



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

ARCHIVIO ISTITUZIONALE DELLA RICERCA

Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna Archivio istituzionale della ricerca

Recensione a: Rossana Rossanda e il PCI. Dalla battaglia culturale alla sconfitta politica (1956-1966) by Alessandro Barile, Roma, Carocci, 2022

This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:

Ventresca, R. (2024). Recensione a: Rossana Rossanda e il PCI. Dalla battaglia culturale alla sconfitta politica (1956-1966) by Alessandro Barile, Roma, Carocci, 2022. MODERN ITALY, 1, 1-2 [10.1017/mit.2024.39].

Availability:

This version is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/995739> since: 2024-11-05

Published:

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1017/mit.2024.39>

Terms of use:

Some rights reserved. The terms and conditions for the reuse of this version of the manuscript are specified in the publishing policy. For all terms of use and more information see the publisher's website.

This item was downloaded from IRIS Università di Bologna (<https://cris.unibo.it/>).
When citing, please refer to the published version.

(Article begins on next page)

Recensione di **Roberto Ventresca** al libro:

Rossana Rossanda e il PCI. Dalla battaglia culturale alla sconfitta politica (1956–1966)

Alessandro Barile, Carocci 2022 - ISBN 9788829018055

Rossana Rossanda (1924–2020) was a versatile, insightful and combative communist militant throughout her long life. The features of that life were condensed into her incisive 2005 memoir *La ragazza del secolo scorso* (literally *The Girl of the Last Century*, but translated into English as *The Comrade from Milan*). Alessandro Barile's work, however, is not a proper biography of Rossanda's early political experience. Rather, the author explores her role as a director of the Italian Communist Party's (PCI's) Cultural Section (formerly the Cultural Commission) between 1962 and 1966, thus shedding new light on a subject – and, incidentally, a segment of Rossanda's own life – that in Barile's opinion has been largely overlooked by the current historiography. After discussing the book's general scope and highlighting the tension between culture and politics as the main conceptual pillar of his research, in the first chapter Barile outlines how Rossanda took her early steps as a prominent representative of the PCI's cultural policy in post-1945 Milan's *Casa della cultura* (house of culture). He also investigates the watershed of 1956 – a year marked by the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Poznan upheavals, the Suez issue, and the Budapest invasion by Soviet troops – as a significant turning point in the broader relationship between the PCI and intellectuals during the early stages of the Cold War. The second chapter provides the reader with an in-depth analysis of Rossanda's appointment as a new director of the party's Cultural Section in December 1962 under Togliatti's auspices, as well as her efforts to reshape the connection between culture and politics in light of the staggering transformations experienced since the mid- to late 1950s both in Italy (i.e. the so-called economic boom) and in the international communist movement (destalinisation, détente and dissent within the Eastern bloc). The third (short) chapter focuses on the events that occurred within the PCI's Cultural Section after 1966, when the party's leading branch did not renew Rossanda's appointment and when both political and ideological frictions with emerging extra-parliamentary leftist forces increased. Finally, the book features a series of short interviews with prominent protagonists of that political season – namely, Giuseppe Vacca, Luciana Castellina, Aldo Tortorella, Filippo Maone and Mario Tronti. Barile's journey through Rossanda's political trajectory as a director of the PCI's Cultural Section touches upon several issues regarding the party's own 'translation' of Marxist categories within a changing industrial democracy, as Italy turned out to be after 1945. Barile explores the well-known 1956 debate in the PCI's magazine *Il Contemporaneo* and retraces a confrontation that retrospectively pivoted on the concept of freedom as a juncture between the communists' political strategies, the role of intellectuals and the setting up of an updated 'Marxist science' through which to address the often unexpected transformations that Italian society was undergoing at that time. Furthermore, the author portrays Rossanda's and the whole party's cultural commitment between the late 1950s and the early 1960s as an effort to understand the reconfigurations of the national working class both as a political subject and as an object of sociological or literary analysis. In this respect, Rossanda complained about the lack of a 'revolutionary framework' that could prevent the working class's full integration into the existing state and its social structures, given that Italy's cultural trends – that is, trends that were well beyond the party's remit and Marxist circles – were still imbued with the legacy of idealism (pp. 50–54). As a former student of Antonio Banfi in Milan in fact, Rossanda began criticising the wider historicist tradition that deeply permeated the party's cultural horizon. To some extent, this contributed to the

deterioration in her political relations with leading party members – from the former director of the Cultural Commission, Mario Alicata, to Gian Carlo Pajetta – as well as affecting her own role as a head of the Cultural Section. Along with the reflection on historicism, Barile stresses the extent to which Rossanda's confrontation with the ongoing debates on neocapitalism, consumerism and mass culture – note, for instance, the controversy with Umberto Eco in 1963 (pp. 126–129) – moulded her conceptualisation of how the PCI should have behaved with regard to the 'cultural dimension' of the early 1960s. In doing so, the author emphasises Rossanda's claims that the party needed to shift from the pretension/claim to directly intervening in the making of the cultural domain (and its related products) to the goal of stimulating its autonomous evolution. It must be noted that the author's narrative and methodological perspective seem to privilege, in some cases at least, a sociological interpretation of well-known topics relating to the wider Italian cultural debate of the 1950s and 1960s rather than a specific historiographic reconstruction of Rossanda's broader political path. However, this book offers a useful understanding of the communists' attitude towards issues that were particularly crucial in the general economic, social and political developments of post-Second World War Italy, such as the relationship between school education and professional training, or the PCI's views on urban policies, to mention just two. In the end, Rossanda aimed to keep alive a productive connection between the political strain of building up socialism and a non-bourgeois – i.e. non-liberal – interpretation of cultural freedom, whose seeds would then nourish the global movement of 1968 and Rossanda's own experiences in the following years, including the creation of *Il Manifesto* and her expulsion from the PCI.