

1968 : The Italian Paradox

Why in Italy, on the one hand, there has been the most widespread student protest and the longest (every year until today in the Italian schools the ritual of student occupations is repeated), and for decades the Italian Communist Party has been the most voted in the western world, but, on the other hand, today in 2018 in Italy there is the only alt-right government of Western Europe? This is the Italian paradox that I will deal with in this paper.

Two public figures marching to a different drummer

Almost all Italian intellectuals (writers, artists, journalists) immediately fell in love with 1968. And the student protest in Pisa and Milano initially then spread everywhere. Only two great intellectuals opposed it; they were very different from each other, but both courageous and alien by fashion: Norberto Bobbio and Pierpaolo Pasolini. They found serious intellectual contradictions and moral distortions in the ideas and practices of 1968.

The two were quite different from each other : Bobbio, upper class, older, renowned scholar, lecturer and writer of political philosophy, senator for life of the Italian republic, married, father and reserved. Pasolini middle class, younger, poet and most of all controversial film director, openly gay, artistic, libertine and outspoken. However they shared some common characteristics: 1) humility, lack of snobbery, 2) great erudition in the humanities , even though in different fields, 3) a deep involvement in the resistance during the war without being communist. 4) a vocation in being moral mentors of the younger generations.

In June 1968 Bobbio was teaching at the University of Turin, and published several articles on the students' protest.

"Today we know that freedom can be used for good and for bad. You can use it not to educate but to corrupt not to increase your ideal heritage but to squander it. not to make men wiser and noble, but to make them more ignorant and vulgar. Freedom can also be wasted. You can waste it to the point of making it look useless, an unnecessary asset. indeed harmful. And by dint of wasting it, one day or another (near? Far?) We will lose it.

They will take it off. We do not know yet who: whether those who have let prosper to our right or those who are impetuously growing to our left. We still have the suspicion, fueled by a continuous severe lesson lasting half a century, that the difference will not be very large."

In June 1968 Pasolini was living in Rome and working as a film director. After a clash between students and policemen, he wrote a poem. Here are a few verses:

**Now journalists from all over the world
(including
those of televisions)
they lick you /.../the ass. Not me, dear.**

**You are fearful, uncertain, desperate
/.../ but you also know how to be
bossy, blackmailers, confident and
shameless
/.../
This, dear children, you know.
And you apply it through two
imperative feelings:**

**the awareness of your rights (you know,
democracy
takes only you into consideration) and
greed for
power.
Yes, your horrible slogans always focus
on the taking of power.
In your beards I read impotent
ambitions,
In your pallors I read desperate
snobbism,**

Success (the Takeover of Power)

After 50 years since then, the great majority of 1968's young leaders are now at the top of power in Italian politics, economy and academia.

“especially in the media and in politics, which self-protect themselves and bar the passage to others. And if you go to dig into the biographies of important entrepreneurs or managers, in age, you find that almost everyone has a past as 1968 militants/leaders. And then there are already well-placed children of theirs (nepotism). We will never get rid of it.” (Massimo Fini, 2017).

Failures (Promises Unfulfilled)

Having been in power for decades now, they should have at least partially realised their ideals. But paradoxically the opposite happened: 1) the protest had begun in the university against the academic 'barons', and today the nepotist corruption in Italian academia has increased exponentially. The movement wanted 2) to free the youths from the oppression of the family, but, while then the young people were soon at work and living on their own, today half of them are unemployed and stay at their parents house till late. 3) The 1968's activists were pacifists and against the American war in Vietnam; but, while before 1968 the Italian Republic had never entered any war, afterwards she took part in 8 wars overseas. 4) The movement was strongly antifascist, and today a fascist party is forming the new Italian government.

Let us see these points one by one.

Age of emancipation from parents

In 1968 the average age in which young Italians left their parents' home was 25 years.

In 2016, the average exit age of parents in Italy is 30.1 years, fourth in Europe after Malta, Croatia, and Slovakia. For example, we compare: Young people between 18 and 25 years of age living with their parents are 23% in Denmark, and 79% in Italy.

The Quest for Transparency in Academia

The decline of Italy's universities, none of which currently appear in the world's top 200, is a constant source of lament among the country's chattering classes. But the reason for this sorry state is laid bare by new research that shows the extent of nepotism in higher education.

In 2010 the investigative magazine L'Espresso has revealed the astonishing degree to which lecturing jobs are kept in the family in Italy's academia. In Rome's La Sapienza University, for example, a third of the teaching staff have close family members as fellow lecturers. Overall, the country's higher institutions are 10 times more likely than other places of work to employ two or more members of the same family.

Whereas in the very years following 1968 (the Seventies) many of those young leaders of the movement became academics without having family connections

War and peace

Till 1968 the Italian republic never take part in a war, whereas after that date, it took part in eight of them :1982 in Lebanon, 1991 First Gulf War, 1992 Bosnian War, 1992 Somali Civil War, 1997 Albanian Civil War, 1998 Kosovo War, 2001 Macedonia, 2003 Iraq, 2011 Lybia.

Fascism

In 1960 the students said they were the heirs of the Resistance partisans, they declared themselves all anti-fascists and called 'fascist' their teachers and parents, the police, the judges and all the political parties that were not the communist one. They already did not admitted that the true , historical anti-fascism was done by very few people in Italy during the fascist era and the war.

Today in the Italian government of 2018 Salvini (when young he was communist) dresses with the black shirt and has threatened the president of the republic to make a march on Rome, he has announced that the police will be ruthless to maintain order, he sympathized with explicit fascist youth groups (Forza Nuova, Casa Pound) that openly praise Mussolini.

A Paradox

It is a paradox, isn't it? ...

What is a paradox?

A paradox is a statement which can be false , yes, but is more likely to be true, even though it seems false. Why? 1) Because it is so different from what we are used to thinking and 2) because we are not (easily) able to understand its logical structure.

A System of Ideas

Why this paradoxical failure which, so far, has never been acknowledged by the witnesses, the protagonists, and, also, by the scholars and the historians ?

Being in power in academia, politics and media, every ten years from 1968 (1978, 1988, etc.) there were only self-flattering celebrations without any self criticism: in that year the 'heroic' ones had rebelled against the 'system' of capitalism and oppression etc etc

In this paper I will argue that this failure derives from the very fundamental ideas of that neo-Marxist movement. So, I will analyse the very ideas which built the ideology of 1968 Italian movement (an ideology is: a 'system of ideas'). The ideology in short was a Romantic version of Marxism:

The ideas I would like to analyse are: materialism, Machiavellianism, extremism, anti-authoritarianism and moral narcissism

Materialism

The activists of 1968 followed the materialistic philosophy of Karl Marx who, within the reality, distinguished the so-called structure (economic facts, production, work relationships, market) from the so-called superstructure (politics, religion, art) saying that only the structure is important and the superstructure depends on the structure, has not autonomous force. However, it can serve the structure to hide it and allow it to act wickedly. For example: the industrial capitalistic exploitation of the 19th century GB (structure) produced a kind of fake world of liberal institutions, liberal philosophy, liberal education that only served to hide with noble words and respectable feelings a ruthless thirst for wealth and a cynical practice of exploitation.

These ideas have made 1968 activists support the factory workers' struggles and idealized what was called the working-class, in their economic demands. Whereas, on the other hand, they never fought for liberals ideals, such as balance of powers, freedom of press, separation of the church from the state, anti-trust laws.

30 years afterwards, the result was that they did not understand and did not fight Berlusconi who acquired the monopoly of the media and attacked the independence of the judiciary. And the famous 'working class' spoiled by economic well-being and ignorant of the ideals and institutions of liberalism, has no longer abandoned the left and started voting for Berlusconi and Fascists.

Machiavellianism

In one famous Machiavelli's sentence: "The ends justify the means"

Marx was a strong admirer of Machiavelli and after him Lenin and after him Gramsci and the Italian leader of the communist party Togliatti.

1968 activists publicly said : we want to get power in politics and media and academia in order to subvert it,. But, privately they said to themselves: to do that, we need to use non decent means such as nepotism and cronyism.

Machiavelli's sentence means that politics must be independent from morality: for example throughout the first decades of my life I have often heard that, if a communist leader is very rich, this does not have anything to do with his being a good politician

What are the current outcome of this idea and attitude? Today Italy is the third most corrupt country in the European union according to watchdog Transparency International, and 60th in the world.

Italian MPs are by far the most paid in the EU 167, 000 euros , the second is Austria with 120,000 euros

Anti-authoritarianism

Their anti-authoritarian propaganda was always confusing two very different things: 1) the abuse of bullies who use power beyond, out of and against the law; and 2) the need to respect the law. While pretending of fighting the bullies, in reality they advocated the scorn of laws and rules

This has been a cancer for Italian society ever since . Already in 1968 the activists preached:

- the Right to have a minimum 'pass' score for all the exams at school and at the university, regardless, the quality of the performance;
- to be able to occupy universities and other public places;
- not to pay the due university fees;
- being able to break the laws on the consumption of drugs

But then this disobedience to laws has expanded like a cancer: Italy is the country with the highest tax evasion in Europe (In Italy, the rate of evasion was 27.55 percent, in Sweden is only 1.2 percent).

Another example of current outcomes of this idea of disobedience to is the current school situation where violence against teachers by students and parents has continuously increased . Violence caused by 'fail' marks given by the teachers.

Extremism

The 1968 activists were extremists: they were always in favour of direct democracy against parliamentary democracy and in favour of personal charismatic leadership against the limitation of power, that is, the division of powers, that is, political liberalism.

They despised reforms and praised 'revolution', that is, of extreme change. Their heroes were Mao Zedong, Ho-Ci-Min, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro.

Today the new government wants to "revolutionize" Italy: 1) Outside the European Union; 2) Printing the old currency (the Lira) in order to finance an universal state benefit called 'citizenship income for all'; 3) Outside Italy from NATO; 4) Deport hundreds of thousands of immigrants.

And Steve Bannon, Trump's strategist, went to Rome twice and declared 'the revolution begins in Italy'

Moral narcissism

Definition: it is the tendency to think about morality in terms of how your actions make you feel about yourself as superior to the others rather in terms of their consequences for others. It is the joy of feeling righteous and, because of that, allowed to despise the others as inferior because they are unrighteous and vicious.

The 1968 activists used to feel morally superior to many categories of people: 1) parents and adults in general (they are too narrow minded, selfish, traditionalist, 'bourgeois'); 2) the police: all the policemen are fascist; 3) the teachers: out of date, crony, authoritarian, handing down ideologies which back and support the wicked current social 'system'; 4) the Americans: warmongers, addicted to consumes, racist against black people

As an example of analysis of this quality: racism , they felt superior to the "racist Americans" because in Italy there were not black people then.

Today, when there are, Italy is the most racist country of western world and this especially against the black African immigrants (not much against the eastern European women who work as carers, because they are white skinned and fair haired), who are blamed for allegedly being: lazy, stinky, benefit fraudsters, thieves, bullies, rapists, unfair competitors, illiterate, rude, fanatic, terrorists.