Culture was a crucial yet elusive battlefield of the Cold War. Both superpowers tried to promote their way of life and values to the world but had to do so carefully. The means adopted by the United States included not only propaganda and the use of mass media such as cinema and television but also efforts to help shape the world of highbrow culture and the arts. The Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), an organization sponsored by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), offered U.S. policymakers and intellectuals the opportunity to provide indirect support for anti-Communist intellectuals without being openly associated with their activities. Although the CCF represented one of the main instruments for the United States to try to win the hearts and minds of postwar Europe, it also created new challenges for U.S. Cold Warriors. By tying themselves to the European intelligentsia, they were forced to mediate between different societies, cultures, and intellectual traditions. This article looks at the contexts of France and Italy to highlight this interplay of competing notions of anti-Communism and cultural freedom and how the local actors involved helped redefine the character and limits of U.S. cultural diplomacy. Although scholars have looked at the CCF and its significance, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, a focus on French and Italian intellectuals can offer fresh insights into this subject.

The Congress for Cultural Freedom was the product of a convergence of interests between the CIA’s recently established Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) and a small number of American and European intellectuals, many of them former Communists, concerned about the perceived success of the Soviet cultural offensive in Western Europe. Its origins lay in the previous two decades as much as in the climate of the early Cold War: it built on a transatlantic network of anti-totalitarian thinkers who had fought the fascist
regimes of Italy, Germany, and Spain in the 1930s and 1940s and who, after 1945, had seen Iosif Stalin’s Soviet Union as the greatest threat to freedom.

In June 1950, an ostensibly independent Congress for Cultural Freedom was held at the Titania Palast in West Berlin, bringing together intellectuals from a variety of personal and political backgrounds who were united only by their commitment to defend cultural freedom from Stalinist encroachments. The driving force behind the Congress was a small group of U.S. and European intellectuals, including prestigious ex-Communists such as the writers Arthur Koestler and Ignazio Silone. The funding, however, came from the CIA, as some participants found out almost twenty years later. The decision by U.S. intelligence to provide secret funding for this heterogeneous group of intellectuals reflected concerns about the penetration of Communist sympathies among the educated elites of Western Europe. A formally independent organization seemed to offer a greater possibility of drawing them away from the fellow-traveling and neutralist positions that, in the long run, could undermine their democratic systems. The CIA thus aimed its strategy not so much at rightwing anti-Communist as at the non-Communist Left, considered a more effective instrument to turn the European intelligentsia away from the attraction of Communism.

The Berlin Congress for Cultural Freedom led to the creation of the homonymous organization, which operated until 1967, when revelations in the press about the secret CIA funding forced a fundamental change in its character and membership. The CCF located its headquarters in Paris and supported the setup of national branches in most West European countries to promote the democratic values it identified with a common Western tradition through seminars and conferences, demonstrations, and the publication of pamphlets and magazines. Among its most enduring legacies are the Science and Freedom conference in Hamburg in 1953 and the Future of Freedom conference in Milan in 1955. The former gathered Western scientists to affirm the principle of the freedom of scientific research and condemn government attempts to limit or direct free scientific enquiry. The latter popularized the notion of the “end of ideology,” which posited the exhaustion of ideologically driven recipes for social progress in the West, replaced by pragmatic improvement through technological and scientific expertise. The CCF became closely identified with the theory of the end of ideology, contributing to its success in the following years. At the peak of its growth, in the 1960s, it had expanded

---

to all continents and organized cultural and artistic events both alone and in collaboration with governments and universities worldwide.

From its foundation, the creators of the CCF conceived of it as an international organization not exclusively identified with any country or region. Its central principles of anti-Communism and defense of free culture allowed it to move smoothly from a predominant concern with Western Europe in the early 1950s to a range of activities and national branches that by the following decade were much more focused on the developing world. Nonetheless, two countries from the outset were especially delicate, not only because of their own political and intellectual significance but also because of the larger implications they had on the mission of the CCF. France and Italy were central to the work of the organization for the better part of the 1950s and continued to play a significant role even after the main front of the Cold War had moved away from them.

In the first years of the Cold War, the centrality of these two countries was warranted by the fear that Communists could come to power, democratically or by force, in the heart of Western Europe. Even when such an outcome appeared less and less likely, Italian and French Communists continued to have by far the largest mass following of Communists in the West. A large part of the two countries’ public opinion and intellectual classes expressed sympathy, even open support, for Communist and neutralist positions. Analysts in Washington and intellectuals in New York were worried that a failure to oppose these feelings and the Communist propaganda that spurred them could ultimately undermine the support for democratic parties and institutions and pave the way for a Communist takeover in the midst of Western Europe. Cultural warfare thus touched directly on the geopolitical and military concerns of the early Cold War. To wrest French and Italian intellectuals away from neutralism and fellow-traveling required years, money, and credible figures who could lend their prestige to the newly formed organization.

The CCF directly promoted or sponsored activities to counter Communist propaganda in France and Italy mainly through three related channels. An important part of the Congress’s initiatives in the two countries was conducted through their national committees, the Amis de la Liberté and the Associazione Italiana per la Libertà della Cultura (AILC). Operating directly or relying on local groups and associations, the two committees were mostly oriented toward the capillary task of mobilizing and informing a large number of citizens about issues involving the defense of cultural freedom. Their activities included the publication of bulletins and pamphlets, the organization of conferences and debates on international or national issues, and public protests or demonstrations against the Soviet Union or its satellites. The
Congress also attempted to establish a relationship with prestigious intellectuals, especially those undecided between sympathy for certain aspects of the Communist message and rejection of Soviet policies. Depending on the nature of these activities and on the circumstances, the French and Italian members of the CCF could decide to emphasize either the national committees or the personal, high-profile engagement with artists and thinkers. In certain cases, the latter could be more effective. More so than with U.S. intellectuals or lesser-known figures, the well-known anti-fascist militancy and intellectual stature of prestigious people such as Silone or sociologist and philosopher Raymond Aron made it harder for local Communists to dismiss them as agents of U.S. imperialism and allowed the organization to operate more effectively in the leftist and independent milieus.

Finally, a significant part of the work of the CCF in France and Italy revolved around its magazines, *Preuves* and *Tempo presente*. The former, originally intended as a Congress bulletin and later turned into a full-fledged magazine, faced considerable hostility in Paris because of its defense of an Atlanticist foreign policy—its critics dubbed it the “American magazine”—and its vigorous anti-Communism. *Preuves* was also characterized by strong support for the idea of European integration and attention to East European intellectuals, especially after the thaw in Cold War tensions in the mid-1950s. *Tempo presente*, edited by Silone and journalist and critic Nicola Chiaromonte, began publication in April 1956, and it reflected both the changed international landscape and the independence of its editors. The two magazines provided an important instrument for the CCF to reach out to intellectuals who hesitated to join the activities of the national committees, which they saw as too overtly political, but who belonged to the leftist or neutralist circles that the Congress aimed to engage. Although this article does not deal with *Preuves* and *Tempo presente* in detail, they were one of the main achievements of the CCF and made significant contributions to the intellectual life of the two countries.

Several authors, beginning with Peter Coleman and Frances Stonor Saunders, have discussed the character and significance of the cultural Cold War


and the CCF. Coleman provides a sympathetic portrayal of the work of the CCF, stressing the real threat to cultural freedom coming from the Soviet Union and the lack of viable alternatives to CIA funding in the early 1950s. Saunders condemns the agency’s involvement, judging that it altered the intellectual landscape of the Cold War by promoting to a first-class role people who served U.S. interests. Volker Berghahn has also written about the U.S. cultural diplomatic efforts in Europe and the double challenge of Communism and anti-Americanism. More recent works by Giles Scott-Smith and Hugh Wilford have challenged both the more apologetic accounts of the CCF’s record and the simplistic interpretations of the cultural Cold War as merely a cover for CIA control over European intellectual life. Whether by describing the CCF as conducive to a general realignment of Western elites into a hegemonic Atlanticist discourse, as Scott-Smith does, or by stressing the contested nature of its activities and the ability of intellectuals to appropriate its activities for their own purposes, these authors have complicated a debate that had long concentrated on the morality of accepting CIA funding. As a result, their contributions have added greater complexity to the relationship between American patrons and CCF affiliates. They have continued, however, to concentrate overwhelmingly on the Anglo-American dimension of the cultural Cold War, looking at the unique context of Great Britain and the English-language sources.

A growing literature has recently integrated this picture with an assessment of the CCF’s activities in other countries, including India and the Netherlands. In addition, valuable works on U.S. psychological warfare in


Western Europe have improved our understanding of U.S. policies in the early Cold War and the resistance and obstacles they faced. Recent scholarship on the state-private network has also contributed to placing the CCF in the context of similar efforts in which non-governmental agents were relied on to further the goals of U.S. diplomacy. Another significant debate associated with the Congress concerns the extent to which artistic movements, and in particular abstract expressionism, were employed by the U.S. government as Cold War tools. The “revisionist” argument maintains that sponsorship of artists such as Jackson Pollock, directly or through organizations such as the CCF and the Museum of Modern Art, contributed to their success in the United States and abroad and to the image of the United States as a free and culturally vibrant society. This article does not address such questions, in part because of space limitations. The choice also reflects, however, the scarce archival evidence of CCF efforts to promote such aesthetic questions in France and Italy. Whether because of lack of pressure from its officers or the peculiar dynamics of the production and criticism of modern art in France and Italy, such considerations seem to have played a very limited role in the experience of the Congress in the 1950s.

This article thus expands on previous work by providing a different perspective on what continues to be a relatively understudied topic: how French and Italian intellectuals responded to pressure from the officers of the CCF and how they fit into the Congress’s transatlantic network of intellectuals. The article traces the activity of CCF affiliates in France and Italy, the peculiar character of their anti-Communist campaigns, and the way European


intellectuals fulfilled—or fell short of—the expectations that Americans had about the nature of cultural warfare. I discuss the efforts to establish the credibility of the Congress in the two countries, including the difficulties the CCF faced and the ways national realities colored and influenced the nature of the CCF’s cultural Cold War. At stake were fundamental questions about the nature and legitimacy of anti-Communism, which appeared very different not only on both sides of the Atlantic but among the countries of Western Europe.

The article also highlights the complicated and at times conflicting relationship between the CCF’s international secretariat in Paris—and, indirectly, the U.S. intellectuals who looked at the CCF and the local actors it financed. The role of the latter as the public faces of the CCF at home and worldwide, far from making them puppets to be maneuvered, increased the agency and independence of its members. The founders of the Congress, including its sponsors in the CIA, deliberately encouraged debate and disagreement within its ranks, and in fact considered this an asset. The coexistence of different political and personal positions would demonstrate, the founders believed, the superiority of a free and open society over totalitarian systems. A “culture of dissent” was, therefore, intrinsic to the nature of the CCF, nor would many of its members have joined if they had been required to silence their opinions. Nonetheless, the practical boundaries of acceptable disagreement were not always evident, and Italian and French members repeatedly tried to redefine and negotiate them.

The CCF employed the prestige of figures such as Silone or Aron when doing so helped it further its goals; for example, in establishing a dialogue with East European intellectuals. In turn, the members used the CCF’s platform and resources when doing so served them. These intellectuals advocated for their own priorities and beliefs inside the CCF—or outside, ignoring it altogether and claiming their independence. Although they never questioned the need for the Congress’s anti-Communist activity, they made sure their voices were heard when it came to defining what the organization’s tone and content would be. Although cooperation was mostly satisfactory for both sides, these instances showed the different ways they interpreted and waged their cultural Cold War. Each national affiliate defended its independence jealously, claiming that it was best suited to deal with the specific conditions in its own country. In doing so, the affiliates also showed that they understood the need to keep their distance from an organization associated with American sponsors and money. In several instances, the CCF had to accept that its allies felt no obligation to defer to its advice and that its influence was limited. The connection between intentions in Washington or Paris and outcomes on the ground
could be far from absolute. In the end, Italian and French intellectuals were as active as their U.S. counterparts in setting the terms of the relationship.

“A confused and apathetic people behind the lines”: The Intellectual Landscape in France and Italy

A fundamental paradox of the post–World War II international scene was that, despite the high degree of institutional and cultural assimilation between Europe and the United States, European intellectuals were largely diffident about, or even hostile toward, the United States, in part because of fears of a supposedly militaristic and imperialistic power being the sole owner of nuclear capability, an image that Communist propaganda contributed to fostering. The deeper roots of this suspicion, however, lay in a representation that had gradually taken hold in Europe, especially among its elites, of the United States as a crass, consumerist, and technologically enslaving society in which the individual inevitably loses his or her identity and disappears into a uniform mass of material wealth and spiritual poverty. Acceptance of the “American way of life” seemed to imply the decadence of Western civilization and its intellectual accomplishments. The double challenge for U.S. policymakers and intellectuals was to denounce the totalitarian nature of Communist rule while at the same time dispelling the image of a shallow and unsophisticated society.

Communist propaganda in Western Europe was especially effective when it played on these fears, which had a much larger reach than a merely political anti-Americanism. As Alessandro Brogi points out, the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) and the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) soon linked the opposition to the cultural and political aspects of Atlanticism—the idea, promoted by Western governments and certain political forces, that the United States and Western Europe should establish close bonds and strengthen their common values and interests. Communists presented resistance to U.S. leadership as a defense of national identity and cultural heritage:

10. The quotation is from a confidential memorandum from Arthur Schlesinger, one of the “witting” U.S. members of the CCF, to one of his contacts in Washington. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., to Kenneth Giniger, 9 June 1952, in Box 375, Folder 2, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

Turning America into a metaphor for all the worst vices that could beset Western civilization, they conjured an image of a new superpower that was both tough and stupid, a combination of greed, aggressiveness, naiveté, and irresponsibility. American dominion, in their view, posed a twin threat to Europe’s independence and intelligence.  

Soviet propaganda and cultural policy were based on the recognition of two realities. On the one hand, Soviet leaders understood that a change in the geopolitical balance in Western Europe would be unlikely in the short term, especially with the consolidation of the Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The likelihood that Communists would come to power through elections in France or Italy had significantly receded by the end of the 1940s. On the other hand, a large segment of public opinion in both countries continued to hold an at best ambivalent view of the dominant power in the Western Hemisphere. Communist initiatives were thus aimed not at establishing Communist regimes in the West but at weakening West European ties with the United States and promoting the growth of a “gray area” of neutralist feeling. In the context of this strategy, the PCF and the PCI joined enthusiastically in the Communist peace campaign of the late 1940s, centered on the basic opposition between an imperialist and war-mongering Western bloc and a peace-loving Communist world. By appropriating the issue and rearticulating the debate on Americanization around peace and cultural resistance, Brogi notes, Italian and French Communists were able to break their political isolation and move beyond a purely economic discourse of opposition to capitalism that was losing traction in the wake of Europe’s speedy reconstruction.

To accomplish these results, the two Communist parties had to rely not only on militants and party members but also, more crucially, on neutralist or undecided intellectuals who could lend their prestige to Communist causes. In France and Italy, therefore, the most important confrontation was not


so much the direct one between Communists and anti-Communists, heated though it often became. Rather, the battle for the hearts and minds of Europe rested instead on the indirect competition for what the *New Leader* defined in those years as the “Commibut”—those individuals and organizations that were sympathetic to the Communist line without officially joining it (“I’m not a Communist, but . . .”).¹⁴ Even some who were not unambiguously in favor of the Communist system believed that Marxism was a valuable interpretative tool of society. Those who subscribed to the notion that the working class was the main agent of change (and that change could come only from the USSR, despite its flaws) were naturally inclined to view the United States as mostly a counterrevolutionary force.¹⁵

When the CCF began its activities in France and Italy in late 1950, it had to contend with this complicated political and intellectual environment. Not only did the Communist parties enjoy considerable prestige among the intelligentsia, but even many intellectuals who did not openly support them opted for some form of neutrality between the United States and the Soviet Union. Among the instruments the CCF put in place were the two national committees, originally conceived as a way to mobilize at the local level social groups that were a natural audience for the Congress, including professional classes, trade unions, students, and youth groups. Both received their funding from the CCF, initially through the American Federation of Labor, and later directly as part of a regular allotment. The committees, however, strove to maintain their autonomy and distinctive identity and had their own staff and governing boards. Although the rationales for their existence were similar, they functioned differently in the two countries. In France, the Amis de la Liberté quickly developed into an organization with a sizable membership and presence in several provinces outside Paris. The committee included different political families united by their anti-Communism and directed its efforts at an “intellectual middle class” made up of professionals, teachers, and local figures. In Italy, the AILC followed the opposite path: its officers, to the disappointment of the CCF leadership, opted for a limited number of high-profile members rather than for mass participation, and for a less militant approach. Only later did it join forces with existing local groups to gain a wider reach and penetration into the provincial intellectual milieu.

---


The Polarization of French Intellectuals

Historians have offered divergent explanations for the predominance of left-wing and radical intellectual positions in France from the end of World War II until the 1970s, pointing to the Jacobin revolutionary tradition or to the absence of robust liberal political thought and of “a well-founded tradition of rights discourse.” What they agree on, however, is the characterization of postwar Paris as especially receptive to the message of the PCF. The concern that U.S. officials expressed about the situation in France, and especially Paris, at the beginning of the Cold War is hard to overstate. U.S. diplomats and intellectuals were highly skeptical about the possibility of intervening effectively in the “atmosphere of intellectual arrogance” in the French capital and were wary of working with the “fuzzy and unrealistic” neutralist intellectuals. Although the United States initially concentrated on economic and military assistance to Europe through the Marshall Plan and NATO, U.S. policymakers could not afford to ignore the impact that the intellectual scene in Paris had on a wider network of influential European artists and thinkers. Brogi notes that “from the American point of view, it did not matter how many intellectuals actually joined the PCF or the PCI; the problem was the emergence of a cultural milieu dominated by the Marxist or pro-Marxist Left.”

Michael S. Christofferson has estimated that, even at the peak of the PCF’s popularity, a majority of French intellectuals never joined the party. Rather, they saw it as a difficult but indispensable ally in the goal of transforming French society. The PCF’s most effective influence was in the creation of a pro-Marxist climate that drew on the widely shared aspirations of many intellectuals to bring about radical social transformations. The PCF then tried to channel this climate for its own purposes. The party could also rely on its

17. U.S. embassy counselor Robert P. Joyce as quoted in Brogi, Confronting America, p. 179. The problem was not exclusive to France. U.S. Ambassador to Rome Clare Booth Luce complained that Italian intellectuals were “spiritually and politically . . . the descendants of the Jacobins and the 19th-Century Socialists” (p. 179).
18. Ibid., p. 30.
19. Several prominent intellectuals, including Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, lent their support in the late 1940s to the short-lived experiment of the Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire (RDR). The RDR was a leftwing galaxy of forces and individuals who rejected a bipolar confrontation between the two superpowers and searched for a viable third camp. Many of the participants were as critical of the United States as of the Soviet Union and shared with the PCF a belief in the need for fundamental changes in French political and social life.
wartime credentials: the salient role it played in the Resistance to the Nazi occupation and its emotional appeal as the “party of 75,000 Resistance martyrs [fusillés].” Finally, it benefited from its virtuous appearance in contrast with the discredited and corrupted Third Republic, which had collapsed under the German invasion. In post-liberation Paris, the expectation of justice and a desire for change were a consequence of the suffering of the war and common to the population and the intelligentsia, and it was widely believed that neither could be accomplished without the PCF.

These political and structural conditions allowed Communists to attract intellectuals, even those who were ambivalent about the Soviet Union or the PCF itself. A prominent role was played by the progressive intellectuals who, while stopping short of formally joining the party, generally sympathized with its initiatives and showed deep suspicion for the United States and NATO. Existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre was the most widely known and influential of these fellow-travelers, and one of the favorite targets for the intellectuals associated with the CCF. In the early 1950s he had become the “model fellow-traveler,” helping to foster the image of the Soviet Union as a peaceful and egalitarian society.

The choice was more difficult for those who harbored strong reservations about Communism per se but were immersed in an environment that tended to pose the question of political and intellectual allegiances in stark terms. Tony Judt summarized the dilemma that this “Manichean mood” posed for the French progressive milieu, when the refusal to take sides came to be perceived as a choice in favor of the status quo:

For the bien pensant left-wing intelligentsia, anyone who wasn’t sympathetic to the French Communists and the Soviet Union, who was unwilling to give them the benefit of every doubt, to ascribe to them every good intention, must be a conscious agent of the United States, an active advocate of confrontation and even war.

A crucial element for the success of the CCF was to establish itself as a legitimate actor on the French intellectual scene. An important step in that direction was the Masterpieces of the Twentieth Century festival held in Paris in May 1952. The festival marked a turn from more directly political activities to an emphasis on culture and the celebration of a common Western tradition.

Scott-Smith and others have detailed the significance of the Paris festival and how the process that led to it had as much to do with the logic of the CCF’s covert sponsorship by the CIA as with the opinions of its members. However, decisions about the nature of the event were also shaped by the French context in which it was located. Intellectuals who had joined the organization after the founding session in Berlin in June 1950, and later claimed they had no knowledge of the CIA’s role, were involved in the discussion. Although some CCF members—including most U.S. participants—argued that a massive congress along the lines of the Berlin one was necessary to stir intellectuals and provide increased visibility for the CCF in France, a majority of the Europeans (including Aron and the two Italians on the executive committee, Silone and Chiaromonte) were opposed to it. They objected to the idea of a large political congress both in principle and in light of their knowledge of the French scene. They questioned the propriety of the demonstration in an election year, with growing tensions among Gaullists and non-Gaullists, and in light of the “effet nul” that the Berlin congress had had in France, according to Aron.

The arts festival, despite mixed reactions from French intellectuals and journalists, was a significant success for the CCF and lent greater respectability to the organization, even among its critics in France. Nonetheless, some members of the executive committee, in particular Silone, pointed out that the lack of participation of many French writers and artists in the proceedings and debates remained a major weakness in the work done so far. In the first years of its existence, the CCF had therefore to solve the problem of how to speak to—let alone influence—French intellectuals who remained reluctant to associate themselves with the organization. Even the formal procedure for joining the CCF in France, at least for those who had not been among its original sponsors, remained unclear well into the mid-1950s.


24. François Bondy and Jacques Carat to Nicolas Nabokov and Michael Josselson, 22 November 1955, in Folder 2, Box 201, Series II, International Association for Cultural Freedom Records, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library (IACF Papers). Since the time I conducted research at the Special Collections Research Center, the collection has been reorganized. I have tried to indicate the current box numbers based on the descriptions in the online finding aid, but in the event of discrepancies the SCRC’s staff should be able to offer clarification.
Italy and the Competing Principles of Legitimacy

The AILC faced a similar task and addressed itself to a similar audience, seeking to reach intellectuals who were not decisively in either camp but gravitated toward the PCI. As in France, the remarkable prestige the Italian Communists enjoyed among the population and the intellectual classes alike made the task more difficult. The party reaped the political fruits of its participation in the Resistance movement during World War II, which gave it legitimacy as a popular and national force. As Mario Del Pero has noted, “the Cold War entailed a clash between two different principles of legitimacy that defined inclusion and exclusion within the international alliance of which Italy was a member and in the Italian political system itself.”

The Italian political system was founded on the constitutional compromise of 1948, when the parties that had opposed the fascist regime and fought in the Resistance approved a new republican constitution. Rather than the Cold War “antinomic pair” of Communism and anti-Communism, Italian politicians and intellectuals—including the Christian Democrats, staunch U.S. allies—focused on the binary of fascist and anti-fascist. From this fundamental dissonance came the greater degree of tolerance toward the PCI, a legitimate enemy to defeat rather than an irreconcilable one to eliminate.

Many intellectuals could think of a friend or acquaintance who had joined the Communist Party, often in the years of anti-fascism or during the Resistance. Beyond the personal ties and the shared experiences, which mitigated the harshness of the polemical exchanges, many of those who had become Communists were deeply rooted in Italian cultural traditions. By and large, Italian intellectuals saw many of their Communist counterparts not as dangerous adversaries to eradicate but as friends they had to help take the “slow, painful, and courageous” steps needed to reject the Communist dictatorship.

U.S. officials did not always fully grasp this difference, voicing concerns that some were not “sufficiently Atlantic.”

Italian Communists also pursued a distinctive cultural and intellectual line, seeking to give the party a national identity and a more reassuring aura to neutral observers. PCI General Secretary Palmiro Togliatti tried to link the party to a national tradition that began with the eighteenth-century

26. Ibid.
philosopher Giovan Battista Vico, extended to the liberalism of Benedetto Croce, and found its culmination in Communist theoretician and martyr Antonio Gramsci. The attempt to transcend and absorb Croce’s idealistic school was also functional to the larger strategy of creating a dichotomy between Communists, the true heirs of an Italian tradition, and reactionary anti-Communism. The PCI wanted to appeal to undecided intellectuals by convincing them that a reformist and innovative policy was impossible outside the party itself, the only credible opposition to U.S. “imperialism” abroad and “clerical and reactionary right-wingers” at home.  The centrality of this self-representation explains why Togliatti was especially critical of the AILC and other attempts to create a third-force camp. By denouncing Communism without entirely subscribing to the line of the United States or the Catholic Church, according to Massimo Teodori, these groups belied the Communist axioms that anti-fascists could not also be anti-Communists, and that anti-Communism came only from the right.  

Ultimately, the relationship between the PCI and many intellectuals in postwar Italy became close and mutually beneficial. The party proved to be especially effective in the mobilization and coordination of different cultural environments—university, cinematic, scientific and artistic worlds—into formally independent Communist-front organizations attracting independent thinkers. The success of the peace campaign in 1950 is the best example of the PCI’s ability to reach well beyond the ranks of militants and sympathizers with allegedly non-political initiatives. Starting in March 1950, a petition against the use of nuclear weapons collected 17 million signatures in Italy, more than double the votes for the alliance between Socialists and Communists in the watershed elections of April 1948.  

Intellectuals thus became precious allies and consensus-builders for the PCI, helping to legitimize their culturally nationalistic claims and construct a negative image of the enemy. These fellow travelers found that an association with the PCI and the notion of their public role in support of progress gave them a sense of prestige and self-importance in contributing to a larger and noble cause. More prosaically, they could exploit the “informal networks

30. Ibid., p. 145.
31. Ibid., pp. 113–118. On the political use of pacifism by the PCI, see also Andrea Guiso, La colomba e la spada: “Lotta per la pace” e antiamericanismo nella politica del Partito comunista italiano (1949–1954) (Soveria Mannelli, Italy: Rubettino, 2006).
for professional advancement” that the PCI and PCF were able to provide.\textsuperscript{32} Decades later, novelist Italo Calvino tried to sum up the ambivalent relationship with the party that many Communists, intellectuals in particular, had:

We Italian Communists were schizophrenic. Yes, I really believe that is the exact term. Part of us wanted to be witnesses of the truth, avengers of the wrongs suffered by the weak and oppressed, defenders of justice against any oppression. Another part of us justified the wrongdoings, the oppression, the tyranny of the Party, Stalin, for the sake of the Cause. Schizophrenic. Dissociated. I remember very well that when I happened to travel to some socialist country, I would feel profoundly uneasy, an outsider, hostile. But when the train took me back to Italy, when I crossed the border, I would wonder: but here, in Italy, in this Italy, what else could I be but a Communist?\textsuperscript{33}

The problem of how to make inroads into the leftist intellectual milieu plagued the work of the CCF in Italy from the start. Two members of the organization’s international secretariat, reporting on a trip to Rome in late 1950, diagnosed several of the peculiarities of the country’s intellectual class: divisions and parochialism, hostility to the Catholic Church and its influence on Italian society, and suspicions of the United States and its perceived interference in Italy’s domestic affairs. At a meeting with socialist groups, the two men were asked questions such as “Is your liberty that of American capitalism?” and “Who pays for your organization?” Anti-Americanism was a concern because of its widespread hold on almost every political group: no sizable political force expressed unambiguous support for U.S. policies or, at a deeper level, the U.S. way of life. The Christian Democrats and their patron, the Catholic Church, had long expressed reservations about the materialistic and hedonistic model that American capitalism seemed to embody. “In this respect,” they warned, “we can regard the left as extending all the way to the person of [Christian Democratic prime minister] de Gasperi.”\textsuperscript{34}

The Italian committee had to struggle against the belief, widely held among intellectuals, that the PCI was animated by an authentic concern to defend cultural freedom and, at the same time, that the CCF was an agent of the U.S. State Department in Europe rather than an independent organization. Its members thus sought to establish personal relationships and a credible record of activities that could show the independence of the committee from


\textsuperscript{34} François Bondy and Georges Altman, “Rome Report,” n.d. (October 1950), in Folder 2, Box 190, Series II, IACF Papers.
external pressures. These efforts were met with widespread suspicion, and for years the national and international organizations had to respond to accusations of being exclusively anti-Communist by pointing to other initiatives, such as the campaigns against Francisco Franco’s dictatorship in Spain.

The socialist-leaning philosopher Norberto Bobbio, for example, publicly expressed his reservations about the militant anti-Communist line that the AILC had advocated in its December 1951 manifesto. Comparing the AILC to other cultural organizations such as the Société Européenne de Culture, Bobbio criticized what he saw as its “anti-Communist crusade,” judging it not compatible with an authentic desire for dialogue. The choice to exclude from its ranks Communists but not members of other political “churches,” he said, seemed to belie the organization’s call for the defense of intellectuals’ independence from all political pressures and to demonstrate the willingness to defend only “a certain conception of truth.” Bobbio argued that although the approach chosen by the AILC—and, by extension, the CCF—was ostensibly less political, it actually amounted to a fight against Communism. Like Bobbio, some intellectuals who were unsympathetic to Communism nonetheless found it unwise to associate with the Congress and its Italian outfit because of their implicit political orientation—a perception that Silone and others, nationally and internationally, tried to deny, to little avail. Others, even in the circles that represented a natural constituency for the AILC’s work, refused to join the group or its activities for reasons that reflected their own outlooks or the prominence of domestic battles and considerations.

35. The manifesto of the AILC, published in December 1951, expresses the goals and guiding philosophy of the organization. It reprises the manifesto approved at the end of the Berlin Congress for Cultural Freedom in June 1950, proclaiming freedom of conscience and expression to be a fundamental human right. At the same time, it differs from the CCF’s manifesto in tone, being less militant and more influenced by the distinctly Silonian themes of the individual’s personal responsibility and the solidarity among intellectuals. For a more detailed analysis of the AILC manifesto, see Daniela Muraca, “L’Associazione italiana per la libertà della cultura,” Storiografia, Vol. 11 (2007), pp. 139–160.

36. Norberto Bobbio, “Politica culturale e politica della cultura,” in Norberto Bobbio, Politica e cultura (Turin: Einaudi, 1955), p. 45. My translation. Bobbio’s remarks on the tension between the political and apolitical nature of the CCF were echoed in internal discussions and CCF executive committee meetings. On this ambiguity, the fundamental work continues to be Scott-Smith’s The Politics of Apolitical Culture.

37. For example, two influential members of the AILC, Ernesto Rossi and Gaetano Salvemini, refused to support the protest against Soviet military intervention in Hungary in 1956. The former suspected that the United States might be behind the unrest and could benefit from it; the latter could not overcome his hostility toward the Catholic Church to denounce its persecution in Hungary. See Ernesto Rossi to Nicola Chiaromonte, 30 August 1956, in Folder 64, Box 3, Nicola Chiaromonte Papers, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Yale University (NC Papers); and Gaetano Salvemini to Nicola Chiaromonte, 2 November 1956, in Folder 71, Box 3, NC Papers.
Silone himself had to respond to an AILC member, the journalist Ernesto Rossi, who was also member of the European federalist movement and had criticized the unilateral anti-Soviet line of the organization. Silone forcefully denied that the organization’s activity “followed the line of American foreign policy” and stressed that the majority of its initiatives had been on the domestic front, fighting censorship in the press and elsewhere. He pointed out that, alongside the condemnation of Soviet interventions, the AILC had protested against Franco’s Spain, U.S. policy in Latin America, and the ostracism of the nuclear physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer and the diplomat George Kennan. The leader of the CCF in Italy thus showed the necessity of emphasizing to its own members a “healthy” distance from the international organization and of dispelling the suspicion of external pressures even among intellectuals who had expressed support for the AILC. \(^{38}\)

If a single intellectual embodied the challenge of the CCF in Italy, that person was the novelist and journalist Alberto Moravia. He had first gained literary recognition with the novel *Gli indifferenti* (*The Indifferent Ones*) in 1929 and denounced the fascist regime in his writings. With the end of the war, his popularity and prestige increased, and the CCF hoped to associate him with its activities to boost their credibility. Moravia’s profile was common to other Italian intellectuals of the time. Although he was not officially a PCI member, he was not hostile to the party and took part in some of its campaigns and appeals. This ambiguity and refusal to burn bridges with the Communist milieu represented one of the greatest frustrations for the CCF, which was never able to claim him as one of its members. More than that, it symbolized a distinctive characteristic of Italian intellectual life, with its reliance on categories that transcended the “Communist versus anti-Communist” dichotomy on which some U.S. officials based their understanding of cultural diplomacy. The battle for the “soul” of Moravia assumed, therefore, a larger significance than that of his importance as an individual.

Moravia seemed to understand this complexity, as he showed in a series of letters he wrote to Chiaromonte around 1946. Both men had opposed fascism. Chiaromonte had been an anti-fascist exile, and, though he had lived in New York for years, he was critical of several aspects of U.S. society and foreign policy. The two men found themselves increasingly divided, however, in the new Cold War climate: Chiaromonte later joined the CCF, while Moravia remained sympathetic to, though not affiliated with, the PCI. Their views on anti-Communism anticipated the different positions that intellectuals in Italy

would assume toward the CCF. “Anti-Stalinism,” Moravia wrote, “is easier in America than in Italy, where the anti-Communist campaign is directed and caused by truly impossible people.” He blamed the “Italian bourgeoisie” for its immobility and reactionary positions, which he said had abetted the rise of fascism and might do so again.39 Later, he explained why he had turned down an offer to collaborate with the New York magazine Partisan Review:

The main reason is my attitude toward Communism. I am not a Communist, and I disagree with Stalinist Communism on many fundamental questions, but I do not feel I can be an anti-Communist today, in Italy, for the simple reason that this country has created Fascism and is ready to create it again. I am afraid Americans cannot understand what it means to live in a country that has been fascist. I would like to know how an American intellectual would behave toward the American bourgeoisie and consequently Communism if that bourgeoisie had sent to power Huey Long, had worshipped him for twenty years, and had applauded without as much as a blink all the concentration camps, special tribunals, propaganda ministries, secret police, etc. etc., and had eventually abandoned the dictatorship only after it had been forced to do so by a horrible and shameful military defeat. I believe that intellectual would look at his bourgeoisie with suspicion, and would refrain from defending it when in danger, or from siding with it against Communism. Which is totalitarian, too, but compared to Fascism has the advantage, if nothing else, of not having come to power yet, and therefore of being at least for now a political force like the others. . . .

What I say, then, is that for now Communism is not a danger to freedom in Italy, at least not to the same extent as rightwing neofascist parties and especially the despicable groups that hide behind these parties, the same groups that thirty years ago financed Fascism.40

These positions were expressed years before the creation of the CCF and do not exhaust Moravia’s political evolution or his approach to specific issues over the years. But they provide an important window into the differences in thinking between intellectuals in the United States—and even other Europeans—and the Italian intellectuals who had just emerged from the trauma of fascism. They also help explain why the CCF secretariat in Paris, which was so eager to have Moravia take part in its activities, was also so ready to be disappointed—or just puzzled—by him.

In the early months of the AILC, officials at the Rome office reported that Moravia had signed the manifesto, and they expressed optimism that he would

40. Alberto Moravia to Nicola Chiaromonte, n.d. (1946), in Folder 60, Box 2, NC Papers. My translation. The content makes clear that this letter was written after the one cited in the previous note.
publicly join the committee. That turned out not to be the case, however, and Moravia’s positions continued to preoccupy the national and international offices of the CCF. In 1952, the U.S. government, citing the McCarran Act of 1950, denied Moravia a visa to visit the United States. The act allowed federal authorities to investigate people suspected of subversive activities and to deny entrance into the country to members of totalitarian groups, either fascist or Communist, and to those closely associated with them. Passed in the anti-Communist climate of the Red Scare and McCarthyism, the McCarran Act left many—not only liberals and civil liberties advocates—perplexed about its propriety and implementation. Members of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom (ACCF) were concerned that an indiscriminate policy of visa denials, left to the discretion of bureaucrats unaware of the political complexities in other countries, would ultimately damage the reputation of the United States. The ACCF released a protest signed by prominent writers (among them James Farrell, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, and John Dos Passos) who called the decision to deny a visa to Moravia “incomprehensible” and warned about the propaganda victory for Communists in Europe and Italy.41

Before that, however, the ACCF requested information from the Italian committee about Moravia and his political positions, especially his relations with Communists. The Rome office said that Moravia was not a Communist himself but opposed the policy of isolating the PCI and in some cases was ready to collaborate with them. That was the reason he had refused to join the AILC, which was unequivocally anti-totalitarian. In a letter to CCF Secretary General Nicolas Nabokov to discuss whether the committee should make a public protest, Irving Kristol, then executive secretary of the ACCF, wrote that “Moravia is not a Communist, but . . . neither is he an anti-Communist in our sense of the term.”42 Kristol’s ambiguous formulation reflected the uneasiness of applying categories that made sense as intellectual positions in the United States but were less clear-cut in European countries where Communism had a much broader appeal among the public and the intelligentsia.


42. Irving Kristol to Nicolas Nabokov, 21 July 1952, in Folder 1, Box 76, Series II, IACF Papers. On a similar note, the following year the Rome office had to explain to Josselson that Moravia’s position could hardly be described by the terms “Communism” and “anti-Communism.” Like him, other Italian intellectuals were adamant about preserving full independence. See Alice Ceresa to Michael Josselson, 13 March 1953, in Folder 7, Box 188, Series II, IACF Papers.
The ACCF did protest Moravia’s visa denial, and the members of the Italian committee continued to have a frank dialogue with the novelist, who remained sympathetic to the Communist Party. However, the CCF ultimately abandoned its attempts to associate Moravia with its activities on a stable basis. Paradoxically, the novelist visited the United States a few years later, in 1955, on a trip funded by the United States Information Service (USIS). As Simon Obia has detailed, USIS officers were eager to remedy the propaganda backlash of the visa denial case, but they were also interested in Moravia’s anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist positions: they believed that a more critical perspective, which official USIS publications lacked, could be taken more seriously by the Italian intelligentsia and public. In his reports on the trip, Moravia highlights elements of U.S. society that did not appear in the official propaganda—consumerism, standardization and mechanization of life, McCarthyism—but he came away with an overall favorable impression of U.S. democracy.\footnote{Tobia, Advertising America, pp. 261–267.} The failure of the CCF to secure Moravia’s participation, therefore, was not exclusively due to the novelist’s pro-Communist sympathies, although these contributed to his unwillingness to join the AILC. The complex relationship between the novelist and the organization encapsulates the CCF’s difficulty in reaching some intellectual circles and milieus abroad. For certain groups deeply influenced by national dynamics that transcended the division between Communism and anti-Communism, the CCF was not able to find a convincing message and tone that could speak to their concerns. The priority given to anti-Communism prevented the flexibility that might have allowed the CCF to adapt to certain contexts more successfully.

**The Impact of 1956**

A turning point in France and Italy, as elsewhere, was the year 1956, with its succession of international events that had deep repercussions on European intellectual life. The Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), in February, was the first to be held after Stalin’s death in March 1953. In what came as a shock for Communists around the world, CPSU First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev denounced many aspects of Stalin’s reign and condemned the cult of personality that had developed around the late leader, which, according to Khrushchev, was harmful to the revolutionary cause and against its tenets.
Equally important were two events that showed the popular discontent brewing in the Soviet satellites of Eastern Europe. The first, in June 1956, was a large-scale uprising in the Polish city of Poznań, which the Polish army and security forces quelled, killing dozens.\textsuperscript{44} The second was the Hungarian revolution in October, when a mass anti-Stalinist uprising quickly evolved into a nationwide rebellion against Soviet rule. The Soviet authorities sent the Soviet Army into Hungary to crush the revolt, killing more than 2,500 Hungarians.\textsuperscript{45} Moscow’s bloody repression of popular unrest made an enormous impression in Western Europe. The Soviet regime could no longer deny the tensions within the Eastern bloc and the coerciveness of its control.

However, the propaganda victory for the West was offset by an equally unpopular intervention by Western powers. On 29 October, French, British, and Israeli forces unsuccessfully attempted to seize control of the Suez Canal in Egypt, which the government of Gamal Abdel Nasser had recently nationalized. The failed expedition was particularly unpopular among the governments of newly independent and nonaligned countries, which highlighted the colonialist overtones of the intervention. Even though the United States took a strong stand against the British and French over Suez, the crisis was a dismaying embarrassment for the Western bloc.

The events of October 1956 in Hungary had a profound impact on many West Europeans, especially Communists and sympathizers, and nowhere more so than in France. According to a CCF officer, the “Communist mystique” had been shattered, leaving many former Communists grappling to find a political home, which could not be the Socialist Party because of its involvement in the Suez fiasco.\textsuperscript{46} Until that moment, the Communist cause had enjoyed a significant measure of support not only from party members but also from intellectuals. Hungary changed all that, leaving the PCF largely isolated in defending the actions of the Soviet Union and causing many fellow-travelers to reassess their political sympathies. The most sensational defection


\textsuperscript{46} Michael Josselson to Shepard Stone, 1 December 1956, in Folder 9, Box 136, Series II, IACF Papers. At the same time, Josselson warned, anti-Americanism was on the rise again in France to levels unseen since the time of Joseph McCarthy. The French Section of the Workers’ International (SFIO) was blamed for the failure of the Suez intervention because the French prime minister at the time, Guy Mollet, was a member of the SFIO and the leader of a center-left coalition that came to power in the 1956 elections.
was that of Sartre, until then a close ally of the PCF, who publicly denounced the Soviet invasion and distanced himself from the party.\textsuperscript{47} Yet, even though Communism in France was experiencing what Tony Judt dubbed a “crisis of confidence,” this did not mean that the anti-Communism of the CCF was suddenly popular everywhere. With the decline of Communism’s appeal, French intellectuals turned their attention to the non-European world and \textit{tiers-mondisme}, at a time when decolonization was assuming a growing centrality in Paris. As Judt notes, the shift stemmed in part from the difficulty a serious debate over the meaning of Communism would have created for many after 1956 and in part from the “seemingly straightforward moral choices” posed by the colonial question.\textsuperscript{48}

The consequences of the events of 1956 were visible in Italy as well. The Socialist Party broke with the PCI and began to move toward a sort of “détente” with Christian Democracy, marking a fundamental turning point in Italian postwar politics that opened the way to the experiment of the centro-sinistra a few years later. The PCI refused to condemn Soviet intervention outright but began to stress greater autonomy from Moscow and to elaborate the notion of “national ways to socialism,” which allowed it to distance itself from the most damaging effects of the crisis. Intellectuals were generally sympathetic to the rebels and refused to accept the PCI’s explanation that the uprising was simply a counterrevolutionary movement backed by the United States. Some, most notably Calvino, eventually abandoned the party in protest over its solidarity with the Soviet Union. Other fellow-travelers, including Moravia, distanced themselves from the Communist line. The increasing criticism from many intellectuals was not unconditional, however. Most of those who broke with the PCI over Hungary refused to ascribe the events in Budapest to the deeper nature of socialism and instead denounced the distortions of the cause. Many also tried to contain the dissent within the Communist world and insisted that Marxism still had the possibility to redeem itself in a way that capitalism lacked. Many fellow-travelers and former party members were alienated, but they remained in the camp of anti-anti-Communism.\textsuperscript{49}


On the other hand, for the CCF and the two national committees, the events in Eastern Europe had a galvanizing effect. They saw in the Hungarian revolution a momentous opportunity to denounce the oppression and brutality of the Soviet regime, and all the CCF’s magazines and national committees seized the opportunity to take the offensive against Communists. In doing so, the Congress had to explain the different reaction toward the Suez intervention, which many saw as equally serious. The widespread perception in many circles that the organization was pro-American—either a direct creation of the State Department or indirectly supported by it—made its position more delicate. The official response of the CCF was that the intervention in Egypt, no matter how despicable, was a matter of political and economic interests on which the CCF was not competent to take a stand. The Hungarian events, however, directly touched on cultural freedom because intellectuals were being persecuted or forced into exile. The crackdown confirmed that the Soviet Union, even after Stalin’s death, had not abandoned its imperialist foreign policy and its totalitarian character, just as the anti-Communist front had been arguing for years. The Hungarian revolution was a unique opportunity in the West to embarrass those who had actively supported or sympathized with the USSR and thus make a mark on the intellectual landscape. For some members of the CCF, however, the question went beyond pure ideological struggle, touching much deeper.

In the immediate wake of the crisis, the executive committee of the CCF met to discuss the possibility of releasing a statement and gathering signatures from high-profile figures in France condemning the intervention. The excitement was palpable, and the discussion was at times broken and overlapping. Some voices suggested that the Congress could try to approach Sartre, among others, stressing the propaganda victory to be gained regardless of whether he signed or refused to sign. Aron reacted indignantly, denouncing the idea as “indecent” and “undignified,” a “provocation” that morally revolted him. He explained,

I don’t think we should treat a man like Sartre this way. If he changes his mind he must do it alone and not under our pressure. Don’t make a small political trick with Sartre. It is such a moral tragedy for him.\textsuperscript{50}

The relationship between Aron and Sartre, arguably two of the most influential French intellectuals of their century, was fascinatingly complex and spanned decades. The two had studied together at the École Normale...

\textsuperscript{50} Minutes of the CCF Executive Committee, 27 October 1956, in Folder 1, Box 58, Series II, IACF Papers.
Supérieure in the interwar period and developed personal ties. Despite their political differences, Aron was a contributor to Sartre’s magazine *Les Temps modernes* until after the war, and he stopped only after Sartre’s shift further left in support of the Soviet Union. The prestige of the existentialist philosopher was so great in those years that Walter Laqueur, who edited one of the CCF magazines, noted that “it was said at the time in Paris that it was better to be wrong with Sartre than to be right with Aron.”

Judt suggests that Aron throughout his life suffered from a puzzling “complex of inadequacy” vis-à-vis his former friend, spending an inordinate amount of time reading and replying to his publications. In return, Sartre almost made a point of ignoring the Sorbonne professor’s output. Although Aron shared the other CCF members’ revulsion over the Soviet invasion of Hungary, his reaction could not help but differ from those who mainly wanted to score political points. This dramatic instance, though eventually secondary in the larger discussion of the CCF’s role in France, suggests the complexity of the situation facing anyone who hoped to use the CCF as a political tool against Communism.

As the situation unfolded, the challenge for the CCF was to avoid being too conspicuous in exploiting the favorable situation, especially in France. Initially, the most pressing issue was to assess and absorb the seismic change in the intellectual scene that the breakup of the Communist-progressive front represented. At the beginning of 1957, with the Hungarian revolution crushed and some of the emotion fading, the CCF executive committee discussed what steps to take next. For the first time, according to the Swiss writer and CCF President Denis de Rougemont, the CCF seemed to be gaining traction in the French milieu. Writers, artists, and professors who had manifested their solidarity with the appeal sent out during the Hungarian crisis were now requesting a way to join. CCF Administrative Secretary Michael Josselson outlined the project to create a group of 40-50 writers and intellectuals to act as a French Association for Cultural Freedom. This group would not be in competition with the Amis de la Liberté, which spoke to different subjects and promoted larger initiatives.

53. Minutes of the CCF Executive Committee, 12–13 January 1957, in Folder 3, Box 58, Series II, IACF Papers.
54. Ibid.
The debate once again touched on the nature of CCF activity in France, the most appropriate interlocutors, and the ways an international organization could effectively enter national and local discourses. The writer David Rousset, a critic of the Soviet Gulag prison camps, concluded the discussion by stating that a small group of friendly intellectuals could play an important role in CCF activities, but he also stressed the importance of evaluating the progress made in France (or Italy, for that matter). The new opportunities to work in France, he claimed, were not attributable solely to the Hungarian crisis. Some French intellectuals were overcoming their initial wariness of the CCF at least partly because of its willingness to take positions on the international scene that marked its independence from the United States; for instance, in criticizing South Africa’s apartheid regime. As the “legend” that the CCF was an instrument of the U.S. State Department lost its widespread circulation, the Congress could more easily influence the French scene.

The executive committee did not reach a consensus about a French association, and its members agreed to leave the matter for the CCF Secretariat to explore. In the end, such a group was never created, even after the Amis de la Liberté ceased to exist in 1960. This suggests that the initial enthusiasm for gains in the aftermath of the Hungarian revolution had not been an accurate predictor of a lasting impact among neutralist and pro-Communist intellectuals. The lack of such a group also reflected both the difficulty of bringing together the politically diverse French members of the Congress and the organization’s increasing reliance on magazines rather than on the national committee in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The CCF chose to rely on what Josselson later described as “actions parallèles”: magazines and national and international organizations that were not officially connected in any way but inside which operated members of the Congress who could obtain positive results without overexposing the organization. The CCF pursued its goals by deploying a variety of methods and interacting with individuals and organizations that followed their own logic beyond the Congress’s control. The CCF

55. Ibid.
56. Minutes of the CCF Executive Committee, 18–19 January 1958, in Folder 5, Box 58, Series II, IACF Papers. The main examples were the Union des Écrivains pour la Vérité, an organization of French writers, and the International PEN Club, which included writers from both blocs and thus was frequently highly controversial. To oppose Communists, the CCF occasionally relied on people like Silone who were members of both organizations. Josselson even went so far as to suggest that André Malraux, then Charles de Gaulle’s minister of cultural affairs, intervene to improve the level of the French delegation to the PEN Club to preserve French prestige. See Michel Josselson to Manès Sperber, 26 October 1964, in Folder 3, Box 32, Michael Josselson Papers, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas (MJ Papers); and Michel Josselson to Manès Sperber, 24 November 1964, in Folder 3, Box 32, MJ Papers.
was not helpless, as the prestige of some of its members and the connections it established with other organizations shows. But neither was it free to influence the public discourse and the intellectual scene at will. CCF members themselves continued to recognize that influence on the French cultural scene was far from accomplished. The perception of the success of an organization such as the CCF could vary greatly depending on its political and personal dynamics: who took part in conferences and debates, which circles were involved. Moreover, the situation could evolve quickly—as the events of 1956 demonstrated.

**Vaseline and Castor Oil: The Tensions between the CCF and Local Intellectuals**

The relationship between the officers of the CCF and the Amis de la Liberté and AILC was close, fruitful, yet conflicted. Most of the time it was positive, as the two sides fundamentally agreed on the mission of the CCF and on the importance of countering Communist propaganda. Congress officials in Paris understood that the national committees needed a significant degree of autonomy to work effectively, and the CCF largely respected the boundary between national and international organization. In some cases, however, the relationship was far more complicated. An analysis of the instances of tension and conflict highlights the complexity of a dynamic that blended several elements: national and international perspectives and interests, personal and political disagreements, and competing views between the headquarters of a global organization and its affiliates about hierarchy and respective roles. Despite such instances, the Amis de la Liberté and the AILC were a successful part of the activities of the CCF, and the things on which they agreed ran deeper than those on which they disagreed. Policy disputes did not diminish the underlying agreements or even the strength of personal relationships developed over time. The tensions and controversies that emerged underscore nonetheless how different personalities, agendas, and political and intellectual backgrounds interacted. The fundamental goals were close enough to guarantee effective cooperation, but the CCF could not expect to impose its will on the Amis de la Liberté or on the AILC simply because it was financing their activities.

Frequently, the clashes that arose with the Amis de la Liberté were not so much about fundamental disagreements over anti-Communism or French politics but about tactics. Conflicting personalities also played a role. None of the main characters—whether socialist Jacques Enock (the Secretary
General of the Amis de la Liberté), Nabokov, or CCF Administrative Secretary Josselson—was particularly easy to work with. A recurring source of tension, however, was uncertainty about the relationship between the committees and the Secretariat, and their reciprocal rights and obligations. A larger issue involved what level of control the CCF could exercise over the activity of the Amis de la Liberté and AILC and, implicitly, how much to influence these organizations with the financial support that the Congress provided. According to Enock, the correct position was little if anything at all.

In the fall of 1952, for instance, Josselson wrote Enock with a few suggestions for pamphlets that the CCF had prepared for its national committees, requesting that he decide whether the Amis de la Liberté would use them for its activities. The response was a sharp pushback against the idea that the Congress would be involved in any way in deciding what was publishable in France:

I am absolutely decided to refuse tomorrow as I did yesterday any document that the Secretariat General of the Congress will find fit for publication in France without first consulting me as it has always done so far. . . . It is not for the Secretariat of the Congress to play the role of brain trust, a function which it has given itself or has been given at a time when there were no national sections, and which it insists in maintaining at all costs (in France at any rate) in spite of any common sense. We will consult the Secretariat ourselves every time it will seem to us useful and necessary. . . .

*Congress policy as it is elaborated by its Executive Committee is carried out in France through the ‘Amis de la Liberté.’* It is this way for the publications, and it will be for all the demonstrations (including the preparation of a congress) decided by the Congress. The international Secretariat has the authority to intervene directly in the countries where there is no national section as well as in the countries where the national sections accept its direct intervention without protesting. That is all.

Judging from the tone, one could be forgiven for wondering which man was accustomed to giving orders to the other. Enock insisted there could not be two centers for the activities of the CCF in France and assumed that the Amis de la Liberté should be left free to pursue independently the goals it

57. Nabokov once referred to the secretary general of the Amis de la Liberté as “king Enock” and lamented that “His Majesty” had been impossible to reach lately. See Nicolas Nabokov to Gisèle Dubuis, 17 October 1953, in Folder 9, Box 251, Series II, IACF Papers.

shared with the CCF. If its promoters had expected to set up an organization that would merely implement their directives, they had to face a different reality.

Josselson, too, was unable to hide his frustration at times. In the summer of 1953, the Congress and the Amis de la Liberté were mobilized to denounce the Soviet Army’s role in quelling mass uprisings throughout East Germany. The plan included the distribution of pamphlets to neutralists and Communist sympathizers and appeals to French public opinion. Everyone agreed on the strategy; the problem was how to implement it. After several letters and telephone conversations, Josselson sounded almost bitter: “since it is on my initiative that the Congress sets aside part of its funds for action in Berlin, the least that one could ask for is that our advice be at least taken into consideration.” Enock replied icily, warning that, if the CCF wanted the activities of the Amis de la Liberté to succeed, it should not try to control them. Turning down Josselson’s request to modify a text that the Socialist Party had circulated, Enock claimed that the party was not at his service and that he could not “make ring in their ears [tinter à leurs oreilles] the funds that we make available to them to this effect.”

Therein lay the challenge for Josselson, the CCF, and its U.S. sponsors: their support for local actors and organizations allowed them to intervene in France and elsewhere to boost the positions they shared or prevent them from disappearing, but this did not automatically mean they had the right to demand that the local actors diligently follow their instructions. The Amis de la Liberté did not wait docilely for the CCF to decide the best way to fight Communism in France and instead asserted its own views on the matter.

A similar dynamic occurred when the CCF tried to express its disagreement with the orientation or activities of the Rome office. The Congress’s international secretariat viewed the tensions with the Italian outfit as involving both practical and more substantive issues. Josselson and Nabokov in particular were frustrated with the apparent “lethargy” of the committee, which they ascribed to the dominant role played by Silone in its setup and running. His continuing centrality left little room for gradual correction, according to Nabokov:

I’m afraid that very soon we’ll have to do something radical about it and either call it quits or get other blood into our Italian “apparatus.” If Paris is at times

---

59. Michael Josselson to Jacques Enock, 22 June 1953, in Folder 1, Box 78, Series II, IACF Papers; and Jacques Enock to Michael Josselson, 23 June 1953, in Folder 1, Box 78, Series II, IACF Papers. My translation.

60. Nicolas Nabokov to Michael Josselson, 5 May 1954, in Folder 12, Box 251, Series II, IACF Papers.
Vaseline this is pure castor oil. Silone thrones [sic] invisible in heaven and prevents the kids in the office from doing their work. I wrote him 2 letters, I wire to ask him to descend from his summer vacation for a day to see me here in Rome . . . no answer to anything. I see dozens of people daily. Most of them are ready to join, work, help (including Moravia) but all say that so long as Silone is the sole master here, no work will be done. I formulated a concrete plan of how to change this situation. Will discuss it with Mike [Josselson] and Denis de R. [Rougemont] (also not entirely unlazy) and then we must do something about it or else close the Italian office and have an agent in Italy.61

The policy disagreements revolved mainly around two issues: the approach toward Communists—that is, domestic Communists (there was less disagreement about condemning the Soviet Union)—and the AILC’s anti-clerical tone. The first issue was especially delicate given the anti-Communist inspiration of the CCF and the particular situation in Italy. Because of the strong support for Communism among intellectuals there, the AILC had decided early on that it could not assume a purely anti-Communist position. Doing so would have prevented it from reaching a large section of the Italian intelligentsia. Rather, the AILC tried to expose Communist hypocrisy while establishing its bona fides with fellow-travelers and PCI sympathizers, separating the hard-core supporters from the rest. The way to do so was by joining causes that resonated strongly in Italy but did not fall into the Communist–anti-Communist dichotomy, thus potentially putting the AILC on the side of its adversaries on issues that many intellectuals—regardless of their political affiliation—felt to be important.62 This willingness to assert independence from the Paris offices, and to question the rigid division between the two competing blocs, contributed to the growing recognition of the AILC (and Tempo presente) as a legitimate intellectual force. Especially after 1956, Silone’s organization owed its penetration into the Italian intelligentsia to its reputation of autonomy from the CCF and the United States.

Nonetheless, the CCF did not conceal its dissatisfaction when Italians failed—in its view—to pursue a vigorous anti-Communist line. Writing in 1955, Josselson claimed to be “rather surprised” by the latest issue of the Italian bulletin:

61. Nicolas Nabokov to Irving Brown, 13 September 1951, in Folder 16, Box 13, Irving Brown Papers, George Meany Memorial AFL-CIO Archive. I consulted the Brown Papers when they were still at the National Labor College Archives in Washington, DC. They have since been donated to the University of Maryland’s Special Collections and University Archives.

62. For example, the campaign to abolish fascist laws had survived in the new republican constitution, as had the efforts to curb the influence of the Catholic Church on Italian public life.
I do not think that the role of an anti-Communist publication is to downplay the differences that exist inside the Communist Party. This is psychologically false and a task that one can very well leave to the Communists themselves. I think you will agree with this critique.\textsuperscript{63}

Especially controversial was the AILC campaign against laws that, according to the AILC and other critics, were an attempt to limit the freedom of expression of Communist intellectuals and journalists and to prevent PCI members from holding certain offices. The Italian committee’s strong condemnation of the “anti-Communist laws” earned it Josselson’s rebuke. To criticize the Christian Democratic government too harshly, he said, was to concentrate on a secondary problem while ignoring the real threat to freedom coming from Communists. “Tactics,” he said, “is one thing, and the main goal of our activity is another.” The AILC bulletin should, in his view, denounce the attempt by Communists to exploit this episode instead of criticizing fascist laws or the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{64} Josselson added that

\begin{quote}
given [AILC secretary] Mr. Libera’s sensitivity to all infringements on freedom of press, which in my opinion is not threatened by [Italian Minister of the Interior] Mr. Scelba, I hope he will not let himself be drawn into supporting the cause of Communist journalists out of devotion to principle.\textsuperscript{65}
\end{quote}

Josselson’s statement was remarkable and in contrast with the CCF’s assertions that the defense of cultural freedom was apolitical and equally sensitive to violations from democratic and pro-Western governments. His comments seemed to belie the organization’s claims and suggest that what its leadership expected from the national committees was primarily that they combat Communist influence, a goal to which their other activities should be subordinated. Whether these expectations were met is a different matter.

To the CCF’s more or less explicit pressure, the Italian committee could respond in two ways. One was to argue, as Silone did, that the choice to sponsor campaigns that were not anti-Communist per se strengthened the organization in the eyes of neutralist and undecided intellectuals.\textsuperscript{66} The other

\textsuperscript{63. Michael Josselson to Sigfrido Ciccotti, 2 March 1955, in Folder 7, Box 189, Series II, IACF Papers. My translation.}
\textsuperscript{64. Michael Josselson to Ignazio Silone, n.d. (May 1954), in Folder 11, Box 291, Series II, IACF Papers.}
\textsuperscript{65. Michael Josselson to Ignazio Silone, 11 May 1954, in Folder 11, Box 291, Series II, IACF Papers. By comparison, only once did Josselson intervene to condemn the bulletin’s use of a cartoon from an extreme rightwing publication.}
\textsuperscript{66. Ignazio Silone to Michael Josselson, 16 February 1955, in Folder 1, Box 292, Series II, IACF Papers.}
was to protest firmly any attempt to interfere. Libera did so in response to a suggestion by Josselson to take a more critical stance toward a recently formed leftist magazine:

I have not understood very well the reasons and implications of your letter about “Lo Spettatore Italiano” . . . ; or I’m afraid I understood them too well . . .: but that would mean questioning once again the “policy” of the Italian Association, which has been devised—in accord with the International Secretariat—during three years of discussions and research for the most effective ways to make a dent in the peculiar positions of Communist and fellow-traveling intellectuals in Italy. We find it to be normal and indispensable to sometimes mention (not to praise it, but in a tone of objective evaluation) an important article from an extreme leftist, fellow-traveling or even Communist publication: we think it is a conditio sine qua non to continue to denounce these publications and argue with them effectively. . . . We have seen that it is the only way our Association (and Bulletin) have attained the “honor” of the front pages of [Communist or leftist newspapers] L’Unità, Rinascita, Società, Contemporaneo, etc., and naturally gained in reputation among non-Communist intellectuals. 67

Once again the Paris office had to come to terms with a national committee that disagreed with it on the best way to confront Communist intellectuals and was independent enough to ignore its recommendations on certain issues. Josselson eventually sounded discouraged when he confessed he could not be surprised by or understand Italian writers, who were inflexible with fascists but not bothered by ex-fascists who had turned to Communism. 68 In that paradox lay the difficult dialogue between the CCF and the Italian committee.

The other controversial issue was the AILC’s relationship with the Catholic Church and the political and intellectual groups close to it, which wielded great prestige and influence in Italy. The problem was due in part to the composition of the committee itself, which from the beginning tended to be overwhelmingly composed of socialists and liberals in the tradition of Croce; that is, critical of the role of the church in Italian society. The CCF exhorted Silone and the Rome office to include prominent Catholics among its members, setting as its first priority the expansion of its base. However, the attempt to replicate the successful experiment of the Amis de la Liberté in France, where a significant number of Catholic individuals and groups worked with other democratic forces, turned out to be impossible in Italy.


68. Michael Josselson to Konstantin Jelenski, 19 September 1963, in Folder 3, Box 203, Series II, IACF Papers.
Despite Silone’s reassurance that the committee was not planning to adopt an anti-clerical line, the Paris secretariat observed with growing concern what it perceived to be an anti-Catholic turn in the AILC and, in particular, its bulletin.

In the spring of 1954, Nabokov was in Rome to organize a musical competition sponsored by the CCF, allowing him to gain first-hand knowledge of how the AILC was perceived in Italy. He and Josselson agreed that for the Italian committee to be seen as an anti-clerical movement would damage not only its national activities but the global work of the organization. Josselson found it “grotesque” that Italians concentrated on secondary problems, given the threat to Italian democracy from the Communists, and he urged Nabokov to talk to Silone to convince him to moderate the committee’s line. The effort had only limited effect: Silone agreed that other issues were more pressing and to tone down the rhetoric. But he reasserted the need for the committee to defend religious freedom, as well as his belief that the church in Italy—unlike in France—was not interested in and was even hostile to culture.69

After his diplomatic efforts, Nabokov sounded hopeless about the prospects for progress:

I cannot attempt to explain to the Catholics that the Congress and the Italian Association have different policies, without throwing an onus upon Silone and his friends, which, of course, would be highly resented and may lead to great unpleasantness. Talking “confidentially” to people I barely know is impossible. It will immediately get back to Silone. The only way to improve things is for me to talk to Silone himself in the spirit of your letter. But, knowing Silone, I expect very little from it. Catholics, even the liberal ones, such as [philosopher Jacques] Maritain, as you know, resented the very presence, among our Congress patrons, of Croce; and the presence among the Italian association, of [anti-fascist historian and politician Gaetano] Salvemini, who eats the Pope the way [New Leader editor Sol] Levitas used to eat Uncle Joe, is to Catholics, unbearable. Besides, liberal Catholics of the French type, who would agree to co-operate with the non- and anti-Communist Left, are rare in Italy. But what the Association could and should do is to stop that quixotic and bellicose tone as regards the Church and its various organs. In other words, it is a question of intelligence and manners and also of the proper recognition of one’s mission.70

---

69. Nicolas Nabokov to Michael Josselson, 8 February 1954, in Folder 13, Box 251, Series II, IACF Papers; Michael Josselson to Nicolas Nabokov, 24 May 1954, in Folder 12, Box 251, Series II, IACF Papers; and Nicolas Nabokov to Michael Josselson, 26 May 1954, in Folder 12, Box 251, Series II, IACF Papers.

70. Nicolas Nabokov to Michael Josselson, 1 June 1954, in Folder 13, Box 251, Series II, IACF Papers.
Nabokov believed there was a simple reason for the AILC’s position—namely, that “most of the members of the Italian Association are so profoundly steeped in Croceism, and besides, are drug addicts of anti-Fascism.” He proposed that someone in the CCF executive committee (perhaps Aron, Rougemont, or the U.S. philosopher Sidney Hook) read the bulletins and raise the question at the next meeting, “so that we could finally have a show-down with Silone.” At the same time, he suggested that a prominent Catholic such as French philosopher Maritain, one of the honorary chairmen of the CCF, write a “long letter” to the Vatican authorities to present the Congress in a more favorable light and assuage papal anxiety. Nabokov’s proposal was extraordinary for several reasons. The first was the high profile of the figures involved—Silone was one of the founding members and public faces of the CCF. That the international secretariat discussed the possibility of both confronting and bypassing a national committee suggests the level of conflict and frustration toward the Italian association and highlights the tensions between the international organization and its local outfits.

Josselson probably realized the seriousness of the proposal and advised Nabokov to avoid a confrontation that could result in the definitive resignation of “our friend.” He suggested instead talking privately to the Italian office to stress that it belonged to an international organization and could not compromise its activities by pursuing too aggressive a campaign against the clergy. The AILC should eschew a “selfish or national” point of view and instead take account of the repercussions for the whole CCF. Josselson was careful to stress that he was not giving orders but merely offering suggestions, possibly to avoid a negative reaction from Rome. Nabokov agreed to this course but doubted that a talk with “Silone and his slaves” would do any good. The reputation of the Italian committee was well established by now, he wrote, and the Vatican itself did not seem interested in distinguishing between national and international activities.

The CCF’s International Secretariat managed to smooth some of the roughest anti-clerical edges from the Italian committee’s rhetoric but was not as successful in changing its fundamental orientation, which by this time reflected a well-defined membership and political affiliation. The tensions surrounding Italian anti-clericalism, however, speak to the relationship between the “center” and the “periphery” of the CCF. The Paris secretariat left a considerable degree of autonomy to its national committees, but it tried to influence

71. Ibid.
72. Michael Josselson to Nicolas Nabokov, 4 June 1954, and Nicolas Nabokov to Michael Josselson, 9 June 1954, both in Folder 12, Box 251, Series II, IACF Papers.
policies when it considered them to be misguided or damaging. Its efforts reflected the ambiguity of the hierarchical structure of the Congress, which did not explicitly provide instruments to impose the International Secretariat’s will when it clashed with that of local actors. The secretariat could reduce or cut off funding, as it did with the U.S. committee, but such decisions could not be made rapidly. When Josselson and Nabokov tried to intervene with the AILC, they had to rely on personal diplomacy—either directly or through other members of the executive committee—which often turned out to be complicated and frustrating. In sharing their concerns about the Italian organization’s anti-Catholic stance, they seemed worried that such a stance would impair the international movement, highlighting a different aspect of the CCF’s relations with national committees. Central CCF officials often were unable to “play a tune” to which local intellectuals would march, contrary to what some analysts have argued. The dynamics and orientations of national committees had a distinctly national genesis and dimension that could travel well beyond their countries of origin, impairing U.S. strategic interests and global activities. In this case, the strength of the anti-clerical feelings among Italian members posed a threat to the U.S. policy of maintaining friendly relations with the Vatican, a natural ally given its visceral anti-Communism. Nonetheless, the CCF eventually had to accept that its local associates were more or less consciously setting the boundaries of its activities in Italy and that the country’s powerful Catholic milieus would therefore continue to have no role in its operations.

Conclusion

The history of the CCF’s activities and policies in France and Italy is central to our understanding of how an international organization, inspired by the United States, tried to navigate the cultural and intellectual intricacies of the continental European scene. Rather than serving merely as a background for U.S. attempts to contrast Communist hegemony among European intellectuals, the political and cultural contexts of France and Italy in the 1950s set the limits of a successful anti-Communist message and influenced its tone and content. The debates and arguments in the two countries demonstrated the interplay of personal and political elements that were best understood by local

actors. Efforts to engage European intellectuals who professed Communist or neutralist sympathies were at the center of the CCF’s mission but could be carried out only because these intellectuals enjoyed credibility and prestige among their peers.

U.S. intellectuals such as Josselson and Nabokov, as well as other members of the CCF executive committee, were fully involved in the CCF’s planning and had the opportunity to influence decisions. They were rarely, however, in a position to impose orders or directives. A practical consideration also discouraged the officers of the CCF from pushing too vigorously in directions that were unpopular with its members. In France and Italy, the public face of the CCF was not the secretariat but the intellectuals, and their prestige was on the line if the organization became unpopular or compromised. If the intellectuals publicly withdrew their support, it would be a debacle for the CCF, as its members and officers knew well. Some—Silone more than anyone else—were more inclined than others to threaten to resign, but none quietly accepted the imposition of decisions they found distasteful.

In France and Italy, the national committees and the intellectuals who worked with the CCF’s international secretariat largely shared the organization’s stated goals of democratic anti-Communism and defense of cultural freedom. But they also responded to stimuli and dynamics that were exclusively national, and this put them at odds with their allies. The forms the CCF’s cultural diplomacy could take were influenced as much by the concerns and agendas of French and Italian intellectuals as by expectations in Washington about the purpose of the CCF. At the same time, the CCF encountered resistance and suspicion that forced it to adapt to the unique contexts of its national committees. Because the strategies and tactics employed by the Congress reflected the French and Italian contexts of the early 1950s, observers in New York and Washington often found them hard to understand. U.S. officials looking for “their” kind of anti-Communism were often frustrated—or ignored—in places where the anti-Communist struggle from the Left had to reflect the peculiarities of place if it was to be successful. European intellectuals were as active as U.S. officials in setting the terms of this diplomacy, and of the relationship between the CCF and the intelligentsia of each nation.