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Virgile Cirefice, *"L'espoir quotidien": cultures et imaginaires socialistes en France et en Italie (1944-1949)*. Rome: École française de Rome, 2022. vii + 580 pp. Annexes, bibliography, list of illustrations, and index. €35.00. (pb). ISBN 9782728315314; €9.90. ISBN 9782728315505 (eb).

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It has frequently been an illuminating exercise to compare the political situations of France and Italy, two neighbouring countries with remarkable similarities and equally remarkable differences. The *locus classicus* is probably the pioneering study of *Communism in Italy and France*, edited by Donald Blackmer and Sidney Tarrow.[1] Most of the contributing papers focused on one or the other country and it was left to the editors to draw comparisons, while recognising the pitfalls, especially in the dominance of single-country research, and the problems of dealing with different understandings of apparently similar concepts. More recently, several studies have focused on the other end of the political spectrum, exemplified by Andrea Mammone's *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy*, which demonstrates the influence of reciprocal relations and transnational networks in the development of the two movements.[2]

Virgile Cirefice's study of the socialist parties of France and Italy is the result of doctoral research that featured extensive archival research in both countries and is published by the French School in Rome, which has a long and distinguished history of collaborative work. He presents a deep dive into the activities of leaders and militants in the two socialist parties over a period of five or six years after the Second World War, examining the ways they presented themselves, the ideas uniting and dividing them, and the evolving relationships between them. It is an impressive and fine-grained study that combines detailed analyses of many episodes with a clear grasp of the underlying issues at stake.

The introduction presents the approach as "une histoire croisée et transnationale du socialisme des deux pays" which explains their divergences at least in part by "un ensemble de représentations": a body of representations of power, history, society, the role the party can play, and the legitimate means it can use (p. 13). He especially acknowledges the work of Edward Thompson, Serge Berstein, Jean-François Sirinelli, Christophe Prochasson and Marc Lazar, though many other leading historians are cited and have informed his analysis. The emphasis on representations is a key part of what might comprise the culture of socialism and its "imaginaire collectif" (p. 14). He, therefore, offers a cultural history that does not focus on intellectual frameworks or cultural artefacts, but rather on behaviour and attitudes, analysing the discourses, codes, symbols, and rituals that express them. They are summed up by an anonymous contributor to the socialist weekly, *L'Avenir du Nord*, who lists some of the improvements socialists aim to bring to the everyday life of ordinary people: from meat on the table

and a happy home to a future for young people and contented old age. The writer concludes: "Le socialisme, c'est la permanence de l'espoir quotidien" (p. 507). This expression of everyday hope gives an appropriate title to the book.

From the beginning, Cirefice suggests that the spectre of Marxism ("*le surmoi marxiste*," p.11 and *passim*) hangs over socialists of both countries. This is a recurring theme, in which Marxist philosophy and communist practice act as pressures, often unconscious, that shape the socialists' conceptual frameworks and their approach to action, as well as their relationship with the powerful communist party in their country. The response of socialists to these pressures provides one of the fundamental divisions between the French socialist party (SFIO) and its Italian counterpart (PSI), which took opposite directions in the great fracture of the Cold War. The refusal of the Italian socialists to break with the Italian communist party brought an end to their relationship with the SFIO and the expulsion of the PSI from the international socialist movement.

The main body of the book follows three movements: how socialists acted to rebuild their country after the war, how they saw themselves and behaved in everyday practice, and how they fell into divisions with the onset of the Cold War.

For the socialists, rebuilding the country in both cases meant reconstructing the socialist party, with all the complexities of combining a new start with honouring the past and its many ambiguities. The new start was made possible by the radical discrediting of the right and far-right movements that had supported the regimes of Pétain and Mussolini. This also raised the option of new political configurations, including the possibility of joint action or even amalgamation with the communists, who were then at the height of their prestige. In the event, the majority decision of both socialist parties was to reconstitute a version of their previous organisation, with a strong steer from their former leaders, Léon Blum and Pietro Nenni. Both parties then faced the question of participation in government, and took similar decisions to join a ruling coalition, though not without a good deal of internal debate. Relations with their respective communist partners were a point of particular anguish, mingled with a certain inferiority complex. Attitudes to the bourgeois and pro-clerical Christian democrats were guarded. Initially, both socialist parties enjoyed fraternal relations on the international stage.

One of the initial challenges both faced was to implement radical and even revolutionary change and to reconcile it with a commitment to a democratic Republic. They looked back warmly on the revolutionary aspirations of the Resistance movement which had propelled them to unprecedented access to power at the Liberation. At the same time, they acknowledged the overriding need for a democratic political settlement that could provide a bulwark against the return of fascism. As a result, the Republic became a many-hued concept and a locus for options, from the soaring rhetoric of power to the people to the messy compromises of parliamentary democracy.

Cirefice proposes to understand the socialist worldview through the way they represented themselves in discourse at many levels. Sources such as private letters and memoires are precious though in short supply, and he draws heavily on the published sources, especially in the press of the period. He suggests that a fundamental issue at stake is the conflict between two visions of socialism. One is an antagonistic socialism, striving for the victory of the oppressed working class against the dominant bourgeoisie and the oppressive structures of the capitalist mode of production. The other vision is a

humanist socialism that strives for moral improvement leading to the emancipation of the entire human race. The socialism of class struggle was deeply rooted in the experience of manual workers and provided a strong bond with the communists. The socialism of human emancipation was powered by revulsion against the atrocities of the recent war and articulated by intellectuals and leaders like Léon Blum, whose *A l'échelle humaine* was a classic statement.[3] The two conceptions were capable of being brought together, but also lay the basis for quite opposed political strategies.

Painting a picture of how the socialists thought of themselves, Cirefice invokes Benedict Anderson's concept of an "imagined community."[4] He shows the complexities of loyalty to a tradition and membership of a community. Members valued the freedom and comradeship, and often had long-standing family ties and a deep-seated feeling of belonging to a movement. Party militants were expected to exercise discipline, set an example to others, and maintain high moral standards. They were proud to be workers, but worried about how they should relate to the middle classes and the peasantry. A perennial concern was whether communists were brothers in arms or false friends. The socialist parties were both predominantly masculine and had difficulty in opening to women, not least because they feared that women were too influenced by the Catholic Church. Both parties had around 11 percent of women members and, despite declarations of equality, struggled to include them in practice.

Religion was a constant issue for the two socialist parties, both of which had a history of anticlericalism and an instinctive suspicion of the Catholic Church. The Church, for its part, had a long history of denouncing socialism and continued to preach against it. The parties were both aware that many of their members were practising Catholics, and the religious traditions of both countries continued to exercise great influence in the representations that the parties presented. A frequent strategy was for the parties to attack the official actions and statements of the Catholic authorities while courting progressive-minded and working-class Christians. There was also a messianic tradition within Marxism, and some aspects of Christian teaching could be mobilised against capitalist forms of alienation and exploitation.

Both parties had similar approaches to their organisation. Most activities were carried out at a local level where members were recruited, trained, brought together regularly in meetings of different kinds, and encouraged to take part in campaigning. Cirefice offers engaging insights into the symbols and rituals that helped to cement their members' sense of belonging. The parties deployed red flags, banners, anthems like the *Internationale*, and images of great figures of the past. These adorned the many popular fetes and festivals they organised around significant dates, such as May Day, or institutions, like the party newspapers. They organised leisure activities, including sports teams and cinema clubs, with mixed success, and worked to put their stamp on public spaces through plaques, posters, demonstrations, and celebrations.

The two final chapters return to a more chronological account of relations between the French and Italian parties. 1947 marked the beginning of serious internal divisions within both parties as they attempted to respond to the deteriorating political situation. From these followed the increasing rift between the two parties as the Italians adopted a united front with the communists against the Christian Democrats and their allies, while the French sought to embody a 'third force' between the communists and the Gaullists. The intensifying Cold War exacerbated differences, amid strikes, mass

demonstrations, anti-war protests, and conflict on the streets. The differences soon led to the breakdown in relations between the two parties.

At each stage, Cirefice provides detailed documentation in support of the broader argument he is developing. With an impressive range of sources from archives, including private letters and police reports, he gives nuanced analyses of particular incidents, recognising the range of different positions his subjects occupy. He notes some conspicuous exceptions, including the anguished position of the Italian socialists working in France but belonging to the PSI: their organisation was shut down in 1948.

A particular attraction of the book is the many illustrations: photographs, posters, cartoons, maps, and tables, most of which are used to confirm specific points in the argument. Some of them would merit much more discussion, like Figure 47, which strikingly depicts an image of Christ and a text from St Matthew, with the invocation to vote for socialism in order to redeem the poor from being exploited by the rich. Cirefice only rarely gives expansive discussions, however, since he is working with an understanding of culture as collective representation, where the political community, rather than the signifying practice, is the object of study.

His rich and detailed account of how the two parties navigated the turbulent postwar years is full of insights, especially in highlighting the contradictions and complexities involved, from the competing visions of socialism (antagonistic or humanistic) to the conflicting self-perceptions of the socialists (solid or unstable, firmly principled, or self-doubting). He successfully demonstrates that comparison between the two countries can contribute to a deeper understanding of both and of the commonalities and differences between them. In the process, he sheds some interesting sidelights on the complexities of political movements in other countries that share similar aspirations, especially on the socialist and social democratic parties of other European countries.

NOTES

[1] Donald L.M. Blackmer and Sidney Tarrow, eds., *Communism in Italy and France* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015), originally published in 1976.

[2] Andrea Mammone, *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[3] Léon Blum, *A l'échelle humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).

[4] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983).

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