often difficult to know much about many of the protagonists, outside of the moments in which they speak up to explain their associations. These groups and individuals have left behind only fragmentary records, ephemeral bits gathered

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19 As identified in Paul Steege et al., "The History of Everyday Life: A Second Chapter," *The Journal of Modern History* 80, no. 2 (June 2008): 358–378.

20 See the description of the work of everyday-life historians in Geoff Eley's "Foreword" to Adelheid Von Saldern, *The Challenge of Modernity: German Social and Cultural Studies, 1890-1960* (University of Michigan Press, 2002).

from photographs and pamphlets, newspaper articles and letters. I am not always able to explain whether a speaker is a PCI member or a passer-by, a long-time member of a group or a temporary presence. I have excavated insofar as possible details about the individuals and spaces that make up the history of the associations in question, but the nature of the research leaves many more unexplained and perhaps undiscoverable.

This study is built on my original research in archives in Bologna. I conducted the lion's share of this research in the private ARCI archives, long abandoned by ARCI, kept in moldering cardboard boxes in the basement of the Italian Union of Sport for Everyone (UISP) in Bologna. These files are only a fraction of what once constituted the ARCI archives, rescued from destruction in the early 1980s by leaders of ARCI Bologna in the course of the national ARCI being evicted from its headquarters in Rome. The files have never been cataloged or indexed, and this fact, combined with the difficulty in accessing them through a private association, has meant that they have never been consulted as extensively and thoroughly as for this dissertation. These archives contain correspondence between the national ARCI leadership, the provincial headquarters and local circles, conference proceedings from the many ARCI-sponsored cultural conferences, some sparse financial documents and miscellaneous institutional papers. I have marshaled the details of the thousands of pages of uncataloged ephemera to understand the work of ARCI and the concerns and problems of affiliated circles and allied organizations.

In addition, I have consulted the published primary source *Le ore libere*, the periodical published by ARCI from 1958-1968. It contains a fairly detailed accounting of all the goings on in ARCI, in provincial offices and sometimes in circles themselves. The leaders at these various levels wrote about what they were working on, what was going well, and what problems they were facing. The periodical was organized as a means of communication of significant

information to circles; it included legal advice, relevant bills presented in Parliament, legal precedent and court proceedings, summaries of issues of rents, evictions, claims to seized properties, permits, among other legal issues facing circles. A dedicated section of the journal, “Working experiences” was a space for circles to report their experiences and successes, to inspire or inform others. I approach the journal as a window into the relationship between the national ARCI organization and local branches, and as a guide to the chief preoccupations and problems that ARCI attempted to confront.

Furthermore, I have made extensive use of visual materials: posters and fliers from the Manifesti Politici collection, and photographs from the Fondo Arbizzani, both at the Istituto Gramsci Emilia Romagna, the latter of which are still in the process of being archived. The Fondo Arbizzani contains photographs collected by Luigi Arbizzani, local historian, journalist close to the Bologna Federation of the Italian Communist Party, and director of the Istituto Gramsci Emilia Romagna in the 1970s. In particular, the collection includes an album of photos commissioned in 1957 by the Bologna Federation on the case del popolo in the province of Bologna, by photographer Enrico Pasquali. Pasquali assembled photos he had taken from 1950 to 1957, in the course of his work as a photojournalist, as well as new photos he took of the buildings, their facilities such as bars and theaters, as an inventory for the local PCI. I was fortunate enough to encounter a particularly helpful archivist, who allowed me a brief look at the catalogs in progress and provided me with several of the more poignant photos that I have employed as primary sources.

I have carefully avoided using visual materials as mere illustrations, and have attempted to read them as closely and scrupulously as I would a written text, considering the author and the author’s objectives, the composition of the image, as well as the specific content that contributes

to my subject matter. These photographs are an invaluable way to understand the texture of the everyday, which is often difficult to glean from other sources. I employ them to better identify the individuals in their associations: cues from their dress and aspect allow me to understand more about class, gender, and age, in particular the presences or absences of women, families, young people, peasants, etc. I read them for details on the spatial layouts and furnishings in the associations, thus comprehending the profound difference between the rudimentary bars of the early 1950s and the glamorous ballrooms of the 1960s. I have found in the photos the objects and people that have allowed me to describe the types of activities and life within associations that may have been considered so commonplace to contemporary observers that they would not have thought to write about them, for example, how they watched television together, crowded around a tiny screen in the corner of the casa del popolo.

Finally, I have consulted a number of local histories, memoirs and other published sources to help fill in the gaps. An incredible number of first-hand accounts of local history by party members and activists in Bologna constitutes a veritable literary subgenre of communist memoirs, a phenomenon that merits a study in its own right. I have attempted to employ such sources carefully, acknowledging and noting the ways authors' self-consciously shape representations of their experiences, but also attempting to treat them humanely.

I have divided my work into two sections that are chronologically and thematically very different, the first a narrative that traces the reconstruction of workers' associations and the political forces pushing and pulling at them after World War II through the 1950s, and the second a thematic exploration of how some of the new kinds of cultural challenges in the 1960s were met in the neighborhood circles. In this way my study is structured to follow the pace of

transformation of associations: their shifting place as the geographic and social center of a neighborhood, and their engagement with new media, and new kinds of political activity.

Part 1: Rebuilding, defending, and democratizing associational life, 1945-1960 describes the struggles of associations to occupy what members viewed as their rightful place in the new democratic Republic. Chapter 1 deals with re-occupying and rebuilding the case del popolo in the aftermath of World War II, a moment of great relief, enthusiasm, and desire to return to “normal”, to pick up where the political parties and associations had left off. It describes the process of reconstruction through the example of the project of building a new casa del popolo, a collective effort by hundreds of local volunteers who through their participation in building, imagined their contributions as part of re-founding Italy on principles of solidarity and mutual aid. Chapter 2 describes the struggles of workers’ circles and case del popolo with the regulatory schemes that attempted to circumscribe their activities. It examines the limits imposed by the institutional heir to the fascist workers’ recreation agency and the negotiations to free associations from the rigid system of rules intended to control workers. Chapter 3 deals with the mass evictions of workers’ associations in the mid-1950s, a moment in which the case del popolo became the site where wider political battles were fought. A close examination of the Casa del popolo of Crevalcore illuminates the toll of the Christian Democratic model of “armored democracy” on residents of Crevalcore. It furthermore analyzes how the heavy-handed policies were understood in terms of historical struggles, tying contemporary events to an uninterrupted war between fascism and Resistance. Such interpretations fueled mobilization for the left, and the defiant rebuilding of the case del popolo.

Part 2 is about moving out from the shadow of the “hard years” of the 1950s, the new prosperity and consumerism of the 1960s as a different sort of challenge to associations trying to

hold together their memberships and members trying to understand these changes. These chapters deal with three big themes that the circles identify and try to come to terms with: the changing shape of the city, cinema and television. Chapter 4 addresses the new urban landscape, including the social geography of the city, and the new mobility of citizens which represented a challenge to the old *casa del popolo* whose attraction in many cases was in being nearby, accessible, the only place with any activity in a neighborhood. It also provided an opportunity, as I show through an extended look at the Casa del popolo Tosarelli – a center that participated in its own urban planning, expanding with the neighborhood, building for new demands and new uses of free time. Chapter 5 looks at the expansion of informal cinema in associations made possible by expanded access to projection technology in the late 1950s. ARCI efforts in the field of cinema attempted to connect left-wing intellectuals: critics, sociologists, and theorists to the mass membership of affiliated circles, for the supposed edification of the latter. ARCI concerns for quality and critical capacity met resistance from association members' desires for "purely entertaining" films. Chapter 6 examines a new opportunity for groups – putting a television in the *casa del popolo* – to meet the demands of their memberships, despite the ambivalence of party leaders and intellectuals. I show how a variety of responses and critiques to elements of mass culture were formulated by intellectuals but also by ordinary members of circles, through the Group for the Study of Audiovisual Instruments, a group of workers and students who undertook their own projects in media criticism, with guidance from experts provided by ARCI.

The common thread throughout these chapters is the continued importance of the *casa del popolo* and circles as sites where members worked out ways to understand or mitigate the rapid social, economic, and cultural changes transforming their lives. But as those members achieved precisely the demands that they had voiced together in their associations: increasing participation



in political and economic life, a greater share in the national prosperity, expanded social services, and opportunities for education; the urgency of aggregating began to fade. New generations in the 1960s began to formulate more sophisticated and specialized demands, beginning through the older structures like the *casa del popolo*, but ultimately relying less and less on the model of neighborhood solidarity and increasingly on self-selected interest groups. Thus the arc of history described in this dissertation follows these associations from their resurrection and rise to prominence in the 1950s, to the transformations of those forms in the 1960s that would ultimately fragment associational life into a constellation of scattered interest groups.

*PART 1: Rebuilding, defending, and democratizing associational life, 1945-1960*

***Liberation: from clandestine struggle to the light of the sun***

On April 20, 1945, the eve of the liberation of Bologna from German military occupation and fascist authority, several leaders of the Resistance in Bologna met secretly in the offices of attorney Roberto Vighi to review the draft of a bill that would restore properties confiscated by the fascist party to their former owners.<sup>21</sup> The legal commission of the Committee for National Liberation (CLN) of the province of Bologna, made up of the socialist Vighi, a liberal, Tito Carnacini, and the Christian Democrat Angelo Senin, had drawn up the draft earlier in April in anticipation of uncertainties about the ownership of buildings, goods, and land in the aftermath of the fall of the fascist regime.<sup>22</sup> The bill, drawn up in consideration of the fact that the fascists had “destroyed, sacked, or preyed upon” institutions including the trade unions, case del popolo, consumers’ cooperatives and agricultural cooperatives, decreed the immediate restitution of illegally seized properties, the so-called *maltolto*. Legitimate owners, it specified, could claim restitutions for damages as well as interest on the capital. Individuals who had purchased such

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21 The meeting was later recalled in detail by former partisan and historian of the Resistance in Bologna, Nazario Sauro Onofri as the last meeting before Giuseppe Bentivogli, head of the socialist federation of Bologna, was captured and killed by retreating fascist forces in Luigi Arbizzani, Nazario Sauro Onofri, and Alessandro Albertazzi, *Gli antifascisti, i partigiani e le vittime del fascismo nel bolognese (1919-1945): Volume II, Dizionario biografico* (Bologna: Moderna, 2003).

22 Nazario Sauro Onofri, “Maltolto,” in *Bologna dall’antifascismo alla Resistenza* (Bologna: ISREBO, 2005), 172.

property were obliged to report it to the CLN, and those guilty of seizing or pillaging property under the fascist regime were subject to immediate arrest, which would be enforced by the Volunteer Corps for Liberty (Corpo dei Volontari della Libertà).<sup>23</sup> The decree was an attempt to reverse the damages of fascism, to take back the properties seized and impose the payment of reparations, but it largely ignored the complexities involved in realizing these goals. Local fascists had often masked outright seizures as donations, had coerced the members of these institutions to vote to hand over properties to the Fascist party, to convert a *casa del popolo* to a *casa del fascio*, or had produced apparently legal documents to support transfers of property.

On the day of liberation, April 21, 1945, the local center for the organized labor movement, the Camera Confederale del Lavoro della Provincia di Bologna, posted a manifesto on the *maltolto* around the city, exhorting workers and citizens to return “solemnly” to their cooperatives, leagues, case del popolo, and other associations:

“This patrimony, the fruit of long years of work, of savings, of sacrifice and tears, was plundered: from you, who never stole anything from anyone, your seats of trade union organization, your Case del popolo, your lands which constituted the meager savings of the poor, set aside for the poor were violently taken from you. Not in violence, then, and not oppression, but in the legitimate recognition of a human and legal right, the first real manifestation of the re-establishment of moral principle that must be at the base of social reconstruction. The pillagers must give back [properties] and must be judged. Workers! As is your right, return solemnly in possession of your Case del popolo, of your lands, of

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23 Comitato di liberazione nazionale della Provincia di Bologna, “Progetto di decreto sul ‘mal tolto’, 1945,” in *La Camera del lavoro di Bologna nella Resistenza 1944-1945*, ed. Rinaldo Scheda and Luigi Arbizzani (Bologna: Steb, 1973).

your residences and, united as always, celebrate this day that signals the resumption of the path towards a better future.”<sup>24</sup>

The manifesto emphasizes these two themes: the great importance of these properties and the justice of retaking possession of them as a restoration of rights, not as a vindictive reprisal. At the same time it stresses the “bestly violence” of fascist squads and the devastation of the war, the “iniquities suffered”, the “heinous mutilations”, “a profound wound for which the soul of the proletariat still bleeds”. It was also intended to excite a passion for justice by appealing directly to the collective “you” (*voi*) and the indignities “you” have suffered.<sup>25</sup> It is inclusive, allowing the readers to identify with the indignation it expresses about the injustice and violence of the fascist regime.

The fascist seizure of the associations of the left had indeed been calculated two decades earlier to dismantle the social structures capable of organizing antifascist resistance. Even more than that, the fascists’ “deeds or “*gesta*” had been acts of robbery of their legacy of hard work, their “legitimate pride” in their patrimony, their “indomitable faith”, their “generous impulse of social solidarity” and patriotism, the founders of the case del popolo’s, “sacrificing an hour of rest...to build, stone by stone...”. Addressing them directly, it declared that “only one thought and only one desire animated your spirit: that the moon would shine at night to illuminate your hard work, your sacrifice for the good of all”. This collective effort with volunteer labor, donated materials, and small contributions of funds from workers and peasant farmers from the surrounding areas represented examples, in solid stone and concrete, of the power of solidarity

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24 Camera del lavoro della Provincia di Bologna, “Lavoratori, lavoratrici!, 1945,” in *La Resistenza a Bologna, testimonianze e documenti; Vol IV: manifesti, opuscoli e fogli volanti* (Bologna: Istituto per la Storia di Bologna, 1975).

25 Ibid.

and collective action, of socialist ideals put into practice. For that reason, too, restitution and reparations were not just acts of justice, but also acts of re-launching the socialist movement.

Restitution of the *maltolto* thus stood at the top of the CLN's political priorities at the time of the liberation. It was conceived by its theorists as "the first real manifestation of the re-establishment of moral principle that must be at the base of social reconstruction", setting the tone for a reconstruction guided by justice and solidarity. Another dimension was played down at the time, though it was surely foremost in the minds of the leaders of the CLN, namely that they needed to establish operational headquarters in the province. In reality, the properties seized, more than cultural or economic, sites, had also served as headquarters for the local sections of political parties, socialists and communists in particular. Re-establishing those headquarters was urgent if the CLN was to establish a more permanent presence in the interim local government and restore the neighborhood sections.

Both the CLN decree and the accompanying manifesto thus highlight a number of issues for understanding the immediate postwar moment: the decree on the *maltolto* presents a legal and administrative problem that was not resolved by this order from the CLN, which later would not be recognized as legally binding. It was an optimistic attempt, even if not in the end successful, to revert to pre-fascist order, to turn back the changes that the Ventennio had wrought. The reclamation of properties became instead a legal gray area which would continue to plague associations for the next decade and in some cases decades, taking the form of legal proceedings, attempted and executed evictions, and in some cases violent encounters with the police. It represented a legacy of fascism that would endure decades because of the botched project of *epurazione*, or purging, of fascism both in the personnel and the apparatus of the state. The manifesto directly addressed the workers' links to the properties and associations, particularly of

the workers' movement to social reconstruction and rebuilding democracy in an impassioned appeal to a sense of justice, rights, and outrage. It was about justice, but more importantly about picking up where the workers' movement had left off. It offered hope, "faith" in rebuilding Italy, the "continuation of your united labor struggle in order to continue, with strong faith, toward shining political, economic, and social destinations".<sup>26</sup> Both documents demonstrate how central workers' associations, both political and recreational, were to the leaders of the CLN, the architects of reconstruction, and to their understandings of what would constitute a return to peacetime.

### *Collective spaces and democratic life*

The symbolic and functional importance of the associations and cooperatives was thus made clear, first, through the great effort by fascists, both as local squads or under official state direction, to destroy, seize, or shut them down (and then to replace them with fascist institutions), and second, through the priority placed upon re-occupying and rebuilding these institutions beginning immediately in 1945. As the manifesto by the Camera del Lavoro demonstrates, re-claiming collective properties and associations was as much a symbolic and psychological victory as it was an administrative issue. Liberation from fascism and from Nazi occupation meant a physical liberty: coming out of hiding and clandestine action into public spaces and public discourse.

While many historians have explored the degrees of liberty that individuals could negotiate under fascism, the limits of the regime's power, and the channels it opened or left open for individuals to operate, one must contend with fascist occupation, appropriation of places – a

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<sup>26</sup> "...proseguimento della vostra compatta lotta sindacale affinché proseguire, con viva fede, verso mete luminose politiche, economiche e sociale." Ibid.

spatial fact as well as a metaphor for power.<sup>27</sup> The spatial implications of underground activity bear spelling out. During the fascist Ventennio and German occupation, opposition political parties and workers' organizations were forced underground. The material reality of clandestinity was exile from public life and public spaces: the regime could limit political oppositional activity, but could not extinguish it. Political life was concealed, underground, ongoing but unseen. There could be no party headquarters, no banners, and no public manifestations, only secret meetings in private homes, basements, abandoned buildings, only messages passed furtively, or, with relatively more liberty, within partisans' hidden encampments in the countryside and hills, in exile in Switzerland or elsewhere abroad. While this may appear to be a fairly obvious point, it must be understood not generally as a condition of life under fascism, but as a part of a specific spatial reality of individuals which after the war would inform their decisions about creating physical homes for their parties and communities. In other words, the experience of partisans who had to hide in caves to compose their political pamphlets informed their grasp of the importance of having a licit space for political activity and community. This underground experience in the true sense of the term, shaped the thinking of the generation of organizers and leaders who built and rebuilt associations, the majority of whom were former partisans. Returning "solemnly" to their homes and neighborhoods, ravished by war, they established or re-established neighborhood headquarters of political parties, trade unions, but also the bars and billiard halls that centered community life. The casa del popolo, as the time-honored space for neighborhood assemblies, the physical home for political parties, trade unions, and bars where patrons could openly expound on politics proved to be profoundly significant politically and socially to the generation of the Resistance.

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27 For example, De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy*.



The case del popolo and associations proved to have a symbolic and emotional importance as well, beyond the strategic necessity for spaces of political organization and social gathering. The presence of a permanent, solid structure was an embodiment of solidarity, democratic, and egalitarian ideals. In much the same way as the cathedral and city hall occupied a prominent place in the main piazza of a town or neighborhood, as embodiments of the power that the church and state claim in citizen life, the casa del popolo was often situated prominently and in juxtaposition to these other institutions. Thus it served as a monumental presence, signifying a force that offered an ethico-political alternative to state and religious authority. Contemporary commentators in 1945 affirmed the “moral value” of these organizations, as supporting the fundamental principles of democracy. For example, local communist newspaper *Il Momento*, described the foundation of a casa del popolo by the Committee for National Liberation that would include representatives of all political parties:

“The moral value of these organisms is enormous: they serve to normalize civil life, they serve to channel and develop culture and education, they serve to provide spectacles and entertainment at low prices and they serve to create scrupulous and honest organizations...The Case del popolo are organizations that will serve the defense and diffusion of the principles of liberty, of justice and of democracy.”<sup>28</sup>

This article couched moral value in terms of inclusivity, normalization, education, and honesty. But the most frequent term in discussions of the importance of the case del popolo was democracy. The assertion of this link between associations and democracy is so pervasive that it bears examination. How did the founders of case del popolo and cultural circles understand the connection between their institutions and democratic political life?

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<sup>28</sup> Zani, “La Casa del Popolo,” *Il Momento* (Imola, 1945). in Arbizzani et al., *Storie di case del popolo: saggi, documenti e immagini d’Emilia-Romagna*.

Universality was a key component of this vision of democracy: everyone should be included. The CLN Alta Italia in the first months after liberation published a list of regulations on case del popolo that clearly established inclusion as the ideological point of departure for the reconstruction of community life.<sup>29</sup> The rules established as a first principle that the Casa del popolo was a place for discussion and study, a meeting place for free time open to all citizens, independent of sex or race. Moreover, the library that the casa del popolo was required to maintain was to have books and periodicals of all political tendencies. One major exception to the policy of inclusivity was for former fascist party members or any other persons subject to punishment under the laws of *epurazione*, purging, or for other “moral indignities”. Former fascists were to be ostracized. In theory, then, people from all other parties could be welcomed, workers as well as the bourgeoisie, farm owners as well as landless peasants, women, men, and entire families. Furthermore, the CLN regulations set the tone for the re-establishment of democracy by requiring the democratic election of officers in case del popolo, consensus decision-making processes and transparency in the organizations’ rules, which were to be prominently posted. This rules-making, especially in contrast to the way the fascist institutions had flouted rules to suit political ends and had imposed party hierarchies on the associations, demonstrates especially well that that the CLN, as it busied itself with the enormous challenges of reconstruction, conceived of these institutions as sites where the ideals and the aspirations of the liberation would be put into practice.

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29 Comitato di liberazione nazionale della Provincia di Bologna, “Regolamento interno delle case del popolo” (Archivio Istituto Gramsci, 1945).

### *Re-occupying the case del fascio*

Establishing or re-establishing these democratic institutions usually meant seizing fascist properties and institutions, often their fascist analogues: the *casa del fascio* became or became once again casa del popolo. This action was also loaded with symbolism: the *casa del fascio* had proved to be a proxy target for popular rage against the regime, as in July 1943, when the announcement of the dismissal of Mussolini's government prompted antifascist celebrations in many cities, in which demonstrators sacked the *case del fascio* and state buildings and destroyed the iconography of the Duce and the fascist party.<sup>30</sup> Retaking the public spaces of fascism in 1945 was a gesture of victory, claiming the apparatus of the fascist regime to be re-imagined and repurposed.

In Bologna as elsewhere, many of the *case del fascio* became headquarters for local offices of the CLN, and with it trade union organizations, local sections of the political parties, the communist and socialist parties but in some cases for the brief period of national unity also the Christian democratic party and others. While these organizations undertook the serious demands of logistical and political questions to re-establish a functioning local government, other local leaders came forward to claim space for organizational headquarters to plan recreation and entertainment, to establish youth groups, women's groups and cultural organizations, as well as cooperatives and social services. Many of these were local chapters of what are commonly seen as national flanking organizations of the PCI: the Italian Women's Union (UDI) and Italian General Confederation of Labor (CGIL), for example, though one of the

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30 See for example accounts of events in Bologna and Reggio Emilia respectively: Dianella Gagliani, "La 'strana' defascistizzazione del 25 luglio 1943," in *Pensare la contemporaneità* (Roma: Viella, 2011), 213–228. and Antonio Zambonelli, "25 luglio-agosto '43: caduta del fascismo e azione popolare nella provincia reggiana," *Ricerche Storiche* 49 (1983): 5–21.

goals of this study is to challenge overlooking local groups as simply subsidiaries of national organizations, and national organizations as thin cover for a top-down PCI agenda.

Some local examples illustrate that while there are general patterns in the chronology of establishment and development of associations in the case del popolo, the outcomes were highly variable and subject to many external influences, chief among them the demographic and urban developments of the neighborhood that they served. In Corticella, a peripheral semi-rural neighborhood north of Bologna, partisans returning from the Corticella Battalion after it demobilized occupied the *casa del fascio* on Piazza Garibaldi, the main square in town. The building, until the fascists had seized it in 1922, had housed a library, bar, cooperative, and an anarchist and socialist workers' club. After 1945, it became headquarters for the CLN, socialist and communist parties, the cooperative, and democratic organizations like the Youth Front (Fronte della Gioventù). For a brief period the unity of the Resistance continued through the activities planned by the Youth Front, which welcomed youths of all the political parties in planning a series of entertainments, dances and concerts and in managing the bar of the casa del popolo. Except for the casa del popolo, there were no parks, no gardens, no social centers, and no neighborhood administration or public spaces available to residents of Corticella. A barn at the nearby aristocratic manor Villa Torchi served as a makeshift dancehall, the single point of social gathering and entertainment. Dancing was the most broadly popular activity in this period, and according to leaders, attracted more women to the organization than political meetings or card games in the bar did.<sup>31</sup> The occupation of the *casa del fascio* in Corticella was

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<sup>31</sup> According to sociology student Saveria Bologna, who conducted extensive interviews with leaders and older members of the case del popolo in Bologna in 1979, in which she asked detailed questions on their memories of the structures, members, and activities. Her interview transcripts are available as appendices to her thesis, “Associazionismo culturale e mutamento sociale: le case del popolo nella provincia di Bologna” (Università degli Studi di Bologna, 1979).

a solution to the absence of other structures from which to organize the reconstruction of the area: political and economic as well as social and recreational.

While there was a momentary satisfaction in partisans returning home and taking back the centers that had been stripped of them, the old case del popolo would often prove to be outdated and inadequate to meet the new needs of their neighborhoods. The period of reconstruction changed the city, demographically as well as geographically. In Corticella, as I will illustrate in later chapters, the total transformation of the area later required building an entirely new casa del popolo. In other neighborhoods, building spaces with an eye to the future of the neighborhood began as part of the post-war reconstruction and re-imagining of the city. The case del popolo built in this period are documents of the urgency of building this new, democratic city.

### ***Reconstruction, city planning and new case del popolo***

In many neighborhoods the exuberance of the liberation manifested itself in plans to build centers of political and community life ex novo. Even before the liberation of Bologna, urban planners and architects were working clandestinely on a plan of reconstruction for the city. If these plans addressed first and foremost the wartime destruction and housing needs, they also were a way to imagine the future of the city. Leaders of political party sections, case del popolo and cooperatives engaged with the designs of the urban plans for Bologna to plan their own organizations and objectives as part of that imagined future city.

The Casa del popolo Corazza provides a great example of the construction of associations in this immediate postwar moment. It is rare that such associations maintain coherent archives, and for many the only testimony of their existence is their presence on lists maintained by the national organizations with which they affiliated. The Casa del popolo Corazza, however, has

been in uninterrupted activity since 1946 and home to the Circolo Leopardi since 1960. In its capacity as a proud member of the national Italian Recreational and Cultural Association (ARCI), the circle maintained a historical record of the Casa del popolo, as well as compiling the most detailed history available of the neighborhood, San Donato. The study dating to 1976, called, simply, the *Casa del popolo Corazza*, is a remarkably sophisticated document reporting the research findings of a group credited only as ARCI of Bologna, and edited by one Aldo Volpi.<sup>32</sup> A few mimeographed copies have been conserved in Bologna archives and by the Circolo Leopardi. The research was apparently intended to be a single chapter in a series of studies of case del popolo of Bologna, for the occasion of the 20th anniversary of ARCI. Unfortunately, if parallel studies were ever completed they have not survived.

In the case of the Casa del popolo Corazza, the conditions for the development of the association were notably linked to the development of the neighborhood, the specific local reality in which it operated, to the changes in the social fabric of the city through the reconstruction, and to the wider political context of the Cold War. A convergence of forces came together to give rise to the new casa del popolo, the social hub of a postwar neighborhood: the support of the local PCI federation, the expansion of the city, and most importantly the massive volunteer effort by the local population.

### ***Planning and building the Casa del popolo Corazza***

The Casa del popolo Corazza came to life in San Donato, which before 1945 had been a tiny village outside the walls of Bologna, a zone where the city gave way to countryside, inhabited by peasant farmers, agricultural laborers, and *mezzadri* or tenant farmers, railway workers, and the urban poor, pushed to the extreme periphery of Bologna. The main street of the

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32 Volpi, *La Casa del popolo Corazza. Una ricerca dell'ARCI di Bologna*.

neighborhood, Via San Donato, communicates with the provincial town Granarolo dell'Emilia, from directly under the iconic Asinelli and Garisenda towers at the heart of the historic city center, along today's Via Zamboni, out Porta San Donato and over the railroad tracks, where the neighborhood began in the immediate postwar period. Nearby was the Scalo di merci di San Donato, the main railroad yard where freight was loaded and unloaded (the largest in Europe until very recently), which provided work for around 500 railway workers.<sup>33</sup> Along Via San Donato there were perhaps a dozen houses, a workshop, a barracks, two *osterie* and a handful of storage sheds and rude shacks. Long time residents in interviews with sociologists from the Center for Studies of Problems of the City and of Territory (Centro studi sui problemi della città e del territorio) at the University of Bologna emphasized the former emptiness of the area before 1950; after that the Dozza Plan and other public housing programs built affordable houses for those whose homes had been destroyed: "There was nothing...countryside, pastures..."<sup>34</sup>

"There were four houses...and in front of those there were another three or four houses and then the rest was all countryside; then there were a couple of peasants in the area of Via Mondo...there was a 'macero' where they soaked the hemp, to the left and to the right there were peasant farmers. And then there were the houses built in the fascist period in via Vezza, the homes of the poor, where they sent the worst element, and two houses in via Piana, the Case Zamboni, and another two or three houses...The rest was all countryside..."<sup>35</sup>

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33 Giovanni Pieretti, *La persistenza degli aggregati : cittadini e welfare locale in un'area periferica di Bologna* (Milano: F. Angeli, 2000).

34 Ibid, 46.

35 Ibid, 47.

The unidentified interviewees give a sense of their perceptions of the nothingness of the area, emphasizing the poverty and isolation, even while going on to describe the many things they recall in the area: hemp works, railroad and trams, a number of small groupings of houses.

Another characteristic of the area that emerges through oral histories was the precocious penetration of the local Communist party. One interviewee claimed that PCI enrollment of the area laborers was at one hundred percent around 1950. In other interviews, the residents had occasion to describe the area as “too red”.<sup>36</sup>

In 1946, the neighborhood resembled a rural village more than the urban periphery that it rapidly became in the next decade. However, the city administration under communist mayor Giuseppe Dozza put on display the so-called clandestine city plan in which the development of the periphery was forecast. Leaders of the local communist party (PCI) section Bentivoglio, interpreting this information, began to plan to build a *casa del popolo* to serve as the social center of the neighborhood.<sup>37</sup> The decision was based on a perceived need for a large room that could serve as the seat for activists who at the time had no available meeting place, and as room for union assemblies for the neighborhood population. The Bentivoglio section was not unique in this calculation, as similar groups throughout Emilia Romagna and beyond built a number of new structures in emerging neighborhoods in the same period.

In 1947 the Bentivoglio section began planning for the financing and construction of the building. Representatives of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) were invited to participate and use the headquarters as well. But in meetings between local representatives PCI and PSI to decide how to pay for construction, the PSI claimed to have no capital to finance the effort, and asked the PCI to anticipate the money, agreeing to reimburse half the expenses later to become equal

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<sup>36</sup> “una zona troppo rossa”. Ibid, 48.

<sup>37</sup> Volpi, *La Casa del popolo Corazza. Una ricerca dell'ARCI di Bologna*.



partner. In effect, this left the organization of construction in the hands of the PCI. The Bologna Federation of the PCI put forward the money to buy the land, one million lire, or 1000 lire per square meter. The deed of ownership was signed over to the Cooperativa Bastia, which also owned other properties on behalf of the Bologna Communist Federation, which had formerly been held under the names of individual party members. The link between the case del popolo and the local communist party was particularly strong in the period of construction, as the PCI provided the capital to start construction and facilitated the financial transactions necessary to carry the building project forward.<sup>38</sup>

In spring 1948, even before the necessary documents attesting to the sale and transfer of ownership of the land were official and notarized, and before the building permits were obtained, volunteers began construction work. If the labor was unpaid, provided free by the area residents, obtaining materials presented a challenge. The building committee organized a system of contributions through voluntary subscriptions and private loans to finance materials costs. The main contributors were the peasants and market farmers, particularly from nearby towns San Sisto and Castenaso, who offered enough cash and goods to buy the first round of material. The subscriptions came from a broad swath of the surrounding population, workers as well as shopkeepers and smallholder farmers, not solely from communist militants or even individuals enrolled with the party.

Given the resources at hand and the construction methods employed, much of the work was labor-intensive. Volunteers dug the foundations by hand, with their own shovels and tools. They dismantled an old barn nearby to salvage the materials, and used anti-aircraft gun mounts they had found to dismantle for parts. The role of women and retired people in the work was

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38 Ibid.

conspicuous. They gathered sand from the nearby Reno river, and purloined bricks from the reject pile of the local brickmaking cooperative, while other materials like cement they purchased only out of necessity.

The authors of *Casa del popolo Corazza* describe the construction as a broadly popular effort. Volunteer laborers came from a variety of political backgrounds; they were not only PCI members. Descriptions of the effort point out that no acts of theft, vandalism, or sabotage were recorded. The homogeneity of the working-class in the area, together with the communist majority prevented opposition to the project; there was no organized fascist presence in the neighborhood that could have been an obstacle to construction. Unlike the experience of other associations being built at the time, there were no police interventions to slow down the construction. The description of these circumstances through negation is a telling construction: *not* only communists, *no* sabotage, *no* fascist opposition, *no* police interventions. It suggests that the authors of the *Casa del popolo Corazza*, looking back from the 1970s expected there to have been obstacles, sabotage and repression, and that the appeal to more than the PCI membership should be a surprise.

The only real antagonist to the casa del popolo came from the local Catholic clergy, in keeping with the hard-line anticommunist policy of the Vatican at the time. As the construction of the casa del popolo was completed, the newly-appointed archbishop of Bologna, Giacomo Lercaro, began an ambitious plan to build new parishes in emerging neighborhoods, much as the PCI had planned case del popolo and party sections in the same areas. Lercaro pursued an energetic and innovative anticommunist policy, intensifying Catholic-Communist antagonism in Bologna in the early 1950s. One of his more famous projects, for example, was his squad of “flying priests”, who rather than being fixed in a parish were mobile, deployed to evangelize

throughout the city from cars fitted with megaphones and in improvised chapels in underserved areas.<sup>39</sup> The Catholic project for the area San Donato was the “*villaggio dei giovani sposi*”, a plan to build low-income housing for young newlyweds, also known as the Case Lercaro. The parallel construction of Lercaro’s project contrasts with the project of the local PCI in the construction of the casa del popolo: while the projects differ in size and scope, they both represented interventions in the future shape of the city, diverging in their emphasis and vision. While Lercaro’s point of departure for the future was young married couples, whose social and recreational needs would be organized through their parish, the local PCI began first with the social and political center, the casa del popolo, which at least according to their own rhetoric was to be inclusive of everyone. The authors of *Casa del popolo Corazza* interpreted the intentions of the Case Lercaro as having “openly proposed to divide the area in two social components – the Catholic and the Marxist, thus splitting the movement for social solidarity that was at the foundations of the new growing structure”.<sup>40</sup> Laying the blame for this split at the feet of the archbishop is a vast oversimplification, but it points to a deep rancor very different from the exuberant descriptions of 1945 of the goals of the casa del popolo. The organizers and longtime members of the Casa del popolo Corazza who were interviewed for the history pieced together in *Casa del popolo Corazza* understood the casa del popolo to be in direct competition with the Catholic forces organizing in the neighborhood.

The ground floor of the casa del popolo was completed in six months. The construction continued even as the operations began on the ground floor, until 1950 when the last two floors

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39 The frati volanti were also known to attend PCI rallies during electoral campaigns, to distribute anticommunist pamphlets and challenge the orators in public on political and ethical questions. See Jenner Meletti, “Io, frate volante, così duellavo in piazza con il Pci,” *La Repubblica* (Bologna, April 5, 2007). , an interview with the head of the frati, Tommaso Toschi.

40 A thorough exploration of Catholic-communist antagonisms in a nearby neighborhood is David I. Kertzer, *Comrades and Christians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

were completed. At the end of 1948 the casa del popolo housed the bar, which was really more of a café serving coffee, soft drinks and wine; the local chapters of the PCI; the Communist Youth Federation (Federazione Giovanile Comunisti Italiani); the PSI; a dairy outlet; a butcher shop; the consumer cooperative; an apartment whose occupant acted as the guardian of the Casa; and the Italian Union for Popular Sport (UISP). The priority placed on the bar in the casa del popolo demonstrates how it anchored social life. The bar was the first part of the casa del popolo to open, obtaining a full license to serve alcohol to the public while still operating out of a shack on the construction site, allowing the casa del popolo to begin to function and also generate income. Once the first floor of the building was completed, the bar moved into a space opening onto the street, where passersby could stop in for an espresso at the counter and pensioners could sit at small tables nursing small glasses of cheap wine. By combining small businesses that served primary needs of the residents of the neighborhood, the butcher, dairy and the consumer cooperative; political groups; the local branch of UISP, which organized recreation and sport; and the bar, providing a social space for all residents, the Casa del popolo di Corazza brought to a neighborhood that had previously been deprived of almost any services a lively hub for commercial, political and social life.

### ***Construction of the casa del popolo as construction of community***

The effort to build the casa del popolo involved the entire neighborhood of San Donato and surrounding areas. Builders, railroad workers, peasants and laborers, but also merchants and owners of local businesses volunteered materials, funds, and most extraordinarily, thousands of hours of labor to erect the large, three-storey building. For two years the volunteers dedicated most their available free time after work and weekends, for four to five hour shifts, forty to eighty volunteers at a time. On weekdays, aside from the one paid mason who prepared the

materials and tools to have everything ready for the volunteers, there were consistently four or five people working 2-3 hour shifts putting up walls and plastering. In total, volunteers gave nearly 30,000 hours of labor. The remarkable constancy and intensity of this participation of the volunteers was a manifestation of how deeply invested these individuals were in their vision of the casa del popolo.<sup>41</sup>

In *E' storia*, a local history of the Casa del popolo Nerio Nannetti, built in the same period, the author, Orlando Pezzoli recalled the construction of the casa del popolo when he worked for the local PCI section in Via Emilia. Pezzoli emphasized the diversity among the volunteers as well, noting that even the elderly had tasks like filling holes at the construction site or mothers and children would pick through piles of rubble to recoup bricks. The chapter describing this phase is illustrated with staged photos, taken self-consciously to record the construction effort. They show various groups of volunteers employed in the building process: young and old men gathering stone and sand from the banks of the Reno River, workers with buckets and wheelbarrows pausing from work to smile into the camera, groups of young women carrying wine and food to the workers to sustain them. The photographic record demonstrates great care taken to record these moments, to frame the work crews as happily working together.<sup>42</sup>

The construction itself of the Casa del popolo Corazza was a process that not only built the concrete, material building, but also the social community around the casa del popolo. The shared effort tied together all the volunteers and donors socially. Construction provided a series of tasks in which anyone could participate and which were all significant in achieving the end result, yet alone had limited significance. Piecing the building together, brick by brick, provided

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41 Volpi, *La Casa del popolo Corazza. Una ricerca dell'ARCI di Bologna*.

42 Orlando Pezzoli, *È storia: Casa del popolo Nerio Nannetti-Santa Viola, Bologna* (Bologna: PCI Zona Santa Viola, 1981).

a metaphor for the relationship of the individuals to the collective whole. All had a stake in the casa del popolo as contributors, but also as sharers of the common experience of labor. The work itself was a form of socialization. The photos of the construction site in *E' storia* show a convivial work site, at which *vinaiole*, young women who brought wine to the brick-layers kept spirits high. In this sense, the process of building the casa del popolo might be regarded as the material expression of principles of indirect reciprocity and interdependence that characterized workers' organizations and also reinforced those principles.

The authors of the *Casa del popolo Corazza* sustain that this volunteer labor is a tradition in the Italian left and workers organizations, claiming a genealogy of mutual aid not typical of Italy as a whole but specific to socialist movements. Thus they echo contemporary commentators on the construction efforts of the period, fitting the construction of the casa del popolo into a broader, heroic narrative about the Italian left and socialism more generally. *Rinascita*, for example, the national PCI politico-cultural monthly, printed a first-hand account of a similar construction project by Ivo Cavedoni, secretary of the PCI in Vignola, near Modena. The article is a paean to a grand effort of the workers building a casa del popolo in which more than 48 cubic meters of bricks were laid in a single day.<sup>43</sup> Much like descriptions of the construction of other case del popolo, the article emphasizes details on the long hours that workers toiled, in shifts from 6 a.m. to midnight, and highlights the size of the workforce, the dozens and dozens of volunteers. Moreover, like the photographs of smiling workers in *E' storia*, Cavedoni describes the high spirits of the workers in Vignola: singing "patriotic hymns" as they moved heavy stones, and erupting into celebration when a fresh crew of workers came to relieve the laborers. These stories of construction emphasize details that parallel the chief

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43 Ivo Cavedoni, "Come nacque la casa del popolo di Vignola," *Rinascita*, 1951, Bologna edition.

elements of Soviet Stakhanovite narratives: stupendous quantified achievements, tireless and unflappable workers, and the cheerful solidarity of the peasants and workers. Thus the descriptions of construction not only tie the single casa del popolo to an Emilian or Italian tradition of collectivism, but also to international socialism. Such narratives were an important part of a story that informed how the Italian left identified itself, building locally while drawing on stories from Eastern Europe to underline the significance of local efforts.

The case del popolo founded in the years immediately following World War II were part of a particular vision for the reconstruction of Italian cities and Italian society: taking up the ideals of democracy, egalitarianism, and collectivism attributed to the Resistance. The reestablishment and construction of these institutions was a political and social project that prefigured a radically different society. The casa del popolo was envisioned as an institution that would help usher that society in and that anticipated the features of that society. At face-value it was a meeting place: people came to meet at the dancehall, at the bar, at bocce, at assemblies and political debates for workers who looked to the casa del popolo as place of political direction. The organization of the construction showed the casa del popolo to be something more than a mere assembly hall. Building with volunteer labor created the opportunity for members to develop a sense of belonging through material participation in the project. Moreover, in the stories that they told about that experience of collective effort, they situated their history in a much larger narrative about the Italian left. Thus the case del popolo and the workers' associations that inhabited them held a position of great symbolic and cultural importance in their towns. This significance is critical to understand how, as the Cold War set in, the case del popolo became the sites of heated battles between communists and Christian Democrats.

### ***Regulating and organizing associations: ENAL and ARCI, 1945-1959***

The casa del popolo called back into life after World War II was not born free. Sooner or later it would have to address that it operated in a highly regulated institutional and legal context: the regulations that governed associations' activities, the entities mandated with supporting or surveilling associations, and the debates about what these regulatory schemes should and should not do are the subject of this chapter.

Like so many other sectors of Italian society and state, associational life had been profoundly shaped by the fascist regime, with the creation of national agencies for workers' leisure and recreation, women's' and youth groups.<sup>44</sup> The Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro, or the OND, was established in 1925 to provide administrative control over these disparate groups and initiatives for recreation. Overseeing access to a variety of leisure and entertainment activities, it sought to construct what has been called a "culture of consent", to overcome older class or regional divisions to integrate Italians into a national, classless culture, the most immediate goal of which was to destroy leftist and Catholic traditions of solidarism. The agency, transformed into the National Institution for Workers' Assistance (ENAL), was retained after the fall of the regime. The new political elite shaping the Republic preferred to preserve the associational

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44 De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent : Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy*.



network, ostensibly as a public service for workers, rather than to dismantle state authority over associational life. Subsequently, they were at times indifferent to the agency, leaving it to its own devices or interested in capturing it as the machinery of consent for their own political agendas. Sweeping to power in 1948, the DC inherited control of what Undersecretary Giulio Andreotti acknowledged was a “fascist-corporatist organization” needing radical reforms to democratize the administration.<sup>45</sup> Opposition leaders in the PCI on the other hand recognized the breadth of the appeal of the former *dopolavoro* organizations. Although they feared that the administration would become a tool of Christian Democratic hegemony, they also saw an opportunity to secure benefits for the workers’ clubs and case del popolo that were an important part of workers’ subculture. When the DC not only neglected proposed reforms of ENAL but also employed it as a cudgel against the groups that made up that subculture, ENAL became a site of struggles between the DC and the left, the focal point of debates about free associationism, culture and recreation as welfare, and competing concepts of state intervention in associational life, as guarantor of civil liberties on the one hand and provider of calm, depoliticized leisure as a guarantee to public safety on the other.

This chapter will examine the state programs that were the legacy of fascist organizations after World War II, insofar as the continuity of the fascist project in Republican Italy constituted the framework in which clubs and circles were expected to operate and became instruments of state control over associational life. The left’s dissatisfaction with state programs and its failure to make headway in reforming them became the impetus for the foundation of an alternative entity, the Italian Recreational and Cultural Association, ARCI, in 1957. This chapter describes

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45 In response to questions about the fate of ENAL in the *Assemblea Costituente della Repubblica Italiana*, *Risposte scritte ad interrogazioni, Allegato alla CCXLIX seduta del 13 gennaio 1948* (Rome, 1948), 1098.

the conditions in which ARCI founders proposed a vision of a national organization guiding and supporting a network of grassroots clubs throughout Italy, liberated from the limits and controls imposed by state authority through ENAL.

### ***From OND to ENAL***

As with all ministries and agencies of the new Italian Republic at the end of World War II, the entities in charge of overseeing and regulating associations faced the problem of taking over the state apparatus that had not simply been led by fascist officials, but deeply implicated in the regime's overarching programming. As the new representatives of what would shortly become Republican Italy prepared for the referendum that would decide that fate, they had to swiftly judge the fate of the machinery of the fascist regime: agencies had to be remade, dissolved or constructed whole cloth, purged or reformed.

On 22 September 1945, the ruling transitional government<sup>46</sup> under the leadership of Ferruccio Parri decreed that the fascist Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro or OND (the National After-work Institution), became the Ente Nazionale Assistenza Lavoratori or ENAL (National Institution for Workers' Assistance), without modification to the statutes of the institution. The apparatus of the OND was appropriated in its entirety by the Republic, as was its jurisdiction over OND properties and affiliated recreational organizations and associations throughout Italy.<sup>47</sup> The first commissioner of the new organization, Vincenzo Baldazzi of the Action Party, was quickly replaced in 1946 by a Christian Democrat, Gioacchino Malvasi, a lawyer, Catholic anti-fascist, and former partisan. As "extraordinary commissioner" Malvasi retained the

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46 Made up of the Christian Democratic Party, the Italian Communist Party, the Italian Socialist Party of Proletariat Unity, the Liberal Party, the Action Party and the Labor Democratic Party.

47 "Decreto legislativo luogotenenziale del 22 settembre 1945, n. 624," *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia* no. 123 (1945).

absolute control of ENAL that was granted to the commissioner of the OND appointed by Mussolini under fascist decrees.<sup>48</sup> ENAL had a staff in a national office, provincial offices throughout Italy, and vast real estate holdings. The new agency maintained the administrative role that the OND had established over recreational and cultural programs: registering all affiliated associations, collecting their membership dues, and certifying their affiliation for the provincial authorities. ENAL also published a monthly national magazine, “Ricreazione”, various regional and provincial magazines, published almanacs of leisure time, and sporadically sponsored conferences, on regional folklore, for example.

Propagandists for ENAL from within the ranks of the employees, and managers explained the social service they provided with reference to the *dopolavoro*. In the early years of his tenure as extraordinary commissioner Gioacchino Malavasi himself gave voice to the mission of ENAL, though he would later withdraw into the ENAL offices, behind a curtain of silence. One such early propagandistic effort, a curious source of information on ENAL, *ENAL: ricreazione popolare e sociale*, also published in translation (in deeply flawed English) as *ENAL: popular and social recreation in Italy* was printed in 1948 as an expensive glossy report, packed with photographs: pages of photo-montages of men practicing vigorous sports.<sup>49</sup> The pamphlet acknowledges the development of the administration of the *dopolavoro* under fascism; in fact, it can hardly hide it, given that many of the photos were relics of the OND, with conspicuous fasci.

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<sup>48</sup> *Regio decreto di legge 1 maggio 1925 n. 582, 1925; Legge 24 Maggio 1937, n. 817* (Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 135, 1937).

<sup>49</sup> I have been unable to locate further information on the pamphlet, though it seems to be a justification of the continued state expenditure in a period in which public spending might have been under close scrutiny by American Marshall Plan administrators in the ECA. Furthermore, it seems to suggest that ENAL is the politically neutralized alternative to communist and trade union associationism, an assertion of particular interest to an American audience.

In this promotional material, Malavasi elaborates his vision of *dopolavoro* under ENAL as a public utility, offering services for workers.

The organizing principles of ENAL, rest on Malavasi's understanding of workers' lives: "The week consists of 168 hours; of them, 40 are for work, 56 for sleep, 14 devoted to meals and 58 completely free. How will the worker spend these hours if he does not have at his disposal ways and means to spend them advantageously?"<sup>50</sup> ENAL, Malavasi argued, could provide "advantageous" ways to use those "completely free" hours. This vision stressed the positive influence of organized leisure contrasted with the implied dangers of workers left to their own devices: drinking, agitating, or engaging in otherwise damaging pastimes. Moreover, the statement clearly conveyed a paternalistic view that that outside of work, sleep and eating, workers were completely free, idle and needing guidance as to what to do with themselves. In this conception of the role of ENAL however, Malavasi and the managers of ENAL saw the agency's work as a high-minded public service, welfare that would keep workers contented and appropriately occupied. Malavasi extends his validation of the charitable goals of the agency to the OND as well: "The *dopolavoro* was, and still is in its new denomination as E.N.A.L. a work of prolific benefit, of human solidarity and of very high civility."<sup>51</sup> Malavasi, in order to stress the importance of ENAL, also retrospectively validated the *dopolavoro* and the fascist OND as the most effective and legitimate means of organizing worker leisure-time. Rather than breaking with the fascist past, Malavasi chose to absolve the OND of what he argued was a superficial fascism, and to underline the continuity of the *dopolavoro* project.

The affirmation from the head of ENAL of the continuity of the agency's mission with that of the OND calls for a closer examination of the degree to which the fascist project persisted

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<sup>50</sup> Gioacchino Malavasi, *ENAL, ricreazione popolare e sociale* (Rome: Superstampa, 1948).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

in Republican Italy. First and most apparently, the statute establishing ENAL directly linked it to the agency established and developed in the fascist Ventennio, changing the name, while leaving in place the fascist charter, rather than reinventing the administration. In its organizational structure ENAL maintained the authoritarian bent of the OND: it maintained the absolute authority of the commissioner as legal representative of the agency to manage finances and personnel. The commissioner was appointed by and answered directly to the prime minister, with neither oversight by Parliament nor input from the associations under the administration

Moreover the agency maintained personnel that had been trained during the Ventennio, among whom there were fascist sympathizers, apologists and more benignly, those who had absorbed the OND's conception of culture as an instrument to pacify class tensions. Victoria de Grazia noted about ENAL in 1978 "Its functionaries today deny that the OND was ever fascist in any strict sense" and that they commented nostalgically that the agency ran better under fascism.<sup>52</sup> While in his close readings of ENAL publications from the late 1940s and '50s, Gianmarco Bresadola Banchelli, examining the transition from OND to ENAL as an example of the failure to purge fascism from Italian bureaucracies, finds ENAL functionaries to be contemptuous of democracy, dismissing elections as "ridiculous stuff".<sup>53</sup> In one example Banchelli cites an article of a provincial ENAL magazine from Udine that argued that Italians were too immature for democracy, suggesting that it would be more appropriate to look backwards, invoking "race" and "values" to rehabilitate the past.<sup>54</sup> Such attitudes within the

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52 De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy*.

53 Gianmarco Bresadola Banchelli, "La burocrazia del dopolavoro fra fascismo e repubblica," in *Progetti corporativi tra le due guerre mondiali*, ed. Matteo Pasetti (Roma: Carocci, 2006), 216.

54 Banchelli cites a bit of indecipherable rhetoric, "un passato remoto e recente che, nonostante le apparenze, porta il crisma della razza e del valore", Ibid, 217.

bureaucracy of ENAL indicated a continued commitment to top-down control that often placed the institution at odds with the clubs under its aegis.

Most importantly however, the core concepts of the *dopolavoro* remained the same: the interpretation of its role as a welfare service, the paternalistic sense that workers needed to be guided by the agency and channeled into appropriate pastimes that would attenuate class tensions and political dissatisfaction.

While ENAL slowly declined into mismanagement from its rechristening in 1946 to its eventual dismantling as a national entity and devolution to regional administrations in 1977, it still represented the principle bureaucracy with which many cultural and recreational groups had to contend. The regulatory scheme established for ENAL was the template by which the legitimacy of other associations was judged: what constituted membership, what privileges and burdens belonged to associations and within what limits could they operate. The following section will examine how those limits were employed, continuing the *dopolavoro* model of depoliticized leisure, and the ways clubs navigated those controls and resisted demands that they conform to ENAL's definition of apolitical. From 1948 to 1957, this struggle was implicated in the wider political confrontations between the anticommunist Christian Democrats and the left.

### ***Regulation and privilege***

Recreational and cultural circles, case del popolo, and associations of all types were not required by law to affiliate with ENAL, that they did so was entirely voluntary. However, affiliation brought with it a myriad of privileges and obligations. As not for profit entities, associations were eligible for a lower tax burden and favorable regulatory scheme, with respect to commercial entities. This privilege had been established for fascist organizations under the jurisdiction of the OND to subsidize workers' leisure. National law required that to be

considered for these benefits, associations enroll in a national entity chartered to provide a social service, of which ENAL was initially the only example. The Minister of the Interior, Mario Scelba, at his sole discretion extended the same privileges to the Association for Christian Workers of Italy, ACLI, in 1947, and in 1949 to the Social Action Movement (MAS, later the National Democratic Social Action Agency, ENDAS), the associational agency of the Italian Republican Party<sup>55</sup> Enrollment in ENAL required a minimum of one hundred card carrying members per circle, each paying an annual subscription, initially 250 lire in 1947, and subjected the association to administrative hierarchy of ENAL in the form of provincial ENAL officials who imposed mandatory bureaucratic procedures with associated fees. Registering a change of association officers, for example, cost 10,000 lire, or about a third of an average worker's monthly wages. Every year circles had to reapply for their affiliations, re-register their officers, renew their permits, accumulating administrative fees in order to retain the privileges of ENAL affiliation. Moreover, the national and provincial directors of ENAL had unchecked power to reject subscriptions, affiliation requests, and even leaders of clubs, who they could dismiss without justification, as provincial directors did in Pisa and Brescia in 1948, Como in 1950, and Firenze in 1951, as I will discuss in more detail below.

The most important privilege that affiliation with ENAL offered was that it allowed circles to obtain the licenses from the State Police (the *Polizia di Stato*) to operate a bar as a not for profit enterprise. Commercial liquor licenses were difficult and expensive to obtain, subject to laws on public security that imposed rigid limits, such as prohibitions of a variety of activities within the commercial space from card-playing to political assembly. Police and tax agents kept

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<sup>55</sup> While there are a handful of publications by former leaders of ACLI or institutional histories describing important events in the history of the association, no historian to date has undertaken a critical examination of ACLI, notwithstanding its significant place in Catholic associationism.

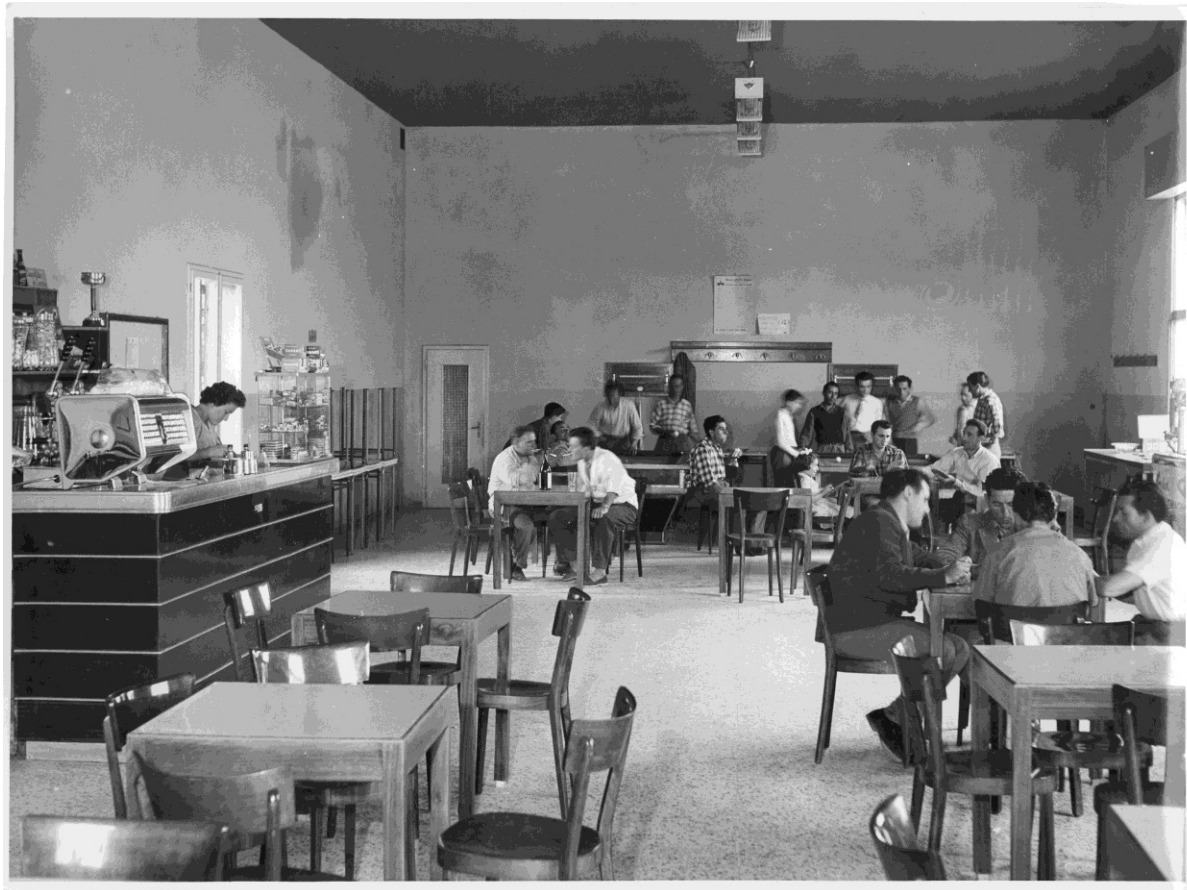
a close watch on bars, both commercial and not-for-profit, to verify adherence to these limits. The relative ease of obtaining alcohol permits through ENAL, allowing clubs to serve wine at a reduced price to members, was a strong incentive to affiliation. However, it also meant submitting to the bureaucracy of ENAL and left clubs vulnerable to controls by the police, who could appear without notice to check membership cards. Alcohol permits proved to be the fulcrum which gave ENAL and the State Police leverage on associations that, limited to either a commercial bar with higher tax rates and higher prices, an ENAL-affiliated bar with the imposition of ENAL rules, or no bar at all, often chose to accept ENAL.

To the local circles and associations, a permit to operate a bar was tantamount to a permit to exist. Socialist Member of Parliament and later founder of ARCI, Alberto Jacometti, underlined the significance of the bar in his defense of censured circles in his district of Novara in 1953. In a parliamentary debate, he objected to the Undersecretary of the Interior's dismissal of his concerns that the circles were being crippled by the revocation of bar permits because of what the local police deemed infractions of the ENAL rule that the circles be apolitical, "Honorable Undersecretary, you have answered that this is not a matter of the closure of a circle, but simply the closure of the bar. But you well know that a circle without a bar is like a fountain without water..."<sup>56</sup> The circle in question was guilty of displaying portraits of fallen partisans, being frequented by "elements of the parties of the left", and holding a conference in which the high price of bread was discussed. Without the bar, Jacometti sustained, the life of the circle would dry up.

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56 "onorevole sottosegretario, mi ha risposto che non si tratta della chiusura del circolo, ma semplicemente della chiusura dello spaccio. Ma ella sa benissimo che un circolo senza spaccio a è come una fontana senz'acqua...". Atti parlamentari, Camera dei deputati di Italia, legislatura II, *Discussioni, seduta di martedì 22 settembre 1953*, 1953, 699.





**Figure 1. Enrico Pasquali, The Bar of the Casa del popolo of Crespellano. Courtesy of the Istituto Gramsci Emilia Romagna.<sup>57</sup>**

Bars in associations ranged from rudimentary, like the provisional shack during the construction of the Casa del popolo Corazza, to more modern spaces with wider choices of refreshments and entertainments, depending on the size of the association.<sup>58</sup> The photo above is one of several from Enrico Pasquali's series of photos of case del popolo commissioned by the Bologna PCI Federation that show the bar of a casa del popolo in Crespellano, a small town outside Bologna, around 1957.<sup>59</sup> Pasquali attempted to document what appear to be candid

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<sup>57</sup> Enrico Pasquali, photographer. "[Bar della Casa del popolo di Crespellano]", Photograph. Bologna: Istituto Gramsci Emilia Romagna, Fondo Arbizzani, 1957.

<sup>58</sup> Refer to Chapter 1 for a description of the Casa del popolo Corazza.

<sup>59</sup> See page 14 on Enrico Pasquali and the PCI Album, "Case del Popolo".

moments of the life in case del popolo in the province of Bologna, though many of the photos show signs of staging and direction by the photographer, details like newspapers folded and angled precisely towards the camera to show the masthead, or people rearranged from one shot to the next in completely different activities. Nonetheless, these photographs provide a sense of the material reality of the case del popolo: what they looked like, how the spaces were laid out, the kinds of facilities in them, etc. In this photo Pasquali shows us several groups of men who appear to range from teenaged to middle-aged sitting at small tables, playing cards and Italian billiards, or reading newspapers. Two men drinking a bottle of wine lean in to share a match to light their cigarettes. Other men stand around Italian billiards tables, watching the games, while others are engrossed in their cards. A little girl works on her homework on a small chalkboard. The furnishings are spare, simple wooden chairs and square, glass-topped tables, while the bar counter is of a more modern streamlined design, sleek lacquer with a shiny metal top, with a gleaming stainless steel espresso machine perched at one end. The only adult woman there is working behind the counter; unlike the men, she is not there to pass her free time, but is there to serve them coffee, snacks and drinks. Behind the bar, instead of an assortment of bottles, there are tall glass apothecary jars filled with what are most likely candies.<sup>60</sup> A few bottles at the very top of the shelves advertise the bar's meager offerings, framed by large trophies at either end of the shelves. Drinking, in the moment captured in the photo, was not the sole function of the bar, yet being able to serve wine was important. These men expected to be able to gather after work to share a bottle of wine and play cards; it was an important part of their social customs. The bar was the context for the social practices that attracted and integrated members.

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60 This is more apparent in another photo in the series with the same title, *Ibid.*

Moreover, the bar was an important source of revenue for circles. Membership fees covered ENAL affiliation costs, but most circles were loath to create barriers to membership by raising fees above the ENAL minimum. Circles could do occasional fundraising for construction or special purchases, like a radio or billiard tables, but such extraordinary projects depended on members' enthusiasm. There were other mundane costs like rents or building maintenance that circles usually paid with the revenues of the bar.

From the point of view of the circles, ENAL affiliation offered the possibility of easy liquor licenses to keep open the bar that they saw as a vital part of their clubs. However, circles chafed at the restrictions that ENAL imposed, the regulations and financial obligations of affiliation.

### ***Dissatisfaction with ENAL***

It was unavoidable that circles would be dissatisfied with such arrangements. The Catholic circles affiliated with ACLI and the far smaller number of Republican circles with ENDAS, were able to break free of ENAL by successfully bidding for the Minister of the Interior's recognition of their national organizations as social service organizations entitled to the same legal status as ENAL. The left, by contrast, was initially unwilling to renounce the massive structure for organizing recreation and culture, holding out hopes of working within ENAL. Associations dissatisfied with ENAL pushed their representatives in parliament to intervene on their behalf, and discussions of ENAL in parliament became a point of frequent interrogations from a group of concerned socialist and communist deputies. Dissatisfaction grew in the 1950s as both the ENAL bureaucracy and police administrators exercised their power over associations in the service of an increasingly aggressive anticommunist policy.

Orazio Barbieri, Communist deputy from Florence, and later founder and officer of ARCI, drew attention to problems of enforcement, requesting that the Minister of the Interior clarify to the State Police (*Polizia di Stato*) offices that they should follow the regulations for granting and renewing the alcohol licenses for associations in a correct and timely way, that “the State Police do not follow the growing and arbitrary pretenses of the provincial ENAL offices, which do not take into account the difficulty of passing to a larger membership requirement...on account of the high cost of the membership card and the economic difficulties of the working class”.<sup>61</sup> In numerous cases in Florence and elsewhere in central Italy, the provincial ENAL offices had decided to require more than the 100 members as established by law, possibly in an attempt to increase revenues for the financially flailing agency, and had passed their demand to the State Police, in charge of authorizations of any activities deemed relevant to public safety: assemblies and conferences, theater performances, in short, any public gatherings. Associations renewing their liquor licenses or other permits in 1952 and 1953 found that the police might impose membership requirements of 150 or 200 members. Barbieri was alarmed by the hostility of ENAL, the agency charged with supporting associationism, towards clubs, but even more so by the complicity of the State Police in enforcing arbitrary rules. Such failures in the rule of law were antidemocratic, Barbieri charged. His complaint met with general disinterest from his colleagues in Parliament, with the exception of a telling interjection from a smart young Christian Democrat politician from Naples, Giovanni Leone.<sup>62</sup> Leone dismissed Barbieri’s concerns, citing as the reason for Parliament’s indifference, “The ENAL circles are nearly all in

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61 Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei deputati di Italia, legislatura I, *Interrogazioni, Seduta 1073 del 11 febbraio 1953*, 1953, 46226–46227.

62 Leone would become Prime Minister for two brief terms in 1963 and 1968.

your [communist] hands.”<sup>63</sup> Leone thus betrayed one reason that ENAL’s management was so neglected. Christian Democratic antipathy towards communist clubs trumped any concern for rules.

Notwithstanding Leone’s assertion that the circles were all communist, ENAL regulations required that they be “absolutely apolitical”, a prohibition which proved to be vague enough to allow wide interpretation. The original wording in the statute on recreational and cultural circles under ENAL demanded that they be “*apartitici*”, not affiliated with a political party. This prevented the local sections of political parties from obtaining the privileges and concessions available to social service associations. Over time the original term “*apartitici*” was replaced in common use with “*apolitici*”, which allowed a broader prohibition on activities, not simply blocking a specific political party affiliation.<sup>64</sup> The definition of “apolitical” was left entirely to the police, in the capacity of granting, revoking or denying permits. By 1956, the application form that ENAL circles had to file with the police to request liquor licenses included an explicit prohibition against specific political activities, which included use of the space for any kind of political or labor movement activity, but also affixing posters, political newspapers, or hanging portraits of exponents of political parties either national or foreign on the walls, on threat of immediate revocation of the license.<sup>65</sup> Of course, this left open to interpretation what “any kind of political or labor activity” might be. The specificity of the latter prescriptions give an idea of the micromanagement that ENAL administrators and the police wanted to retain in the circles: down to the level of what could not be stuck on the walls, whose picture could not be displayed. Prohibited political decorations included portraits of communist icons such as Marx

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63 Ibid, 46227.

64 Alberto Jacometti, *L’ENAL una bandita chiusa* (Milano: Avanti, 1956), 16.

65 The form is reproduced in Ibid, 17.

or Gramsci, antifascist martyrs Giovanni Amendola, Giacomo Matteotti, and Bruno Buozzi, fallen partisans from the neighborhoods of the circles, and in one case, a portrait of Garibaldi, which was forcibly removed from a circle.<sup>66</sup> Obviously policing the decor of every circle was beyond the capacity of ENAL. What such a regulation did was open the door to intervention when and where the police deemed necessary, an instrument that as Cold War tensions escalated in the early 1950s, police used more frequently.

In Italy, the Minister of the Interior had broad powers as the head of the Prefectures, the provincial seats of the national government, with jurisdiction over public order and security, as well as a number of administrative issues. Thus the interpretations of law and priorities enacted locally were those established centrally by the Minister of the Interior. Moreover, the police forces (*Polizia di stato*) also answered directly to the Minister of the Interior, making the position a powerful executive with a reach that extended from Rome into all the provinces. This position was occupied by Christian Democrat Mario Scelba from 1947-1953, 1954-1955 (when he was also Prime Minister), and 1960-1962. His rigorous definition of what the government intended by apolitical determined the enforcement of regulations on circles.

Scelba described the apolitical rule as an attempt to avoid confrontations, possibly even violent ones, fueled by the combination of political discussion and alcoholic drink. The special concessions given to ENAL circles, he argued, were exclusively granted to “absolutely apolitical” groups with the stated goal of “rest” for the worker.<sup>67</sup> Critics of ENAL charged that the “apolitical” rule was a justification that ENAL provincial offices and State Police trotted out to close down circles, negate alcohol permits, or cancel events only when activities of the circle

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>67</sup> Atti parlamentari, Camera dei deputati di Italia, legislatura I, *Discussioni, seduta del 22 dicembre 1950*, 1950.

appeared too closely linked to the interests of parties of the left. As critics of ENAL pointed out, Catholic ACLI circles sometimes held unauthorized events without any police interruption.<sup>68</sup> No ACLI or Republican ENDAS circles were reported closed during this period. The *casa del popolo* model, in which recreational and cultural circles shared space with organized labor and political parties, was by definition vulnerable to closure. Numerous circles, particularly in central Italy, were accused of political activity and as a result typically lost their alcohol permits and had their elected leaders ousted.

The presence of political communications was another indicator of political activity that was frequently cited in closures. Politically-oriented newspapers, specifically the local organs of the PCI, were banned from the premises of ENAL circles. So-called clandestine radio transmissions, such as Radio Moscow, Radio Tirana, and Radio Prague, with its “Today in Italy”, a short PCI news broadcast transmitted from Prague by Italian former partisans in exile, were deemed political and off-limits.<sup>69</sup> Many Italian families could not afford private radios, and relied on the radio in local associations as their principle form of news. The few RAI channels were firmly in the control of the Christian Democrats, and offered a sanitized version of the news, thus for alternative points of view, listeners in the often already left-leaning circles tuned into Italian language broadcasts from Moscow and Prague. While the state could not prevent clandestine radio transmissions, ENAL, with its rules on political activity could do its best to

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68 Atti parlamentari, Camera dei deputati di Italia, legislatura II, *Discussioni, seduta di martedì 23 marzo 1954*, 1954, 6282.

69 Radio Prague, in particular was a thorn in Christian Democrats’ side throughout the 1950s, persisting despite their several failed attempts to use diplomatic pressure against Czechoslovakia to force its closure, on the grounds that was used to defame the good name of Italy. See Philip Cooke, “‘Oggi in Italia’: The Voice of Truth and Peace in Cold War Italy,” *Modern Italy* 12, no. 2 (June 2007): 251–265.

keep them out of the spaces where workers were most likely to listen to them together.<sup>70</sup> The directors of ENAL of Ascoli Piceno, in the central Marche region, for example, explicitly forbade all circles of the province to listen to clandestine radio transmissions. PCI deputies Ada Natali and Silvio Messinetti objected, dismissing the justification as “specious”, asking which law, precisely, allowed ENAL to limit the rights of Italians to listen to whatever radio they choose, regardless of from where it is broadcast.<sup>71</sup> Their objection highlighted the severe limits on the liberty of ENAL circles written into the ENAL statute. In sum, “apolitical” had been reframed to deny liberty of expression.

Another case pointed more directly to which transmissions exactly were not allowed and why: Torquato Baglioni, the PCI deputy from Siena reported that the State Police had revoked the ENAL affiliated circle’s licenses to sell alcoholic beverages in Bettolle, a small Tuscan town to the southeast of Siena. The police’s concern was that, “From the beginning of the hostilities in Korea, there is a daily gathering of people belonging to extremist parties to listen to communications on the international political situation, transmitted from the station of Moscow”.<sup>72</sup> The police’s reasoning as stated here, by linking Korea, “daily gathering”, “extremists”, and Moscow suggests an imminent danger, that these “extremists”, influenced by the foreign communist propaganda posed a threat to public safety. One way to mitigate that danger was to interrupt these people’s ability to listen to Radio Moscow, the most important connection that isolated towns like Bettolle had to the USSR. Moreover, in such a rural community, peasant farmers and agricultural laborers would not have been able to afford private radios, and most

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70 Though Philip Cooke notes that the government did try to keep radio broadcast from behind the Iron Curtain out with expensive and completely nonfunctional wavelength blocking technology. *Ibid.*

71 Atti parlamentari, Camera dei deputati di Italia, legislatura I, *Discussioni, seduta del 22 dicembre 1950*, 25058.

72 *Ibid.*



would have been illiterate, making the circle's radio a vital source of information. ENAL prohibitions on political activity allowed the police to cut off Radio Moscow indirectly, by taking away the circle's liquor license. With the escalation of the Cold War into armed conflict in Korea, the attempts of local authorities to keep circles in check took on new significance, in a high-stakes geopolitical struggle.

While the police, under direction of the Christian Democratic government, used such methods in an effort to keep control of the groups within ENAL circles in an increasingly tense political climate, Baglioni and other communist deputies positioned themselves as defenders of the Constitution, of the rule of law and of civil liberties, alarmed by what they feared represented the dismantling of democracy and a backslide into fascism. These critics pointed to the use of such controls as evidence of this backslide, characterizing police intervention as thinly-veiled pretense: "they contrive any kind of pretext, ways to bully, to abuse power, they invent quibbles...they intervene exactly in the way one would intervene in the time of fascism..."<sup>73</sup>

The examples cited of control of activities in ENAL circles all come from Tuscany, Emilia Romagna, Umbria, and Le Marche, and represent only a fraction of the complaints brought before Parliament. This pattern of police and State intervention in the activities of associations in the Red Belt of central Italy began in ENAL circles, and intensified through the early 1950s as the Cold War intensified.

ENAL provoked widespread dissatisfaction for these attempts to discipline associations but also for its more general mismanagement of funds and incapacity to show meaningful, concrete results in its mandate to enrich workers' lives by providing access to culture and recreation. The agency appeared in national headlines in 1954 over scandalous financial

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<sup>73</sup> Jacometti, *L'ENAL una bandita chiusa*, 18.

mismanagemnt and neglect by the government ministers to whom the commissioner was ostensibly responsible. By December 1954, a delegation of wives of ENAL employees was lobbying members of parliament for an intervention on their behalf, complaining that the agency owed employees months of back pay and their families could not go on.<sup>74</sup> Commissioner Guido Vianello, in a 1955 report to the prime minister, wrote:

“A large part of management could be characterized as reacting to the desperate calls of employees faced with threats from their creditors and lawsuits brought against them in all the courts of the peninsula... the situation has gotten worse and will get worse with at an ever increasing pace...”<sup>75</sup>

Vianello blamed a bloated bureaucracy within ENAL, particularly at upper levels, combined with cutbacks in funding from the State for the agency's mounting debts, which by 1954-1955 totaled about 2 billion lire.<sup>76</sup> In June 1955, when Vianello presented this situation, Parliament voted to grant ENAL an emergency payment of 400 million for “war damages” in December 1955 and another 200 million in September 1956.<sup>77</sup> Notwithstanding the bailout the agency still owed billions to employees and creditors.<sup>78</sup>

Objections to the management of ENAL came from parties across the political spectrum. Proposals to reform the organization were put forward by socialists, communists and socialists,

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74 See pathos-heavy accounts of the wives of ENAL employees unable to buy milk for their babies in *Atti parlamentari, Camera dei deputati di Italia, legislatura II, Discussioni, seduta antimeridiana di mercoledì 22 dicembre 1954*, 1954, 15672.

75 Guido Vianello, "Relazione alla Presidenza del Consiglio", cited in Jacometti, *L'ENAL una bandita chiusa*, 4 (fn) .

76 Ibid, 9.

77 *Legge 14 dicembre 1955, n. 1294: Provvidenze a favore dell'Ente Nazionale Assistenza Lavoratori (E.N.A.L.)* (Roma: La Camera dei deputati, Senato della Repubblica, 1955).

78 Jacometti, *L'ENAL una bandita chiusa*.

and Christian Democrats, only to be passed to committees and never to be heard of again.<sup>79</sup> These proposed reforms ranged from radically democratic to moderately corporatist, but all had in common a reorganization of the agency to provide for better representation and autonomy for associations and clubs. In 1955 however, Parliament passed the Scelba-Vianello law to reform ENAL, a project of Prime Minister Mario Scelba and the Commissioner of ENAL, Guido Vianello that only reinforced the control of the national government over a bureaucratic hierarchy overseeing the activities of local clubs and circles. All leadership roles in ENAL would be filled by Ministers of the ruling government or by political appointees. Members of circles and clubs would not elect the presidents of their organizations; rather the president of the clubs would be selected by the provincial ENAL office. Even the name ENAL, in many cases, reverted to the fascist-era term ‘*dopolavoro*’, as was the case in Modena, where the provincial director of ENAL, Armando Bosi, regularly referred to the organizations under his supervision as ‘*dopolavoro*’.<sup>80</sup> Despite many calls to democratize and open ENAL to greater participation from its base, the reform of 1955 only solidified the agency’s hierarchies, and signaled a profound mistrust of the principles of democratic representation from the highest leadership of the Republic.

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79 Alberto Jacometti and Pieraccini, *Proposta di legge: Nuovo ordinamento dell’Ente nazionale assistenza lavoratori (E.N.A.L.)* (Roma: Camera dei deputati, 1954).; Giovanni Pieraccini et al., *Proposta di legge: Ordinamento dell’Ente Nazionale Assistenza Lavoratori (E.N.A.L.)* (Camera dei deputati, 1948).; Giuseppe Di Vittorio et al., *Proposta di legge: Nuovo ordinamento dell’Ente Nazionale Assistenza Lavoratori (E.N.A.L.)* (Camera dei deputati, 1951).; Massimo Storchi and et al., *Proposta di legge: Costituzione dell’Ente nazionale attività ricreative (E.N.A.R.)* (Camera dei deputati, 1951).

80 See for example the correspondence between Modena circles, provincial ENAL Modena and ARCI in Folder ER, Box 1958, Bologna: UISP, Archivi ARCI.

### *The movement to democratize recreation*

These reforms of ENAL were so damaging to the autonomy of grassroots organizations that after 1955, for many groups not even the lures of financial privileges and alcohol permits were sufficient reason to subject themselves to the rigid regulations of the agency. The Scelba-Vianello reforms were the turning point for a growing number of political figures, many of them the same communist and socialist deputies in Parliament that spoke out on behalf of beleaguered circles, and leaders and members of cultural associations that had struggled to work within ENAL. These individuals and groups began mobilizing around 1955 around the urgency of reforming ENAL, though this movement soon shifted away from ENAL altogether and towards the construction of an alternative national association to provide the structure and support that ENAL had failed to give them. The first step for circles and associations in breaking free from ENAL was mobilization and the creation of networks, in other words building a movement.

One well-documented example of the networks that coalesced in this period was the Alliances for popular recreation, organized provincially with the backing of left-wing political parties, labor unions, and local governments. These networks organized especially in North-Central Italy: in Novara, the Associazione Provinciale Circoli; in Torino and Firenze, the Alleanza per la Riconoscimento Popolare; in Ravenna, the Comitato Provinciale per la Riconoscimento Popolare; Committees for the defense of the Case del Popolo, and many city and provincial instances of Committees for the democratization of ENAL.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, other political and labor organizations spoke out in support of local circles, or created committees to discuss the problem

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<sup>81</sup> Maurizio Degl'Innocenti, "Un episodio della vicenda politica e culturale del secondo dopoguerra: la costituzione dell'ARCI (1957)," *Risorgimento* 46, no. 2-3 (1994): 391-408. In Modena, see Il Comitato per la difesa delle case del popolo, "Volantino del Comitato per la difesa delle case del popolo" (Bologna: IGER, Fondo Arbizzani, 1954). In Bologna see the Comitato democratizzazione ENAL di Bologna, *Lo statuto Scelba-Vianello ed il progetto legge Jacometti-Pieraccini* (Bologna: STEB, 1955).

of ENAL, as was the case in the Camera Confederale del Lavoro in Reggio Emilia and the Federazione Provinciale delle Cooperative e Mutue in Forlì, which created the Comitato Circoli e Cooperative Case del Popolo.

These groups agitated for reform and established networks that connected similarly dissatisfied local circles to politicians and intellectuals concerned with the democratic movement for the diffusion of culture. One excellent example of the work of these alliances is the Committee of the Alleanza per la ricreazione popolare di Firenze, formed in July 1955. The founders included many socialist and communist politicians, all former partisans: Gaetano Pieraccini (PSLI), Orazio Barbieri (PCI), Giovanni Pieraccini (PSI), Giulio Montelatici (PCI), Armando Saporì (independent of the left), Pietro Ristori (PCI), Mario Fabiani (PCI), Gianfranco Musco (PCI), Gastone Gensini (PCI), Elio Gabbuggiani (PCI), Benito Sasi (PCI).. A number of Florentine intellectuals were involved, notably, the poet Piero Jahier, composer Valentino Bucchi, literary critic Raffaello Ramat, historians Ernesto Ragionieri and Giovanni Baldi, lawyer Carlo Furno, film and theater critic Sergio Surchi. A number of leaders from the Fondazione Laboratori Officine Galileo, a large cultural and recreational center founded in 1945 by workers and managers of the optics producer Officine Galileo were involved as well. The group drafted a petition to the Prime Minister, Antonio Segni, that boasted that notwithstanding the state's hostilities towards workers' associations, in the province of Firenze the alliance represented over 500 associations, the workers' "instruments of culture", which had matured and were active in the cultural life of the province. It cited prizes and competitions like the prize for narrative works on the Resistance, the "Prato" prize, "Pian d'Albero", "Pozzale" and awards for film criticism, for painting, etc. and cited shows of photography and painting or theater, all intended

for a popular audience, as evidence of a vital collaboration between intellectuals and the popular masses.<sup>82</sup>

In direct response to the Scelba reforms of ENAL in 1955, the Alleanza per la ricreazione popolare di Firenze published a pamphlet, *The ENAL statute and the autonomy and self-governance of the Cral*, in which the group objected to the ENAL statute, employing the vocabulary of fascism versus antifascism.<sup>83</sup> The authors sustained that:

“...even if one cannot claim that this regards the reconstitution of the dissolved fascist party, all the same, one can affirm that it regards the reconstitution of that organism that was an integral part of the fascist party – the application of such a decree would not only strike a blow to the rights gained by citizens in the field of recreational activities, not only would it profoundly offend the values of antifascism and of the Resistance, but it would trample the fundamental rules and principles of the Constitution of the Republic.”<sup>84</sup>

In their estimation, undermining the autonomy and self-governance of associations threatened the very foundational principles of Italian democracy. Invoking the Resistance, the committee aligned itself with “the values of antifascism” in its campaign to reform ENAL.

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82 Degl’Innocenti, “Un episodio della vicenda politica e culturale del secondo dopoguerra: la costituzione dell’ARCI (1957).”

83 CRAL were the ENAL circles connected to a workplace, the Company Workers’ Recreational Circle (Circoli ricreativi aziendali dei lavoratori)

84 “...seppur non si puo' affermare che si tratta della ricostituzione del disciolto partito fascista, tuttavia, si puo' affermare che si tratta della ricostituzione di quell'organismo che del partito fascista fu parte integrante -- l'applicazione di tale decreto, non soltanto verrebbe a colpire i diritti conquistati dai cittadini nel campo delle attivita' ricreative, non soltanto verrebbero ad essere profondamente offesi i valori dell'antifascismo e della Resistenza, ma verrebbero ad essere calpestate le norme fondamentali e finali della Costituzione della Repubblica”, in Alleanza per la ricreazione popolare: Comitato provinciale Firenze, “Lo statuto dell'Enal e l'autonomia e l'autogoverno dei Cral,” (Firenze: Alleanza per la ricreazione popolare, 1955). as cited in Vincenzo Santangelo, *Le muse del popolo. Storia dell’Archi a Torino 1957-1967*, 2007.

In Bologna a Committee to Democratize ENAL was similarly formed to oppose the 1955 statute of ENAL, headed by president Armando Pilati, a former communist partisan who had had been incarcerated for antifascist activity multiple times for most of the period from 1929 to 1943.<sup>85</sup> The group published the pamphlet *Lo statuto Scelba-Vianello* which contained the full text of the 1955 reform of ENAL by Scelba and Vianello, juxtaposed with the 1954 bill to reform ENAL by communist Pieraccini and socialist Jacometti, and an article entitled “Vianello-Scelba is equal to Starace-Mussolini”.<sup>86</sup> The explicit equation of Christian Democrats, Prime Minister Scelba and ENAL commissioner Vianello to Mussolini and fascist party leader Achille Starace makes clear that the leaders of these Committees to Democratize ENAL understood the undemocratic statutes that ruled associations as part of a much more insidious threat to democracy.

These committees and alliances pointed to the necessity for a concerted consistent attention to the problem of pulling together all the disparate forces supporting autonomous associations into a national, popular unified movement. Moreover, they portrayed their effort as a defense of democracy itself, as a movement that would be a continuation of the Resistance.

### ***The foundation of the Italian Recreation and Culture Association, ARCI***

By the mid 1950s it became clear to those interested in problems of recreation and culture that the left needed to look towards an autonomous entity to guide associational life. Any hope of rehabilitating ENAL was set aside in favor of the creation of an alternative mass cultural organization. The recognition of the flaws of ENAL came at different levels: ENAL was

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<sup>85</sup> “Pilati, Armando” in Arbizzani, Onofri, and Albertazzi, *Gli antifascisti, i partigiani e le vittime del fascismo nel bolognese (1919-1945): Volume II, Dizionario biografico*.

<sup>86</sup> Comitato democratizzazione ENAL di Bologna, *Lo statuto Scelba-Vianello ed il progetto legge Jacometti-Pieraccini*.

corrupt, inefficient, authoritarian, expensive, politically stifling, and worse, an enemy to the values of antifascism. However, the founders of a national alternative association were not simply reacting to defects in the existing entity; they also had in mind a potential political strength that could be fostered through education, culture, and associationism. The organization of free time and recreation was not enough; a national network of associations could form the base of an alternative culture, but would need guidance and assistance from a national center.

Later secretary general of the Italian Recreation and Culture Association (ARCI), Luciano Senatori recalled the foundation of ARCI as emerging from a new understanding of culture and recreation on the Left:

“In the parties of the Left, there re-emerged in a way that was not entirely explicit, the ‘historic’ necessity for a national, mass, cultural organization. Meanwhile, in the everyday practice of communists and socialists, underestimating the role and the potential for a cultural battle for thousands of grassroots associations, they set up other associative forms like cultural circles, foundations, clubs, etc, spaces for encounter, for comparison and elaboration between intellectuals and the leaders of the party.”<sup>87</sup>

While in everyday practice, members and even leaders of the political parties used local associations for meeting spaces, informal socialization and games, a unified cultural organization had not been a top policy priority for left wing political parties. . It was only the establishment of local and regional initiatives like the Alliances for Popular Recreation and Committees to Democratize ENAL after 1955 that called attention to the richness and importance of this

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87 Luciano Senatori, “Il percorso che porta alla costituzione dell’ARCI,” *Arcitoscana*, 2007, 2. “Nei partiti della sinistra era riemessa, in modo non del tutto esplicito, l’esigenza ‘storica’ di un’organizzazione culturale di massa e nazionale. Tuttavia nella prassi quotidiana comunisti e socialisti, sottovalutando il ruolo ed il potenziale, per una battaglia culturale, di migliaia di sodalizi di base, si dotarono di altre forme associative come i circoli di cultura, le fondazioni, i club, ecc, luoghi d’incontro, di confronto e di elaborazione fra intellettuali e dirigenti di partito.”



everyday practice, in response to their difficulties with ENAL and the Scelba government's policies of harassment, that captured the attention of the political parties for problems of culture and recreation. As Senatori recalls, that attention was not fully crystallized as policy in the early 1950s, at least not until clubs and associations organized themselves into a national association.

On May 25 and 26 1957, over five hundred leaders of associations, federations of clubs and case del popolo, political parties, representatives of organized labor, and national organizations met in Firenze for a conference that established a new national association, the Italian Recreational and Cultural Association (ARCI). Representatives came principally from North-Central Italy, and often had multiple affiliations with labor organizations and recreational and cultural associations as well as activism within left-wing political parties. Many also came from provincially-formed networks of associations: from Novara, the Associazione Provinciale Circoli; from Torino, Firenze, and Bologna the Alleanza per la Ricreazione Popolare, and from Ravenna, the Comitato Provinciale per la Ricreazione Popolare. These alliances and federations born in the climate of political persecution of the 1950s represented a push from the grassroots, from networks of local clubs and circles banding together to attract support from labor and political parties.

The representatives at the conference in Firenze elected a board of directors that was charged with building this new association. The members of the board of directors represented a broad swath of the Italian Left, including a number of political leaders and activists, labor leaders, organizers of cooperatives, members of women's and youth organizations, and a handful of cultural figures. The Italian Communist Party was well-represented by Mario Alicata, member of the central committee of the PCI, close collaborator with Togliatti, and later the director of l'Unità; Orazio Barbieri, member of parliament from Florence and outspoken

advocate of case del popolo and circles; members of parliament, Florentine Senator Renato Bitossi and Deputy from Pisa Leonello Raffaelli; national PCI party leaders Piero Pieralli, Eraldo Gastone, Enzo Lalli, and Arrigo Morandi, and regional activists like Tuscan Benito Sasi.

Fewer Socialist politicians participated in the foundational conference, but took up important leadership roles: Of the PSI, Deputy from Novara Alberto Jacometti became the association's first president, Deputy Luigi Mariotti from Firenze and Deputy Renzo Pigni from Como, Firenze city councilor for the and University of Firenze professor Raffaello Ramat, and former Senator from Puglia, Michele Lanzetta. Representing the PSIUP, Senator Luigi Carmagnola, from Novara was also elected to the board.

Labor leaders Bruno di Pol, Domenico Marchioro, and Giuseppe Morasso represented the Italian General Confederation of Labor (CGIL). Other representatives came from organizations for cooperatives, Garibaldo Benefei of the League of cooperatives and Orazio Bardi, president of the League of cooperatives of Firenze; women's groups, Elsa Bergamaschi of the Italian Women's Union (UDI); youth organizations, Erasmo Boiardi of Socialist Youth (Gioventù socialista), Arrigo Diodati and Carlo Pagliarini of the Italian Pioneers Association, the communist answer to the Boy Scouts (API); and recreational groups, Arrigo Morandi, the president of the Italian Union for Popular Sport (UISP), Enzo Biondi of the Alliance for popular recreation of Bologna, and well-established case del popolo and workers' societies, like Orlando Moschini, of the Rifredi Mutual Aid Society (Società di Mutuo Soccorso Rifredi) in Firenze.

The committee also included cultural figures like journalists Giulio Trevisani (theater critic for *l'Unità*), Alfredo Puccioni (*Il Risorgimento*), and writer Piero Jahier, also affiliated with the Circolo di cultura Fiorentina; art historian Dario Durbé with the Centro Diffusione

Cultura. Ilio Favati,<sup>88</sup> Ezio Orlandi, and Giuseppe Pistolato also served on the board of directors, though I have been unable to identify these individuals.<sup>89</sup> These board members found unity of purpose in founding and supporting ARCI notwithstanding political tensions between their parties and organizations. Geopolitical and domestic events of the 1950s had taken a hard toll on the Italian Left: Khrushchev's revelations about the brutality of Stalin's rule and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 had ruptured the unity of action of the left and provoked the CGIL, PSI and many members and intellectuals to distance themselves from the PCI. In ARCI these representatives were able to work toward a common purpose despite party differences.

Delegates to the founding conference passed an act of establishment, explaining the goals of the association. The text introduced the context for the foundation of ARCI at great length, describing a situation in which the popular masses have developed aspirations, "yearning" for "cultural and civil elevation" beyond the capacity of existing organizations to satisfy those desires. The document stressed that this demand came from below, this "creative force" emanated from the popular masses themselves, from their desires for new types of ways to use their free time, for new experiences and for re-imagined forms of older recreation and culture like cineclubs, group tourism, and cultural clubs. This expanded demand was described as a form of progress, a way towards the renewal of the country, employing "modern techniques" and the most advanced and modern tendencies of civil and cultural life" to "elevate" Italian citizens. The document described the extent and nature of this popular demand as new, stimulated by political freedoms and technological progress.

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88 Identified only as from Pisa in available source materials.

89 "I circoli ricreativi dei lavoratori fondano una nuova associazione," *l'Unità* (Roma, May 27, 1957); and Degl'Innocenti, "Un episodio della vicenda politica e culturale del secondo dopoguerra: la costituzione dell'ARCI (1957)," 402.

The current organizational structure, the text continued, could meet these needs because the national organizations for social, cultural, and recreational activity were controlled by political factions or by large “monopolistic” complexes like Fiat and Olivetti, which bent the workers’ aspirations for free time activities to their own paternalistic ends. These entities could not meet the “deepest civil and cultural aspirations of the people”, they could not represent the “democratic expression” so vital in this sector. According to ARCI founders, the strength and the initiative for a national organization must come from the grassroots, from the workers themselves. The charter singled out ENAL for particular criticism as unconstitutional and illegal, and damaging to associational life through its meddling, impositions and seizures of property. The text also decried the inadequacy of legislation on the matter and the ineptitude of Parliament in correcting a situation in which associations and circles had no democratic representation in the entities charged with guarding their interests. These condemnations set up the context in which the foundation of ARCI was the antidote.

ARCI was the proposed solution to these problems, in contrast to the anti-democratic, paternalistic, suffocating interference of ENAL and company recreation schemes. ARCI would be instead “free, voluntary, democratic, independent of the government, autonomous from political parties and from all the mass organizations”. The three main goals for ARCI were stated as:

- “1. To constitute a unitary national organism of recreational and cultural circles of workers that respond to the characteristics above enumerated and able to conduct an effective action to obtain the re-ordering of all the legislation;
2. To carry out (after an accurate study of all the activities currently undertaken by existing recreational associations) a program intending to realize a national coordination

of activities of those organizations that want to adhere to Arci and in this way to activate the experience of the national direction, that, along with the management of similar organisms, could be important for the recreational movement in general;

3. To carry out an action of assistance (legal, trade union, economic, and cultural) for all the affiliated organizations.”<sup>90</sup>

This vision of the role of ARCI as a lobby, center for coordination, and administrative aid was modest in comparison with the more expansive introduction to this statement of purpose. Initially, the goals for the new association were limited and concrete, notwithstanding a theoretical underpinning that, while not fully fleshed-out, appeared in glimpses in this document: the possibility of elevating citizens through their participation in recreational and cultural associations, of renewing and making progress in civil life, of freeing the workers from the colonization of their free time by the ruling class and of employers. In short, ARCI intended to favor the conditions in which workers’ free time could be employed in associations that were to be the foundation of an alternative culture.

This charter shows that the foundation of ARCI was on the one hand an act of self-defense, a reaction against the inadequacy of ENAL, the failure of legislative reforms, and the repression and harassment under Christian Democrat hegemony. On the other hand ARCI proposed a positive program to build a nationally unified popular association to sustain cultural and recreational spaces outside of confessional, work- and state-sponsored programs.

In the first few years of activity ARCI leaders made concerted efforts to gather and exchange information. For example, new regional branches of ARCI, usually former Alliances for Popular Recreation, sent the national headquarters lists of theaters in the area, spaces usable

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<sup>90</sup> Claudia Ranzani, graphic designer. “Nasce l’Arci: L’associazione ricreativa culturale italiana”, Poster. Bologna: Istituto Gramsci Emilia Romagna, 1957.

for cultural events, lists of circles and case del popolo, statistics on membership, and news of events and problems. The national ARCI leaders worked with the Società Umanitaria in Milan and with sociologists and research groups to conduct surveys and interviews in case del popolo and circles throughout Italy. This attempt to assess the state of associationism was also an attempt to expand the network of circles, not only to convince many to affiliate with ARCI, but also to simply maintain contact with as many of the clubs and associations in Italy as possible. Organizers of local circles wrote to ARCI to solve administrative and organizational problems. The national ARCI offices sent out sample constitutions on which to model a democratic institution, guides on the formation of circles in general and specialized guides for founding a cineclub or organizing tourism or youth activity, for example. National ARCI leaders put provincial seats in contact, facilitating the formation of a network of associations in cases where surprisingly no contacts existed. For example, notwithstanding the distance of less than 10 miles between Carpi and Modena, it was often by way of the national ARCI offices that news from one local group reached another. This pointed to serious problems in some local cases, sometimes due to personal clashes or leadership failures. National ARCI officers pushed local circles to undertake ambitious projects, fostered technical proficiency in organizing, and facilitated communication and cooperation.

*Le ore libere*, the national ARCI periodical, became an important part of ARCI's communication efforts. Initially the publication was a monthly newsletter published by the provincial ARCI offices in Bologna. In September 1959, the national ARCI office took over editing the periodical, publishing in the first new issue the acts and resolutions of the first national ARCI congress. The periodical was transformed many times during the nine years it was published (1959-1968), but in the early years it mixed legal and administrative information,

the proceedings of various ARCI conferences and congresses, discussions of theories of free time, suggestions for the club library (and later for films and music), news from associations in a section titled “Work experiences”, and practical programming advice for clubs.

The themes for programming for the centenary of the unification of Italy in 1959 offer a useful example of the type of guidance that the national ARCI leaders offered through *Le ore libere*. A group of related articles on the subject introduced the history and the historiography of the Risorgimento and suggested themes for discussion, debate and further reading. Piero Anchisi, a national ARCI functionary, introduced the subject briefly touching on the idea that the anniversary offered an opportunity to critically examine the “mythical” interpretations of the Risorgimento rampant throughout all levels of information in Italy: in schools, newspapers, even through entertainment. Anchisi calls the circles and clubs, with their “authentically popular orientation” to do what the schools, press and radio do not, to fight to “give a critical consciousness to the citizens, objective information, a culturally healthy education, combating intolerance, control of our minds, and the brutalization of our consciences...”<sup>91</sup> Anchisi expressed an ambitious, expansive view of the potential of free associations to become centers of cultural transformation. In the pages of *Le ore libere*, ARCI leaders elaborated this vision of what they hoped cultural and recreational clubs could do, and offered much information and advice on how to do it as well.

For instance, Anchisi’s call-to-arms was followed by prescriptive “how-to” articles that offered advice on programming educational and cultural events in great detail. Carlo Pagliarini, of the Italian Pioneers Association, a scouting-type group, contributed an article of suggestions for children’s’ activities for the centenary, while a third article, “How to organize an evening

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91 Piero Anchisi, “Il centenario dell’Unità d’Italia,” *Le ore libere* 1 (1959): 14–16.

dedicated to the Centenary of the Unity of Italy in a Circle” advised concrete details down to the time allotments for speakers (30 minutes), as well as the themes (the continuing importance of the Risorgimento), suggested bibliography (Antonio Gramsci, Cesare Spellanzon, and Giorgio Candeloro), selected poetry and prose works to be read (Alessandro Manzoni, Giovanni Berchet, Arnaldo Fusinato, Luigi Mercantini, Ippolito Nievo, Giuseppe Cesare Abba, Silvio Pellico, Luigi Settembrini, and Massimo D’Azeglio) and possible Risorgimento hymns to sing.<sup>92</sup> Finally the “Library” section of the periodical suggested a number of books on the Risorgimento for purchase, and included a brief book review of Cesare Spellanzon’s *Garibaldi*. In this example, national ARCI leaders used the pages of *Le ore libere* to communicate an ambitious program for education and discussion through clubs and circles and concrete guidelines for the clubs to follow.

Another goal laid out at ARCI’s foundation was to effectively lobby on behalf of free associationism. ARCI began operating immediately after it was founded to request formal legal recognition to obtain the same privileges granted to other national organizations for recreational circles, ENAL, ENDAS, and ACLI. It would however, prove a long battle for legal recognition. In 1960 Minister of the Interior Giuseppe Spataro rejected the request for recognition of ARCI as a national welfare<sup>93</sup> entity, decreeing that

“...the welfare and recreational activity implemented by the Association is generally inspired by partisan aims and seems entirely secondary to the propaganda operation...the

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92 Luciano Malaspina, “Come organizzare in un Circolo una serata dedicata al Centenario dell’Unità d’Italia,” *Le ore libere* 1 (1959): 19–20.

93 “finalita' assistenziali”.



aforementioned observation finds confirmation in the circumstance...that many circles of the Association are located in the headquarters of partisan political organizations.”<sup>94</sup>

ARCI was deemed to be too politically biased to qualify as a welfare organization in the same category as the Republican ENDAS, Catholic ACLI or state agency ENAL. In particular, the many circles that shared an address with political parties, namely, the large portion of associations in Tuscany and Emilia Romagna within the case del popolo, were suspected of being primarily propagandistic. ARCI continued to lobby for official recognition until 1967, when it was finally granted. In the meantime, the national and provincial ARCI offices intervened on behalf of circles in disputes with local authorities and other organizations, offering them advice, legal counsel, information, and at times an advocate in order to protect members’ rights to assemble and to organize cultural and recreational events.

The largest challenge that ARCI faced at its inception was drawing together a heterogeneous group of circles, clubs, case del popolo and other associations, without the guarantee of national recognition. The groups closest to the movement for the democratization of ENAL and the committees organized in defense of the case del popolo were the first to affiliate with ARCI, as their movement had propelled the foundation of ARCI and provided the interest and representatives at the foundational conference. Most of the circles that signed up with ARCI right away were already affiliated with ENAL. Some were in trouble – they had been punished for the political infractions discussed above or had lost their alcohol permits. The rare group was unaffiliated, though these were usually sports groups with very specific and limited scope, a cycling group for example, which owned little or no property and had no bar or other

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<sup>94</sup> Ministero dell’Interno, Decreto ministeriale 28 Giugno 1960 – Divisione Politica (10. 11894/12000. A. 39), 1960; as cited in Bologna, “Associazionismo culturale e mutamento sociale: le case del popolo nella provincia di Bologna,” 124.

specially licensed activity. ARCI initially debated a strategy of mass defection of circles from ENAL and then affiliation with the Republican organization ENDAS as well as ARCI as a way to allow circles to retain their alcohol permits, a strategy that was ultimately abandoned when ENDAS reported receiving negative attention, police repression and harassment relating to this plan and made clear limits on which circles they would allow to enter.<sup>95</sup> The question of alcohol permits proved to be one of the biggest obstacles to enrolling circles: affiliation with ARCI could not provide circles the same legal status as affiliation with other national organizations. The majority of inquiries fielded by the national ARCI office in its early years regarded exactly these questions by leaders and organizers of local and provincial associations about alcohol permits. ARCI could only suggest maintaining the bar as an ENAL circle, separate from the ARCI circle, or obtaining commercial licenses. In Bologna, Enzo Biondi, the president of the provincial ARCI, reported that circles had been “condemned to drink water” instead of wine, when police learned that they were hiding their ARCI affiliation by affiliating with ENAL as well, in order to obtain permits. The obdurate Bolognese circles held out for years, according to Biondi, drinking only water (though in all likelihood they drank wine on the sly).<sup>96</sup> Large case del popolo like Corazza often chose to obtain commercial licenses and sever their affiliation with ENAL definitively.

In Emilia Romagna, many established clubs and associations affiliated with ARCI as soon as the national association was established and through the latter half of 1957. Regional and provincial headquarters had not yet been established, so the archives from this period contain many letters exchanged directly between the ARCI national leaders and local circles. These

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95 Morandi, “Relazione Morandi sul convegno regionale A.R.C.I. (Emilia).”

96 Enzo Biondi, “Relazione Biondi sul convegno culturale nazionale dell’ARCI,” *Le ore libere* no. 12–13 (1961): 49–53.

letters show an immediate response from the region. Most interest came from already organized groups, local sections of the PCI and PSI; the Camere del Lavoro; the local precursors to ARCI founded in the movement to reform ENAL like the Comitato Provinciale per la Riconversione Popolare in Ravenna; but most especially the cooperatives: the Federazione Provinciale delle Cooperative e Mutue in Forlì, Parma and elsewhere . This also helps explain the fast and early success of ARCI in the regions Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, where the cooperative movement was already so strong. The existing structures of the political subculture of the left connected local circles to the nascent ARCI, helping to push ARCI affiliation as a solution to groups tired of the bureaucracy and prohibitions of ENAL.

In 1959, ARCI called a regional conference for Emilia Romagna to discuss the problems and projects of organizing the circles of the region under the auspices of ARCI. The regional presence of circles affiliated with ARCI at the time totaled 1,112 circles, 450 of which were in the province of Bologna.

**Figure 2 ARCI-affiliated circles in Emilia Romagna, 1959<sup>97</sup>**

Ferrara	100
Forlì	183
Ravenna	120
Bologna	450
Modena	84
Reggio Emilia	30
Parma	145
Total	1112

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97 Ibid.

Such a large number of circles demonstrate the tremendous importance of associationism in Bologna and throughout the region, specifically associationism free from ENAL (and Christian Democratic) interference. What it cannot demonstrate is the quality or type of activity in those clubs, and how that activity integrated the members into the circles and the circles into a larger ARCI network. To answer such questions it is necessary to look more closely at the circles themselves, their leaders and memberships, the neighborhoods in which they were located, the major themes that their programming addressed, and the relationships between those circles and other organizations, in Part 2 of this dissertation.

In this chapter I have described some of the administrative and legal context in which clubs and associations operated, the laws, regulations and agencies that constituted the constraints on associations. This regulatory structure was also the contested terrain on which debates about post-war associationism were being staged: debates about welfare and paternalism, civil liberties and public security, democracy and the residues of fascism. Finally, I have framed the foundation of ARCI as an attempt to support a vision of associationism, in which participation in autonomous recreational or cultural groups was being construed as a way to elevate citizens, pave the way for progress, and nurture democracy.

### ***The Case del popolo and “Armored Democracy”***

In the 1950s, the conservative Christian Democratic government and its political opponents waged battle: not only in parliament, through the political parties and trade unions, but also in children’s’ scouting groups, veteran’s’ associations, bocce clubs and cooperative bars. As the homes of many of those organizations, the case del popolo became important sites, in which thousands of Italians directly experienced these confrontations. This chapter will examine a peculiar chapter of the history of Italian democracy, in which associations in small towns of Emilia Romagna and Tuscany became the target of the central government’s’ attempts to exert control over the towns of central Italy. In 1954, Prime Minister Mario Scelba unilaterally ordered the eviction of scores of associations from their headquarters, and authorized armed paramilitary forces to physically remove resisters. This chapter will use a close examination of the battle over one Casa del popolo in Crevalcore, near Bologna, to show the human cost of the Christian Democrats’ attacks on the associations so dear to the left, and to analyze how this struggle bolstered leftwing narratives about continuing the values of the Resistance and defending political liberties in the face of reactionary anticommunist forces. Moreover, it sheds light on how political repression not only failed, it backfired, solidifying a recalcitrant communist presence in places like Crevalcore and throughout central Italy.

In late summer of 1954, Prime Minister Mario Scelba began procedures for the “State recovery of the former properties of the fascist party and its dependent organizations, or of other government properties currently occupied by partisan organizations”.<sup>98</sup> The properties in question were the *maltolto*, seized by the fascist party from the organizations that had founded and built the structures, then reclaimed by the reconstituted incarnations of those organizations after the war. While the CLN as interim government had decreed the restitution of the *maltolto* to the cooperatives, parties, trade unions and associations that they had belonged to before the war, the new parliament had failed to adopt that clause into law. The case del popolo and associations pleaded for years with their representatives to design a law that could adequately deal with the *maltolto*, but the Christian Democratic majority kept any bills dealing with the matter off the agenda.<sup>99</sup> The unresolved legal status of the claims of those organizations to property rights allowed the Christian Democratic government to ignore the history of those buildings before 1922, and to portray the action of recovery as an entirely reasonable effort to expropriate ex-fascist property.

In 1953 and 1954, police executed evictions against properties occupied by political parties and trade unions, but also veterans’ associations, cooperatives, cultural, sport, welfare and mutual aid societies, recreational clubs, free clinics, even day care facilities and nursery schools; any organization in Emilia Romagna and Tuscany that had laid claim to formerly fascist property. The state assumed control of the properties and doled them out to commissioners of state and parastate agencies: to ENAL or to the holding office for defunct fascist

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98 “ricuperare allo Stato i beni già di proprietà del partito fascista e di organizzazioni dipendenti o gli altri beni demaniali attualmente occupati da organizzazioni di parte” Luigi Arbizzani, “Lunga vita alle case del popolo,” *Emilia* (Bologna, 1955).

99 For example, Gino Macrelli et al., *Proposta di legge n. 35, I Legislatura* (Senato della Repubblica, 1948).

confederations,<sup>100</sup> but most were used as barracks for carabinieri, a reminder to local residents of the authority of the central government in the form of armed outsiders billeted in their former social centers and political headquarters<sup>101</sup>

The political background to these events was a crescendo of antagonism between the Christian Democratic Party and the left from 1947 to 1954. Political contestation took on tones of bitter enmity with the national elections of 1947-48, which saw a heated and divisive campaign season.<sup>102</sup> While the Christian Democrats won a clear majority in 1948, they then faced the difficult task of consolidating the party's hold on power, restarting a devastated economy and undertaking critical reforms while satisfying the DC's principal allies in the Catholic Church and guaranteeing continued support of the United States. To accomplish these goals, Alcide De Gasperi formed a government that included two key figures: Luigi Einaudi, Vice President of the Council and Minister of the Budget, and Mario Scelba, Minister of the Interior. Einaudi would enact the policies that dramatically slowed inflation and ended the post-war foreign exchange crisis, but with the effect of depressing the economy, keeping real wages low and starving small and medium businesses of credit that in turn resulted in mass layoffs. In turn, Scelba, "the Iron Sicilian" would keep the resulting social and political unrest in check, reorganizing the State Police forces under direction of the Ministry of the Interior, purging the ranks of communists, securing better funding and support for the forces, and creating efficient and heavily-armed squads, the *celere*, specifically to swiftly repress unruly strikes and

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100 "ufficio stralcio delle disciolte confederazioni fasciste".

101 Paramilitary carabinieri are deployed outside their native regions, as a matter of policy.

102 Extensively described in Robert Ventresca, *From Fascism to Democracy: Culture and Politics in the Italian Election of 1948* (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

protests.<sup>103</sup> Under De Gasperi's leadership, the Christian Democrats pursued these goals under an overarching policy of anticommunism, a stance that not only reflected the antagonism between the DC and PCI parties and aligned with the views of the Church and American allies, but also provided a neat framework for the suppression of domestic unrest in a period of austerity. De Gasperi's particular vision of governing would become known as "*democrazia blindata*" or "armored democracy".

The "State recovery" program evicting associations was part of an intensification of the anticommunist policy of the Christian Democrats beginning in February 10, 1954, when Mario Scelba rose to Prime Minister and immediately began placing further restrictions on both labor unions and the "back roads of the worker's movement", the associations and local governments held by the PCI.<sup>104</sup> These anticommunist measures were motivated both by domestic political demands and by international pressures. National elections in June 1953 had showed support for the DC eroding: the party lost seats to the right (monarchist and neo-fascist parties) while failing to make a dent in the PCI's support in central Italy. The DC maintained a majority of seats in Parliament, but the electoral disappointment left the party in crisis. Scelba's was the fourth in a rapid succession of overturned governments in less than a year following those elections (under Prime Ministers Alcide De Gasperi, Giuseppe Pella, and Amintore Fanfani); rising to Prime Minister meant that Scelba had to contend with competing factions within the DC, and with staunching the loss of support to the right. Meanwhile, American Ambassador Clare Booth Luce and the State Department, losing confidence in the DC as a credible ally against the global

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103 Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 112–113.

104 The phrase "retrovie del movimento operaio" is quoted without citation in a number of histories of cooperatives in Emilia Romagna. For example, Luigi Arbizzani, Nazario Sauro Onofri, and Giuliana Ricci Garotti, *L'unione dei mille strumenti : storia della cooperazione bolognese dal 1943 al 1956* (Bologna, 1991).



communist threat in light of electoral disappointments and the expansion of PCI membership, intensified pressure on the Italian government to take radical measures against the PCI, entertaining plans from far-right functionaries in the Ministry of the Interior to outlaw the party and arrest its leaders.<sup>105</sup> Scelba's anticommunist actions in 1953-1954 were in part a response to this American pressure. It also provided an overarching theme for his government, intended to glue together the various factions within the DC and appeal to the right. The choice to target the case del popolo provided Scelba with several advantages in this anticommunist crusade: it was a chance to demonstrate concrete results against the left through the enforcement of existing legislation on the devolution of fascist property, without adopting any radical new laws directly against the PCI.

Meanwhile on the left, the deprivations of postwar recovery, combined with intense political frustrations, created an atmosphere in which workers were vigilant and on edge. On July 14, 1948, the news of an assassination attempt on Togliatti sparked angry, spontaneous protests in many cities from Genova and Milan to Taranto as well as in smaller towns like Abbadia San Salvatore, a Tuscan village in the Mount Amiata mining region, where the protests against police suppression, noteworthy for their violence and disruption, became emblematic of the popular response.<sup>106</sup>

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105 See Mario del Pero, "The United States and 'Psychological Warfare' in Italy, 1948-1955," *Journal of American history* 87, no. 4 (January 2000): 1304-34.

106 Tom Behan examines the protests of July 1948 in Milan in *The Long Awaited Moment: The Working Class and the Italian Communist Party in Milan, 1943-1948* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997)., in Abbadia San Salvatore see Gino Serafini, *I ribelli della montagna: Amiata 1948: anatomia di una rivolta* (Editori del Grifo, 1981).

Furthermore, from the late 1940s into the 1950s, the PCI was in a period of the largest growth in membership in its history, peaking at over 2.1 million members in 1954.<sup>107</sup> Under Palmiro Togliatti's leadership, the new party was shaping into a formidable presence in public life, through associations, newspapers and cultural journals and extensive intellectual support. And yet, the PCI was also a "besieged party fearing for its future".<sup>108</sup> Christian Democrats had humiliated the party in the national polls in 1948, and notwithstanding gains in the elections of 1953, it remained excluded from government. The party was condemned by the church and Pope Pius XII excommunicated its members. Members were purged from public employment and fired from factory jobs.<sup>109</sup> Togliatti, visiting Bologna in 1949 to give a speech entitled "Italy is adrift" recalled his last visit, three years prior, as a difficult moment, but one in which:

"Everyone suffered, but with a greater sense of solidarity and fraternity. Now things are profoundly different. If we look, for example, at what is happening in parliamentary assemblies, we see a majority that dominates to the point that if ... [the majority] proposes a motion that says the Prime Minister is a woman, [the majority] would approve it, and thus it would also approve a motion that said that the head of the opposition has a devil's tail."<sup>110</sup>

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107 Istituto Cattaneo, "Iscritti ai principali partiti italiani dal 1945 al 2004," in *Adele - Archivio dati sulle elezioni e la partecipazione politica* (Bologna: Istituto Cattaneo, 2012).

108 Stephen Hellman et al., "The PCI between 1948 and 1956 : Four Perspectives on Vol . VII of the Storia del PCI" no. June 2012 (2012): 37–41.

109 For a study of the reprisals against labor in Bologna see the unpublished thesis Andrea Marchi, "I licenziamenti per rappresaglia nell'industria bolognese (1948-1955)" (Università degli Studi di Bologna, 1981).

110 "Si soffriva tutti, ma con un maggior senso di solidarieta' e di fraternita'. Ora le cose sono profondamente diverse. Se guardiamo, per esempio, a cio' che avviene nelle assemblee parlamentari, vediamo una maggioranza la quale domina, al punto che se le proponessero una mozione in cui si dice che il Presidente del Consiglio e' una donna essa approverebbe, e cosi' essa aproverebbe anche una mozione in cui si dicesse che il capo dell'opposizione ha una coda da diavolo." "Italia va alla deriva" reported in "L'abbandono dell'anticomunismo condizione per uscire dalla crisi," *l'Unità*, January 1949.

Togliatti lamented that Italy had passed from solidarity to a deeply divided nation, cleft into two factions that seemingly had nothing in common on which to ground debates. The PCI was demonized by political opponents and frustrated in its attempts to participate in governing.

Nowhere was the climate more tense than in central Italy. In January 1950 Scelba's *celere* opened fire on workers demonstrating against mass layoffs outside the Fonderie Riunite in Modena, killing six and wounding dozens, prompting widespread outrage and strikes. Anxiety about Emilia Romagna was exacerbated by the Diocese of Bologna's publication of a macabre pamphlet titled *Emilia murders priests* in 1951 by former partisan, Catholic priest, and prolific anticommunist propagandist Lorenzo Bedeschi, which alleged that local partisans had executed 52 priests in the years 1943-1946. The national press picked up the image of the "Triangle of Death", that area comprised of Emilia Romagna and specifically the provinces of Reggio Emilia, Ferrara, and Bologna, fueling anticommunist charges that the stronghold of the PCI was a den of dangerous insurrectionaries.<sup>111</sup> The image of uninterrupted partisan violence and dangerous mobs became the justification for the Minister of the Interior to maintain paramilitary state police troops in Emilia Romagna and Tuscany to suppress protests and strikes in "Red Emilia".<sup>112</sup>

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111 Lorenzo Bedeschi, *L'Emilia ammazza i preti* (Bologna: ABES, 1951). Bedeschi was also one of the principle propagandists for the smear campaign against the Associazione Pionieri d'Italia (API), the PCI scouting organization. Catholic clergy charged groups near Padova with sexually perverting children when sex education was included in the scouting curriculum in the 1950s. See Dolores Negrello, *A pugno chiuso: il Partito comunista padovano dal biennio rosso alla stagione dei movimenti* (Franco Angeli, 2000), 100–105.

112 Initially the alarmist term "Triangolo della Morte" indicated political assassinations and reprisals against supposed former fascists and sympathizers, priests and political opponents of the PCI between 1945 and 1948 in a more limited area near Modena, between Castelfranco Emilia, Mirandola and Carpi. Former partisan, journalist and historian of the Left in Bologna, Nazario Sauro Onofri provides a good analysis of the highly polemicized portrayal of Emilia in the immediate postwar, without diminishing the tragedy of the assassinations. See Nazario Sauro Onofri, *Il triangolo rosso (1943-1947): la verità sul dopoguerra in Emilia-Romagna attraverso i documenti d'archivio* (Bologna: Sapere, 1994).

In the fall of 1954, *Rinascita*, the monthly politico-cultural journal of the Italian Communist Party directed by Togliatti, published an extensive inquiry into anticommunism in Italy, giving concrete examples of a systematic anticommunist policy.<sup>113</sup> It dedicated an entire chapter to the political persecution in Emilia Romagna. It was there, where communist support was deep-rooted, that the most episodes of police action against parties, unions and associations had been directed, sometimes with deadly violence. Newsstands were prohibited from selling PCI newspapers, it detailed, pamphlets and posters were prohibited, permits for meetings and rallies summarily denied, and police aggressively prosecuted any infractions of these rules.

*Rinascita* presented the sum total of the political persecution of workers in the province of Bologna between April 18, 1948 and May 31, 1954 in figures:

**Figure 3. Total human and economic costs of political persecution in Bologna<sup>114</sup>**

Dead	2
Wounded	773
Tried	13935
Acquitted	6494
Convicted	7531
Sentenced to life in prison	5
Total years sentenced	1765
Total lire in fines	46,510,366

These figures demonstrate an alarming pattern of harassment. Given a total adult population of around 580,000, these totals mean that 2.4% of the adults of the province of Bologna had been

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113 “Le persecuzioni a Bologna,” *Il Momento* (Imola, November 5, 1954).

114 As reprinted in *Ibid.*

brought to trial for political crimes: during strikes, illegal assemblies, unauthorized distribution of printed materials, or disobedience or resistance to the police.<sup>115</sup>

Evictions of the case del popolo, like Scelba's other anticommunist actions, carefully toed the limits of legality. By employing the formal pretext of concern for state properties, the evictions could be framed as correcting previous administrations' failure to properly manage former fascist properties, rather than a bold-faced attempt to uproot workers' associations and party headquarters. In this way, the political struggle between the PCI and DC took the form of legal battles, executed by the police and pursued through provincial courts.

The outcomes of the processes of eviction were varied, often resulting in protracted legal battles in which the magistrates might halt evictions until a case could be decided in court, leaving organizations in suspense for years. Without legislative guidelines, the cases brought before local magistrates were left entirely up to the discretion of the individual judges. Moreover, associations could not be secure that even if magistrates ruled in their favor that the ruling would be respected. In the example of the Casa del popolo "Lega", in Forlì, a large town east of Bologna, the organizations housed in the casa, the local section of the PCI, 'Pietro Alfezzi' and the Ortolani Recreational Circle obtained a judicial injunction to halt their eviction until they could plead their case to legitimate ownership of the building before a judge. The police forcibly removed the organizations from the premises anyway, ignoring the injunction and undermining the principle that neither the central government nor police could intervene in cases awaiting hearing.<sup>116</sup>

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115 According to the 1951 census, Istat, *Censimento Generale della Popolazione*, 1951.

116 Atti parlamentari, Camera dei deputati di Italia, legislatura II, *Discussioni, seduta di giovedì 8 luglio 1954*, 1954, 10367.

Scelba ordered evictions in Emilia Romagna and Tuscany, particularly in the towns where PCI support was the strongest. In Tuscany, the first actions against associations began in April 1952, when 21 case del popolo were abruptly put up for auction. Between May and August 1953, 150 Tuscan case del popolo were threatened with eviction, though only two of these were executed. After Scelba's decree of March 1954, another eight case del popolo and 13 recreational clubs and mutual aid societies were evicted regardless of their claims to ownership.<sup>117</sup> In Emilia Romagna, the number of evictions was even greater and the enforcement often devolved into physical confrontation between police and citizens. In the province of Bologna alone, around twenty case del popolo were seized between August and November 1954. The police-enforced evictions extracted a substantial human and economic cost on top of the alarming figures of the preceding years, documented by the *Rinascita* study. In the province of Bologna, between June 1, 1954 and March 31 1955, a further 508 citizens were arrested or held; 847 individuals were brought to trial, of which 453 acquitted and 394 found guilty; sentenced to a total of 74 years, 7 months and 6 days, and fined nearly a million and a half lire, most of these for resisting police in the course of evictions, the rest for other political crimes.<sup>118</sup>

The evictions were sometimes destructive in ways that exceeded any justifiable use of force. At Jolanda, near Ferrara, police broke down the doors of the Casa del popolo, and smashed furniture and scattered files.<sup>119</sup> In San Damaso, a rural community just 5 kilometers from the center of Modena, the police employed what supporters of the casa del popolo referred

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117 "La difesa delle case del popolo," *Quaderno dell'attivista* September-, no. 18 (1954): 558–559. and Alleanza per la ricreazione popolare: Firenze, *I diritti dei cittadini e i beni patrimoniali dello stato* (Firenze: Il Cenacolo, 1954). Other sources suggest that the total evictions in Tuscany were closer to 30, though these were without documentation or references.

118 Arbizzani, "Lunga vita alle case del popolo."

119 "In difesa delle libertà," *Quaderno dell'attivista* August, no. 15 (1954): 463.

to as “various fascist elements” to remove the furniture and contents of the Casa del popolo. These “fascist” furniture movers vandalized the objects of the most politically symbolic value: they destroyed portraits of labor organizers and smashed the memorial to fallen partisans.<sup>120</sup>

In a handful of cases these evictions in the province of Bologna were hotly protested and violent: in Marzabotto, the Apennine town famous as the site of one of the worst massacres of civilians in Italy during World War II, San Giorgio di Piano and Crevalcore, rural towns north of Bologna, Borgo Panigale, to the immediate west of Bologna and home to Ducati, and Crespellano, another agricultural hub further west of Bologna. These communities were strongholds for the left, particularly for the PCI but with significant support for the socialist parties as well; in the 1953 elections, votes for the Christian Democrats in these areas were less than 25% (Crespellano: 17.6%, Crevalcore: 24.7%, San Giorgio: 23.9%, Marzabotto: 23.5%).<sup>121</sup> Moreover, these towns were home to well-organized labor movements, for agricultural workers or, in the case of Borgo Panigale, industrial workers. The members of the case del popolo in these towns tended to be experienced ex-partisans, strikers, activists and political militants, prepared to mobilize in support of their organizations.

### ***Eviction from the Casa del popolo of Crevalcore***

Examining the program of evictions of the case del popolo at the local level illuminates aspects of the experience of the period of armored democracy that histories of policy and diplomacy miss. The example of one town’s experience of anticommunism in 1950s Italy illustrates details about the ways political repression was pursued, its human costs, and local

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120 Arbizzani, “Lunga vita alle case del popolo.”

121 Borgo Panigale is part of the City of Bologna, and therefore its election returns are aggregated into the city totals.

responses in defense of the case del popolo. This experience highlighted the importance of those sites to the culture of the left.

On August 3, 1954, members of the resident organizations were evicted from the Casa del popolo of Crevalcore in a violent confrontation with the police, in which both police and civilians were wounded and seven people were arrested and brought to trial. While only one example of a number of evictions in the province of Bologna and throughout central Italy, this one generated particular controversy. It pitted citizens attempting to defend what they understood as their rightful property against police forces acting under orders from the Minister of the Interior, in what the presiding government held to be a legitimate claim to the same, however cynical such a policy might be.

The entire town of Crevalcore came to a standstill on Monday August 2 in anticipation of the announced eviction. Members of the Casa del popolo and sympathizers called a general strike. Other inhabitants and business owners, perceiving the tension and potential danger of the situation closed up their homes and shops behind heavy shutters. Workers, men and women of all ages spent the night in vigil, barricaded inside and seated in front of the Casa del popolo, hoping to receive word that their appeals to review the order of eviction had been heard. They hung signs and banners on the façade of the building, “Hands off the Casa del popolo!” and “United against abuses of power in defense of the Casa del popolo”. A photograph from the private collection of the Partito democratico di Crevalcore shows a young man, identified as Piret, standing on the peak of the roof of the Casa del popolo with a bull’s horn, ready to sound the alarm when police arrived. The windows and doors of the casa del popolo were shuttered and locked; the members had prepared the building for siege.



The morning of Tuesday August 3, around 8am, the state police arrived en masse, with *celere* riot squads and carabinieri in jeeps and military personnel carrier trucks. One of Enrico Pasquali's photos published in *Il Momento* with the caption "In closed ranks, marching against the Casa del popolo" shows the arrival of approximately 50 *celere* officers marching in loose formation towards the casa del popolo, occupying the full width of the street.<sup>122</sup> They confronted the protesters waiting in front of the casa del popolo.

The protesters held their ground, blocking the entrance to the building. Remigio Barbieri, a communist journalist present in Crevalcore wrote of the encounter for *Il Momento* with undisguised sympathy for the protesters, the "undefeated women and courageous men of Crevalcore" in their energetic, "legal and democratic" defense of the casa del popolo, unintimidated by the armed, menacing police.

"...now the division of the police get out of the trucks and advances in formation, in tight ranks, down the street. A brief sound of a horn, then the formation advances yelling, brandishing arms, batons and iron chains. The clash is very violent, but the workers resist and they defend themselves... Then under the heavy pressure of the unbridled brutes, the workers retreat. We saw comrade Pignatti, assaulted by a dozen policemen and villainously beaten: while some of them held him tight by the arms, others took turns clubbing him in the face, on the neck, on the head... Notwithstanding the gunfire and the heavy launching of canisters of tear gas, the Crevalcoresesi continued energetically in their defense, legal and democratic, against the unrestrained police..."<sup>123</sup>

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122 "Crevalcore: a ranghi serrati, in marcia contro la Casa del Popolo," *Il Momento* (Imola, August 6, 1954).

123 Remigio Barbieri, "In un'atmosfera da prima linea sfratto poliziesco a Crevalcore," *Il Momento* (Imola, August 3, 1954).

Barbieri contrasted the valorous workers and the brutally violent police. In this passage, he emphasized the arms, naming specifically batons, chains, tear gas and guns. He described the ordered militarism of the police forces in their approach but also delegitimized their sanctioned use of force as barbaric, “unrestrained” violence in their yelling and charging. On the other hand, he framed the workers’ actions as resistance, noble and justifiable defense of their organizations. I have paid particular attention to this passage by Barbieri, because not only it is the only first-hand account of the events in Crevalcore available, but also because Barbieri was later tried for defamation for the phrases quoted and underscored above, as I will discuss below.

Photographer Enrico Pasquali documented the event in a handful of photographs, some of which were printed in newspapers, *La Lotta*, the weekly newspaper of the PCI federation of Bologna and its local supplement *Il Momento*, printed in Imola, and in the Bologna edition of *L’Unità*, the PCI’s national daily.<sup>124</sup> Pasquali regularly worked for the left-wing press and with the local communist and socialist parties, and his presence as documentarian suggests that he expected dramatic events to unfold. He took the photos from above, looking down on the street from a nearby roof or window, where he must have positioned himself in anticipation of the eviction, as the photos show the arrival of the police. The five photos of this series that have been preserved in the archives of the Istituto Gramsci and the Partito Democratico of Crevalcore, and those printed in the contemporary newspapers capture moments of the battle around the Casa del popolo of Crevalcore.

These photographs of the confrontation are confused and out of focus. In one, the crowd at the entrance of the casa del popolo is a mash of bodies, indistinguishable from each other, obscured by a shadow cast across the façade (see Figure 4 below). Uniformed police push at the

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124 Prints of these photographs are held by the Istituto Gramsci Emilia Romagna (Fondo Arbizzani), and by the Partito Democratico di Crevalcore.

margins of the crowd, the figures blurred in movement. Officers in the foreground have their arms raised, batons in hand, to strike the protesters. In another photo, ten policemen run away from the casa del popolo, chasing a protester down the street. Enrico Pasquale's photos of the eviction in Crevalcore depict an episode of police violence against unarmed civilians.



Figure 4. Police forces enforcing the eviction from the Casa del popolo of Crevalcore August 3, 1954. Courtesy of the Partito democratico di Crevalcore.

Both local people and police officers were hurt and wounded in the encounter. The locals threw stones and physically resisted police attempts to move them from the doorway; police used tear gas and clubs to disperse the crowd. Eventually the police were able to pry open a window and enter to disperse the citizens who had barricaded themselves inside the building. In the process, they arrested seven of the local citizens: Walter Borgatti, Carlo Pignatti, Renato Gardosi, Fernanda Grimaldi, Nella Boiani, Carmen Ferrara, as well as a seventeen-year-old boy, Otello Mazzoni. They were accused:

“Because with several hundred people they used violence and threats to oppose the clearing of the Casa del popolo and of the relative surroundings, while officials and agents of the police and carabinieri executed that operation, with kicks and punches and throwing stones against the police forces in such a way that many officials and agents of the police were struck.”<sup>125</sup>

All of them would be prosecuted for “contempt, violence and resistance” to a public official.<sup>126</sup>

The national and local press interpreted the event along party lines. Accordingly, the PCI papers *L'Unità* and *La Lotta* described a heavy-handed military action: police in “closed ranks” marching against the citizens, a “state of siege” or an atmosphere of the “front lines” of a battle. They emphasized the tear gas and Billy clubs, and police charging against the workers, who they described as bravely defending their Casa del popolo and their constitutional rights. Moderate and center-right papers, by contrast, echoed the government’s portrayal of the eviction as a bureaucratic process, in the name of the recovery of properties that legally belonged to the State.

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125 “La libertà per i ‘rei’ di Crevalcore ristabilirà la piena e vera giustizia,” *Il Momento* (Imola, September 17, 1954).

126 Very little information is available about these individuals. Carlo Pignatti had previously been involved in organizing the agricultural workers’ strikes of the early 1950s, and continued to work within the PCI and in the cooperative movement into the 1970s. The names of the others are nowhere to be found outside records and articles about their arrest and trial in 1954.

For example *La Stampa* described protesters as “extremists” while the building in question is referred to as the ex casa del fascio, without acknowledging that the Casa del popolo had occupied it over the previous decade let alone that the building itself had originated several decades before that as a casa del popolo.

The press coverage in *L’Unità* made special note that the women of the casa del popolo were particularly fierce in their defense of the Italian Women’s Union (UDI) headquarters in the Casa del popolo, and identified the three women arrested defending it, namely, Carmen Ferrari, Fernanda Grimaldi and Nella Bonani.<sup>127</sup> By linking the women’s resistance to their particular association, *l’Unità* both exulted their bravery and carefully distinguished the interests of the women from the general interests of the “citizens” for the casa del popolo.

### ***The trial of the Kings of Crevalcore***

The “Kings of Crevalcore”, as the resisters (including the women) were styled in the communist press, were tried in late September before the Tribunale of Bologna. The defense was in the hands of an illustrious bench of jurists that included Senator Umberto Terracini, former president of the Constituent Assembly and one of the founding fathers of Italian communism; prominent professors of law Giuseppe Branca and Pietro Nuvolone; and a number of respected lawyers including Giuseppe Sotgiu and Sigfrido Coppola.<sup>128</sup>

Defenders of the citizens charged framed the issue as one of citizens resisting an unjust and illegal state action, and therefore not only legitimately defending their interests but also the very principles of liberty, respect for rights, and rule of law fundamental to a democracy.

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127 “Per difendere la Casa del Popolo tutta Crevalcore scende in strada,” *l’Unità* (Bologna, August 4, 1954).

128 Alberto Drusiani, “Un agguerrito collegio di difesa per gli attivisti imputati di violenze,” *La Stampa* (Torino, September 23, 1954).

According to the defense, the crimes committed in the events in Crevalcore, were those of Scelba's government in usurping the power of the judicial system to evaluate and rule on property disputes, in trampling Constitutional rights, and in abusing its power to order military force against citizens. The organizations and the citizens who constituted them were rather the victims of this "fascist" abuse of power. Defense attorney Sigfrido Coppola argued that to find the Crevalcore seven guilty would mean that all citizens are subject to these abuses of power without the possibility to resist them; it would "open the door to the worst dictatorship".<sup>129</sup> It would, he warned, "open the way to a continuous series of illegalities on the part of the executive power, lacking any control and with the impossibility of containing the abuses of power".<sup>130</sup> Coppola pointed out other cases in which the eviction of case del popolo was creating a precedent of erosion of judicial power: in Brescia, the local tax office (Intendenza di Finanza) ignored the Magistrate's impending ruling on standing rental contracts with the Casa del popolo and forcibly evicted the association. Moreover, subsequently, it ignored court orders to restore the building to the Casa del popolo. As Coppola urged in the headlines of many articles he authored during the trial, "The Judiciary cannot legitimate the illegal conduct of the Scelba government".<sup>131</sup>

The public prosecutor, Ottavio Lo Cigno, argued instead that the illegitimacy or validity of the eviction was irrelevant to the case, as considering that question would in effect undermine the executive power of the Prime Minister, on whose orders the police carried out the eviction. The accused were to be judged on their actions, "resisting an order to disperse a seditious

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129 Sigfrido Coppola, "Al processo contro Crevalcore sia bollato l'arbitrio governativo," *Il Momento* (Imola, September 10, 1954).

130 Sigfrido Coppola, "La Magistratura non può legittimare l'operato illegale del governo Scelba," *Il Momento* (Imola, September 3, 1954).

131 Ibid.

gathering”, regardless of merits of their reason for gathering. He claimed that as soon as the commanding police officer gave the order, the administrative questions about the eviction became irrelevant; citizens must not resist police orders.<sup>132</sup>

The presiding judges ultimately found more merit in the prosecutors’ arguments, and found the seven guilty. They were sentenced to a total of four years and three months in prison in addition to a fine 14,600 lire.<sup>133</sup> Walter Borgatti was sentenced to one year in prison, Carlo Pignatti ten months, Renato Gardosi six months and ten days, Fernanda Grimaldi and Nella Boiani to five months, Carmen Ferrara to four months and 16 days in prison.<sup>134</sup> The seventh defendant, Mazzoni, was the only of the seven pardoned for his involvement as a minor. *L’Unità* decried the “inconceivable sentence”, characterizing the result as so unjust as to be unimaginable; it “stunned the college of defense attorneys and has also left the numerous magistrates and lawyers that were following the whole development of the trial perplexed.”<sup>135</sup> Defense lawyers expressed dismay and outrage that the case had not been about defending these seven citizens but about defending Liberty itself.<sup>136</sup> They protested that decision justified and legalized the arbitrary power of the state against its own citizens. Sigfrido Coppola explained his understanding of the gravity of the injustice in a statement to *Il Momento*, “...through the Case del Popolo we defend the essential principles of the democratic life of our country.”<sup>137</sup> Thus, the

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132 Alberto Drusiani, “Massiccia battaglia,” *La Stampa* (Torino, September 24, 1954).

133 Equivalent to about 200 euros at 2006 value.

134 Their sentences did not include time served, which ranged from one month and seven days to one month and eighteen days.

135 “Una iniqua sentenza contro i cittadini che difesero la Casa del popolo di Crevalcore,” *L’Unità*, September 26, 1954.

136 “Una sentenza contro la libertà quella che condanna Crevalcore,” *Il Momento* (Imola, October 1, 1954).

137 “Una dichiarazione dell’avv. Coppola,” *Il Momento* (Imola, October 8, 1954).



sentence against the protesters from Crevalcore was framed as a message about Italian democracy under attack.

In Crevalcore, public outcry against the decision took the form of assemblies and protests in the town. In factories throughout the province workers voted to approve an official letter of protest to the President of the Republic and to Parliament.<sup>138</sup> Luigi Arbizzani, communist journalist and later historian of associationism and the cooperative movement in Bologna, noted in a 1955 article summarizing the history and contemporary difficulties of the case del popolo that the public disdain for the evictions and subsequent prosecutions of protesters had re-created solidarity among all the citizens, “who recognize in the action aimed to strike the workers a threat to democratic liberties, a first step towards an anti-Constitutional and liberticidal politics...”.<sup>139</sup> The perceived injustice of the government’s action against the case del popolo became a rallying point, providing a clear common enemy against which to mobilize further protest and political opposition.

The government continued to assert high-handed authority in Crevalcore and other towns in the province after the eviction and the trial. The Prefect of Bologna, local representative of executive power of the state, removed the communist mayor of Crevalcore, Loris Manfredi, from office for having refused to cooperate with State Police Commissioner Aniello Diamare to evict the Casa del popolo.<sup>140</sup> After a six-month suspension, he was reinstated, only to be removed from office again for authorizing posters that contained expressions “contemptuous of the government and the Republic”, and refusing to order their removal upon such instructions from

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138 Il Momeno reported that workers at Ducati, OMA, Palomba, Degli Esposti, Parma, Cavalli, Carati, Doppieri, MBC, Minerali, Pasquali, Curtisa, Roncati, Laffi, Marchi, Manzoni, Dellarosa and others sent letters of protest to the President of the Republic, to the Senate and Parliament. In “Una sentenza contro la libertà quella che condanna Crevalcore.”

139 Arbizzani, “Lunga vita alle case del popolo.”

140 “Sospeso un sindaco colpevole di abusi,” *La Stampa* (Torino, November 26, 1954).

the courts. Mayors of nearby towns Soragna and Ozzano Emilia were similarly dismissed for their actions in relation to the eviction of *casa del popolo* in their towns: for holding a city council meeting to determine a temporary location for the evicted associations, and for failing to clear out of the *casa del popolo*, respectively.<sup>141</sup> By removing local, democratically elected mayors, the prefect reinforced the central government's authority at the expense of local autonomy. Such maneuvers were worthy of Mussolini, lending credibility to opposition claims that what was at stake in Crevalcore and other provincial towns, was Italian democracy itself.

Journalists were also vulnerable to persecution for their reportage of the evictions. Remigio Barbieri, journalist, and Giuseppe Brini, the editor in chief of *La Lotta* were charged with '*villipendio*', public defamation of the armed forces for their coverage of the eviction at Crevalcore.<sup>142</sup> The defamatory statements consisted of characterizing police officers as using excessive force and of intentionally inciting "hatred, rancor and disrespect for the police forces".<sup>143</sup> The Territorial Military Tribunal of Bologna claimed the right to try Barbieri and Brini as "discharged soldiers", and therefore indefinitely subject to conscription and to military authority.<sup>144</sup> At trial, defended by many of the same lawyers who had defended the "Kings of Crevalcore", the journalists produced the photos by Enrico Pasquali discussed above, to demonstrate the truth in their characterizations of police excess. Both Barbieri and Brini were found guilty, though in a series of appeals Barbieri was acquitted, while Brini served seven

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141 Arbizzani, "Lunga vita alle case del popolo"; "Denunciato un sindaco per concorso in vilipendio," *La Stampa* (Torino, November 21, 1954).

142 Giovanni Panozzo, "Il processo Brini è incostituzionale, afferma la difesa nella prima udienza," *l'Unità* (Roma, January 11, 1955).and "Il Tribunale supremo militare annulla la sentenza contro Brini e Barbieri," *l'Unità* (Roma, February 26, 1955).

143 Panozzo, "Il processo Brini è incostituzionale, afferma la difesa nella prima udienza."

144 Another prominent example was in the trial of Silvano Armaroli, secretary of the Bologna federation of the Italian Socialist Party. See Nazario Sauro Onofri, "Silvano Armaroli un socialista con le carte in regola," *Il Ponte* no. January-February (2009).

months in prison. The prosecution of the editor and journalist were only one example of a rash of accusations and trials before military tribunals of communist and socialist journalists for defamation of the government and of armed forces in 1955. Much as in the eviction of the left-wing organizations, such trials took advantage of legal ambiguities for the political persecution of strategic figures and institutions. These prosecutions of journalists, local politicians and protesters constituted a pattern of harassment that, from the point of view of citizens of towns like Crevalcore, contributed to the alarming idea that Italian democracy was being undone, civil liberties being trampled, and the institutions of justice were being warped to political ends.

### *The memory of Fascism*

“It has been about ten years that there have not been men armed to the teeth, marching in tight formation against some enemy in the streets of our cities or the villages in our province. It has been about ten years that the towns of our province have not been besieged by armed forces. For a few hours these days it has seemed that time was going backwards.”<sup>145</sup>

Only ten years after the end of World War II, which had in the final years developed into a civil war between partisan forces and the fascist Italian Social Republic, these violent, politically-charged confrontations between uniformed and armed police officers and members of left-wing institutions touched a raw nerve. As the passage from local communist weekly *Il Momento* above demonstrates, anticommunism was often framed as a return of fascism. In turn, the distinction between ‘resistance’, meaning civilians opposing a policy they felt to be unjust, and ‘Resistance’, armed partisan mobilization against fascist forces, was blurred in the language used to describe the events. The members of the case del popolo and other organizations subject

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145 “Sotto due bandiere,” *Il Momento* (Imola, August 6, 1954).

to evictions and police interventions described their state as under attack, under siege.

Opponents of the program of evictions and of Scelba's government wrote and spoke about the parallel between the contemporary attacks on the case del popolo and the fascist gang violence of 1922. The discourses about the program of eviction and the events surrounding its enforcement used the memory and the language of fascism and Resistance to explain contemporary anti-communism and to mobilize support for the associations and case del popolo. These explanations gave a new generation of members of the case del popolo a place in a long narrative of struggle, and situated their defense of their case del popolo as the new Resistance.

An article in *Rinascita* by communist Senator and prominent journalist Ottavio Pastore, titled "The clerical offensive against the workers' headquarters", exemplifies the inescapable historical parallels. With no preface, Pastore began by excerpting from the diaries of Italo Balbo, the commander of the infamous March on Ravenna of July 1922, which at the time had generally been regarded by the fascists, as well as the opposition who were victimized by it, as the rehearsal for the March on Rome in October. With glee, it chronicled hour by hour, the wave of destruction, burning, beatings, etc, that was passing through the province of Ravenna. With a surprising degree of empathy, considering his role directing the violence, Balbo described:

"...the stronghold of the red leagues is completely destroyed. The burning of the large building cast a sinister glare in the night... when I saw the socialist organizer come out, tearing at his hair, with signs of desperation in his face, I understood entirely his tragedy. In that moment, along with the Ravenna cooperative building, his dreams and all his life's work were turned to ash."<sup>146</sup>

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146 Ottavio Pastore, "La offensiva clericale contro le sedi operaie," *Rinascita* XI, no. 5 (1954): 314.

The byline gives no indication of the fact that these events were not contemporary; the year is omitted from the date, no quotation mark or indentation or other signal hints that this is in fact an account of events of 1922, not 1954. The effect could not but be horror. Only near the end of the page does it become clear that this long column about violent destruction was a quotation:

“I researched and reread these passages from the Diary of 1922 of Italo Balbo, after having read the unofficial communication with which the government reconfirmed that by the 20th of April, all the formerly fascist buildings occupied by trade unions, political and popular organizations were to have been vacated, even if the riot police and carabinieri were needed to use force to evict them.”<sup>147</sup>

Pastore’s juxtaposition of the fascist destruction and the contemporary attacks underlined what he understood as actions that shared an objective: crippling the opposition, with violence if necessary. Pastore was perhaps uniquely able to make such a comparison— he was of an older generation of Italian communists who had firsthand experience of the fascist terror, and had been a friend and colleague of all the great figures of Italian socialism, many of whom died in prison or as partisans

In the article for which Remigio Barbieri was accused of defamation, he claimed that the contemporary eviction and past events of fascist squads terrorizing civilians were “identical”:

“We remember clearly an identical episode from ten years ago that by way of analogy could well be compared to that of last Tuesday in Crevalcore. In Medicina, on 10

September 1944, after the partisans had left the town ... the Black Brigades came down

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147 “Ho ricercato e ho riletto questi brani del Diario 1922 di Italo Balbo, dopo aver letto il comunicato ufficioso on il quale il governo ha riconfermato che per 20 aprile avrebbero dovuto essere sgombrati tutti gli edifici ex fascisti occupati da organizzazioni sindacali, politiche, popolari in genere, anche a costo di sfratti forzati per mezzo di celerini e di carabinieri.” Pastore, “La offensiva clericale contro le sedi operaie.” Pastore used “Clerical” as synonymous with “Christian Democratic”, not necessarily having any relation to the church.

the main street, with the same rifle-fire and the same frenzied yells... The episode of the beating was identical as well...<sup>148</sup>

Readers of the local paper would have remembered that the Fascist Black Brigades had killed the partisan they beat in the streets of Medicina in 1944, and their rifle fire had wounded civilians. By emphasizing the sameness of the actions, Barbieri tapped into such memories of violence and terror of wartime that were all too familiar to residents of the towns outside Bologna.

In some very concrete ways, the historical parallel was inevitable. Because of the nature of the evictions, employing the legal justification of devolution of formerly fascist property to the state, the evictions touched exactly the same organizations that had been violently removed from their cooperatives, party headquarters, case del popolo and other associations in 1922. The injustice of the eviction and the members' opposition to it hinged on this fact, and so it was impossible to discuss the matter without referring to that history. What the equation of the events of 1922 and 1954 failed to acknowledge was that while the same buildings were being taken from them, the origins of the orders and the actors involved were not the same. The attacks in 1922 throughout Emilia Romagna on parties and organizations were the work of fascist blackshirts, not a policy deliberated by the Cabinet of Ministers enforced by the police and the military. To the members of the case del popolo and their sympathizers, however, both seizures of property were motivated by anticommunism and both were enacted forcibly.

Moreover, the sites of the evictions were not only contemporary PCI strongholds, they had also been home to populations that been deeply involved in early socialist movements, antifascism and partisan Resistance and in some cases were sites of bloody reprisals against civilian populations for harboring partisans. In Marzabotto, for example, objectors to the

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148 Barbieri, "In un'atmosfera da prima linea sfratto poliziesco a Crevalcore."

eviction of the Casa del popolo pointed to the identity of the members of the organizations being evicted. They were the surviving family members of the massacre of Monte Sole, one of the worst war crimes perpetrated in Italy during the war, in the course of which German troops executed around 800 civilians in reprisal for the local support of the Stella Rossa partisan brigade. *L'Unità* identified among the victims of police violence during the eviction of the casa del popolo of Marzabotto the widow and mother of two of the victims of the massacre of Marzabotto.<sup>149</sup> Including reference to this traumatic history both elicited outrage for the community, subjected to a violent eviction, and invited comparison between Nazi forces and the State Police.

Communist Member of Parliament Nilde Iotti published a pamphlet, “The workers in defense of the case del popolo” denouncing the evictions of the case del popolo and chronicling the events and history of the associations in her hometown of Reggio Emilia. Iotti herself had been a partisan in Reggio Emilia, in a Women’s Defense Group; her evocation of the Resistance was personal as well as rhetorical, and she had connections to the organizations involved and to her fellow Reggiani, who she then represented in Parliament. In the pamphlet, she defended the use of parallels to fascism as an apt comparison: “The analogy of the circumstances is perfect. Above all the same class character, the anti-worker and antidemocratic nature emerges clearly.”<sup>150</sup> Iotti’s analysis framed the parallel in terms of class conflict, focusing on the objectives: in

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149 “La ‘Casa del popolo’ di Marzabotto occupata dalla polizia di Scelba e Saragat!,” *l'Unità* (Roma, July 29, 1954).

150 “nel comizio e sulla stampa, sono stati collegati storicamente alle vicende del regime fascista, non lascia dubbi. L’analogia delle circostanze e’ perfetta. Soprattutto emerge evidente lo stesso carattere di classe, la natura antioperaia ed antidemocratica ... Erano i grossi industriali e i grossi agrari che hanno dato le armi in mano alle squadre fasciste per le loro violenze e gli attacchi alle Case del Popolo... Nello sfratto amministrativo contro le sedi del P.C.I. e della C.C.d.L. non si possono non individuare ragioni di classe. Ad applaudirlo erano gli stessi giornali, come “Il Resto del Carlino” che ieri esaltavano l’azione dei fascisti.” Nilde Iotti, “I lavoratori in difesa della Case del Popolo” (Reggio Emilia: Tip. Sociale, 1955), 17.

damaging the case del popolo, both the fascist squads and the ministers of the government intended to cripple the political parties and trade unions that these centers nourished. A second version of the same pamphlet was distributed without Iotti's name attached under the more provocative title, "The clerico-fascists against the case del popolo and against the liberty of all", making the connection even more pointedly.<sup>151</sup>

Furthermore, the connection of the struggles against fascism with the evictions provided a way for a generation that had no direct experience of the Resistance to link themselves to that history. Nilde Iotti connected this new generation to the older generation of partisans in the example of Massimo Prandi, a victim of police violence during the protest and occupation of the casa del popolo. Prandi had come to Reggio Emilia with his father and others from their nearby village to defend the casa del popolo:

"When he was still a child his father had told him stories of earlier times when the fascists had come to San Martino in Rio to occupy with fury the Casa del popolo. He was among those who defended the center. Now he found himself committed to the same struggle as before, but alongside him he found thousands of new hard-fighting young people."

Through Prandi, Iotti illustrated how the narrative of struggle transcended generations, passed from father to son. She tied together past and present in a long narrative of a tradition of resistance, underlining the oldness and sameness of the struggle. Iotti reminded readers that "The people of Reggio are not new to these battles" with the figure of Mentore Torelli, militant antifascist, veteran Garibaldino in Spain, "persecuted by the usual reactionaries". Torelli too was beaten by police, despite his 74 years of age, described as "burdened with struggle and sacrifice".

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151 "I clerico-fascisti contro le case del popolo e le libertà di tutti," *Quaderni de la verità* no. 3 (1954).



Not only did the example of Torelli outrage, it emphasized the sameness of the struggle. Iotti wrote that this event was part of “the same struggle as before”, “the same threats as yesterday”. This way she situated the particular experience of the eviction of organizations of the left from the Casa del popolo in Reggio Emilia in an older struggle, in which the villains, in the present, the police, under orders from Christian Democrat ministers, were allied with fascists, reactionaries, violent squadristi.<sup>152</sup>

This sense of alarm that history was repeating itself became a common motif. Recalling the fate of the associations and case del popolo in 1922 heightened the sense of urgency of defending the same organizations in 1954. Moreover it gave a new generation of members and leaders of the case del popolo a sense of belonging to a long, noble tradition of struggle, in which they were called on to defend their institutions as heirs of the Resistance.

Ultimately, Scelba’s program of evictions proved to be a potent tool for mobilizing support for associations and case del popolo. National figures like Nilde Iotti and Ottavio Pastore wrote passionate calls to defend these institutions. Intellectuals and political leaders organized conferences like the “Assembly for the defense of democratic liberties” in Bologna. Members of the organizations and their sympathizers marched into the piazzas, barricaded buildings and physically confronted armed police officers to protect what they held important.

However, the most remarkable outcome of the period of repression of associations and case del popolo after 1948 was a new wave of construction. Given the uncertainty of legal battles, or the difficulty of challenging the evictions and seizures of buildings, many groups decided to begin again, purchasing outright or more often, building from scratch a home for clubs, associations and parties. The decision to rebuild was a statement of independence: groups

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152 Iotti, “I lavoratori in difesa della Casa del Popolo.”

preferred to start fresh, in a space to which the government could lay no claim, notwithstanding the cost of construction. In the province of Bologna such new constructions were begun immediately following eviction in Idice, Pianoro, Savigno, Vado, Altedo, Molinella, Castelmaggiore, Camugnano, Marzabotto, Crespellano, Persiceto, Guardata and several within the city of Bologna. The left-wing press triumphantly announced construction projects underway as the expression of communities unbowed by the injustices done to them.

### ***Conclusions***

The evictions of the case del popolo are surely part of the history of *gli anni duri*, the hard years, but they should not be understood as just another form of political repression in a laundry list of illiberal actions. The case del popolo acquired a renewed importance in the context of the persecution of the left from every other angle: the press, in the factories and in the public sector. The political parties and associations that found a home in the case del popolo, chased out of public institutional life, had even more need of their shared headquarters and the solidarity of the bar of the casa del popolo. The attempt to deprive them of that home met with an obdurate resistance that attracted support beyond the little towns that they served. The experience of political repression provided an education for a new generation of leaders of the case del popolo, and linked them to a triumphant narrative of workers in resistance to reactionary forces.

While the case del popolo proved unyielding in the face of political struggles of the early 1950s, moving forward to the 1960s, associations would have to face the new challenges of prosperity and consumer culture that threatened to undermine their capacity to organize support around older local centers. The hard-won place of the casa del popolo would not be secure for long.

## ***PART 2 : New prosperity and new roles for cultural associations, 1960-1968***

By 1955 the arduous task of reconstruction was largely completed and Italians of all classes began to share in the new prosperity of the so-called “economic miracle”, the period of unprecedented economic growth from 1955-1963 characterized by increased employment, an accelerating shift from agricultural employment to industrial and service sector, a flattening of inequalities in income distribution all of which led to significant growth in private consumption. The promise of better standards of living and employment drew over nine million Italians to relocate to cities, particularly in the industrial north, between 1955 and 1971.<sup>153</sup> It is particularly this mobility that transformed cities through the 1960s, and in turn the social institutions that were so closely tied to their territories: the neighborhood cultural circle, the rural town *casa del popolo*, as well as new entities like the peripheral neighborhood association, which popped up in the freshly created terrain of the urban peripheries constructed in this period.

These transformations brought equally novel shifts, not only the rhythms and practices of everyday life, but also in citizens’ expectations of how and where they would pass their free time. Activities that might have once been viewed as a special occasion, spending Saturday night at the dancehall or seeing the latest Hollywood films in the cinema, in the 1960s became a

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<sup>153</sup> As estimated in Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988*, 211.

regular part of the free time of all classes of Italians. Working class families saved up to buy a radio for their families, and as the prices dropped after 1960, to buy a television on a payment plan. Free time was increasingly organized around these purchases, which a few years before would have been unimaginable luxuries.

These shifts required a reorganization of associational life. The rural case del popolo lost members as agricultural workers moved into the cities to find more stable, better paying work. In the cities, older workers' associations had to adapt to the expanded demands of their members. They collectively purchased television sets, so that neighborhood residents who could not yet afford their own could experience the new medium: crowded together in a bar or meeting room to watch the single channel. Small neighborhood clubs began to organize movies in assembly halls and courtyards, while larger associations collected donations to erect dedicated movie theaters to seat hundreds. The case del popolo expanded and built new facilities to house the new activities that members demanded.

Workers' associations were not only the spaces in which many Italians first gained access to this new culture, but they were also sites of critical reflection on the new consumption practices. From the beginning of the 1960s, ARCI began to voice a concern for the rising consumer culture and its consequences for workers' culture. The national association found a new, increasingly important role in analyzing and theorizing the ongoing cultural transformation and in encouraging affiliated circles to develop a critical stance with regard to "low quality" films and "distortions of reality" of the television.

The following chapters will examine three themes: the expanding city, cinema, and television. It will explore the challenges and opportunities that shifts in these sectors presented,

through the examples of ARCI circles in Bologna as they transform out of the hard years of the 1950s and into the new prosperity of the 1960s.

### ***Town planning and local associational life***

In 1964, ARCI Torino hosted a national conference *Urban planning and free time*, representing a new subject of interest in ARCI circles, *urbanistica*, or urban planning. The conference was the work of a cohort of sociology students in the Political Science department of the University of Torino, under the direction of political philosopher Norberto Bobbio: Paolo Almondo, Vittorio Alcorani, Lorenzo Fischer, Massimo Follis, Carlo Marletti, Angelo Picchieri, and Gianni Vaccarino; and architects from the leftist Architecture Collective Biagio Garzena, Silvio Tordolo-Orsello, Adriano Amedei, as well as architect Egi Volterrani. These intellectuals presented their theories on the role of cultural and recreational structures in the city to achieve the goal of “social recomposition”, intending to overcome the “fragmentation of the existence of the individual in different moments of time and areas of territory” that characterized the city of the 1960s, transformed by urbanization and developments in transportation and communication. Their presentations were built on an understanding of the importance of social geography to older models of associative life:

“The popular circle represented an indispensable instrument of cultural action in an epoch in which social relations of production and consumption were contemporarily concentrated within well-defined territorial areas (like the neighborhood in urban zones, and the town in rural zones), which came to have the form of real, true community unity, between which there were few communications and interdependencies... Within the neighborhood the circle reinforced

solidarity, carrying out in this way a function complementary to the ideological movements and class politics.”<sup>154</sup>

The neighborhood circle or *casa del popolo* had been a central structure in workers’ lives so long as they lived and worked in a circumscribed area. By the early 1960s, however, those neighborhood circles no longer stood at the geographic and social center of a community. They had become one of numerous scattered sites where people could choose to spend their free time. These theorists warned that this geographical dilation of everyday life risked eroding the solidarity provided by the associational experience. Free time would become no more than a “moment of consumption”, oriented towards buying and consuming goods and experiences which would further fragment the social foundations of working class politics.<sup>155</sup> By analyzing this transformation, the sociologists and architects working with ARCI Torino thus sought to signal a new way of understanding the functions and operations of associational life in terms of territory and consumption, providing the key concepts for the new associationism that would evolve in many neighborhood circles in the 1960s.

The entry of urban planning into the vocabulary of ARCI publications and correspondence in the early 1960s opened a period of reflection on the place (in both the literal and figurative senses) of associations in a rapidly changing society. As architect Silvio Tordolo argued in correspondence with national ARCI officers, “The spatial translation of ARCI initiatives, the study of the reality of our country, the context in which these initiatives are inserted, cannot be undertaken and deepened without a serious understanding of urban problems.”<sup>156</sup> Intellectuals connected with the left, like those in Torino, found in ARCI circles not only an audience eager to hear their analyses of the cultural and

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154 Original emphasis. Paolo Almondo et al., eds., “Aspetti sociologici del problema delle attrezzature per il tempo libero,” in *Convegno nazionale urbanistica e tempo libero* (UIISP: Archivi ARCI, Box 1964, Torino, 1964), 41. Nearly all of these sociologists went on to teach at the University of Torino.

155 Biagio Garzena, “Schema di relazione generale introduttiva al convegno,” in *Convegno nazionale urbanistica e tempo libero* (UIISP: Archivi ARCI, Box 1964, Torino, 1964), 10–14.

156 Silvio Tordolo, “Proposta per l’adesione dell’ARCI nazionale al Istituto nazionale di urbanistica” (UIISP: Archivi ARCI, Box 1964, Torino, November 7, 1964).

social problems in the new urban peripheries, but also a laboratory in which to experiment with projects to decentralize culture, to organize alternative circuits of cultural and educational activities and to design new structures to house such activities. In the early 1960s, new types of associations were built within older *case del popolo* and in new structures to meet the demands of neighborhoods in flux. Within ARCI and affiliated circles, leaders recognized the collapse of older models and began to develop new structures and activities in an attempt to maintain the solidarity that the old *case del popolo* reinforced.

This chapter examines how one association, the Casa del popolo of Corticella, navigated this transformation, with particular attention to the social and geographic developments of the neighborhood, Corticella, within the larger context of the changing city, Bologna. This example illuminates the tightly woven relationships between the association, local sections of the PCI and PSI, and the neighborhood population, as was the case with older models of the *casa del popolo*, but also the new relationships that linked the neighborhood group to local businesses, to the University of Bologna, to local government, and to national organizations and international movements. Because this analysis relies on geographic specificity, it is necessary to briefly provide some background on the changing shape of Bologna and the neighborhood Corticella.

In Bologna, the growth of the local population and economy since the mid-nineteenth century and the development of new sectors of activity such as early industrial manufacturing had produced a pattern of urbanization of a dense historical center of the city and several peripheral workers' neighborhoods clustered around economic activities necessarily outside the city center: San Donato around the rail yard, Santa Viola and Corticella around brickworks on the canals and rivers, while the rest of the territory of the city was still occupied with agricultural use reaching right up to the medieval city walls in some places. These earlier urbanization patterns had segregated the city into self-



contained districts based on concentration of types of work and social class.<sup>157</sup> Corticella, for example, circumscribed most of the everyday activities of the population made up of mill and brick workers and agricultural laborers. The neighborhood, while part of the city of Bologna and connected by a tram, functioned as the home, workplace, commercial and social hub for residents, obviating the need to travel on an everyday basis. Workers lived in the popular housing available there, worked within walking distance, bought everyday necessities in the few shops on the piazza, and socialized in the osteria or the casa del popolo.

A massive influx of people from the countryside from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s rapidly expanded the population of the city. Between 1951 and 1961, the resident population of Bologna increased by over thirty percent, making it the fourth fastest growing city, behind Torino, Rome, and Cagliari.<sup>158</sup> About half of the immigrants came from the rural areas of the province of Bologna and the rest from other regions of Italy.<sup>159</sup> This demographic pressure, coming on the heels of a postwar housing crisis resulting from wartime destruction, created a huge demand for affordable housing and a resulting construction boom. Reinforced concrete apartment buildings were erected in what had previously been farmland, along the main roads once built for agricultural transport into the city. Urban planning in the 1950s in Italy tended to be grandiose in scale, sprawling out from the city centers neglecting to protect historic buildings, sites, and landscapes and providing little provision of public

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157 Robert Evans provides a detailed description of the geography of Bologna neighborhoods up to the mid-1960s in *Coexistence: Communism and its Practice in Bologna* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967).

158 Istat, “Popolazione residente totale e popolazione residente dei centri abitati dei grandi comuni ai censimenti 1861-2001 e anno 2009 (ai confini dell’epoca),” *L’archivio della statistica italiana* (2011). As Paul Ginsborg points out, however, laws that required employer sponsorship, complicating the bureaucratic procedures for migrants to officially change their residence, left many in a situation of “illegal” residence that is not recorded in official statistics. That fascist era law to suppress the rural exodus was only repealed in 1961. See *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988*, 218–219.

159 Summarized from Comune of Bologna reports in the appendices of Evans, *Coexistence: Communism and its Practice in Bologna*, 192.

services and mobility to the new peripheries.<sup>160</sup> These trends are particularly evident in Milan. Bologna, although it was spared some of the worst sprawl, was nonetheless shaped in the 1950s by the same school of planning that neglected to connect spreading residential building with the existing city services. The demands of reconstruction, which required attention for the most basic and urgent of needs for housing, hygiene and transportation, precluded more deliberate, far-sighted planning. By the late 1950s however, under the leadership of a city council that included a new generation of communist reformers like future mayors Guido Fanti and Renato Zangheri, Bologna began to develop into a model city for reformist urban planning, adopting new ideas about the organization of the city, politically and socially.<sup>161</sup>

During the same period, citizens were mobile within the city in an unprecedented way. Once dependent on bicycles, foot or limited public transport, workers in the 1950s could afford motor scooters produced by Piaggio and Innocenti, and in the 1960s, private automobiles. Moreover, the expansion of municipal transportation services, cited as one of the major achievements of the city administration, served denizens of the city and its periphery, as well as connecting more towns in the province and region to Bologna. Citizens could quickly reach the farthest quarters of the city, and move throughout the region easier and faster than ever before. As a result, the previous geographic concentration of work, home, and social life into one area of the city began to fracture into different zones in the 1950s. Workers might live in a dormitory apartment block at the edge of the city, go to work in another area, and perhaps pass free time in the center of town, which offered entertainments like movie theaters or window shopping along the main commercial streets.

These changes were also profoundly transforming social institutions, particularly those like the neighborhood *casa del popolo* and the local Catholic parish so closely tied to their territory. Mobility

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160 Giuseppe Campos Venuti, *La terza generazione dell'urbanistica* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1993).

161 An excellent examination of the “modello emiliano” by protagonists in the Bologna administration is Guido Fanti and Gian Carlo Ferri, *Cronache dall'Emilia rossa: l'impossibile riformismo del PCI* (Bologna: Pendragon, 2001).

and social flux introduced new possibilities for citizens, new ways to spend their time, and new interests and concerns. Neighborhood circles transformed to meet these new demands, for example, updating the music played at Saturday evening dances and creating new activities beyond the dancehall and the bar: adult education classes in the evenings and after-school activities for children. Yet others, like the Casa del popolo Tosarelli, embraced the changing shape of the city, new rhythms of life and ways of using free time, and new citizens coming into the city as an opportunity to rethink the casa del popolo and to construct a new building and new organization adapted to the demands of the 1960s.

### *Corticella and the Casa del popolo Tosarelli*

Reflecting on the history of the Casa del popolo Tosarelli on the occasion of its fortieth anniversary in 2003, Vittorio Girotti, member of the center's organizing committee affirmed that,

“Without the Casa del popolo it is impossible to imagine the development of Corticella, maybe it is really true that “the sites of culture and of music have the natural function of enriching the social fabric.” Adapting to new needs and opening to positive novelties, it has furnished spaces for aggregation, useful services for everyone, of noteworthy quality and quantity.”<sup>162</sup>

These remarks point to the intertwined threads of the history of the Casa del popolo and the history of the neighborhood from which it grew, which echo the questions guiding this chapter: what were the relationships between the casa del popolo and the neighborhood, Corticella?<sup>163</sup> The Casa del popolo of

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162 “Senza la Casa del popolo non si può immaginare lo sviluppo di Corticella, forse è proprio vero che “i luoghi della cultura e della musica hanno la naturale funzione di fecondare il tessuto sociale.” Adeguandosi ai nuovi bisogni e aprendosi alle novità positive, ha fornito luoghi di aggregazione, servizi utili per tutti, di qualità e quantità notevoli.” Lanfranco Boccafogli et al., eds., *Casa del popolo Bruno Tosarelli, Corticella, Bologna: 40 dal 1963* (Milano: Teti, 2003).

163 Girotti was paraphrasing Renzo Piano's architect's statement for the Auditorium Parco della Musica, Roma, “Cultural locations, just like musical ones, have the natural ability of enriching the urban texture, stop the city's barbarization and give back that extraordinary quality that it has always had in history.” [I luoghi della cultura, d'altronde, come quelli della musica, hanno la naturale funzione di fecondare il tessuto urbano, sottrarre la città all'imbarbarimento e restituirle quella qualità straordinaria che ha sempre avuto nella storia.] Renzo Piano, “Auditorium Parco della Musica,” accessed April 19, 2011, <http://www.auditorium.com/it/auditorium/renzo-piano>.

Corticella was a social center born at the beginning of the 1960s: shaped by profound social transformations, home to new forms of politics and new generations of members with respect to the “traditional” casa del popolo of the 1950s. Through the example of this Casa del popolo, run by the Circolo ARCI Brecht, I will explore the geographic and social development of the neighborhood and how the circle engaged with these changes, as well as with questions of urban planning and local government.

But if it is impossible to imagine the development of Corticella without the Casa del popolo, the inverse is also true: it is impossible to imagine the history of the Casa del popolo without the history of the development of Corticella in all the social, political, and economic aspects of its changing geography. Before Corticella was a neighborhood at the periphery of the territory of the city of Bologna, it was a small rural town, separated by 7 kilometers of farmland from the center of Bologna, a port on the Navile Canal connecting Bologna to the rich agricultural zones of the Po River Valley to the north.

The shift from rural town to industrial corridor proceeded at an alarming pace. The local economy shifted from earlier industries like brick manufacture and water-powered mills to modern factories and warehouses.<sup>164</sup> In 1948, the Navile Canal was closed to navigation, marking the end of the slow mule-driven passage from Bologna to the surrounding countryside, giving way to the construction of highways and roads.<sup>165</sup> Via Corticella began to develop into an axis of industrial development; machinery producer Sasib, Spa. was established there in 1933, anchoring the development of “packaging valley”, one of Bologna's most important industrial districts.

The population of Corticella, 2,600 at the end of the war, exploded towards the end of the 1950s with an influx of immigration from surrounding rural areas that expanded the population from 3,736 in

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164 The Museo del Patrimonio Industriale is now located in the former brickworks Fornace Galotti, a major employer in the area, which closed in 1966.

165 Roberto Matulli and Carlo Salomoni, *Il canale Navile a Bologna* (Marsilio, 1984).

1953 to 5,411 in 1960.<sup>166</sup> New arrivals to the neighborhood came from nearby rural towns like San Giorgio di Piano, Bentivoglio, and San Pietro in Casale. From the end of World War II to 1971, 2,500 new homes were built, closing the perceived distance between the center of Bologna and Corticella by filling the open agricultural landscape with condominiums and commercial structures.<sup>167</sup> Urbanization was accelerated by public housing programs (PEEP) in Corticella and nearby Dozza and the public-private coordinated developments in Croce Coperta. Figures 1 and 2 below illustrate the transition from sparse rural to dense urban landscape.

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166 The population of Corticella continued to increase steadily, reaching 17,000 in 2003. On the growth of the area, see Paolo Giudicini, *Luoghi metropolitani. Spazi di socialità nel periurbano emergente per un migliore welfare*, ed. Paolo Giudicini and Marco Castrignano (Milano: F. Angeli, 2000), 59.

167 The demographic development of Corticella was particular among Bolognese neighborhoods, in that it remained relatively isolated and unaffected by the population growth that characterized other areas until well into the 1950s. The population remained centered near the canal along the three main streets, Via delle Fonti, Via San Savino and Via di Corticella, with one major exception in the Villaggio Rurale, the fascist era low-income housing project that remained isolated on the other side of the railroad and canal from the rest of the area.



Figure 5. Map of Corticella in 1948, illustrating the main roads and features.



Figure 6. Map of Corticella in 1969, demonstrating the extensive new development of the area.<sup>168</sup>

168 These maps are the author's own renderings, from information gathered from city plans and historical maps: Comune di Bologna, "Consultazione comparata repertorio storico fotopiani e mappe," n.d., <http://sitmappe.comune.bologna.it/fotostoriche/>.

This shift of formerly rural workers to urban industrial jobs and city apartments brought a new constituency to the small existing Casa del popolo in Corticella. People from the countryside of Emilia Romagna were familiar with the traditional casa del popolo, with cooperatives and party headquarters that had long been an important fixture in the rural towns of the area. A leader of the Casa del popolo later recalled that these new residents came from places where “the battle in the rice fields was widespread, where the cooperative movement was highly developed, where [social] aggregation was a fact, acquired years ago”<sup>169</sup> These were people with experiences as *mondine*, the women who took seasonal jobs in the rice fields, and *braccianti*, landless agricultural laborers, both groups that had fought bitter labor struggles to guarantee humane working hours for subsistence wages.<sup>170</sup> They were accustomed to the rhythms of agricultural work, with its seasons of intense, seemingly endless labor alternating with boredom and underemployment. In the 1950s *braccianti* in Romagna were still harvesting grain crops with scythes and hand tools, a process that employed entire villages of men and women for long days in the fields to do the work that one person on a combine harvester machine could accomplish in a few hours.<sup>171</sup> Many fled this grueling life of manual labor for the promise of more comfortable lives: modern factory or construction jobs with more regular hours, that paid well and left them some leisure time, access to new entertainments, to culture and education that had been so far out of reach in the countryside. However, they did not abandon their political education or the institutions, like the casa del popolo, the cooperative, and the socialist and communist parties that had served them so well in their struggles to improve their lives in the countryside. The casa del popolo in particular bridged the gap between rural and urban, providing a structure that new arrivals recognized as a place

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169 Bologna, “Associazionismo culturale e mutamento sociale: le case del popolo nella provincia di Bologna,” 123–124 (appendix).

170 On the struggles of the *mondine*, see Elda Gentili Zappi, *If Eight Hours Seem Too Few* (SUNY Press, 1991).

171 Photos by Ando Gilardi and Enrico Pasquali of the rural labor movements of the 1950s bear this out. Cineteca Comunale di Bologna, “Fondo Miscellanea Bologna 900,” n.d. and Ando Gilardi and Fabrizio Urettini, *Olive & bulloni: Lavoro contadino e operaio nell’Italia del dopoguerra 1950-1962* (Fototeca Storica Nazionale Edizioni, 2009).



where they could spend their free time and meet others from the neighborhood, and also providing access to the cultural and educational programs that helped acculturate immigrants. The newly urban flocked to the casa del popolo, finding in it the support they needed to transition into the city and new ways of life and providing a base of politically active organizers that would help lead and sustain the casa del popolo through the 1960s and beyond.

The new casa del popolo, built in the early 1960s, would harness the desires of these new neighborhood residents, promising to serve this population with modern facilities and activities that would entertain and educate them. The Casa del popolo of Corticella, built in this period of rapid transformation, illustrates how the model of the casa del popolo was repurposed to suit new needs.

*Building the new Casa del popolo*



Figure 7. “Here the Casa del popolo will rise”. Courtesy of the Istituto Gramsci Emilia Romagna<sup>172</sup>

172 Enrico Pasquali, photographer. “[Contadina davanti a un cartello che annuncia la costruzione di una Casa del popolo]”, Photograph. (Bologna: IGER, Fondo Arbizzani, 1958). The location of the photo is unidentified in the archive, but Circolo ARCI Bertolt Brecht, “Casa del popolo Bruno Tosarelli” (Bologna: Tip. Moderna, 1979). makes reference to the sign in a description of the construction of the Casa del popolo in Corticella.

A black and white photo by Enrico Pasquali from the album compiled by the PCI Federation of Bologna frames a scene from the late 1950's at the edge of a city, where new urban construction was spreading into rural areas.<sup>173</sup> A *contadina*, or peasant woman, in the far left foreground looks over her shoulder towards a handwritten sign announcing the construction of a new casa del popolo: "Here will rise the Casa del popolo, with the volunteer labor and the contributions of all the citizens". Her face is turned away from the camera, drawing the viewers' eye across the photo to the sign, in sharp focus, while the figure is slightly blurred. She is dressed simply, without any particular details that would identify her as anyone but a generic *contadina*: a headscarf covers nearly all of her head, which combined with her turned posture hides her facial features. Her dark sweater and skirt blend in with the dark shadowed hedge bordering the construction site. She carries a long stick or tool, the identifying details of which are indistinguishable from the hedge background. She is portrayed less as an individual than as a symbol for the countryside and rural ways of life.

The sign stands out in stark contrast with the blank sky, its message in carefully hand-drawn blocky letters. The composition of the photo emphasizes the importance of the sign: framed at the upper right third of the vertically oriented photo, the gaze of the figure of the *contadina* towards it, and the focus all demonstrate that the photographers' attention here is on the sign. The reaction of the *contadina* is unexamined; we can only see that she is looking towards the sign. It is unclear that she could even read it.

The photo shows us the juxtaposition of this anonymous rural figure and the message announcing the coming of the casa del popolo. We understand through this framing that the construction site was in what was once open countryside. Thus, it captures the encounter of countryside and rural people with the expanding city, the construction sites that pushed further and

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173 See page 14 on Enrico Pasquali's album for the Bologna PCI Federation.

further out into fields surrounding the city. With the encroaching city, rural inhabitants encountered new ways of life, new structures and new possibilities for free time and recreation.

In Corticella, part of the transformation of the neighborhood from rural village to urban periphery was the transformation of the old workers' associations into a new modern *casa del popolo*. There had been a workers' circle in a small rented space on the central piazza of Corticella since 1913, though in Italo Balbo's attacks on cooperatives and associations in the Great Terror of 1922, it was attacked and converted to a *casa del fascio*. At the end of the second World War, the *casa del fascio* was taken over by the CLN and occupied by the socialist and communist parties, a cooperative, and the youth arm of the Popular Front. This older *casa del popolo* had party and labor offices and a bar, but organizers and members felt that they needed more space for organized recreational and social activities as well. Organizers' descriptions of the old space emphasize its inadequacy: they described the ENAL bar as small and "unsanitary", and reported that to hold assemblies they used the cinema down the street.<sup>174</sup>

In the summer of 1958 local activists of the PCI, PSI, the ENAL circle that ran the bar of the old *casa del popolo*, and the center for the labor movement (*Camera del Lavoro*) formed a committee to plan the construction of a larger headquarters. Bruno Tosarelli was elected president of this "Comitato pro-erigenda Casa del popolo". The later decision to name the Casa del popolo after Bruno Tosarelli reflected how important a protagonist he was in the establishment of the structure. Tosarelli was a local artisan, a woodworker, imprisoned in a Saarland concentration camp during the war for desertion after 1943. After he returned to Corticella in 1945 he became involved in local politics and labor organizing and became a leader in the old Casa del popolo.<sup>175</sup> Tosarelli organized support from local organizations, involved architects, engineers, surveyors and builders, many artisans and the

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174 Ibid, 7.

175 "ANPI | Biografia: Bruno Tosarelli," accessed December 6, 2010, <http://anpi.it/b1912/>.

population of Corticella. Other significant figures in the committee were representatives of the organizations that had cohabitated in the older casa del popolo. Italo Caprara, of the local section of the PSI, advocated for the participation of that organization, and eventually drew in Denilla Francia and Nerio Comastri also representing the PSI. The PCI had a number of activists on the committee: Lino Tosarelli, Ariosto Bergamaschi, Gabriele Facchini, Ilario Boselli, Cesare Collina, and Bruna Zacchini. These were both older activists and former partisans, like Lino Tosarelli, as well as new party militants like Bruna Zacchini, who was 22 years old. Representatives of other organizations included the managers of the ENAL circle that ran the bar, Mario Natali and Aurelio Cenacchi; Martino Bondi of the Camera del lavoro; Giuseppe Corticelli, former partisan and representative of the National Association of Italian Partisans (ANPI); and Vittorio Girotti from ARCI Bologna.<sup>176</sup>

The first challenge facing the committee was finding a location for the casa del popolo. This meant purchasing land near the center of the neighborhood, not too distant from the city. The organizing committee considered several options: purchasing and renovating the old casa del popolo, adapting an old sawmill on Via delle Fonti, or purchasing a parcel of land nearby from the local mill, on what would later become Via Bentini but that at the time was open countryside. The committee evaluated the city plans under discussion in the same period, which foresaw the extension of Corticella along via Bentini, a road then under construction. At that point, Corticella was centered around the old piazza, Via delle Fonti, and Via di Corticella (see Figure 1 above).

Though purchasing the land and building from scratch was an expensive choice, the committee decided to place the Casa del popolo in a location that would in the future become the center of the neighborhood. This seemed at the time to be a big risk: moving the Casa del popolo too far from the center of Corticella could isolate it. The committee understood the importance of the location of the Casa del popolo, to be the social center of the neighborhood it needed to be physically situated so as to

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<sup>176</sup> Boccafogli et al., *Casa del popolo Bruno Tosarelli, Corticella, Bologna: 40 dal 1963*, 7–9.

be part of everyday activity. In a neighborhood without other institutions, without a town hall of its own, the Casa del popolo, with its party offices, bar, cooperative, along with the shops, grocers, newsstand of the main piazza made up the vital heart of the area. However, this traffic of people in the piazza would be shifted as the projected new roads and residential and commercial zones reshaped the neighborhood. The committee was able to anticipate these changes based on the 1958 General Urban Development Plan that was in the process of approval by the city council. This strategic thinking was possible because the committee had access to the relevant information, the city plan that was made available to the public, and to assistance in interpreting the information through the connections from the local section of the PCI to the Bologna PCI Federation and the city government. The leadership of the Casa del popolo was able to marshal these connections and extrapolate from city plans to envision and plan for the future shape of the neighborhood.

Thus, in building the Casa del popolo, the members were participating in the construction boom and the processes of urbanization that characterize the period. The architecture of the structure also signals the departure from the functional nineteenth-century rural buildings that made up the town of Corticella up to that point: the unmistakably 1960s modernist structure, blocky concrete shapes and cantilevered upper floors jutting out above the street level. Organizers used the architectural model demonstrating these traits as fundraising tool, displaying it at events to help residents visualize the goal to which they were contributing. The project of building a new casa del popolo offered the opportunity to all the members to engage in the exuberance of the economic miracle by participating in their own modernist construction project, their own form of urban planning, imagining and planning a center to serve their future social and cultural needs. Members of the associations in the old Casa del popolo and residents of the neighborhood contributed small sums, buying in effect, small shares in the project.

While the histories narrated by the leaders of the Circolo Brecht who recounted the history of the Casa del popolo at significant anniversaries as a broadly popular initiative, supported by the entire

population of Corticella, there were also local antagonisms that are glossed over by this triumphant reading. The owners of neighboring properties were concerned about the presence of a *casa del popolo*. There remained a strong prejudice against left wing organizations, “subversives”, from nearby landowners, and they pressured the owners of the lot not to sell.<sup>177</sup> In order to successfully close the purchase the committee members had to hide the identity of the group, purchasing the land as private individuals instead.

Construction began in 1961. New construction methods in the 1960s, which used reinforced concrete as opposed to brick and masonry, and new building codes precluded the kind of volunteer labor that characterized the *casa del popolo* built in the late 40’s and early 50’s. The building project was instead contracted out to a local construction company. This shift in construction methods meant that there could be no shared experience of building by volunteers, as there had been in earlier *casa del popolo*. Rather, local participation in the construction took the form of donations of materials and contributions of money. Organizer Mauro Olivi described these contributions: “The residents in large measure felt that it was something of their own, they all felt the need to give something to build the *Casa del popolo*, profoundly understood as a small piece of socialism.”<sup>178</sup> Former fundraisers for the construction effort recalled the example of Old Gangini, the security guard at the *Villaggio rurale*, the low-income housing development from the 1930s across the railway from the center of Corticella. When organizers went collecting contributions “we went to his house, where none of us had ever been before, not even to sell him a subscription to *l’Unità*; we found him in bed, ill with a fever; he heard us out and responded that because he was retired he couldn’t follow our proposal of 1000 lire for every family, and instead gave us 6000 and told us to come back next year.” The leaders of the *Casa del popolo* laid great emphasis on this generosity and support in their memories of the construction.

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177 Circolo ARCI Bertolt Brecht, “*Casa del popolo Bruno Tosarelli*,” 9.

178 Boccafogli et al., *Casa del popolo Bruno Tosarelli, Corticella, Bologna: 40 dal 1963*, 15.

But unlike the construction of earlier case del popolo, individuals contributing small donations could not cover the enormous resources required. The organizers solicited some significant loans or guarantees of loans from local businesses, like “the businessman Fantuzzi from Funo”, who helped the Casa del popolo obtain a substantial line of credit and served as guarantor. The brickmaking cooperative, Cooperativa operaia fornaciai, furnished bricks on an eased payment plan. The Molino pastificio Corticella, also a manufacturing cooperative (producing pasta) gave the casa del popolo a loan at reduced interest. Other local businesses made further loans, guarantees, and donations to the construction effort.<sup>179</sup> This involvement of businesses in the construction created long-standing relationships between the Casa del popolo of Corticella and the surrounding community, beyond the traditionally working class membership of a casa del popolo. Forty years later, many of the same businesses continued to support special projects of the casa del popolo, for example, funding the publication of a volume on the history of the association in 2003, in exchange for a small advertisement in the book.<sup>180</sup> This opening of the casa del popolo to entrepreneurs and the middle class was a new and important part of the success of the organization in the 1960s and beyond.

Completed in 1964, the new building consisted of four floors, about 450 square meters each. On the ground floor, the bar opened directly onto the street to welcome in passersby, while inside there were a billiards room, a cards room, a game room (arcade) for entertainment and an outdoor courtyard open when the weather was pleasant. The bar was leased out as a commercial enterprise so that it could remain open to the general public and not only to members. In the basement there was a small theater, an office and storage spaces for the bar and party offices. The second floor housed three large meeting rooms and offices for the political parties, PCI and PSI, the youth organizations of the communist party (FGCI) and the socialist party (FGSI), the labor unions, the National Partisans’

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179 Circolo ARCI Bertolt Brecht, “Casa del popolo Bruno Tosarelli.”

180 Boccafogli et al., *Casa del popolo Bruno Tosarelli, Corticella, Bologna: 40 dal 1963*.



Association (ANPI), Women's Union (UDI) and the soccer league (US Calcio), while the third floor was organized as one big multipurpose hall suited to both dancing and conferences, decorated in relative luxury: the walls brightened with red panels and the space lit with Sputnik-style chandeliers.

The construction and inauguration of the Casa del popolo coincided with political shifts that also marked the transition of the organization from the old hardscrabble casa del popolo to a new kind of site. In an interview in the documentary *L'anima libera di Corticella*<sup>181</sup>, Mauro Olivi, longtime member of the Circolo ARCI Brecht and later head of the Bologna PCI Federation, recalled an important political shift that occurred a few years before the Casa del popolo moved into the new building. The PCI section in the Casa del popolo, the Sezione Alfonso Tosarelli collectively read Khrushchev's Secret Speech together. Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's crimes and call to eliminate the cult of personality surrounding him were a "difficult strain", Olivi remembered. He recounted that later, in the process of moving the offices of the organizations that had occupied the old Casa del popolo on Piazza Garibaldi to the newly constructed building, the section members decided to remove the icons of the old Casa del popolo, the portraits of communist leaders that had long hung on the walls, manifesting their commitment to international communism and to Soviet communism. These paintings of Gramsci, Togliatti, Marx, Engels and Stalin, painted by a local amateur artist on panels of cardstock pasted directly to the plaster walls, were laboriously scraped from the walls. After their removal, however, the inks had leached into the plaster, and the face of Stalin remained imprinted in the wall, Olivi recounted with great emphasis.<sup>182</sup> The anecdote, which Olivi repeated in various interviews and memoirs, touches on the symbolic significance of this episode to him, which he recalled in near mystical tones as though describing a Stalinist Shroud of Turin.<sup>183</sup> The group resigned to abandon the portraits, yet Stalin's image persisted until they covered it with several coats of paint. It

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181 Cesare Bastelli, *L'anima libera di Corticella ieri, oggi, domani*, 2006.

182 Ibid.

183 Mauro Olivi, *Il comunista che mangiava le farfalle* (Pendragon, 2011), 82–83.

was a would-be metamorphosis, shedding a Stalinist past but not entirely erasing it. This memory echoes similar experiences of coming to terms with de-Stalinization in the associations and party headquarters, often reluctantly and with great remorse. This process did not necessarily follow from orders from PCI leadership in Rome, but came through discussion with neighbors and colleagues in the *casa del popolo*.

Moving into the new *Casa del popolo* provided this moment of reflection for the activists of Corticella, prompting them to consider the significance of their icons and relics. The new *casa del popolo* represented a new beginning, moving beyond rigid Cold War sectarianism. Olivi correlated leaving the icons to new relationships.

“After that we became more open, more free and capable of innovating in the development of local initiatives. It marked a leap in quality and political maturity, made the Communists of the section Tosarelli more open in our relationships with socialist comrades, with other political forces and organizations that were emerging at the time, for example the [Liberal] Gobetti Cultural Circle or the Popular Council, in which PCI comrades worked alongside the parish priest.”<sup>184</sup>

In the case of the *Casa del popolo* of Corticella, the construction of a new building provided a physical and political rupture with the old *casa del popolo*. The process of building from scratch, moving the old organizations gave the members and leaders a moment to look forward towards new relationships, a newly expanded neighborhood, new kinds of activities. Elsewhere this transformation was not so literal and concrete, but nonetheless, organizations that survived the transformation in free time moving into the 1960s had to adapt to new demands and expectations of their memberships.

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184 Boccafogli et al., *Casa del popolo Bruno Tosarelli, Corticella, Bologna: 40 dal 1963*, 16–17.

### *Youth and new expectations*

In December 1962, the directing committee of the Casa del popolo distributed an announcement for a scheduled assembly to discuss the foundation of an ARCI circle to help achieve the founding principles of the Casa del popolo: to advance social, cultural and recreational developments in the neighborhood. The announcement invited “all the youths and citizens that are interested in debating ideas, in film, theater, sport, literature and everything that is social progress” to participate in the discussion. Addressing the founding efforts in this way, to “Youth, Citizens of Corticella”, explicitly seeking the input of youth, the committee established one of the most important characteristics of this social center, which proved to be one of its greatest strengths. The involvement of youth also introduced tensions, as generational differences became more pronounced in the 1960's, as I will discuss below.

The ARCI circle, which took the name Circolo Bertolt Brecht, became the most important group in the management of the structure, taking over coordination of all the activities of the Casa del popolo Tosarelli. The circle programmed a variety of types of activities: debates, theater, cinema and dance for example. The dance hall, “Candilejas” was extremely successful and turned a profit, allowing the circle to pay off construction debts and to subsidize the other cultural activities. However, it also attracted what organizers considered an undesirable element. The hall maintained a strict dress code to discourage “teddy boys” from disrupting the “good quality” dance evenings.<sup>185</sup> Not all youth presences were welcome. Through other activities, cultural programs for example, the casa del popolo did attract young people and satisfy their new expectations for how they wanted to spend their free time.

One such activity of the Circolo Brecht is well documented in the records of adult education courses held in the Casa del popolo. In 1965, the circle held the course, *La società industriale*, a

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<sup>185</sup> Bologna, “Associazionismo culturale e mutamento sociale: le case del popolo nella provincia di Bologna,” 273.

survey touching on an array of themes: contemporary science and technology, the family, the status of women, urban planning, emigration, free time, youth and the elderly, education, contemporary democracy, social progress, welfare, and alienation. Because these courses were authorized and funded by the Minister of Public Education, they were subject to more rigid control and the documentation produced contains more rich detail than many other activities in circles, much of which was never preserved in archives.

The course had its origins far from Corticella, but was brought to the casa del popolo through the ARCI network. The idea for the initiative and a sample syllabus came from a similar course developed in Milan: in 1963, the Milanese Società Umanitaria and the Association of Cooperative Circles collaborated to create a program of cultural decentralization. Over the course of 1963, the Società Umanitaria undertook a study of the state of adult education in Italy, sending out survey-takers to circles and cooperatives. Following the survey, they developed an adult education course intended for groups of 30 to 50, which would travel a circuit of local circles. From its inception, the course was conceived as a survey of contemporary problems, using films, books, music, theater, debates. The courses were funded by the Ministry of Public Instruction, local governments, the circle or cooperative itself and an enrollment fee paid by students, all of which provided for payment for instructors and organizational costs. The provincial ARCI Bologna office coordinated with the Società Umanitaria to bring these courses to ARCI circles in Bologna.

The final report for the version of the course taught at the Casa del popolo Tosarelli provided a complete list of participants, their ages and professions and levels of education. The members and participants in the course were mostly local: of 45 students enrolled, 38 lived in Corticella, 5 in nearby neighborhoods and 2 from the center of Bologna. The group was young, ranging in age from 14 to 61 but the vast majority (78%) of participants was under 25. Only eight of the 45 were women, mostly under 21 years old. Most participants had not finished secondary school and nearly a third had never

completed middle school. The older participants in particular had very little educational experience: forty-one year old Maria Tolomelli had a second grade education, and the oldest three members of the class, with ages 39, 41 and 61 had only ten years of schooling between them.<sup>186</sup> Forty percent identified themselves as workers, a quarter as white-collar employees, another quarter as students, while the remaining few were unemployed, retired or disabled.<sup>187</sup> While the group was a mix of ages, employment class and educational experience, the majority were young workers that had not completed secondary school.

The names of participants in this course also reappear in other documents about other activities and in the leadership of the Casa del popolo for many years later. For example, Mauro Olivi, the member of the organizing committee quoted above, was also a student in the course. For Olivi the Casa del popolo Tosarelli was the site where he launched a political career, beginning in the ARCI circle and the local PCI and culminating in a seat in Parliament (1976-1992) and in the leadership of Legacoop Bologna, the provincial branch of the national federation of cooperatives. For Olivi courses like *La società industriale* and debates in the Casa del popolo constituted an important part of his political education. For many others as well, such experiences in the casa del popolo often reinforced further participation, linking participants to the Casa del popolo for decades.

The survey led these students through a series of major contemporary issues, many of which anticipated problems that would come to the foreground of political contestation a few years later. For example, a class on the educational system asked students to reflect on the relationship between school and society, using as material for discussion a documentary on the Fiat technical training school in Lingotto, while a class on the theme of political participation by the popular classes hinged on questions of workers' full participation in political, economic, social and cultural life. Another class

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<sup>186</sup> The difference between the levels of education between younger and older individuals in the group was in part a consequence of a more general trend, produced by the levels of obligatory education shifting upwards.

<sup>187</sup> Aldo Alfonso, "Relazione del corso per educazione degli adulti sul tema: 'La società industriale'" (UISP: Archivi ARCI, Box 1966, Bologna, February 10, 1966).

introduced the issue of the organization of work and its social implications, asking, “What are the fundamental goals of the scientific organization of work?” and “What does “alienation” mean?” Instructors paid particular attention to affluent society and questions of welfare: a class on youth and the elderly focused on the social services targeted at those stages of life, while one on changing family structure and women’s emancipation also made social services central to the discussion. The transformation of the city was also a topic of discussion, in a class on urban planning and the expansion of the city. A glancing effort to explain scientific and technological change, one class provided basic explanations of atomic theory and its applications, departing from “How can we represent an atom?” Finally, a class dedicated to free time and mass communications asked students to consider the “free time industry” and mass communications, topics particularly dear to ARCI. Thus, the course provided a way for students to examine some of the sectors of society undergoing rapid transformation, and tried to furnish them with some basic tools of analysis.<sup>188</sup>

The instructors for the course were mostly young, considered experts in the various fields corresponding to the section of the course they taught. Many had connections to local organizations allied with the Casa del popolo Tosarelli, with ARCI, or with the PCI. Giancarlo Ferri, for example, a member of parliament from the PCI, presented “The struggle for participation in power by the popular masses: citizen participation in political, economic, and cultural life”. Others were academics at the University of Bologna. For example, Giuseppe Longo was a nuclear physicist and had just completed his graduate work at the University of Moscow and the University of Bologna; he explained the basic concepts of atomic structure to the group. Milena Manini and Franco Frabboni, also of the University of Bologna, were experts in pedagogy, invited to present themes relating to work and leisure. The organizers of the course were able to draw on local institutions to find highly qualified presenters to lead the classes. Many of these instructors also formed lasting connections to the Casa del popolo

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188 Ibid, 4–10.

Tosarelli. Franco Frabboni, for example, later experimented with afterschool programs in the structure, developing educational models that were eventually adopted in municipal welfare programs throughout the city.<sup>189</sup> Activities like the course *La società industriale* built connections between the Casa del popolo and individuals and institutions throughout Bologna and further afield and provided a fertile terrain for experimentation and exchange.

Students were asked at the end of the course to evaluate the teaching methods and the themes of the class. The evaluations all suggest that the students enjoyed the class discussions and craved even more time to discuss. Class discussion was not a standard part of Italian schooling, and thus students' positive response indicated that they were excited by this innovation. Asked which topics they'd like to see included in the future, they all suggested a class on sexuality, a topic that might have presented legal problems, given the laws (until 1970) that outlawed dissemination of information about contraception on the grounds that it violated public morals. This desire for information and discussion of sexuality signaled the entrance of entirely new expectations and demands from the youth. Many students credited the course with helping them to develop critical skills. This theme of developing critical skills, awakening a critical consciousness was a fundamental pillar of the didactic mission of ARCI (and of the left more generally) in the 1960s, a theme that will recur in later chapters. What these responses to the course make clear is a longing for information and discussion, expectations that were not being fully met in the participants' lives outside the casa del popolo.

The course *La società industriale*, like many other adult education courses held in ARCI circles, offered a group of individuals with generally limited educational experience an opportunity to learn from professors and experts and to discuss themes of contemporary significance. Their voluntary engagement, their desire to learn was met with the organizational strengths of the Circolo Brecht and

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189 Franco Frabboni, "Fu un grande laboratorio: Intervista a Franco Frabboni," in *Casa del popolo Bruno Tosarelli, Corticella, Bologna: 40 dal 1963*, ed. Lanfranco Boccafogli et al. (Milano: Teti, 2003), 80–81.

the logistical support of the ARCI network. The course gave neighborhood residents a way to link their own experiences to wider changes.

The course *La società industriale* was only one of the activities in the Casa del popolo that tied the neighborhood to the wider city and wider world, in ways the leaders of the old neighborhood casa del popolo could never have imagined. The pilot afterschool program for middle school students, as mentioned above, used the Casa del popolo as space for experiments in education, linking the Casa to the University, through Professor Franco Frabboni, creator of the program, and to the city government, which sponsored the activity and later adopted the model as a citywide service. Moreover, the parents of the children involved mobilized to form a committee for the reform of the educational system, linking up with the critiques of the student movements of the failures of education to overcome class inequalities and provide opportunities for students from all backgrounds.<sup>190</sup> These new articulations of political demands, developing simultaneously elsewhere in Italy and in Europe, in Corticella were formulated through activities in the Casa del popolo.

The Casa del popolo thus remained a political point of reference, but for entirely new kinds of politics. It became the local seat of globally oriented movements. Groups organized around the movement for peace in Vietnam: in 1967 and 1968, the Circolo Brecht and the catholic youth group “Della Rovere” jointly organized vigils and torch-lit processions through the neighborhood. Groups in the Casa del popolo created posters and banners to inform local residents about events in Vietnam, Spain, Mozambique, Greece, the Middle East, Chile, and Iran.<sup>191</sup> While the Casa del popolo was perhaps no longer geographically central to the lives of denizens of the neighborhood, it remained politically central by adapting to the new concerns of youth, of students and parents, and by becoming the hub through which individuals could connect to larger movements.

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190 Circolo ARCI Bertolt Brecht, “Casa del popolo Bruno Tosarelli,” 19.

191 Bologna, “Associazionismo culturale e mutamento sociale: le case del popolo nella provincia di Bologna,” 274.



## *Conclusions*

In 1978, the Civic Center of the Quartiere Corticella was inaugurated, forming a municipal center of public services and decentralized local government that combined space for the neighborhood council, city registry office, a library, bar and gymnasium. In many ways, it was an evolution of the model of the casa del popolo, grander in scale and legitimated by city statutes that delegated administrative functions to the neighborhood council. In fact, the neighborhood assemblies to discuss the plans for the Civic Center before its construction were held in the Casa del popolo Tosarelli.<sup>192</sup> The neighborhood by that point was completely transformed, characterized by high-rise public housing and massive shopping centers, new schools, and a well-equipped public sports complex. These municipal structures multiplied the spaces where denizens could pass their free time. While in 1958, the Casa del popolo was the only center of cultural and recreational activity, twenty years later it was only one of many. Yet the Casa del popolo had played an important role in ushering in this change, piloting programs like afterschool activities and adult education that the local government used as models in its expansion of social services. Most importantly, the Casa del popolo Tosarelli had served as the space where neighborhood residents expressed their increasing expectations, imagining and creating for themselves the services that they wanted.

In this chapter, I have argued that the Casa del popolo in Corticella was an expression of the new prosperity of the 1960s, part of the changing landscape and demographic shifts in the city. It represented the novel and growing expectations of newly urban residents and became an important site where they could express and satisfy those expectations. The example of the adult education course *La società industriale* demonstrates how the ARCI circle in the casa del popolo helped fulfill nonmaterial desires – the wish to understand the big shifts in the world around them and to acquire some critical

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192 Circolo ARCI Bertolt Brecht, “Casa del popolo Bruno Tosarelli,” 21.

skills with which to confront them. Through such activities, the casa del popolo became a center for understanding social transformations and re-organizing political responses to them.

### ***Partisans for a “Cinema Libero”***

ARCI’s 1959 pamphlet for affiliated circles, *ARCI, il circolo, il tempo libero*, included an entire section “On the utilization of the instruments of mass culture” in a chapter that serves as a practical manual for programming the cultural and recreational activities of a circle: planning and setting agendas, use of space, leadership, etc. The instruments of mass culture that it described were both the older cultural activities of that had long been a part of activity in case del popolo and cultural clubs: musical groups, amateur theater, a club library, popular festivities, and sports as well as newer introductions to the circles: television and cinema. These new categories of activity were disorienting, not only as new forms of cultural consumption for circles, for which no clear policy or theory had yet been mapped out, but also in legal-administrative terms. An “impenetrable jungle” of contradictory orders regulated film projections and public television viewing in terms of censorship, public order, and copyright.<sup>193</sup>

While cinema in general was hardly new, the technologies required for these activities, film projectors and 16mm film reels, were available to the majority of circles for the first time. This was a result of the postwar expansion of the use of 16mm film with optical soundtracks, which unlike the 35mm standard used in commercial cinemas, could be viewed on a simplified

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193 ARCI, *ARCI, il circolo, il tempo libero* (Roma: Tip. Sicca, 1959), 48.

and portable film projector requiring little technical skill to operate. By 1962, the prices for 16mm projectors were around 400,000 lire, equivalent to about 4000 euros in 2006, inexpensive compared to the massive and technologically challenging 35mm machines, though still a considerable sum for the local clubs. Moreover, the catalogs of films available in 16mm format expanded after 1948, due largely to the demand from small informal cinemas like those in circles. The process of reducing a standard 35mm film was expensive and was predicated first on a distributor negotiating and paying for the rights to reproduce the film, then commissioning the technical process of reprinting the film in the smaller format. The expense of reproduction rights was proportional to the amount of time that had passed since the original release of a movie, thus 16mm catalogs were padded with movies that had already been shown in second-run commercial cinemas. Agencies catering entirely to the 16mm market popped up throughout Italy, as the number of groups requesting 16mm reels grew, and the agencies slowly built up larger catalogs. Once the purview of large, wealthier associations with dedicated movie theaters, built-in projectors and screens and either an in-house projectionist or one hired for film activities, with inexpensive 16mm projectors and easy to use reels, nearly any group could acquire the technology for film viewing.

By the early 1960's film projections had become one of the most broadly popular activities among circles. Film rental companies and agencies in provincial or regional capitals provided groups with the reels of film, projectors and projectionists necessary to set up viewings ranging from makeshift outdoor events in a piazza, in which the audience brought their own chairs and watched the film projected on a bed sheet, to showings equal to the commercial movie theaters in the fully equipped theaters of some of the larger case del popolo, with large screens and enough plush seats for hundreds of viewers to sit comfortably. The organization of film

showings often translated directly into an increase in enrollment in the associations. In many small towns in Emilia Romagna, the *casa del popolo* that were equipped with theaters with a projection booth boasted membership rates at greater than 50% of the total population of the town. However, the film activities also created new challenges for the organizers of associations. First and foremost among these challenges were the logistics of the activities: choices of films were limited, and while the availability of 16mm films was in expansion after 1948, circles often exhausted the catalogues of titles locally available to them and struggled to find suppliers elsewhere with new films, at affordable prices. The process of locating films usually involved multiple passes of correspondence, inquiries, referrals, settling agreements, and arranging payments. Finally obtaining films in small towns sometimes meant sending an association member by train to personally pick up reels, or arranging courier transport and insurance. Moreover there was little coordination between groups: neighboring circles often used the same rental agencies, and often replicated the same movie shown nearby at around the same time, without sharing any of the transportation or rental costs. They did not communicate with each other about scheduling, and competed for audiences for events held at the same times. When the organizers of local groups did locate films beyond the catalogs of second-run titles readily available from agencies, they rarely shared that information with other groups. Hundreds of cinema circles throughout Emilia Romagna were each acting in isolation, each individually sustaining the time and effort of obtaining the information necessary to organize themselves and the costs of their film viewings.

To make the matter of organizing film activities even more difficult, many circles were subject to tight surveillance and frequent obstruction by local authorities. Projecting films while staying within the rigid limitations for not-for-profit regulations, copyright law, and police

pretenses to control of public order was extremely challenging. Associations were subjected to arbitrary interpretations of regulations meant to protect commercial cinemas from unauthorized competition. The local agents of the national performance rights organization, the Italian Society of Authors and Editors (SIAE)<sup>194</sup>, often made claims to public performance fees above and beyond the fees that cinema circles rightfully owed, the reduced fees established by law for private not for profit groups.

It was precisely this type of logistical disorganization and legal confusion that the national organizers of ARCI had envisioned resolving in establishing the organization. ARCI recognized the difficulties that circles faced in organizing film activities, as early publications attest, from its earliest days, though the process of organizing a policy and concrete program of action in the cinema sector did not take off until after 1962. The pamphlet *ARCI, il circolo, il tempo libero* refers circles to the Italian Federation of Cinematographic Circles (FICC)<sup>195</sup>, with which ARCI had established a partnership in 1957, for instructions on operational questions: what constituted private and not for profit projections; how to avoid having to obtain approval by the public authorities; how to respond to demands that circles adhere to the special list of films authorized by the government for use in cinema clubs; and for suggestions on programming and information on the availability of films.<sup>196</sup>

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194 Società italiana degli autori ed editori

195 The FICC, Federazione Italiana dei Circoli Cinematografiche, was founded in 1947 by representatives of large cinema clubs in major cities throughout Italy. These FICC clubs were most often led by dedicated cineastes, professional film critics and directors, for the viewing of films as art and the discussion of cinematographic techniques. Many proved to be important in the education of filmmakers. A comprehensive history of the early years of the FICC and the life of one very active cinema club in Suzzara, a town outside of Mantova, by documentarian, former FICC leader and former head of the PCI Milan Federation's cinema office, Virgilio Tosi, *Quando il cinema era un circolo: la stagione d'oro dei cineclub : 1945-1956* (Marsilio, 1999).

196 ARCI, *ARCI, il circolo, il tempo libero*.

ARCI activities in the cinema sector began as a series of piecemeal responses to crises in individual circles, to requests for help in organizing film activities, to calls for logistical aid. Through a series of conferences and concrete initiatives enlisting the experience of provincial and local leadership and the network of intellectuals close to ARCI, this spotty response evolved into a vision of an alternative to the existing commercial production, distribution and consumption of film. While this vision was never fully realized as an alternative circuit operating alongside the film industry and commercial distribution, it did produce experimentation with direct interventions in the market for films and with the development of alternative models of consumption.

This chapter describes the evolution of this position: the elaboration of a critique of the Italian film industry and its relationship with the public, a conception of the role of movies as products of a culture industry that “conditioned” public taste, and the search for solutions to this problem of the popular masses conditioned to desire what leaders considered to be bad quality movies. It details some of the direct interventions in the infrastructure of the film industry at both the national and local levels. It analyzes the form these interventions took, and the tensions that emerged between ARCI leaders, who urged circles to watch “quality” films and circles that resisted ARCI’s judgments.

### ***Expanding access to Film***

ARCI efforts in the field of cinema regarded first access to film, expanding the use of film in clubs and circles beyond those specifically organized as cinema clubs. This extension of the capacity to show films outside of commercial cinemas, however, met with resistance from copyright regulators, commercial cinema interests and police, who attempted to impede informal private viewings. Film viewings in clubs were perceived as disruptions to a tightly regulated,

closed system of commerce, viewed as suspect or even criminal by the interests involved in the cinema business or its regulation.

Thick files in the ARCI archives labeled “Cinema” contain hundreds of letters from circles describing the problems that plagued their attempts to organize film projections. Many of the initial inquiries and complaints to the national ARCI directors involved the Italian Authors and Publishers Association, the SIAE. The SIAE holds a state monopoly, solely authorized to act as an intermediary between copyright holders and the public in granting permissions and licenses for the use of copyrighted works, collecting performance fees and distributing royalties. SIAE agents act as copyright police of sorts: they are authorized to check for violations of copyright and verify that public performances (films, music, published and broadcast works) are properly authorized and that relative fees and taxes have been paid. At its establishment in 1882, the SIAE was concerned mainly with policing theaters and printing presses to prevent piracy of literary, operatic and theatrical works. Local agents were able to physically patrol these places, checking performance schedules and controlling registration stamps on librettos and scripts. With the introduction of new forms of mass distribution of works of art, radio, cinema and later television, the SIAE entered a crisis: unclear and often contradictory directions from the central SIAE bureaucracy in Rome, and equally confusing legislation created a situation in which the provincial SIAE offices and their agents enforced very different interpretations of copyright law.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> The history of the SIAE merits a much closer look. It is a corporatist institution still fully intact after 1945, lumping together authors and publishers into a single entity that has the mission of protecting the rights of both groups, without acknowledging any conflict of interest. The SIAE has resisted almost all attempts to revise copyright policy (to include provisions for fair use or address orphaned works, for example) remaining static since the early 1940s with the exception of provisions recognizing new forms of intellectual property, such as computer programs. And like many other entities granted state monopolies, the organization has become an institution that seems to have the main objective of securing privileges for its directors, provoking perennial scandal and periodic plans of reform that come to nothing.



In the legal murkiness that allowed uneven application of SIAE rules, it was small clubs for workers that often bore the brunt of excessive demands by SIAE agents. In 1958, the head of the provincial ARCI office in Modena, Silvano Righi, wrote to the national ARCI office requesting help in resolving a clash with the SIAE. In Modena the SIAE agents claimed that film projections were only allowed in specifically constituted Cinema Circles, not general cultural or recreational groups, and demanded that such circles charge substantial membership fees that would go in large part to the SIAE. ARCI circles in Modena were too small, with budgets too limited to meet such requirements; they were not affiliated with the nationally sanctioned organizations (ENAL or ENDAS) nor were they licensed by the State Police (Questore). The groups in question were simply little local groups that were put together ad hoc to provide recreational and cultural programming for their neighborhoods.<sup>198</sup> What is more, the leaders of these groups did not have easy access to legal counsel or the appropriate information to counter the SIAE agents' claims. Silvano Righi, the president of ARCI for the province of Modena, while certainly a capable leader, as his long career in ARCI, then local politics and trade unionism attest, had only an elementary school education. He wrote to the national ARCI offices to inquire if it was even permitted for the circles to show movies for free to members. Cultural associations in fact enjoyed constitutional protection of their rights to show films or any other cultural form, provided it be not for profit and for members only. The capacity of the leadership of the circles, many of whom were workers with limited education, to respond to the authority of the SIAE agents was hampered by the difficulty of navigating the complex tax codes and legal jargon that agents cited.

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At the time of writing the agency is embroiled in yet another scandal involving grave financial mismanagement, fraudulent real estate transactions in favor of managers, and illegally creating pension funds for members by skimming from enrollment payments.

198 Silvano Righi and ARCI Nazionale, "5 Aprile 1958" (UISP: Archivi ARCI, Box 1958, 1958).

The national ARCI office responded to Righi's questions with a reprint of clear legal guidelines compiled by the Italian Federation of Cinematographic Circles (FICC). The SIAE did have a legal monopoly on collecting licensing fees for performance, but had no legal authority to impose such structural conditions on the entities operating a movie projection or other performance. Yet in many towns, the pretense of the SIAE agents to de-authorize circles had a chilling effect on film projections in circles. The national ARCI leadership distributed counter-information through letters directly with circles, on questions of laws relevant to circles' rights to show films, and the limits of the jurisdiction of the SIAE to regulate this activity.

While the SIAE pressure on neighborhood circles was menacing, circles that showed films had even more formidable foes in commercial movie theater operators, who in many cases successfully pressured the police to bring criminal charges against circles and their leaders for the crime of illegally operating a cinema. Moreover, they often brought civil suit, claiming damages to their own businesses from what they claimed was illegal competition.

Such a legal battle unfolded in the case of the Circolo Amici del Cinema in Medicina, a typical example of a small town circle in Emilia Romagna, but also a groundbreaking group. Many circles in nearby areas looked to the example of Medicina as they planned their own film activities. Medicina is a small town in the farmlands 15 miles east of Bologna. Of 10,000 inhabitants in the early 1960s, 4800 were members of the large Casa del popolo.<sup>199</sup> The projections by the cinema circle were the most popular of the activities in the Casa del popolo.

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199 Biondi, "Relazione Biondi sul convegno culturale nazionale dell'ARCI," 51.



**Figure 8. The theater of the Casa del popolo of Medicina. Courtesy of the Istituto Gramsci Emilia Romagna<sup>200</sup>**

A photo from a study of case del popolo commissioned by the PCI Federation of Bologna shows the new movie theater of the Casa del popolo of Medicina, a large modern theater with several hundred seats. The photo shows the theater empty; the PCI commissioned the photographer to document the structures of case del popolo and associations in the province, not associationism. Thus, the photo shows the size of the theater, the large screen set into a stage that could presumably be used for other purposes, heavily curtained exit doors at either side of the hall, and windowed balconies with more seating along either side of the theater. It is without ornament, unlike a commercial movie theater, instead simply a functional space that could seat an audience of several hundred. It is remarkable, however, that a town of 10,000 had such a lively associational life that with members' donations it could sustain the large investment, necessary to build a full movie theater.

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<sup>200</sup> Enrico Pasquali, "Il cinema della Casa del popolo di Medicina" (Bologna: IGER, Fondo Arbizzani, n.d.).

The cinema of the Casa del popolo of Medicina did not, however, remain functional for very long. In 1961, the proprietors of the Cinema Garibaldi and the Cinema Ariston of Medicina brought civil suit in Budrio against Armando Sarti, the president of the Circolo, charging him with operating a cinema without authorization and therefore constituting illegal competition with their businesses. Commercial cinema operators, indeed operators of any public space of entertainment, were required to obtain licenses from the police, to comply with censorship laws, to submit to inspection to verify standards set by the Commission for Vigilance of Theaters, and a host of other bureaucratic controls, to which non-public spaces like private associations were not subject. The *Pretore* of Budrio ordered the arrest of Sarti, fines of 40,000 lire and 100,000 lire of damages for the civil suit, and the closure of the cinema. The verdict rested in the character of the projections – whether they were public or not.<sup>201</sup> Private projections, meaning limited to members only and free of charge, were a protected right. Public screenings fell under the jurisdiction of the police, for which it was necessary to acquire a “*nulla osta*” (“no impediment”) from the central police station. While the Italian constitution protected the rights of voluntary associations to organize cultural and recreational activities, the State Police (Polizia di Stato) under the Minister of the Interior, an office held by Christian Democrats uninterruptedly from 1946 until 1995, claimed jurisdiction over any public meetings and events and demanded formal requests for authorization which could be denied at the discretion of the police commissioner, on the grounds that public events could present dangers to public order and safety.

The principle problem in Medicina was that the courts did not recognize the membership process of the audience members as valid: they had simply paid for a membership card directly

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<sup>201</sup> Pretore was a judicial office, presiding over civil proceedings.

at the door and were declared members.<sup>202</sup> Membership, the courts deemed, should be a process that required approval by a committee, not granted on the spot. In other words, a club in which anyone could be a member was not a private association. The Tribunal of Bologna upheld the decision of the Pretore of Budrio at appeal, and Armando Sarti was fined and the cinema ordered closed.

The episode put two models of cinema at odds: the cinema of the Casa del popolo, built as a cooperative effort, financed by a voluntarily constituted group of mostly workers and agricultural laborers versus the commercial cinemas Ariston and Garibaldi, privately owned enterprises operated by middle-class business people. The cooperative model was suspect for exactly the characteristics that made it cooperative: it was not operated for profit and anyone could be a member. By its very definition, a casa del popolo is of the people, open to the public. In towns like Medicina, where nearly half of all residents were card-carrying members of the casa del popolo, anyone who had the desire to join was welcomed. The only way for such a poor, working class group to afford creating a cinema was to aggregate as many members as possible, accumulating the small membership fees. The courts on the other hand, imposed a logic that is alien to popular associations, using the standard of bourgeois cultural societies, which were “private” in the sense that they used formal membership procedures and approval processes to exclude the public. The casa del popolo defied this dichotomy of public space and private association, consciously as open and inclusive as possible, while bending to legal requirements by allowing only members.

Similar episodes of forced closures, seized equipment and criminal charges were repeated in Fabbrico (Reggio Emilia) in 1957 at the Circolo Amici del Cinema, in Reggio Emilia in 1959

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202 Tribunale di Bologna, “Testo della sentenza del Tribunale di Bologna riguardante le proiezioni cinematografiche organizzate dai circoli,” *Le ore libere* no. 14–15 (1962): 52–57..

at the Circolo Pushkin, in Forlì at the Circolo del Cinema Ronco Lido in 1960, again in Reggio Emilia in 1961 at the Circolo ARCI Pistilli, in Molinella in 1961, six different circles in Modena, among many other examples.<sup>203</sup> The vast majority of the charges were overturned, found to be based on the thinnest of pretenses. In one case, the only evidence against the cinema club was the testimony of a police officer who was convinced that he had heard the sound of coins in a wooden box from outside the entrance, deducing that the circle was charging illegal admissions fees.<sup>204</sup>

It was not accidental that this rash of closures took place in “Red Emilia”. The members of the Casa del popolo of Medicina and of many of the other groups were familiar with police harassment: the Casa del popolo of Medicina was evicted in 1954, and the members had rebuilt a new structure, including the cinema. The hostility of the police is part of a larger pattern of harassment that had shifted from the blanket anticommunism of the early 1950s to interventions in matters of copyright and competition. Just as at the height of tensions in 1954, when Mario Scelba resurrected fascist deeds of ownership to evict circles, political persecution adopted a legal pretext: questioning the legitimacy of the groups as not-for-profit and as members-only. And as in 1954, central Italy was singled out as an area of concern.

In January 1961, the Minister of Tourism and Entertainment, Alberto Folchi (DC), took explicit aim in at the film clubs of Tuscany and Emilia, a “worrisome” development, in his

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203 Pretura di Reggio Emilia, “Testo della sentenza della Pretura di Reggio Emilia riguardante le proiezioni cinematografiche nei locali dei circoli,” *Le ore libere* III, no. 2 (1959): 33–34. and Pretura di Forlì, “Testo della sentenza della pretura di Forlì riguardante le proiezioni cinematografiche nei circoli,” *Le ore libere* 8–9 (1961): 49. and Biondi, “Relazione Biondi sul convegno culturale nazionale dell’ARCI.”

204 Bologna, “Associazionismo culturale e mutamento sociale: le case del popolo nella provincia di Bologna,” 146.

words.<sup>205</sup> In a circular distributed to local authorities throughout Italy, he asked for particular vigilance of cinema circles:

“It has been called to the attention of this Minister the worrisome development that, especially in Emilia and Tuscany, “pseudo circoli del cinema” have undertaken which, though formally adopting non economic ends: the diffusion of culture by way of cinematography, in fact their intent is instead private economic gain, in the form of illegal competition with commercial cinemas which, as is well-known, are under a complex set of fiscal obligations that are notoriously heavy and under requirements that concentrate on the observation of numerous legal dispositions that aim to assure the safety of the spectators and order in public movie theaters, etc.”<sup>206</sup>

Folchi’s objection rested on his view of the illegitimacy of the circles claim to non-profit status, shirking the admittedly heavy bureaucracy that he held necessary to protect the public. This opening paragraph of the circular suggested that these cineclubs are taking advantage of their status as cultural not-for-profit organizations, cheating in some way. Folchi’s language betrayed a deep suspicion of the circles of central Italy: distrust in the “formal legal aspect”, the “external guise of cinema circles” that circles used to legitimate their activities. While these groups invoked protections meant to guarantee liberties of association and culture in private cultural associations, Folchi suggested that they should not be entitled to such protections. What they were doing was not culture: they were “pseudo” cinema circles. Folchi’s argument that Tuscan and Emilian circles were illegitimate rested again the issue of the use of “public” spaces and

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205 Christian Democrat Alberto Folchi served as Ministero of Tourism and Entertainment (Ministro del Turismo e dello Spettacolo) in the governments Fanfani III, Fanfani IV and Leone I, from July 1960 to December 1963.

206 “Attività cinematografiche organizzate dai circoli: circolare del Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo,” *Le ore libere* 8–9 (March 1961): 44–45..

limitation to card-carrying members. These were the fulcrums on which police could exert authority. Folchi urged every Prefecture and local office of the State Police to attentively monitor the situation to make certain that the film projections by the *circoli del cinema* are free, private and exclusive to members. Moreover, he demanded that the police investigate every single event of film projections. He ordered them to look for hints of violations: cases in which the number of spectators exceeds the number of members, or any kind of entrance fees. He also described less obvious circumstances that would in his estimation indicate a public space: continuous afternoon or evening shows; types of films and the mode of rental similar to the films and distributors used by private enterprise; and advertising for shows.

In cases in which the police found one or more of these indications, Folchi urged the police to prosecute them for opening of a cinematographic theater without the prescribed “*nulla osta*” from the Minister of Entertainment and to make criminal charges of the violation of the penal code, regarding the illegal opening of a place of public spectacle. Minister Folchi made special note of the cinema of Medicina, which he identified as an illegally constructed cinema, as the type of case that should be prosecuted. Folchi offered no examples of actual profit, nor were there any cases in which the organizers of circles were actually found to make a profit through of cinema circles. Yet Folchi urged the police to be vigilant, investigating all cinema circles as suspect, dedicating resources to police the competition between commercial cinemas and voluntary associations.

The remainder of the memo discussed how to bring circles to heel, detailing the procedure to be enforced for such clubs to request authorization from the State and the police for any activities. The message conveys Folchi’s vexation with not having control over circles showing movies. These groups were organizing activities without asking permission. They



*should*, he suggested, just watch the films the government has approved for them, pointing out that if they would just follow the simplified procedure of picking from the list of films that the Director General of Entertainment had approved, the police would give authorization. Folchi's introduction of the issue of authorizations suggests that his concern was not only the illegitimacy of the circles' claim to non-profit status, but also that they were skirting his office's control over which films cultural circles could watch.

What is more, Folchi's territorial specificity, calling for greater vigilance of the cinema circles of Tuscany and Emilia suggested a suspicion of the class and politics of the cinema circles in question. Christian Democrats had often repeated their concern for the communist hold on clubs in the "Red Belt". This memo represented a new variation on the indirect blows to the left over liquor licenses and property rights, this time over film.

Folchi's recommendations to the police produced an outcry from ARCI and affiliated circles. *Le ore libere* published a point-by-point rebuttal of Folchi's characterization of cinema circles, calling for resistance against such attacks.<sup>207</sup> Meanwhile the national ARCI leadership responded to numerous letters from concerned leaders of circles, wishing to program movie showings in their clubs but alarmed at these prosecutions. Over the course of 1961, the majority of cases against circles were thrown out, their leaders absolved of wrongdoing, and prosecutions came to a halt. ARCI's position of defense against the challenges of the local authorities and the SIAE gradually gave way. This freed ARCI to respond to other problems in the extension of access to cinema activities, beginning with the basic logistical challenges that circles faced: obtaining films and projectors. But expanding access introduced a new concern: which films were the circles consuming. Newly founded cinema offices at both the national ARCI and in

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207 "Attività cinematografiche organizzate dai circoli," *Le ore libere* 8-9 (1961): 45-48.

several of the larger provinces began to develop policies that envisioned programs of educating the public taste, building alternatives to the commercial distribution of films and alternative models of consumption of mass culture.

***For a 'Cinema Libero'***

The loftiest ambitions expressed about the Cinema Division of ARCI situated the network of ARCI circles, with the mass audiences that the membership represented as the grassroots of a structure that could present a challenge to the Italian film industry. The fundamental problems with Italian cinema were to be found in the structure of the industry. How did the leaders of the Cinema Division understand the film industry and its relationship with public tastes?

In March 1962, ARCI sponsored a conference on contemporary cinema in Forca Canapine, in the province of Perugia, in central Italy, bringing together film critics, filmmakers (Mario Gallo, Luciano Pinelli), intellectuals involved in the study of cinema or mass communications (critic and theorist Filippo M. De Sanctis, sociologist Gianni Toti, and anthropologist Remo Guidieri), and leaders of provincial ARCI cinema commissions. Speakers at the conference included Piero Anchisi, head of the ARCI Cinema Section; Claudio Zanchi, film critic and founder of the Italian Federation of Art Cinema (Federazione Italiana dei Cinema d'Essai); Pio Baldelli, journalist, film critic, and pioneer theorist of mass communications in Italy; and Lino Micciché, critic and film historian. The conference represents the beginning of a period of intense engagement with problems of mass media in general, of an ongoing refinement of a critique of the so-called culture industry and of the development of alternative models of cultural production, distribution and consumption.

The keynote speaker, Mino Argentieri, film critic, founder and editor of the journal *Cinemasessanta*<sup>208</sup>, in his presentation “Examination of the trends and problems in the production and distribution of contemporary Italian cinema” suggested that at that moment in the early 1960s something new was happening in the structure of the Italian film industry.<sup>209</sup>, Argentieri based his analysis on the shift from what he identified as artisanal, spontaneous films of the immediate postwar moment, exemplified by neorealist works like *Roma, città aperta*, *Sciuscìa*, and *Paisà*, to the industrially produced films of the early 1960s, in which a handful of powerful production and distribution companies, Titanus, De Laurentis and Cineriz, dominated the Italian market. This new industrial organization of film he argued, had produced a number of negative consequences, among which he lamented the overemphasis on commercial success, ballooning production costs, the resurfacing of *divismo*, and the expanding role of producers encroaching on the artistic liberty of writers and directors. In an attempt to compete with the massive presence of American movies in the Italian market and to meet the perceived demands of foreign markets, Italian producers were increasingly favoring big-budget, lavish productions with famous stars aimed at pure spectacle. Furthermore, these new film oligarchs were tied through financing and distribution agreements to powerful American companies that pressured them to conform to Hollywood formulas. Argentieri argued furthermore that the results of the

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208 *Cinemasessanta* is an Italian journal of film criticism, in 2012 still directed by Mino Argentieri. Founded in 1960 by Mino Argentieri, Tommaso Chiaretti, Spartaco Cilento, Lorenzo Quaglietti, and Giovanni Vento, the journal focused initially on Italian filmmaking, though it has broadened its scope, and features articles on cinematography theory and history, film reviews and interviews of filmmakers.

209 Mino Argentieri has had a long and varied career as film critic and historian. He was among the of the founders of the Centro Cinematografico popolare in Rome in 1948 and the historic Roman cinema circle Circolo di cultura cinematografica Charlie Chaplin in 1949; he was film critic for many years for *Rinascita*, the PCI politico-cultural monthly magazine and also for *Unità*, the PCI newspaper, as well as contributing to a number of film journals. He has authored and contributed to several books, noteworthy among them are Mino Argentieri, *Il cinema in guerra: arte, comunicazione e propaganda in Italia, 1940-1944* (Editori riuniti, 1998)., Mino Argentieri, *Il cinema italiano dal dopoguerra a oggi, Volume 1* (Editori Riuniti, 1998). and Mino Argentieri, *L'occhio del regime* (Bulzoni, 2003).

industrial organization of film also included conditioning audiences to the Hollywood formulas, stars, and lavish productions.<sup>210</sup> He was vague about why this works, and how film appreciation seemed, in his estimation to be a zero-sum game, in which audiences are capable of enjoying only one formula of filmmaking.

In attempting to formulate a solution to these problems, Argentieri declared himself a partisan for “*cinema libero*”, which he defined as:

“not only an autonomous formula for production, a liberation from the current laws of production, not simply personal, artistic film, without compromising the artistic creation to outside forces: but a cinema of rupture, unyielding, avant-garde, experimental, a cinema in which there is space for a multiplicity and variety of questions, a cinema that is reborn from critical debate, from a new type of contact with the public, from a new professional morality, from a commitment that unites the filmmaker to the publicist to the studio.”<sup>211</sup>

Arguing that the entire system of production needed to be transformed, including its relationship to the public, Argentieri suggested the network of ARCI circles was uniquely well suited to be the sites where this kind of experimentation and direct audience contact could produce the rebirth of Italian cinema as “*cinema libero*”. ARCI circles could be the mechanism by which the elite minority among popular audiences that appreciates “good cinema” could become a majority, to create:

“...A market for cinematographic culture that... does not... position itself as a ghetto of spectators with a fine palate, but as a movement that expands, albeit with great difficulty,

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210 Mino Argentieri, “Esame delle tendenze e dei problemi connessi alla produzione e distribuzione del cinema italiano contemporaneo,” *Le ore libere* no. 18–19 (1963): 7–23.

211 Ibid, 16–17.

determinedly competing for terrain, meter by meter, with commercial cinema. A market in which consumers develop in the school of a critical stimulus that does not mechanically condition consumption, but that favors consumption by way of obligatory moments of reflection, of meditation, of reason, of culture, of constant and reasoned doubt... »<sup>212</sup>

Through ARCI circles, Argentieri and his fellow critics wanted to institute debate and education in critical thinking, which they hoped would stimulate demand for more thoughtful consumption. In essence, they hoped to model the activity in the circles more closely on that of cineclubs, the groups like the Circolo Charlie Chaplin in Rome, where directors, critics (including Argentieri himself) and elite groups of cinephiles debated finer points of film technique and theory.<sup>213</sup> Gradually, by exposing audiences to debate, they hoped to awaken some critical capacity.

This conference marked the opening of a new ambitious line of activity, focusing in on the structure, the Italian film industry, that the ARCI Cinema Division would attempt to disrupt. Argentieri's keynote presentation outlines a critique of the production of film that provides a structural explanation of the quality of films that he and many fellow critics like perceived as inadequate. This conference laid the foundations for an ARCI policy on cinema that went much farther than trying to help circles locate copies of a movie: it had ambitions to create alternatives to the existing models of production and consumption of movies.

While the ARCI Cinema Division's plans included creating alternative models of production in addition to the work it had already begun in creating circuits of distribution, aside from a handful of amateur short films made by film club members, ARCI was largely unable to

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212 Ibid, 21.

213 On these elite cineclubs see Mino Argentieri, "Il Circolo del cinema C. Chaplin di Roma," *Le ore libere* no. 14–15 (1962): 21–33; and Tosi, *Quando il cinema era un circolo: la stagione d'oro dei cineclub : 1945-1956*.

sponsor the production of any films. One exception, however, is a project financed by several cooperatives in Bologna and promoted by ARCI Bologna leaders, *The outlaws of love* (1963)<sup>214</sup>, a collective project directed by Valentino Orsini, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, based on legislation to introduce the possibility of divorce in extreme cases such as incurable insanity, lifelong incarceration, expatriation and long-term separation, proposed by socialist senator Luigi Renato Sansone in 1954 and 1958.<sup>215</sup> The Taviani brothers, of course, went on to make widely acclaimed films, at major film studios, but this early film reflects their initial closeness to the subculture of the left. Their initial interest in cinema was nurtured in a cinema club at the University of Pisa, and their first projects, shorts and documentaries, were commissioned by trade unions and cooperatives.<sup>216</sup> Aside from this one feature film, the production of movies was far beyond the reach of circles, and beyond even the organizational and financial means of ARCI at the provincial and national levels.

Where national ARCI and some of the more active provincial ARCI offices were able to intervene was in distribution. In the early 1960's the national ARCI technical committee began promoting a special discount negotiated for affiliated circles with the Florentine company Cinelabor for portable 16 mm projectors and accessories. 1962 and 1963 advertisements for the Latemar and the more expensive Filmaster models offer prices between 384,000 - 468,000 lire, discounted to 307,200 – 374,400 lire for Circoli ARCI (equivalent to 2006 Euros: 4100 - 5000;

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214 Valentino Orsini, Paolo Taviani, and Vittorio Taviani, *I fuorilegge del matrimonio*, 1963.

215 Pier Marco De Santi, *I film di Paolo e Vittorio Taviani* (Gremese Editore, 1988), 50–54.

216 Ibid, 27.

discounted to 3200-4000).<sup>217</sup> These discounts allowed ever greater numbers of circles to own the means to show films.

Obtaining copies of films to show was a more significant challenge for circles. Most circles were left largely to their own devices in finding a rental agency to provide whatever films they could. Many wrote to the national ARCI offices asking where to get copies of a specific title, or requesting recommendations of films to show for a particular event. In a few provinces: Bologna (1959), Torino (1959), Firenze (1960), Pisa (1961) and Ferrara (1962); the provincial ARCI offices established their own Cinema Division to aid local circles in locating films. This role expanded from responding to requests from circles, to publishing information and lists of contact information of rental agencies, to the curation of catalogs of suggested films available locally. In 1961, in coordination with the national Cinema Division, many of the provincial Cinema Division began purchasing copies of films, evolving into film libraries: the Cineteca of ARCI Bologna, regional Cineteche in Emilia Romagna and Toscana, an interregional film library in Piemonte and Liguria and the national ARCI Cineteca.

### ***The Cineteca Nazionale ARCI***

Circles throughout Italy, both ARCI circles and unaffiliated groups wrote to ARCI in hopes the association could furnish them with films and projectors. Piero Anchisi, the head of the Sezione Culturale at the national ARCI offices, directed them to agencies from which they could rent copies of specific films, suggested titles for a particular group or about a theme in which the circle expressed interest, and referred circles to other organizations like the Italian Federation of Cinematographic Circles (FICC) or the Italy-USSR Association. In many cases

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217 From advertisements in ARCI publications, “Una grande campagna nazionale ARCI per lo sviluppo delle attività cinematografiche a passo 16 m/m,” *Le ore libere* 16–17 (December 1962): rear cover.; “In ogni circolo e comitato,” *Le ore libere* 18–19 (December 1963): rear cover.

Anchisi helped track down films that were out of circulation, lost, and even contacted directors to inquire about borrowing their personal copy.

The idea to create a National ARCI Cineteca began to take shape in September of 1960 with the reduction of the original version of Visconti's film *La terra trema* to 16 mm format. Visconti himself donated a print to ARCI, which as yet had no means to distribute the film. The cultural orientation of the Cineteca was illustrated by the choice of *La terra trema*: one of the most notorious commercial failures of postwar Italian cinema and also held to be one of the most important works of Italian neorealism. The Cineteca continued in that vein: films shunned by commercial movie theater managers, foreign films unavailable through commercial distribution networks, censored works not allowed to be viewed publicly, works with a decidedly political or social justice theme, and several short documentaries on historical subjects.

The Cineteca officially began operating in 1962, distributing the 16mm films in its collection to circles upon request, for moderate fees, under conditions that mirrored those of commercial rental agencies: requiring payment in advance with the reservation of the film, strict adherence to time limits and number of allowed projections, often requiring that a leader from the circle renting the film accompany it to the train station for return immediately after projection. These conditions were a point of contention between ARCI and some of the circles that did rent from the Cineteca, for example, Enzo Lalli, the head of ARCI Torino, complained bitterly that the quality of films was lacking, the fees too high and the conditions too onerous. Anchisi reminded him that the Cineteca needed to be financially self-supporting and cater to all the circles in the ARCI network, and to do this the fees for rental were set necessarily high, and conditions were strict to ensure availability for all circles. Anchisi argued that the initiative was only sustainable if the Cineteca operated in its early years as a commercial enterprise, then



reinvesting profits in expanding its activities. Anchisi's defense was based in the logic of operational concerns, while Lalli's criticism was ideological: in creating the Cineteca, ARCI had not substantially altered the form of the transactions between rental agencies and renters, and in effect had set itself up as identical to a commercial rental agency, not as an alternative to one.

The Cineteca was indeed very similar in its transactions with circles to a commercial rental agency. However, in the logic of its purchases and production of prints of films like Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) it was not. As Anchisi notes, the Cineteca did make some concessions to the demands of circles for entertainment, but reinvested the profits into making sure that difficult to find film classics would be available to those rare circles that did want them. Even with the profits from rental fees required occasional investments from ARCI and from the Minister of Tourism and Entertainment to cover the costs of obtaining rights to reproduce films in 16mm format, the printing of 16mm copies, conservation and maintenance of films.

Which films were the "quality" films that were important to conserve? What types of movies were suitable as qualified cultural programming, as opposed to pure entertainment? The next section will examine in greater detail which films the national ARCI Cinema Division and the provincial Cinema Divisions promoted, what they hoped to achieve, and how they proposed to educate the public taste.

### ***Good films***

An unidentified circle in San Vincenzo, Livorno, in a letter to national ARCI organizing film rentals, opened the subject of its members' receptivity of certain films:

"We confirm a film for Saturday the 27th...but contrary to your suggestion, it cannot be on the Resistance, and this is because of the demands of the audience. In fact we have

had to discuss that this type of film, for now, is not very well understood by our spectators and we, though reluctantly, must keep this in mind if we want to create an audience that will follow us in the future.

On the other hand it is our firm intention to succeed in showing good films. For this we have given a second look at the catalogue that you sent us along with the film “Ciapaiev” and finding ourselves forced to avoid, not only the films on the Resistance but also those of Eisenstein (for now not comprehensible), only a few other films remain available to us. Indeed, concerning this question, we ask you, if it is possible, to send us a more extensive catalog so that we will have greater choice.”<sup>218</sup>

ARCI’s proposal for a film on the Resistance on April 27 was without a doubt an attempt to link cultural activities to the celebration of the liberation of Italy, April 25, the national holiday commemorating the Resistance, antifascism, and the end of World War II. The liberation of San Vincenzo was, in fact, on April 27, 1945. This proposal from national ARCI is indicative of a more general tendency to promote films with specific themes, in this case the Resistance, of limited schools of filmmaking, as the writers’ complaint about the preponderance of Eisenstein in the ARCI catalog shows; or more generally themes near to the political-ideological commitments of the left.

The catalog to which this letter refers comprised the entire collection of the ARCI Cineteca, which in 1963 included copies of Soviet films Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *Alexander Nevskiy* (1938) and Georgi and Sergei Vasilyev’s *Chapayev* (1935); Czech films Jirí Trnka’s animated *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1959) and Jirí Krejčík’s *Higher Principle*

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218 “Letter from San Vincenzo, Livorno to unknown recipients” (UISP: Archivi ARCI, Box 1963, Livorno, April 22, 1963).

(1960), about the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia; censored films and blacklisted filmmakers' films Herbert Biberman's *Salt of the Earth* (1954), about a strike of zinc miners, Edward Dmytryk's bleak portrayal the world of Italian-American construction workers in the Great Depression, *Give Us This Day* (1949), and Italian neorealist works, Carlo Lizzani's *Chronicles of Poor Lovers* (1954), Giuseppe De Santis's *Caccia tragica* (1947) and Aldo Vergano's *Outcry* (1946), in addition to the founding copies of *La Terra Trema* (1948), and several short documentaries. These choices reflect a narrow cultural policy of a decidedly left-wing stripe. The leaders of the ARCI Cineteca selected films that were considered among the masterpieces of Soviet cinema as well as more recent Czechoslovakian productions, as if torn between older Stalinist aesthetics and the more recent move away from socialist realism in favor of more complex narratives.<sup>219</sup> With regard to Italian film, the catalog included nothing outside the neorealist canon, profoundly connected to the Italian left.<sup>220</sup> Moreover, the films belong to established socialist genres: dealing with war and the Resistance (*Outcry*, *Chronicles of Poor Lovers*, *Caccia tragica*, *Higher Principle*), the tragic conditions of workers (*Give Us This Day*, *Salt of the Earth*, *La terra trema*) and revolution (*Battleship Potemkin* and *Chapayev*). It is also worth noting that the Italian films purchased were not "commercial" films in the sense that they were financed by the PCI (*La terra trema*) and by the National Association for Italian Partisans (ANPI) (*Caccia tragica* and *Outcry*). These limited choices were an attempt to nudge circles towards the ethico-political themes and aesthetic choices that ARCI leaders deemed "good".

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219 On the significance of Czechoslovak film for the Italian left see Francesco Pitassio, "For the Peace, For a New Man, For a Better World! : Italian Leftist Culture and Czechoslovak Cinema, 1945-1968," in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, ed. Anikó Imre (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

220 For a careful look at questions of neorealism see David Forgacs, "The Making and Unmaking of Neorealism in Postwar Italy," in *The Culture of Reconstruction: European Literature Thought and Film 1945 1950*, ed. Nicholas Hewitt (St. Martin's Press, 1989), 51–66.

The San Vincenzo audience's reported incomprehension can be understood as a rejection, at the very least on the part of the letter writer representing the leadership of the group, of these circumscribed interests. Instead, the writer asked for more choices, to be allowed to determine for his or her group which films will be well received. The writer's repeated reference to "for now" was an optimistic note, leaving open the possibility that the incomprehension he or she identified will change. This writer did not entirely discount the idea that ARCI was promoting, that by introducing "quality films" the audience would learn to appreciate them. However, the letter indicated a major problem, the gap between the cultural policies of the central ARCI offices in Rome and the demands of audiences in ARCI circles. It introduces key issues that examinations of specific films or cultural policy often omit: questions of public reception and the possibility of educating audiences.

In this section I will examine how these issues are threaded throughout the activities around film in the ARCI network. I identify some of the themes picked by national and provincial ARCI leaders as gleaned from catalogs and correspondence with circles. I will describe some of the reactions from circles to this promotion in correspondence between circles and national ARCI and in the reports from provincial ARCI offices, in particular ARCI Bologna. Finally I will discuss the ambiguities of the program of education of the public taste in film.

In 1963 Guido Ronconi and Luciano Pinelli of ARCI Bologna produced a report of all the cinema activities in the Province of Bologna in which they drew up a table categorizing all the circles in the province that showed films in terms of the frequency and quality of projections:

**Figure 9. Cinema activities in the Province of Bologna<sup>221</sup>**

Continuous indiscriminate	8
Continuous qualified	4
Total	12
Intermittent indiscriminate	7
Intermittent qualified	12
Total	19
Occasional indiscriminate	24
Occasional qualified	8
Total	32
Total circles that do film activity	63

The use of “indiscriminate” as opposed to “qualified” betrayed the ARCI leaders’ dismissal of the circles’ choices in film programming. The authors defined “qualified” activities as those that conform to their idea of film appreciation: requiring careful curation of a program of films into thematic series, furnishing the audience with additional information on the directors, the production of the film or the cinematography, and including time for debate or discussion in the program. The report described the 43 different film series that ARCI Bologna promoted in circles to improve their quality of programming. These include programs such as “Soviet Cinema”, “Czechoslovak Cinema”, “Italian neorealism”, “Homage to R.J. Flaherty”, “American Cinema and McCarthyism”, and “Italian Cinema: from neorealism to crisis”, among others. The curation of these programs fell to the cultural cadres within ARCI Bologna, who developed a

<sup>221</sup> Guido Ronconi and Luciano Pinelli, “Sezione Cinema dell’ARCI di Bologna,” *Le ore libere* no. 18–19 (1963): 106–115.

series of films around specific criteria: by director (Fellini, Flaherty, etc), by a period in the history of cinema (neorealism, soviet cinema from the “mass hero to the individual hero), or by cinematographic schools (Czechoslovak films, English films, etc.).<sup>222</sup>

They described “indiscriminate” activity on the other hand as purely catering to the demands of the public, in which the choice of films of “particular cultural value is excluded, as is without a doubt the curation of film series or debates.” Perhaps, the authors allowed, some quality films might be shuffled in, as long as they are mixed up among the others, thus describing tricking audiences into watching quality films the way adults might trick picky children into eating vegetables. Such “indiscriminate” film activity is instrumental to other ends: it satisfies public demand in areas where there is no movie theater, “increases the liveliness of the circle and contributes to the sales of products, particularly beer, wine, drinks in general”, it provides “an activity for the women of for other members not interested in the dominant activities (card games, billiards). In this case...the genre picked depends on what will have most success with the public, sentimental or musical films.”<sup>223</sup> These cultural cadres in ARCI Bologna thus identified the problem that they intended to solve: the audiences in circles wanted to watch light romances and musicals, but in the estimation of ARCI, needed to be educated to appreciate quality films.

This careful categorization from ARCI Bologna skirted the most basic question. Which films were “quality films”, according to whom, and by what criteria? While much of the

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222 Ibid.

223 “Occorre un'attività ricreativa per le donne e per gli altri soci non interessati dalle attività preminenti (gioco delle carte, del biliardo ecc.). Nei casi ... la scelta del film cade sui generi sopra indicati (intreccio sentimentale, canzonettistici ecc.) perché incontrano il maggior successo di pubblico. Anche alcuni films di qualità possono venir programmati, purché siano « confusi » tra gli altri. Ciò esclude da parte del dirigente la scelta di films di particolare valore culturale, e, senz'altro, la programmazione a cicli o con dibattito.” Ibid, 107–108.

promotion of “good films” was centered around the national ARCI leadership, in particular the Cinema Division headed by Piero Anchisi, the interpretation of quality happened at every level and there was therefore little consensus on what was meant by “good films”. “Good” was variously articulated as appropriate subject matter, artistic merit, or as offering an opportunity to develop critical capacity, among other criteria, and even the evaluation of films on these bases was subject to contestation.

The creation of catalogs and film programs provided moments of reflection on what constituted “good films” as ARCI leaders collaborated on lists and argued through correspondence for the inclusion or exclusion of specific films. Letters between ARCI Torino and Piero Anchisi are particularly contentious and critical of each other’s judgments of quality and criteria for choosing films. In 1961 Piero Anchisi was employed in negotiating with various film distributors to purchase the rights to reprint films in 16mm format for rental and wrote to various provincial ARCI Cinema committees to ask their opinions about the available titles. He wrote to ARCI Torino to inquire specifically about MGM titles that might interest them. MGM films distributed in Italy in 1961 included a variety of themes and genres by well-regarded directors with well-known Hollywood stars: Vincente Minelli’s musical starring Gene Kelly, *An American in Paris* (1951); John Sturges’ thriller *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1955); Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s *Julius Caesar* (1953), Fred Zinneman’s drama about postwar Berlin, *The Search* (1948), John Huston’s *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951); Richard Brooks’ examination of violence, poverty and racism in an urban school, *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) and also *Something of Value* (1957), depicting events in the Mau Mau rebellion; Robert Wise’s corporate power-struggle drama *Executive Suite* (1954) and biographical film on boxer Rocky Graziano *Somebody Up There Likes Me* (1956); William Wyler’s drama about Quaker pacifists in the

American Civil War, *Friendly Persuasion* (1956); and Anthony Mann's Western *The Naked Spur* (1953), starring Jimmy Stewart.<sup>224</sup> The ARCI Torino Cinema Division had recommended these films to circles in the province earlier in that year. To Anchisi's query however, ARCI Torino responded, that though MGM did not offer exceptional films, they had made a list that:

"in any case seem to us interesting, in the sense that they allow one to conduct a discourse on a real problem, or insofar as they constitute a clear example of a negative or ambiguous or evasive orientation; and this, above all else, keeping in mind that some of these films have had a notable commercial success and that it is not therefore inopportune that some of those who have seen them, perhaps with the conviction that they were good, re-see them this time with a critical presentation that teaches them to see the limits and sometimes ideological falsity."

In other words, the Cinema Division picked unexceptional films in order to provide teaching opportunities in their circles. Moreover, they expected to disabuse the members of circles of the idea that the films they'd once deemed good were "ideologically false". The Cinema Division deigned to consider MGM films at all in recognition that through negotiations with MGM they could obtain more favorable conditions than those any other distributors are able to offer, but insisted that otherwise they would not be interested. Their preferences, they noted to Anchisi, would be for films by De Santis, Visconti, Lattuada, Fellini, or Lizzani.<sup>225</sup> They would rather purchase works by Italian neorealist directors, than these American productions.

In response to their reproach, Anchisi seconded the Cinema Division's disdain for MGM films, with the justification:

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<sup>224</sup> Comitato provinciale ARCI Torino, "Piano di lavoro della Sezione Cinema" (UIISP: Archivi ARCI, Box 1961, 1961).

<sup>225</sup> "Letter from La Sezione Cinema ARCI Torino to ARCI" (UIISP: Archivi ARCI, Box 1961, Torino, November 6, 1961).



"We have included a certain number of films that are not exceptional from an artistic point of view but are interesting as entertainment, to enrich the list of available films, and to be able to fulfill the requests of the Emilian and Tuscan provinces that also organize projections of a purely recreational character. These provinces, you should remember, use in part, to meet programming demands, very poor quality films; so they can make a qualitative leap even by projecting films that might not be rigorous from an ideological point of view, but are nonetheless interesting from a spectacular point of view (I use the term in the best sense: quality of acting, intelligence in the plot and dialogue, cleanness and even inspiration in the style; films indicative of certain genres (mystery, comedy, musical, comedy of manners, westerns))."<sup>226</sup>

Anchisi also noted that the Italian directors that ARCI Torino mentioned were also a priority for national ARCI, and that agreements to obtain their films were underway. Anchisi seemed to find himself torn between the demands for films of great artistic or political value, from ARCI Torino, and the demands for entertainment, for comedies, musicals and westerns to entertain the members of circles in Emilia Romagna and Tuscany.

Anchisi singled out Emilia Romagna and Tuscany as regions with the greatest demand for purely entertaining films, used as a recreational activity as opposed to cultural activity. Note however that Emilia Romagna and Tuscany had the greatest number of circles, the biggest memberships and liveliest activity, and were perhaps the only regions where film-viewing at a local cultural circle was a mass phenomenon. While ARCI Torino was catering to only a handful of circoli, sharing one projector between them, in just the province of Bologna alone

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<sup>226</sup> "Letter from Piero Anchisi, ARCI, to the Sezione Cinema, ARCI Torino" (UISP: Archivi ARCI, Box 1961, November 23, 1961).

there were fifty different circoli showing movies, several of which had a dedicated movie theater, and the other provinces in Emilia Romagna and Tuscany were also extremely active.<sup>227</sup>

### *Reactions from local circles*

ARCI cinema divisions had limited success in promoting film programs, though overall the outcomes of their efforts were unpredictable and highly variable. Circles did not always reject programming suggestions as the group from San Vincenzo had, for example, ARCI Bologna reported that *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) stimulated particular interest among circles. However, the catalog of ARCI Bologna at the time was limited to only Soviet and Czechoslovak films: Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* and *Alexander Newsky* (1938), Georgi and Sergei Vasilyev's *Chapayev* (1935); and Jirí Krejčík's *Higher Principle* (1960); Jirí Weiss' *Romeo Juliet and Darkness* (1962); Jirí Trnka's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1959); and Vladimir Cech's *The Black Battalion* (1958). As I have described above, the Cinema Division of ARCI Bologna described most of the activity in the province as "indiscriminate", not picked from this catalog. Nonetheless, by making these films available and actively promoting their curated programs the Cinema Division did stimulate interest in some circles.

There was however extreme unevenness in the geographic distribution of this activity: Circolo Pavese and Circolo Guernica, both within Bologna proper, accounted for a third of all the projections of film series curated by the Cinema Division. Circolo Pavese, in the lively student purlieu via del Pratello, under the leadership of young cultural cadres was developing in the 1960s into a point of reference for a intellectuals and artists from all over the city.<sup>228</sup> The

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<sup>227</sup> By 1963, the Cinema Division of ARCI Torino had expanded the number of circles involved in film projections to 12, compared with Bologna's 63, in a considerably smaller city. See Remo Guidieri, "Sezione Cinema dell'ARCI Torino," *Le ore libere* 18–19 (1963): 94–100.

<sup>228</sup> Marco Sacchetti, "Quel Pavese di Lajolo e Pasolini," *l'Unità* (Bologna, January 31, 1993).

cinema club founded in the Circolo Pavese, though several evolutionary steps became part of the Bologna Cineteca Comunale, a world class film library and research center.<sup>229</sup> The adoption of ARCI-curated film series there was hardly typical of the province in general. Most circles, over three quarters of those that showed films, did not opt to use the Cinema Division's suggestions in 1963.

In Luciano Pinelli and Guido Ronconi's report "Cinema Division of ARCI in Bologna"<sup>230</sup>, they described the relationship between both the Cinema Division and the leaders of circles, and between those leaders and the members as marked by resistance to change and apprehension. The Cinema Division attempted to convince the leaders of local circles to try the curated programs, reporting optimistically that when "surrendering to the reason of the functionary in charge of the relationship, the leader of the circle decides to undertake a program, the public always responds positively." They described the process of change in terms of "opposition", "long resistance", "pressure", "outcries", "experimentation and repulsion", "acceptance and steps backwards".

Once this difficult process of convincing the leadership of circles to try a film cycle had succeeded, the Cinema Division of ARCI Bologna followed the progress of the initiative actively. They attempted to measure the reaction of the membership through quantitative and qualitative methods: surveys, records of attendance, analysis of audience behaviors through the presentation and debate. To their dismay, they found the debates following the films to be anemic, though audiences showed other signs that the Division interpreted as appreciation:

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<sup>229</sup> In the mid 1970s the Circolo Pavese delegated film activities to the new Circolo Angelo Azzuro, led by a splinter group of Pavese organizers. That group then went on to found the Cinema Lumiere in 1984, which became the home to activities of the municipal Cineteca until the city built a center in via Azzo Gardino for the film library, archives, and theater in 2003.

<sup>230</sup> Guido Ronconi and Luciano Pinelli, "Sezione Cinema dell'ARCI di Bologna."

gathering around the visiting expert that presented the film to shake hands, privately ask more questions and thank him or her. The hope that critics had expressed for “cinema libero”, that by creating space for debate of carefully selected films the public would learn to appreciate “quality”, met with resistance not only from leaders, but also from the audiences, who appeared reticent, unwilling or unprepared to engage in the way critics hoped.

The Cinema Division of Bologna could however, claim unalloyed success in helping to expand the number of film projections in total throughout the circles in the province of Bologna. In 1959, when they began their activity of promotion, there were only 72 projections. By 1962 they counted 712. Though their plan to promote curated “quality” programs proceeded with difficulty, they did successfully stimulate interest in showing movies in circles.

### ***Conclusions***

In the late 1960s the comic Paolo Villaggio developed the character Ugo Fantozzi, a hapless white collar employee at a large company, whose misadventures at work and at home are the subject of Villaggio’s farcical portrayals of contemporary Italian life. Among the many humiliations to which Fantozzi must submit to keep his bosses happy is his participation in company recreation. In the second Fantozzi film in a series of ten, *Il secondo tragico di Fantozzi* (1976), Fantozzi, played by Villaggio himself, is settling in to watch a much anticipated soccer championship when his wife informs him, haltingly, crestfallen, that his boss has called, ordering them to come immediately to watch “a Czechoslovakian film... but with subtitles in German!”, news which causes him to groan and slump into his chair as though fainting. Fantozzi, his colleagues, and their wives obediently sit through *Battleship Kotiomkin* [sic], the “masterpiece” which has been substituted for the Czechoslovakian film until the professor in charge of the presentation invites them to begin their usual debate. Fantozzi volunteers, to the delight of the

professor, “Who knows what profound aesthetic judgment he will have matured in all these years?”. But Fantozzi declares from the podium, “For me... *Battleship Kotiomkin* is a tremendous piece of crap”[sic], unleashing a rebellion against the professor, whom the audience beat, restrain and torture by forcing him to watch low brow comedies.<sup>231</sup>

Though produced over a decade after the ARCI initiatives discussed in this chapter, Villaggio’s grotesque imagining of the revolt against art film echoes the tension between the Cinema Divisions of ARCI and the circles they served. The bias of the Cinema Divisions, not only for art film but specifically for art films with limited political themes and from behind the Iron Curtain met with resistance from the majority of circles. The goal of saving films that had limited commercial success, or that were not commercially available proved to be a difficult fit with the goal of education of audiences in circles often seeking little more than light entertainment.

In this chapter I have explored how with the aid of the Cinema Division of ARCI, the capacity to organize a film projection was extended to more groups than ever. I have shown how that democratization of access to film met with resistance from commercial cinemas, the national copyright agency, and the Minister of Entertainment. These forces attempted to police and limit the activities of cultural associations, to either prevent them from having access to film or to subject circles’ activities to their own authority. The national and provincial ARCI leadership provided information and support to circles to navigate around these challenges. ARCI supported the access of cultural circles to film by creating alternative circuits of distribution of film and facilitated access to existing distribution.

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231 “Per me... "La Corazzata Kotiomkin" [sic]... è una cagata pazzesca!” Luciano Salce, *Il secondo tragico Fantozzi*, 1976.

I have discussed how the extension of access to film created new challenges: once more and more circles had access, attention turned to *what* they were watching. Through the example of the efforts of the Cinema Division of Bologna, I have revealed the tension between popular demand and elite judgments that came with the extension of film projections to small groups. I have examined conferences and reports in which discourses on quality films and educating taste underline a concern from the intellectuals leading ARCI for the problem of popularizing “quality”.

### ***The problem of television: reawakening the critical conscience***

A photo taken in 1957 by Enrico Pasquali, a neo-realist photographer commissioned by the Bologna PCI Federation to document the party sections, case del popolo and affiliated groups in the Province, depicts a group of people in the Galanti Section, in a casa del popolo in the center of Bologna, watching a small television perched on a stand in the corner of a spartan room, in simple wooden chairs crowded in around the television.<sup>232</sup> About thirty people are visible, photographed from behind so that for the most part only the backs of their heads are shown. Nearly everyone's gaze is trained on the TV: they are paying attention, following the programming. They seem to not be talking, not occupied with other activities while they watch; rather, they are purposefully watching. We can distinguish that nearly half are women, while eight or nine are children. In the foreground there is what looks like a family: a man facing the TV, legs crossed, hand resting on his chin as if pensive, a little boy rests his head cradled in crossed-arms on the man's knee. Close beside them a woman, visible in profile looking towards the boy, with the head of another child lolling in her lap. This intimate family moment is situated in a crowd of other people, chairs pushed close. Other children pay closer attention to the TV, occupying the front row of seats and one little boy is on his feet looking up at the screen.

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232 See page 14 for a description of the set of photographs.



**Figure 10. Watching television in the casa del popolo. Courtesy of the Istituto Gramsci Emilia Romagna<sup>233</sup>**

In the upper left corner of the photo we just barely distinguish a portrait of Palmiro Togliatti, General Secretary of the Italian communist party. The TV watchers have turned away from Togliatti's image towards the television in the opposite corner of the room, a gesture that echoed the worst fears of many intellectuals close to the PCI that television would distract the rank and file party members, draw their attention away from political assemblies and workers' associations.

This photo stands out from the set, most of which focus more on the real estate of the case del popolo than on the activity in it; the photos of bars and halls, theaters and auditoriums,

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<sup>233</sup> Enrico Pasquali, photographer. "[Sala di ritrovo della Sezione 'S. Galanti'; [anche Casa del popolo?]; gruppo di persone davanti alla tv]", Photograph. (Bologna: IGER, Fondo Arbizzani, Case del Popolo, 1957).



appear more as a census of available spaces than a register of the members in the course of their activities within them. The inclusion of this particular photo suggests at the very least that the presence of the television was noteworthy, a phenomenon to carefully document. The same Bologna PCI Federation that commissioned the photos had in fact suggested to neighborhood party offices and associations that they *not* purchase a television, advice which clearly went unheeded in this case, among many others.<sup>234</sup>

This photo represents a moment in the late 1950's in which television viewing for many working and even middle class Italians was an activity that took place in public, as collective viewing located in the *casa del popolo*, in the various party headquarters, bars, and other centers of social life. Women and men, often segregated into their own groups for political meetings or recreation in the *casa del popolo*, watched together. Children were permitted entry, and families attended all together. The neighborhood circle was connected in a new way to the rest of Italy and the rest of the world. Television offered a new kind of opportunity for people across generations, across established gendered groups, and across geographical boundaries to engage with a new mass cultural medium.

The *casa del popolo* was an important location in the introduction of television in Italy, as the site of many experiences of collective viewing. As the established center for after work aggregation, with leaders experienced in organizing collective purchases and activities, it was the natural home for the community TV. It was one of the first places that workers and their families encountered the television. As centers of the organization and programming of free time, which now included television, the *casa del popolo* and neighborhood circles were also sites where a conflicted response to new forms of entertainment and recreation like TV was

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234 Volpi, *La Casa del popolo Corazza. Una ricerca dell'ARCI di Bologna*, 24.

played out. They were critical sites in understanding the new medium, its promises and pitfalls. Neighborhood associations were nodes that connected intellectuals concerned with the effects of television on individuals and on associational life in national organizations like ARCI to the constituent individuals and associations that they worried suffered the ill effects.

In this chapter I will attempt to dissect some of the reactions to television from ARCI and its allied organizations, groups that were directly occupied with organizing social, cultural and recreational activity. I will try to disentangle the more significant threads of a complicated response to the new cultural phenomenon of television, from the ARCI intellectuals who expressed apprehension, outrage, and confusion, to national political figures affiliated with ARCI who challenged RAI-TV with reform bills, developing over time more sophisticated and well articulated arguments through concrete local interventions. I will explore the example of the Group for the Study of Audiovisual Instruments in Bologna, a group that demonstrates how engagement with television through neighborhood circles opened the possibility for the development of new concepts of media literacy, and helped fuel the radical critiques of the late 1960s.

But first it is necessary to give some background:

Television broadcasting in Italy began January 3, 1954, with a few hours a day of black and white programming (32 hours per week) on one channel of RAI-TV. Users paid a yearly subscription per television set of 12,500 lire (approximately 170 euros in 2010). By March 1954 the range of the VHF signals broadcast from Rome, Milan, Torino and a series of signal replicators could reach about half of the Italian population, with about 88,000 subscribers, a figure which skyrocketed to 2 million by 1960.<sup>235</sup> The television sets available at the time

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235 Enrico Menduni, "La nascita della televisione in Italia," in *Il miracolo economico*, 2006, 1–12.

featured 14 or 21 inch screens and cost between 160,000 and 300,000 lire (between 2,200 to 4,100 in 2010 Euros). These expensive prices put a private television beyond the means of most families. As a result, much television-watching up to the 1960s was a community activity, in a local bar, casa del popolo, or party headquarters where large groups would gather to watch, during the limited evening broadcast hours.<sup>236</sup>

RAI-TV had a state-conceded monopoly on the television in Italy until 1978, with the entry of Silvio Berlusconi's commercial channels. Like so much of the legislation cobbled together at the start of the Republic, this monopoly over television administration had its foundation in fascist-era agencies that had lent themselves to the construction of fascist hegemony. In the 1920's, private entrepreneurs and companies constituted the Unione Radiofonica Italiana (URI), which was commissioned to provide public radio broadcast services by the state. In 1927 URI was reorganized as the Ente Italiana per le Audizioni Radiofoniche (EIAR).

The public service broadcaster RAI is the direct institutional descendant of EIAR, which held the state-conceded monopoly that in 1927 assumed control of all Italian radio broadcasting under a 25 year contract. EIAR was a private company but subject to state approval of broadcast content and personnel. While the name EIAR was changed in 1944 to Radio Audizioni Italiane (RAI) and in 1952 to Radiotelevisione Italiana, the structure of the organization: a private company granted a monopoly of a public utility with political input in personnel, remained the same. Furthermore, the public holding IRI (Istituto per la ricostruzione industriale) became majority shareholder in 1952, which meant that the formerly private company was mostly publically owned, albeit through a byzantine holdings arrangement. Even journalists and

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<sup>236</sup> The collective period of television viewing is explored in detail in Francesca Anania, *Davanti allo schermo: storia del pubblico televisivo* (Roma: Carocci, 1997).

managers at RAI remained unchanged, for example, Fulvio Palmieri, a journalist favored by the fascist regime, noted for his coverage of the pomp around Hitler's visit in Italy in May 1938, and frequent voice on EIAR from 1938-1949, was an integral part of the direction of RAI for decades, as programming director, writer and manager of various channels and departments. But the most important continuity in the agency was in its position in relation to the government: keeping RAI management under political control of the ruling party, the Christian Democrats, appeared to maintain the relationship between regime and consensus-building cultural apparatus. While television (and all of mass culture) proved a slipperier subject, producing far more complicated and contradictory effects than simply brainwashing Italians into supporting the Christian Democrats, the resemblance to the past fascist uses of media was sufficient to alarm the opposition and divert discussion of television for decades.<sup>237</sup>

With the arrival of RAI broadcasting came a flood of reactions from journalists, intellectuals and religious leaders ranging from the paranoid to the wary to the enthusiastic. Public expressions of skepticism, fear, and confusion accompanied every development in television broadcasting, a reaction Umberto Eco characterized as an “apocalyptic” fear that mass culture signaled the destruction of culture.<sup>238</sup> Catholics worried that the television would bring the worst amoral and materialistic characteristics of entertainments like the cinema directly into the family home to deform young minds, while recognizing that the suggestive power of the

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237 One of the clearest descriptions of how television did not simply serve up consensus is in Umberto Eco's description of how the “television generation”, the generation of Italians raised with “a totally televisual education in a country run by a majority party standing for fundamental Catholic values and slotted into the ideological ranks of the Atlantic Alliance” was also the generation of May 1968, having read television in unpredicted, paradoxical ways. See the first few pages of Umberto Eco, “Does the Audience have Bad Effects on Television?,” in *Apocalypse Postponed*, ed. Robert Lumley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 87–102.

238 Umberto Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati* (Bompiani, 2001).

technology rendered it a useful tool in moral and spiritual education.<sup>239</sup> Communists on the other hand were for the most part concerned lest television, firmly in the hands of the Christian Democrats, would be manipulated as a propaganda tool. But they too decried the vulgar, low quality of programming.<sup>240</sup> There was little doubt from any political orientation that television was powerful, important, and therefore a cultural phenomenon to watch attentively.

The politicians and intellectuals at the helm of ARCI were no exception. From its very inception in 1957 ARCI included television among the different categories of cultural activity with which ARCI was concerned. So television, discussions of how to use television, of reform of the administration of television, and questions of how to organize activity around television were features of articles in *Le Ore Libere*, correspondence between circles, and presentations at ARCI conferences and meetings. Out of these various documents emerges the theme of searching for a way to understand the phenomenon: was television a valuable new means of communication, an empty low-brow receptacle of the worst of popular culture, a political tool? Was television as a medium in and of itself neutral, and therefore objections were to be directed towards the content, the production of programming and the politics of the management of RAI? Or was there something inherently stupefying, hypnotic or otherwise manipulative about the medium?

On the one hand, ARCI statements on television conceded that television in the abstract is an important cultural form. Discussions of television invariably made some gesture toward the

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239 For example Pius XII's *Commentarium Officiale*, "Nuntius Radiophonicus," *Acta apostolicae sedis* XXI, no. 1 (1954).

240 Enrico Menduni argues that this attitude typifies the PCI approach to television from its inception through the end of the 1960s in "Il PCI e la televisione," in *Il frigorifero del cervello: il Pci e la televisione da "Lascia o raddoppia?" alla battaglia contro gli spot* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 2002), 7–18. As an example of early PCI policy on television see Mario Alicata, "Degradazione della cultura italiana in regime democristiano e clericale," *Rinascita* 2 (1958).

“enormous importance of television – whose value has been permanently recognized by ARCI...”<sup>241</sup> But for many ARCI leaders, intellectuals, leaders of associations and circles, and political figures, television was most often posed as a problem. Television created deformations and distance from reality. Television was antidemocratic. Television was in the hands of the Christian Democrats. While some definitions of the problem of TV that came out of circles and ARCI provincial offices were concerned with the viewing public, worried that the low level of maturity and underdeveloped critical capacity of viewers made them susceptible to facile manipulations, others, particularly from the national levels looked to the resolution of the problem of television as a political matter, to be addressed through legal reform that would change the administration of RAI-TV.

### ***The problem of television***

For the March-April, 1960 edition of *Le ore libere*, ARCI's bimonthly national periodical, the organizing theme of the issue was radio and television. The organization of the periodical in the early 1960's followed a standard format: the presentation of a few articles around a major theme regarding cultural and recreational organizations; suggestions for books and films about the theme; a section “Working experiences” that described activities in ARCI circles or major national initiatives, letters from local circles and provincial headquarters; a section “Documentation” that reprinted the full text of laws or proposed bills, court rulings or police memos relevant to the operations of circles; and finally notices about upcoming activities, conferences, rallies, etc. The national leadership of ARCI, the board of directors, served as the directors, editors, and writers of the periodical, with occasional contributions from journalists

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241 ARCI, “Linee programmatiche della Associazione ricreativa culturale italiana: Condizioni di adesione e tesseramento; Servizi e informazioni utili, anno sociale 1963,” *Le ore libere* 15–16, no. supplement (1962): 8.

involved in ARCI but principally employed in the communist and socialist press, *Rinascita*, *L'Unità*, *Avanti!*, etc. Through articles and notices in the pages of *Le ore libere*, these leaders defined the orientation of ARCI in the field of television.

ARCI's national president Alberto Jacometti opened the discussion in the introduction of the issue of *Le ore libere* about the problem of television. This short article defined the “problem of television”, introduced it as a topic that would become focus of subsequent issues of *Le ore libere* and began a period of ARCI initiatives to address the problem.<sup>242</sup> A close reading of this and similar articles reveals the assumptions at the heart of ARCI's approach to television at the national level.

Jacometti began the diagnosis reflecting, “One cannot say that the problem has exploded all of a sudden; in reality it has come to a rather slow maturation over years; but then it cracked open like a pumpkin a field that has soaked up too much water ... the problem of radio television.” In 1960 television had only been broadcast for six years; Jacometti however, wrote of a longer process because he viewed television as a part of a bigger phenomenon, radio-television as the non plus ultra of mass culture. Furthermore, lumping together radio and television made sense if one looked at its administration: it gave emphasis to the continuity from the fascist administration of the radio under ERI to RAI, RAI to RAI-TV. With this periodization Jacometti also underlined the continuity and similarities of fascist administration and Christian Democrat government.

Furthermore, this insistence on the administrative continuity and cohabitation of both radio and television under the umbrella RAI represented a failure to comprehend the medium of television in its own right. The concept of radio-television persisted in ARCI literature as

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242 Alberto Jacometti, “Presentazione,” *Le ore libere* 3, no. January-February (April 1960): 1.

evidenced by a persistent use of terms “listening” and “radio-television” rather than terms that acknowledged the visuality of the medium. This usage was symptomatic of a misunderstanding of the medium. Television was treated as an extension of radio (or a bastardization of cinema), rather than a novel medium. An article by Ando Gilardi in *Le ore libere* demonstrates this failure to come to grips with the medium with its own visual language, a failure particularly odd given the author was a noted photographer, someone who, one would assume, would have a greater sense of the power of images.<sup>243</sup> Gilardi proposed an experiment which pitted radio and television against each other in competition for the attention of members of the circles.<sup>244</sup> He suggested that circle leaders organize simultaneous radio-listening and television-watching events, and record the attendance over a few weeks. The hypothesis of the author was that if the quality of the radio apparatus were improved, through the installation of a stereophonic arrangement of speakers in particular, the number of radio listeners would increase while television viewers would decrease. The author dismissed television altogether as infantilizing, instead turning his discussion to speakers and quality of radio apparatus. He compared only the quality of sound emanating from the television and from the radio: as if the visual nature of television were an afterthought. This misreading of television as a mere extension of the radio, which would be used in the same way as the radio and therefore present familiar fascination for users and familiar problems for political organizers was emblematic of the early confusion among ARCI leaders, and in the left more generally in approaching television in the 1950s and ‘60s.

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243 Ando Gilardi worked as a photojournalist and ethnographic photographer, notably alongside Ernesto de Martino, taking photos for his study of magical practices in Southern Italy, *Sud e magia*. He worked with ethnomusicologist Diego Carpitella and anthropologist Tullio Seppilli as well.

244 Ando Gilardi, “Una proposta interessante,” *Le ore libere* IV, no. 4 (April 1960): 19–26.



Perhaps part of the confusion derived from anxieties about a recurrence of the use that Mussolini's regime had made of the radio, that it was a mass propaganda device that reached millions. In the foundational conference for the ARCI-sponsored Association of Radio and Television Subscribers (ARTA), Ferruccio Parri made the comparison explicitly between Christian Democratic control of television and "how efficaciously the fascist EIAR contributed to the Ventennale poisoning of Italians. Rhetoric, lies, hypocrisy..."<sup>245</sup> Jacometti's definition of the problem of television was couched in terms of propaganda as well. He wrote,

"There is not much data: in Italy today there are about 8 million radio receivers and 1.5 million televisions ... calculating three listeners per radio, he who controls the radio can make himself heard by 24 million Italians; calculating 14 television viewers per television, he who controls the television can communicate with 22.5 million Italians.

This means that today in our country, he who is "*padrone*" of radio-TV is unchallenged "*padrone*" of a great part of public opinion."<sup>246</sup>

He described the "owner" of communications as having enormous power over the viewers, treating television as opinion delivery device, with direct access to viewers thinking without any acknowledgement of their critical capacity. Indeed, the critical capacity, or lack thereof, of the spectator was a major concern for Jacometti and other ARCI leaders, a theme which I will discuss later.

But it was the use of the television as political propaganda that most greatly concerned Jacometti and other leaders of ARCI. To highlight the danger, Jacometti contrasted the reach of

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245 Ferruccio Parri and Ferruccio Parri, "Il Convegno nazionale sulla televisione: Dopo il Convegno," *Le ore libere* VI, no. 14–15 (July 1962): 8–11.

246 Jacometti, "Presentazione."

political parties working face to face with the opportunities presented by the new broadcast medium. He calculated that,

“In the May 1958 general elections... the parties mobilized to inform the electorate, 32 million men and women, of their platforms, ... the large parties organized about 30,000 rallies... assuming that at each rally there were on average 100 new participants listening... the large parties were able to speak to 3 million electors during the election campaign. Let's say four. Let's say 5. And the other 27, 28, 29 million? In Italy there are 6 million peasants dispersed in the countryside; how many peasants did the parties reach?”<sup>247</sup>

Organized rallies could not compete with television as a tool of political communication in terms of the numbers it could reach. Jacometti's view addressed television as purely instrumental, without regard to how it functioned, as though one instrument of propaganda could be substituted for another without any consideration for the traits specific to the medium: the visuality of television, the monodirectionality, the editing and cinematography that it allowed, the ways in which the public viewed television (as a group, in a social space, talking during programming or not, etc.). He neglected that on the other hand, a political rally required an already mobilized public, relied on logistics of space, staging, props, amplification and other technical aspects. The differences between rallies and radio broadcasts and television programs are entirely flattened in such arguments that reduce comparisons to numbers of people reached. However, the real thrust of Jacometti's argument was the political consequence of Christian Democratic control of television.

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247 Ibid.

“The consequence is evident: while whichever party can speak – in times of electoral struggle, when the atmosphere is incandescent and the whole country begins to boil – to three, four, five million electors, Christian Democracy touches 25, perhaps 30 million. One asks if democracy still exists when this happens.”

Yet Jacometti also acknowledged that the use of television for political propaganda was far more subtle than this instrumentalist reading allows. The real power of television was not as simple propaganda but as a tool in cultural hegemony:

“Oh! This is not so much about banal and concrete propaganda! As much as it is about idealizing a certain way of life, proposing a certain way – that world, those behaviors – and thus to chloroform, to serve up, to channel the masses towards the opening that that world brings. It is the school of conformism. Those Italian viewers that have preserved a minimum of critical thought know something about it.”

This purely political reading of television produced the conclusion that television was serving up public opinion to Christian Democrats and cementing their hegemony.

Jacometti's opening salvo at RAI-TV began a period of intense activity in ARCI around television: frequent articles in *Le Ore Libere* and in internal documents further developed what ARCI leaders meant by the “problem of television”. They went on to elaborate a more nuanced critique of the administration of RAI, of the programming, and of the social effects of RAI television in Italy, in neighborhoods and families and associations. Some of the most significant observations regarded the structure and legal status of RAI.

### ***Television and democracy***

In 1960, in response to a challenge by Il Tempo-TV, a would-be private TV broadcaster funded by advertising, the Constitutional Court ruled that the monopoly of RAI-TV over

television broadcasting in Italy was constitutional because its legal nature was that of an essential public service. The judgment to deny for-profit companies access to broadcasting was couched in terms of public service versus profit motives, denying the bid of Il Tempo-TV because "...it was essentially and declaredly inspired by intent to profit and not by intent to disinterestedly facilitate the diffusion of ideas, of culture and of art..."<sup>248</sup>

This affirmation that national interest for the protection of freedom of diffusion of ideas, freedom of culture and of art could trump interests of private economic gain became the basis for many critics of RAI-TV to challenge the organization. If RAI-TV could cite public service as a justification for its monopoly, critics would hold the management to that mandate. Journalists like Ivano Cipriani and Edoardo Bruno seized on the theme of RAI's duty as a public service,<sup>249</sup> while politicians, communists Davide Lajolo, Giancarlo Pajetta, Pietro Ingrao, and Orazio Barbieri; socialists Adelio Albarello, Fernando Schiavetti, Alberto Jacometti and Senator Feruccio Parri (PSI); as well as Ugo La Malfa (Republican Party) among others renewed their calls for reforms of RAI on similar bases.<sup>250</sup>

Elaborating on the Court's sentence and drawing on the articles and reforms cited above, Jacometti proposed a solution to the "problem of television" that pivoted on the role of ARCI

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248 Corte Costituzionale, "Sentenza della Corte Costituzionale n.59/1960," 1960.

249 Ivano Cipriani, "Politica culturale della RAI-TV," *Le ore libere* IV, no. 4 (April 1960): 9–18; Eduardo Bruno, "La riforma della RAI-TV," *Le ore libere* VIII, no. 3 (September 1964): 1; and Eduardo Bruno, "L'ARTA e la riforma della Radio-Televisione," *Le ore libere* X, no. 4 (December 1966): 2.

250 The PCI group first presented such a bill for the reform of RAI in 1959, "Testo della proposta di legge dei Deputati Lajolo, G. Carlo Pajetta, Ingrao, Orazio Barbieri e altri, presentata il 18 marzo 1959," *Le ore libere* no. 4 (1960): 41–42. which they rewrote and continued to repropose in 1965, and 1967. Adelio Albarello et al., "Testo della proposta di legge dei deputati: Albarello, Schiavetti, Jacometti, Luzzatto e altri: Disciplina delle informazioni politiche e legislative alla Radio e alla Televisione," *Le ore libere* no. 4 (1960): 42. Ugo La Malfa and Oronzo Reale, "Testo della proposta di legge dei Deputati La Malfa e Oronzo Reale: Inchiesta parlamentare sulla R.A.I. e sui servizi di radioaudizione, televisione, e teldiffusione," *Le ore libere* no. 4 (1960): 42.

intellectuals together with ARCI membership to draw attention to the flaws he identified in the current administration of RAI and production of television programming:

“to put back on the table, in an organic way, the whole problem of television and to discuss it, in debates, in writing, in conferences, anywhere we can, with the goal of putting the transmissions of the national entity under an effective democratic control, to widen the circle of its interests, to elevate the level of its transmissions, to make of this a formidable weapon, a weapon of culture and civil education”.<sup>251</sup>

Through activities from the grassroots to the national level, ARCI would turn attention to RAI, to encourage criticism and to build support for reform initiatives. This plan of mobilization foresaw a groundswell of public opinion that ARCI leaders hoped to harness as support for the legislative proposals by Jacometti himself and other prominent socialist and communist legislators.<sup>252</sup> ARCI leaders began to theorize a television viewer/citizen, with rights to access both to the television as a viewer (demanding lower subscription fees to put TV within reach of everyone) and as producer. ARCI advocated specifically that radiotelevision subscribers should be involved in programming decisions:

“If there is no participation of the listeners and viewers through a broadly democratic action, RAI-TV could become increasingly an instrument of psychological violence, used not to awaken and educate the conscience but to put it to sleep, not to raise the cultural level of the country but to further lower it.”<sup>253</sup>

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251 Jacometti, “Presentazione,” 2.

252 “Conferenza stampa dell’ARCI sulla campagna popolare per il rinnovamento della RAI-TV,” *Le ore libere* IV, no. 3 (February 1960): 33–34.

253 “La Radio e la TV sono fra i più moderni strumenti di comunicazioni delle idee. Se manca la partecipazione degli ascoltatori e degli spettatori attraverso un’azione largamente democratica, la RAI-TV può diventare sempre più strumento di violenza psicologica utilizzato non per svegliare ed educare le coscienze ma per addormentarle, non per elevare il livello culturale del Paese, ma per ulteriormente

This participation of the citizen viewer was necessary to check the power of the RAI monopoly as established by law and as operated by political appointees. RAI was “a closed organism”, closed to parliamentary oversight, closed to the society in which it operated, closed to input from viewers.<sup>254</sup> Furthermore, the right of the viewers to participate was cast as part of the more general rights of citizens in a democracy to be involved in the decisions that touch their lives. ARCI leaders hoped this democratization of television would also serve as a lesson in the education of democratic citizens.

“... there is the will and the intention to contribute to the formation of the democratic citizen, aware of his own rights and obligations, conscious of the right that he has to intervene in all sectors of the life of the country that regard him, direct or indirectly, personally or through an association, as in our case.”<sup>255</sup>

To promote this platform of reform, in 1960 the national ARCI organization began a campaign for a popular referendum on RAI-TV demanding the democratization of RAI-TV; the cultural improvement of the programs; and reduction of the subscription fees. The call for referendum was published in *Le ore libere* and distributed through ARCI circles and through allied organizations and cultural institutions. ARCI distributed pre-printed postcards to be signed and sent to parliament, decrying the problem:

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abbassarlo. Enzo Lalli, “Il referendum popolare sulla RAI-TV,” *Le ore libere* IV, no. 4 (April 1960): 30–35.

254 Il Comitato provinciale di ARCI Forlì, “A tutti i consigli delle cooperative, case del popolo e circoli ricreativi della Provincia di Forlì” (UISP: Archivi ARCI, Box 1962, ER, 1962).

255 “E' innanzitutto da queste premesse che l'ARCI è partita per porsi il problema del Referendum, perchè al centro della nostra azione, così come è stato deciso dal Congresso Nazionale di Roma, vi sono la volontà ed il proposito di contribuire alla formazione del cittadino democratico, cosciente dei propri diritti e doveri, consapevole del diritto che egli ha di intervenire in tutti i settori della vita del Paese che lo riguardano, direttamente o indirettamente, personalmente o attraverso una associazione, come nel caso nostro.” Enzo Lalli, “Il referendum popolare sulla RAI-TV.”

“The mediocre cultural level of radio and television programs, the partiality and the political discrimination exercised in the sector of information and the utilization of this instrument, represent in our judgment the more conspicuous and immediate aspects of a broader problem, which plagues the very principles of democracy of our country. Such a powerful means to orient and condition the customs and the capacity for judgment of vast sections of citizens, must necessarily be under democratic control.”<sup>256</sup>

Such statements expressed with great urgency the need to place RAI under democratic control: the very principles of democracy were at stake. The popular referendum was, however, unsuccessful. There is no record of how many of these postcards were actually sent in total, but the effort came to nothing and attentions turned towards reforming by other means.

Soon after, in 1961, a number of intellectuals and politicians affiliated with ARCI founded an allied organization, the Association of RadioTelevision Subscribers (ARTA), led by Feruccio Parri, to lobby for reform of RAI.<sup>257</sup> This also began a period of fervent ARCI organization of a series of national conferences on television: in 1962 in Rome, in 1963 in Perugia, in 1966 in Rome at the Teatro Eliseo; as well as a number of provincial and regional conferences. These events brought together “men of culture and of politics, users and workers” to continue to refine the definition of the problem of television but more urgently, to propose solutions to it. As ARTA and the political parties on the left concentrated more on legal reforms, within ARCI an important dimension of the problem of television emerged in the 1960’s: the critical television viewer.

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256 “Abbonati, ascoltatori, spettatori delle trasmissioni radiotelevisive -- sottoscrivete il Referendum popolare sulla RAI-TV,” *Le ore libere* 3 (1960): 2.

257 L’Associazione dei radiotelebbbonati.

A consequence of a view of television that privileged its instrumentalization for political propaganda was a concern for viewers' critical capacity. Would viewers understand that they were being manipulated? The question created a tension for the intellectuals writing for ARCI between a concern that uneducated workers would be easily taken in by the tricks of the Christian Democratic propagandists at RAI and their faith in the workers and in class consciousness, in the party structures and organizing techniques to overcome the seduction of the TV.

Ando Gilardi, for example, in the pages of *Le Ore Libere* wrote:

“There is no one in Italy – critic, sociologist or anyone of the type, that is not in some way occupied with the question – who does not know and does not affirm that the television is an instrument for collective infantilization. That is a big word, but nonetheless inadequate to describe how effectively damaging that which should instead be an instrument of information and instruction. Furthermore, the TV is even more pernicious when it exercises its power of suggestion on individuals who, through no fault of their own, are uneducated and critically lacking.”<sup>258</sup>

While Gilardi vastly oversimplified the diverse responses of intellectuals to television, the fear he expressed on behalf of the uneducated viewer was echoed in similar statements that voiced concern for children, peasants, illiterates, and other “critically lacking” viewers. This concern for ignorant viewers, susceptible to the “pernicious” effects of RAI television programming stimulated interest in various schemes to educate workers through exercises in collective

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258 “Non v'è nessuno in Italia – critico, sociologo o chiunque in genere, che per qualche verso si occupi della questione – il quale non sappia e non e non affermi che la televisione è uno strumento di rimbambimento collettivo. La parola è grossa ma cionostante inadeguata alla effettiva dannosità di quello che invece dovrebbe essere uno strumento di informazione e istruzione. Inoltre, tanto più perniciosa è la TV in quanto esercita la propria suggestione su individui – non per loro colpa – incolti e criticamente sprovveduti.” Gilardi, “Una proposta interessante.”



viewing, debates and discussions on programs through the case del popolo and circoli, and to transform the awareness thus acquired into political mobilization for reform of RAI. The biggest challenge in organizing such initiatives came, however, from a general confusion about how to address media literacy, how it might be taught, how discussions should be organized and who would lead them. While in Rome and Milan one could find journalists and professors positioning themselves as specialists, critics of television and mass media, there were hardly enough such figures throughout the provinces to fill the perceived need. ARCI secretary Carlo Pagliarini corresponded with a number of provincial offices to help coordinate encounters between critics and local groups, for example, with the peasant organizations in the province of Ferrara through interlocutors at ARCI Ferrara and Ravenna.<sup>259</sup> ARCI publications like *Le ore libere* published critiques of popular programs to help stimulate discussion in cultural circles. ARTA enlisted hundreds of circles in a letter writing campaign to the RAI administration expressing member opinions on programming. While these initiatives attempted to place pressure on RAI and to awaken television viewer's critical capacities, they mostly remained at a superficial level of affirming the validity of viewers' judgments about plots and storylines, without addressing the complexity of the television medium.

As the 1960's progressed, the prosperity of the so-called economic miracle touched more and more families and made possible for ever larger segments of Italians not only the purchase of a private television, but also many of the household appliances and consumer goods that the television so successfully modeled. At the same time, the gap between the conflict-free bourgeois family life represented by *La Famiglia Benvenuti*, for example, and the news of American bombardments in Vietnam, and growing, fomenting dissatisfaction in factories and

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<sup>259</sup> Carlo Pagliarini, "Letter to Guido Musacchi, Roma, June 5, 1968" (UISP: Archivi ARCI, Box 1968, 1968).

universities provided opportunity for reflection and examination of the television as mirror of society.<sup>260</sup> The question of the critical capacity of television viewers took on a new tone, as new generations of Italians who had grown up with the television, the very children that early critics feared would be deformed by watching, demanded more than light entertainments, expecting instead that the TV should reflect the issues that mattered to them. In 1966 ARCI Bologna re-proposed the possibility of collective viewing groups, but with the significant addition of an adult education course on media literacy, to train a cadre of young activists. The project put together media critics and young students and workers engaged in re-imagining what the TV could be, what it should be.

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260 “The Benvenuti Family” was a light bourgeois-domestic comedy that purported to be the “chronicles of a very Italian family”. For a withering critique see, Dario Natoli, “Le belle cronache di una telefamiglia: Dio, patria, elettrodomestici,” *Le ore libere* no. 3–4 (May 1968): 6.

*The Group for the Study of Audiovisual Instruments and the Public*

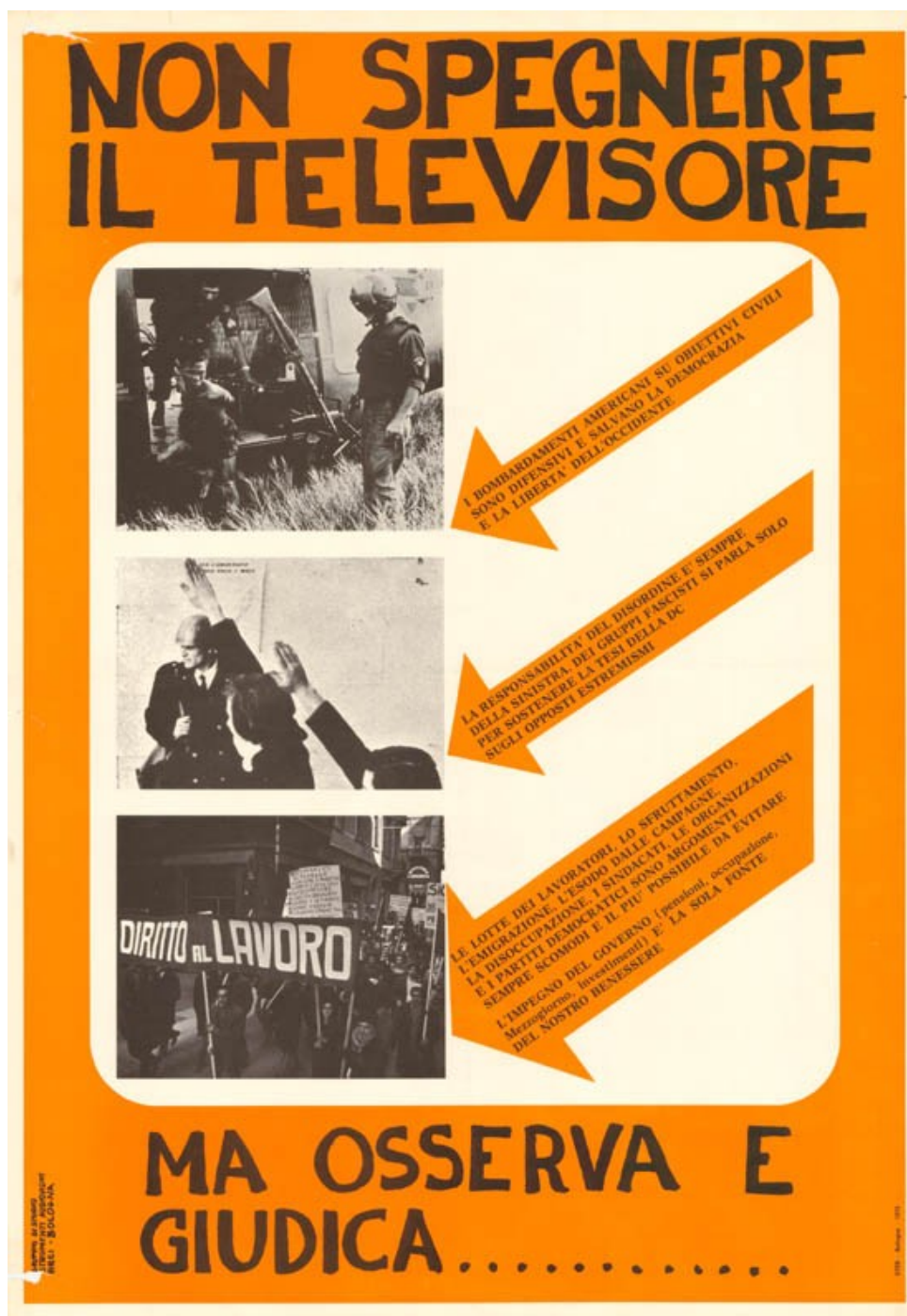


Figure 11. “Do not turn off the television, but observe and judge” Courtesy of the Istituto Gramsci Emilia

Romagna<sup>261</sup>

261 Gruppo di studio strumenti audiovisivi and ARCI Bologna, “Non spegnere il televisore”, Poster (Bologna: Istituto Gramsci Emilia Romagna, Manifesti.it, 1972).

The offset printed poster above is attributed to the ARCI Group for the Study of Audiovisual Instruments and the Public (Gruppo di studio strumenti audiovisivi), a group in Bologna that addressed television, the media, and issues of distortion of information in the press.<sup>262</sup> Printed in high contrast black and orange, it instructs by way of a large hand-lettered headline, “Do not turn off the television ... but observe and judge ...” This admonition frames a series of black and white photographs illustrating contemporary issues and accompanying text representing the bias in the presentation of information on the television news, a juxtaposition to highlight the contrast between points of view. A photo of armed American soldiers detaining a Vietnamese child has the caption, “The American bombardments of civilian objectives are defensive and safeguard democracy and freedom in the West”; a photo of several people giving the fascist salute, “The responsibility for disorder always lies with the Left. One speaks of fascist groups only to sustain the position of the DC on the opposite extremism”; a photo of a protest march behind the banner “Right to work”, “The struggle of the workers, exploitation, emigration, the exodus from the countryside, unemployment, labor unions, democratic organizations and parties are uncomfortable arguments and to be avoided as much as possible. The work of the government (pensions, employment, the Mezzogiorno, investments) is the only source of our well-being.” The images are provocative, touching on war and unrest, and as visual communication register at a visceral, pre-verbal level. Photographs, as used in this poster, are employed to signify truth, in juxtaposition with the distortion of the truth represented by the text. The text on the other hand is a sarcastic reduction of the message that the authors, members of the Group for the Study of Audiovisual Instruments and the Public, had parsed from the

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262 The archives of the Istituto Gramsci Emilia-Romagna have conserved a number of posters printed in the late 1960's through the 1970's by workers' and students' movements, political parties and extraparliamentary political groups, and local associations and circles in the digitized collection [manifesti.it](http://manifesti.it).

television news on these three topics to these biting ironic captions. The efficacy of the poster derives from the contrast between the view represented in the images, and the point of view represented by the text. Such, the Group for the Study of Audiovisual Instruments claimed, is the distortion of the television news.

But the group was not calling for a boycott of television. “Do not turn off the television” was an invitation not to reject or opt out of television viewing, but following the examples provided of “reality” provided in the photos and the distorted messages of the text, to continue to watch to uncover television’s bias, comparing the television’s messages to other sources of information. Television viewing could instead be used as a moment of exercising critical capacity. This poster models what the group thought that criticism could look like, giving an example of the bias of TV news laid bare.

The authors of this poster attempt to harness the gap between these realities as an organizing opportunity; to make viewers aware of the bias in information being presented, in hopes that viewers would rebel, demand more. They hoped to stimulate the critical capacity of the television-watching public. The gap between information as presented on the television news and the experiences and concerns of many viewers had perhaps never seemed as wide as in these years of widespread protests and unrest. Since the late 1960’s, the war in Vietnam, workers' and students' movements and extraparliamentary politics had spilled over from older arenas of contestation like working conditions, into new realms of demands and expectations. In a great irony, the television, which played no small role in shaping and growing the expectations of the generation making these demands, became the object of their critique, but not, as the poster demonstrates, in the form of flat-out rejection. Rather, they used the TV as a point of departure for study, group-learning and debate. As this poster demonstrates, the work of the Group for the

Study of Audiovisual Instruments posed critiques of television that built on earlier concern for television as a propaganda device, but that demonstrated increasing sophistication and comfort with visual media by engaging the television critically.

The members of the Group for the Study of Audiovisual Instruments were a new generation of association members, engaging with the media in new ways, but also used older existing structures and organizational techniques like the *casa del popolo* built by the previous generation. The Group met at the Circolo Brecht, in the Casa del popolo Corticella. ARCI Bologna sponsored the formation of the group and the Circolo Brecht provided logistical support, but the members themselves took over the management of the group as a democratic, consensus-based collective. Detailed information on the founders is partial, though of the eleven members that signed the group's first draft of a mission statement, four were women, and the ages of the members that provided some biographical information range from 18 to 31 years. They espoused a variety of positions at the left end of the political spectrum: they self-identified as Marxists, socialists, nihilist anarchists, but there were also several participants that called themselves right-wing or criticized the immoderate tones of political discussion in the group. They worked in factories, bars, schools, or studied at the university. Membership in the group was fluid, individuals joined and left at various times throughout the year, others quit over disagreements or differences of opinion over which several members left at one time. The life of the group is well documented in the groups' published Quaderni, which detail their research findings in a set of three volumes published over a period 1968-1970, as well as in unpublished and archival sources.<sup>263</sup>

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263 I've also found reference to a fourth Quaderno but have not been able to locate it.

Their first Quaderno introduced the group with a series of brief statements by the individual members that presented their motivations for belonging to the group, statements of what they personally got from the group and the work, and various biographical notes on their identities, a task which the various members interpreted very differently. Some wrote about their jobs, their families, others wrote political treatises to explain their beliefs, and yet others wrote very personal statements of how they felt as a member of the group, describing their experiences and emotional responses. The Group's published writing put great emphasis on this personal experience of collective work.

The group members' introductions touch on a number of reasons to belong to and to participate in the group. Many express an initial hesitation in joining the group: Giovanni Mandini for example, explains that he was unprepared, timid, hesitant because he had never been involved in any circle or political party before, but that his interest for the political and cultural problems in general and specifically for the concepts that the group discussed drew him in.<sup>264</sup> The participants that self-identified as timid described a process of transformation in working with the group, in overcoming their trepidation and developing confidence in their own contributions to the group discussions. Gabriella Miazzo describes an arc from her very closed, limited experience of working in her family business without much outside contact and with few educational or cultural opportunities, to becoming a confident participant.

“My first reaction to the group was fear. Fear of not being able to collaborate with the individuals with superior culture to me, fear of not joining in because of my character and ideology compared to others who are more secure and prepared, fear of laying bare my real potential. But with attendance in the group, that fear transformed into awareness of

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264 Gruppo di studio strumenti audiovisivi e pubblico, *Quaderno n. 1* (Bologna: ARCI, 1968), 12.

the others, of their strengths and weaknesses, it transmuted into confidence and my first uncertainty vanished.”<sup>265</sup>

These narratives of personal transformation through group participation are an important feature of how the members explained the importance of the group. Their personal narratives placed primary importance on what they as individuals gained from a collective experience, in contrast to older narratives, for example, the descriptions of the construction of the case del popolo, which emphasized small individual efforts that added up to collective strength.

But perhaps the most striking theme that runs through the individual statements is that of refusal to be “integrated” or “absorbed” by “the system”. The group, they hoped, would offer the opportunity to mount resistance to the “forms of integration that suppress our individuality”.<sup>266</sup> The members identified a sense of being pushed and pulled by forces beyond their control, into patterns of consumption or patterns of thinking that were not their own, temptations that had to be resisted. They were drawn together out of common “refusal of a society that in one way or another integrates me and pushes me towards passivity of things that I don't approve of.”<sup>267</sup> According to Mara Olivi, this linked the practice of the group to revolutionary politics, a practice of improving oneself by working with others, “To not allow oneself to be absorbed by the system, to refuse the temptations that the bourgeoisie offers, to be conscious critics and to fight it every day.”<sup>268</sup> While exactly what the group members were rejecting was vague, the sum of their various expressions of refusal demonstrated the profound degree of dissatisfaction that was part of the motivations for these individuals to work together.

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265 Ibid, 23.

266 Ibid, 27.

267 Ibid, 12.

268 Ibid, 11.



And while the rejection is posed negatively, against this vague “society” or “system”, many of the statements paired it with at least tentative hope of change, of concrete action of resistance. The individual statements repeated that this was possible in a collective experience in a way that would be impossible as single individuals.

The process of deciding what form this collective action would take was an ongoing process that took nearly two years. The loosely-formed group of founders met throughout May to July 1966, and consulted with Filippo Maria De Sanctis, the president of the Italian Federation of Cinema Clubs (Federazione Italiana dei Circoli di Cinema, FICC) and professor of pedagogy. In July 1966 the group wrote the first of what would be a series of statements of purpose, elaborating a set of observations which set up the context in which the new organism would work. First among these echoed the various ARCI statements on cultural programming around television affirming:

“The enormous importance of the TV instrument ... in the life of each person (formation and information) and in general, the life of the country (human and social relationships), finally coming to the revelation of the fact that TV could represent an obstacle (or a qualitative leap) to certain traditional forms of communication...”<sup>269</sup>

The Groups’ earliest concept of TV was as an “instrument”, a tool that might be used for various ends, depending on the actor wielding it. This tool functioned at different levels: at the individual level, at which television functions as a source of information and as an educating force; at the community level, the level of social relationships, which is identified as a national issue, part of the “life of our country”. Finally, they set up a dichotomy between television and traditional forms of communication, a concept that is left unexamined and unexplained. The

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269 Ibid, 97.

group also recognized the possibility that television could become either an “obstacle” to traditional communication or a “qualitative leap”, that is, they allowed for the idea that the medium could be harnessed to produce different outcomes. They did not simply oppose the form, nor pretend to know in what direction it was developing, but conceived of television as an instrument, a means to be utilized. In this very brief statement, the Group nonetheless revealed that the point of departure for forming an association of people interested in audiovisual media and television in particular was a permutation of the contemporary anxiety surrounding television: a recognition that the medium was indeed powerful, that it was becoming ever more diffuse and popular; they were uneasy with the implications of this trend; and at the same time aspired to harness that power for alternative political and cultural ends.

The Group profited from the Circolo Brecht’s connections to the ARCI network and other local organizations. In September 1966, the group met with representatives from provincial ARCI Bologna, local and Milanese representatives of the Società Umanitaria, and again with Filippo Maria de Sanctis. In this meeting the group, presented their mission statement, proposed a residential seminar on audiovisual media studies, and successfully solicited support from ARCI, FICC, Federcoop and the Società Umanitaria.<sup>270</sup> These organizations provided the group with financial support but also meeting spaces, assistance in planning activities, means to publicize activities and attract new members, access to networks of local circles and their memberships, expertise in the form of the “technicians” Alberto Conti and De Sanctis provided by the Società Umanitaria, and discounts on travel through the agreements established through ARCI's tourism network.

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270 Ibid, 98.

ARCI's interest in the group rested on the goal of the "formation of specialized cadres for activities in circles, study groups, etc."<sup>271</sup> The Group for the Study of Audiovisual Instruments and the Public became the emissaries for ARCI and ARCI Bologna, sent to circles and case del popolo throughout Emilia Romagna to establish organized TV viewing centers or to participate in discussions, debates, or critical training events. The Quaderni were distributed to ARCI circles in Bologna and to other working groups in audiovisual media elsewhere in Italy. In Ferrara, for example, the leadership of ARCI Ferrara wrote to national ARCI for help organizing a viewing center, and was put in contact with the Group for the Study of Audiovisual Instruments of Bologna.<sup>272</sup> This collaboration resulted in a later conference of audiovisual media groups in Ferrara, with the support of the local government and ARCI. The Group was intended to be a solution to the problem of educating television viewers, providing them with the critical tools that would protect them from the pernicious effects of Christian Democrat-dominated television. The training of the Group for the Study of Audiovisual Instruments represented a strategic approach to organizing cultural programming locally. This investment in a specialized training for a core group of leaders/organizers would then be of service in future initiatives in the province of Bologna, in activities organized through local circles and through the provincial ARCI Bologna office.

Film and television critics De Sanctis and Conti led the group through this training, providing the group with a reading list and leading them through exercises intended to develop their literacy in analyzing film and television.<sup>273</sup> Their readings included Lidia de Rita's

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271 Ibid, 96.

272 Pagliarini, "Letter to Guido Musacchi, Roma, June 5, 1968."

273 De Sanctis was a professor of education, specialized in adult education at the University of Firenze and director of the Federazione Italiana Circoli del Cinema. Alberto Conti, who later authored *Il linguaggio della televisione* (1979) was a journalist and critic. Their reading list is a mix of Italian

sociological study of the effects of television on peasants in Basilicata, *I contadini e la televisione* (1964), Cesare Mannucci's study of RAI as an institution that maintains the status quo, *Lo spettatore senza libertà* (1962), Adriano Bellotto's exploration of the potential, positive and negative, of television, *La televisione inutile* (1962), and a translation of Edgar Morin's *L'esprit du temps*, published as *L'industria culturale* (1963). The group then methodically undertook the exercises assigned to them: a structural analysis of Gillo Pontecorvo's film *The Battle of Algiers*, a structural analysis of a television news program, and the analysis of data from a survey of 20 local circles on television viewing in those circles, and produced written summaries of their analyses.

The group members then set to work to apply the critical methods introduced in their seminars and courses to RAI-TV programming. Their first object of study was the television news. They developed a form for the structural analysis of a television news program in the seminar with De Sanctis, a table on which they could record the title of each segment, the length, the use of video or still images, live footage or recorded segments, and the order in which it appeared, all of which factored into a point system that they developed to indicate the importance granted to one segment in relation to another: a longer segment at the beginning of the show was determined to have been assigned more importance. The group then compared this coverage to a variety of newspapers (*L'Unità*, *Avanti!*, *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, *Il Giorno*, *Il Corriere della sera*, and *Il Messaggero*), to show lacunae in the television news or to contrast the relative importance afforded an event. With these methods, the group began their first project of analysis of one hundred episodes of the 8:30 pm broadcast on RAI 1 over the period from January 29, 1967 to

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authors, translations, some English and French texts, but the group only actually read the first few titles. The texts range from studies of psychological effects of television, sociology, education and children, technical guides to TV production and writing, to UNESCO studies on TV.

May 8, 1967. Their second project focused in more sharply, on the electoral campaigns of spring 1968, for which the members followed both 1:30 and 8:30 pm broadcasts of the news for 40 days, April 9 to May 18, 1968, as well as other programs, like *Tribuna elettorale*, a political debate program.

This meticulous work of analysis of the contents of the news depended on the group's narrow concept of television and a specific concern for the inclusion and exclusion of information in the news programs that TV, as a means of mass communication, delivered. With the great importance and potential propagandistic power of television as a point of departure, they were determined to work towards laying bare the assumptions and biases in television programming, while treating the medium itself as an empty container, neutral in and of itself but filled with one point of view or another. If their concept of television was based on the instrumentality of the medium, they wanted to understand better how it was being used to what ends. Their assumptions echoed the prevailing views of the socialist and communist press: TV was in the service of Christian Democratic hegemony; television programs presented a middle-class Christian family ideal. That the television news offered only partial and partisan information, ignored some events and favored others was already a commonplace observation to many intellectuals and politicians. The group's analysis of the television news was an attempt to demonstrate this in concrete terms, and their conclusions validated the demands from the parliamentary left for reform.

As the group continued their careful analyses of RAI programming, their critiques shifted away from the narrow focus on the news, and towards a broader condemnation of the distance between the world as the members saw it and the world they saw mirrored in television programming, in the news but also in dramatic literary adaptations and bourgeois family

comedies. For example, the Group organized a viewing and debate around the 1967 broadcast of a miniseries about youth in Bologna. The program, titled *Questi nostri figli* (*These children of ours*) was an adaptation written by Diego Fabbri of *The Living Bread*, a 1955 film by Catholic writer Francois Mauriac in which a young atheist comes to appreciate the profound piety of the girl he loves. Fabbri updated the story and set it in contemporary Bologna as an encounter between young long-haired atheist and prim Catholic protagonists. The Group's criticisms were published in *l'Unità* under the accusatory title, "In his TV series Fabbri doesn't concern himself with us at all".<sup>274</sup> The Group members condemned Fabbri's use of unrealistic characters that did not resemble any youth that they knew, but were rather flat stereotypes. They objected to the "appalling unreality" of the youth represented and Fabbri's failure to address issues that young people cared about. They complained, "All those problems, all those problems as they were shown, they don't exist..." Television failed to address issues that the young members cared about: school, the war in Vietnam, the nuclear bomb. The Group's criticisms reflect an increasingly urgent demand that the television reflect reality as the young members understood it.

These demands on television programming were further complicated as the Group for the Study of Audiovisual Instruments, through more frequent encounters with other circles and in particular with the student movement, developed critiques that transcended questions of reality versus distortion or inclusion/exclusion, and began to address more subtle issues of interpretation and representation. Following a 1970 meeting with the Student Movement of Budrio, the group co-authored an article titled, "The TV Lies", in which they concluded that the proper question was not whether the television lied or told the truth, but it was whose truth does the TV tell, and

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<sup>274</sup> Dario Natoli, "Nel suo teleromanzo Fabbri non si occupa affatto di noi," *l'Unità* (Bologna, April 9, 1967).

to what end.<sup>275</sup> By 1971, these groups had seen a shift in the way they were represented on television. At first, they observed, students were portrayed as thugs, shown scrawling paeans to Mao on the walls of the city. As the movement continued, they noted, TV began to acknowledge that there were in fact problems in education. Finally, they saw leaders of the student movement interviewed on television, alongside experts who would interpret the contestations, a sociologist, a psychologist, a priest, giving the patronizing impression of paying attention to the problems of the country. But the students and members of the Group noted that while the student and workers' movements were now acknowledged on television, such attention only served to co-opt and tame the most radical demands of the movement, to channel discontent safely into televised debates. The group members were no longer content to demand to be represented, to be included in television programs. Rather, they were dissatisfied with how television formatted revolutionary contestation in a bourgeois model of polite discussion. The television no longer ignored them, but by including representatives of the students' and workers' movements, television programs could appear classless and inclusive, reassuring viewers that they lived in a free society where opposition was tolerated. By modeling an acceptable form of contestation, they complained, TV undermined the strikes and protests that were the workers' form of contestation. The Group began to suspect that the medium was not in fact a neutral container for one type of information or another, but it represented a far more insidious means of persuasion than the early condemnations of Christian Democrat propaganda considered.

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<sup>275</sup> Gruppo di studio strumenti audiovisivi e pubblico, "Relazione presentata dal movimento studentesco di Budrio sul tema 'La TV mente'," in *Quaderno n. 3*, 1970, 91–93.

## *Conclusions*

This chapter has described the main strands of the debates over television within ARCI: definitions of the problem of television, its negative consequences for democracy, and alarm over the television's capacity to dupe unwitting television spectators. It has demonstrated that over the course of the 1960s, attempts to find a way to respond to the increasing role that television played in everyday life intensified and at the same time became more sophisticated, developing from blanket statements about television as a public opinion delivery device to explorations of the techniques of presentation. At the local level, as the example of the Group for the Study of Audiovisual Instruments shows, ARCI facilitated the formation of cadres of critics, with input from professional critics and educators, that could work in communication with provincial circles and groups in the student movements. Unlike party intellectuals who theorized about television audiences but remained outside the case del popolo and neighborhood circles where members watched the television or talked about what they'd seen, the group could engage with those viewers, introducing discussion and debate that helped politicize and sustain popular interest for the question of control of RAI.

These attempts to confront the television monopoly prefigured in many ways an intensification of political activity and interest for RAI by the PCI, which up to 1968 or 1969 had not regarded television as a political priority, colored by a prejudice against low culture from party intellectuals.<sup>276</sup> When, in the mid-1970s, the PCI did develop a sustained interest in reforming RAI, it was PCI deputy Giancarlo Pajetta, who had been a defender of the Tuscan case del popolo since the 1950s and ARCI since its inception, that gave voice to the urgency of PCI involvement in the national popular cultural form at the first communist conference on the

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<sup>276</sup> This understanding of the periodization of the relationship between the PCI and television follows Menduni, "Il PCI e la televisione."



matter, *Radiotelevisione informazione democrazia*, in 1973.<sup>277</sup> Members of the Group for the Study of Audiovisual Instruments became integrated into the national political mobilization in support of the PCI reform proposals: Vittorio Girotti wrote calls for reform in the pages of *l'Unità*.<sup>278</sup> Lidia Serenari, who had been hired to work full time for ARCI in Rome, and Duilio Baratta, who had become a representative of a major engineering union, were dispatched to lead debates on television throughout Italy.<sup>279</sup> Thus political initiatives on television up to the late 1960s, elaborated in ARCI and enacted through neighborhood circles, formed the point of departure for national political battles.

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277 “Radiotelevisione informazione democrazia: Atti del Convegno Nazionale del PCI” (Roma: Riuniti, 1973), 545. cited in Menduni, “Il PCI e la televisione.”

278 Girotti was also on the organizing committee of the Circolo Brecht in Corticella, on staff at ARCI Bologna and working in the Press and Propaganda Division of the Bologna PCI Federation. Vittorio Girotti, “Riforma dell’informazione e nuovo modo di far propaganda,” *l'Unità* (Roma, March 14, 1975).

279 For example “Dibattito al 4 Venti 87 sulla TV,” *l'Unità* (Roma, June 13, 1973).and “Messina: seminario sulla riforma dell’informazione,” *l'Unità* (Roma, December 21, 1973).

## ***Conclusions***

Initiatives like those described in the preceding chapters engaging with urban planning, film, and television criticism signal a very new direction of activity from the *case del popolo* of the 1950s from which they evolved. These new associations, or often rather, groups within the old associations, had incorporated and adapted features of the culture of the new Italian prosperity of the 1960s. These new *case del popolo* would hardly have been recognizable as such to the generation before. Take for example, the *casa del popolo* of the Corticella neighborhood in the early 1950s: a dim bar on an unpaved street, the facade adorned with oversized posters of Stalin and Lenin; inside, there were a few offices and a small room designated the library which housed the canonical texts of communism. Within, former leaders of the Resistance, male as a rule, used the casa for predominantly political activity, for assemblies and labor organizing, while the bar provided a space for the workers close to the orthodox socialist and communist parties to freely discuss among themselves after work. Women met separately in their own party sections, while youth, likewise, could join the separate party youth organizations. Culture and social activity there hinged on the solidarity in the working-class neighborhood at a time when it was still fairly homogeneous, isolated and distant from the urban life of Bologna.

About a decade later, the same neighborhood was part of a contiguous sprawl of the city, with new residents drawn from the surrounding rural areas and beyond. The former *casa del popolo* contrasted starkly with the relative luxury of the hall of the new Casa del popolo Tosarelli: contemporary furnishings like Sputnik-inspired chandeliers and sculpted fiberglass chairs created a space that was not simply a reflection of updated design, but of a new set of priorities and aspirations of the members who designed and paid for the building and fixtures.<sup>280</sup>

The communist icons had been discarded if not forgotten, and the halls were no longer the purview of stalwart Stalinists and labor leaders, but of children and youth, women, social experimenters and innovators. This new generation of association members wanted entertainments: they wished to watch movies and television, to dance to contemporary music, to pass time in a glamorous modern bar or dancehall; but some also wanted to develop their own criticisms of the media and to read new theories of industrial society that could respond to their experiences of shifts in work, gender, and culture. They struggled with questions about the quality of the entertainments: which films and activities would educate members but not alienate them? Young people, both men and women, debated and discussed, planned and programmed. They developed youth and adult education classes, afterschool programs, media criticism groups, and avant-garde theater troupes that animated the many activity spaces of the *casa del popolo*. They connected through these activities to local government, networks of other organizations throughout Italy, and global movements. They opened their doors to critics of the Italian communist party orthodoxy: cultural figures like controversial, activist playwrights Dario Fo and Franca Rame, exiles from the party like Rossana Rossanda, and many extraparliamentary

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<sup>280</sup> See for example the photographs of the Casa del popolo Tosarelli in Boccafogli et al., *Casa del popolo Bruno Tosarelli*, Corticella, Bologna: 40 dal 1963, 45–48.

political groups and movements. This diversity and openness to experimentation distinguished a new kind of organization emerging for a profoundly transformed working class.

This dissertation has explored this transformation. It examined in Part 1 the parallel construction of new associations and new neighborhoods in the aftermath of World War II and the struggles associations faced, and in Part 2, the new challenges to those groups: technology, mobility and new ways of living in the city spatially that characterized the new prosperity of the 1960s. Beginning with the moment of the liberation of Italy, it explored how the re-establishment of associational life was bound up in the process of rebuilding and expanding the city, which founders of associations welcomed as an opportunity to rebuild socially, to found a new society based on renewed commitments to the equality of all citizens and the principles of solidarity and cooperation for mutual benefit. In realizing these hopes however, organizers of associations met with resistance in a variety of forms: agencies that attempted to control or curtail their activities, local authorities or business people wary of how non-profit groups might skirt their authority or erode demand for their enterprises, and the national government that attempted to subvert associationism in areas that resisted its central power. Then, as the city and the lives of citizens were reorganized by the economic and social shifts of the 1960s, associations reorganized as well, engaging with the new shape of the city and new technologies, and accommodating new social groups and their demands.

Thus, this dissertation has illuminated various facets of transformation, from the fierce battles of the generation of the Resistance to re-establish and maintain these social and political centers to the radical critiques of the late 1960s, when a new generation of organizers brought to these associations novel demands and expectations that required increasingly complex and often specialized organization. This was not, however, a story of seamless transition, of the triumph of

modernization over nineteenth-century traditions, rather one of uncomfortable adaptations to modernity, of struggles to understand and respond to change. Through a close focus on associations that might otherwise be dismissed as the residues of nineteenth century socialism, this research has generated new insights into questions of how organizations persist, transform themselves, and how members navigate change through such groups. This focus has allowed me to resist well-worn narratives about modernization, Americanization, the unfolding of the Cold War in Europe, or the so-called Italian economic miracle even as it touches on many of the features typically looked to as emblems of change in such narratives: mobility and urbanization, domestic political tensions amplified by geopolitical context, changing patterns of consumption, and television, communications and other technological developments. Viewing such changes from the perspective of local clubs reveals how small groups and individuals understood and negotiated change, whether they participated in it, welcomed or were apprehensive about it, challenged or actively promoted it. These organizations were central to the everyday experience of hundreds of thousands of Italians at a time when social, economic and geographical transformations were upending precisely their everyday practices. It was often through their involvement in the neighborhood *casa del popolo* or circle that they learned about and experimented with new ideas, movements, or technologies.

Thus a central question of this dissertation is how and in what form these associations persisted. Does the continued presence of some of these circles even today signal the triumph of a particular form of grassroots democracy? This examination of one period of transformation suggests that the tenacity of many associations in central Italy derived in part from a capacity to reorient and redefine core principles of solidarity, cooperation, and democracy even as their foundations, the relatively immobile, working-class residents of homogeneous neighborhoods,

became increasingly mobile with diverse interests. These groups did not simply react or adapt in response to external pressures, but engaged with changes: they provided ways for members to discuss and understand shifts through seminars and debates, created opportunities for individuals to plan complex activities, and allowed members to participate in collective consumption beyond their individual means, through shares in a modern construction project, or television or film equipment. This dissertation has explored how the “democracy” being practiced in the *case del popolo* shifted from basic democratic freedoms of speech and assembly to new expansive definitions of democracy. These included democratic access to culture, claims to participation in media institutions like RAI-TV, and demands that the groups within the *casa del popolo*, youth and workers in particular, not only be represented in culture and the media, but that they have a say in how they were represented.

As a historical study, I have allowed the primary sources for this dissertation to guide discussion of democracy, which, I have pointed out, has been defined and redefined by the leaders and members of the associations themselves. However, the link between associational life and democracy is a topic of theoretical interest as well. My focus on associations has allowed me to question the assumptions of theories of civil society that point to the kind of rich associational life found in central Italy as an example of a civil society that promotes healthy democracy. I have attempted to provide a far more detailed picture of this associationism, which is such a major player in neo-Tocquevillian theory. Variations on the neo-Tocquevillian theme all have in common a view that associations generate participation in public affairs, measured as high voting rates, for example. The history of these associations in this period suggests that the post-war re-establishment of these groups was indeed profoundly linked to the birth of contemporary Italian democracy. However, this participation took the form of an unruly and

defiant opposition that did not channel the dissatisfactions and desires of association members into articulated political pressure, but rather that challenged the legitimacy of and threatened to destabilize the new Republic. The events examined in chapter 3, *The Case del popolo and "Armored Democracy"*, do not look like those in a civil society that nurtures democratic participation, or a democracy that even tolerates civil society, much less accommodates it. This history does not point to the triumph of liberal democratic freedoms or of peaceful resolution of conflicts through elections and political procedures. It highlights rather, the precarious balance of Italian democracy in the postwar period, between repressing and guaranteeing freedoms, and between centralized authority and local autonomy.

As a consequence of this interest in complicating the relationship between associational life and democracy, I have paid close attention to the conflicts that arose around the *case del popolo* and cultural circles. Such conflicts often shed light on the importance of these groups and their activities and gave occasion to group leaders and their antagonists to explain their efforts. Throughout the preceding chapters I have examined how plans to build these organizations and expand their activities were met with obstruction, heavy-handed regulation and taxation by state and parastate agencies, and for a brief period armed intervention. I detailed the ways that the regulations placed on associations were employed in an attempt to drive the political opponents of the Christian Democratic majority out of *case del popolo*, clubs and circles. Taxation status, not for profit status, and liquor licensing were all used to cudgel the obdurate groups, to bring them into line with a vision of classless, apolitical associationism. Persecution often had the opposite effect. Conflicts between the local populations supporting an association and the central government, attempting to claim its authority into the most resistant

areas of central Italy, drew neighborhood residents closer around their embattled clubs, reactivating memories of resistance against the Fascist regime.

But perhaps the biggest challenge to the cultural circles of central Italy was that posed by the great shift in how members spent their free time, a shift that accompanied changes social geography, in the economy and therefore in work, in technology and all the new possibilities it was opening in this period. This dissertation has offered a new perspective on these changes, by zooming into neighborhood circles, where members encountered television for the first time, on evening classes, where youths and adults attempted to piece together some theories on their contemporary, urban, industrial environs, and on the proudly maintained bars and dancehalls, where even neighborhood residents of humble means could feel satisfied in having contributed to building a grand hall. This close view has shown how such groups provided space for members to figure out responses and adaptations to the rapid changes around them, to participate collectively in the activities that distinguished the so-called economic miracle -- building, planning, expanding, consuming -- even before general prosperity extended to portions of the working class. However, by incorporating more complex activities and addressing new needs and expectations, the once unified membership of the *casa del popolo* began to fracture into specialized interest groups that linked to global movements and big issues like media literacy. The *case del popolo* remained significant into the late 1960s because they provided space for a variety of such groups, even as the scope of those groups undercut the specific neighborhood places that once were the base for such associations.

This dissertation has explored the history of these associations up to the beginning of that fragmentation in the late 1960s. In the 1970s associationism was increasingly outward-looking even while still based in neighborhood centers. Circles addressed issues like the war in Vietnam,



debated the merits of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, or hosted avant-garde theatrical productions, events that drew niche audiences from outside their neighborhood. Belonging to a circle became less about where one lived and more about particular, individual concerns, about identities far more specific than class. By the early 1980s, the national support network for associations, the Italian Cultural and Recreational Association (ARCI) had splintered into a loose confederation of separate associations for women, youth, gays, hunters, and environmentalists, among others. These groups later spawned significant national and international not-for-profit organizations: Legambiente, the largest environmental organization in Italy; Arcigay, the most important Italian gay rights advocacy group; SlowFood, the well-known international organization that proposes artisanal and agricultural traditions as key elements in economic alternatives to globalization; to name a few. What are the threads that link these newer organizations to the *case del popolo* of the 1950s? How might a taking a wider view of the history of associations over many decades complicate the observations made in this dissertation? Studies of these later transformations of associationism could complement and reinforce the conclusions of this study of the 1950s and 60s. I hope that this work might serve as a jumping off point for such future studies, which could inform our understandings of the social geography of associationism, of the implications of place on belonging. These questions are only becoming more salient in our contemporary social realities in which place-less virtual communities have supplanted many emplaced forms of sociability like clubs and voluntary associations.

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