overshadowed by the political populism of the strongly Trump-inclined Lega and of the much more ideologically eclectic Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S), whose leader, Beppe Grillo, also had expressed a preference for Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton in the U.S. presidential election of 2016. For the PD to be in a governing alliance today with the M5S—without initially changing the prime minister who had led the previous Lega-M5S government—reveals, in Petruccioli’s telling, the political inanition into which the Italian left has fallen. He laments the failure to replace the greatest party of the Italian left with something better: “This we had wanted to do, this we had sought to do, but this we did not succeed in doing” (p. 317).

Petruccioli argues that the underlying reason for the post-PCI left’s defeat and, worse, its ongoing identity crisis is that too many leftists failed to make a complete break with the myth of the Bolshevik Revolution as the greatest event in human history. In fact, 1917 had not witnessed “the rupture of a system and the finally possible passage to another system” (p. 339). Writing in February 2020, he uses the present tense in explaining, “This is the error to get rid of.” In other words, in the great debate on the left over the positions staked out in Karl Kautsky’s reformist condemnation of the Bolshevik Revolution, Terrorism and Communism (1919), and Leon Trotsky’s Leninist celebration of it, Terrorism and Communism: A Reply (1920), Kautsky had made the right call. To move forward today, a united Italian left would have to begin by acknowledging “with all necessary severity, sincerity, and serenity” the wrong turn made by the PCI at its founding in 1921.


Reviewed by Laurent Cesari, Université d’Artois (France)

Singapore and Malaya were of major strategic importance during the early years of the Cold War. Malaya was a major producer of tin and natural rubber, which were exported through the port of Singapore. Great Britain operated on Singapore its biggest air and naval base east of Suez. Control of the straits of Singapore and Malacca allowed an easy transfer of Western battleships between the Pacific and the Middle East, through the Indian Ocean. In the 1950s, a British strategic plan, based on the occupation of southern Thailand at the level of the town of Songkhla, at the narrowest point of the Kra Isthmus, provided for the defense of the Malaya-Singapore area against an invasion from the north.

The concentration of British military establishments in Singapore, as well the large majority of overseas Chinese among its inhabitants, explains why the UK government was slow to grant independence to the island. The British ruled the crown colony alone until 1955 and retained control of internal security until 1959, when Singapore was granted complete internal autonomy. Even then, Britain reserved the right
to suspend the constitution in case of trouble. Independence came only in 1963, with the inclusion of Singapore within Greater Malaya, followed by the separation of Singapore and Malaya in 1965. Therefore, U.S. policy toward Singapore during Dwight Eisenhower’s presidency, when the island evolved from colony to self-governed entity, provides a test case for gauging the balance between security precautions and the proclaimed U.S. commitment to decolonization during the Cold War.

As Joey Long shows, decolonization was acceptable to U.S. officials only if it was “safe.” The Eisenhower administration put no pressure on Britain to quicken the transfer of power and sought to ensure that the government of Singapore would not hesitate to take police action against “subversive” activities. The book is enlightening because it analyzes all the components of U.S. policy toward Singapore: cooperation with Britain in defense matters, selection of promising locals among unionists and politicians, and psychological warfare.

Social instability and political unrest in Singapore were partly of U.S. making insofar as they resulted from the unemployment caused by the U.S. trade embargo against the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which caused a slump in rubber sales. Fear of losing influence on Singapore was one of the reasons that Britain unilaterally withdrew from the China Committee in 1957. The U.S. State Department worried that Maoist propaganda might seduce the Chinese of Singapore. British authorities were more sanguine: they knew that the Singaporean population harbored a variety of opinions. Because associations that called for a reinforcement of links with the PRC were banned, the British expected the Chinese, in time, to think of themselves only as citizens of Singapore. China might also have left the Malayan Communist Party to its own devices, although the evidence for this is not ironclad.

Among the instruments of U.S. policy, soft power achieved better results than threats or force. The ban on Communist publications in Singapore enabled official U.S. information to spread. The themes of material wealth and scientific progress, which had been important for the modernization movement in China during the interwar years, struck a responsive chord among the Chinese in Singapore. Relations were cultivated with local unionists, journalists, and cinema and radio station owners, some of whom were selected for educational tours in the United States. For instance, Lim Yew Hock, chief minister from 1956 to 1959, who moved against leftist unions and students (partly to position himself as an anti-Communist to whom Great Britain could safely devolve more power), had earlier been a unionist who was chosen to study in the United States in 1951. Conversely, the overreliance of Lim on police powers, which had strong U.S. backing, caused his defeat in the 1959 election. Lim was identified as a U.S. puppet. The accusation that his campaign was funded by Washington stuck, even though the money actually came from Taiwan. U.S. officials perceived his successor, Lee Kuan Yew, as a dangerous opportunist because he would not commit himself in advance to take emergency measures against Communists. In 1960 or early 1961, to obtain more information on Lee’s political views, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) tried to infiltrate his government, without notifying the U.S. consul general in Singapore. The attempt failed and soured relations with Lee for years.
Long’s discussion of U.S. relations with Britain is especially interesting. British and U.S. policymakers shared the aim of keeping Singapore “safe,” but the British, as the power officially in charge, expected to maintain a working relationship with Singapore in the long run and therefore could not appear to rule by force. Nor could Britain compromise its sovereignty by cooperating officially with the United States against internal subversion. For instance, British troops and police backed the repression of unions initiated by the Singaporean government in 1956, but a year earlier British Chief Minister David Marshall had refused to summon British military reinforcements against strikes. For the same reason, although Britain secretly allowed the CIA to use Singapore as a base for subversion against Indonesia from 1954 to 1961, the British and U.S. intelligence services had informally agreed in 1954 not to interfere in each other’s sphere of influence: Britain would not act in the Philippines, and the United States would not act in Singapore, Burma, and Malaya. (The CIA broke this agreement by funding the Socialist Labor Front of Lim Yew Hock for the municipal election of 1957.) Singaporean politicians were not privy to the unofficial military cooperation between Britain and the United States. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization’s defense plans, which called for the use of nuclear bombs against the PRC and North Vietnam in case of invasion, implied the secret deployment of British nuclear warheads on Singapore, starting in 1962. Britain always denied the existence of these bombs, not only to the public but to the government of Singapore as well.

This is a rewarding book. It could have provided more in-depth analysis of local opinion, and it certainly lacks a comparative analysis of other parts of Southeast Asia—relations between the United States and French authorities in Indochina, for instance—but as a monograph it is excellent.


Reviewed by Astrid S. Tuminez, Utah Valley University, and Andrew Paull Jensen, Utah Valley University

In Freedom Incorporated, a readable and engaging book, Colleen Woods argues that U.S. imperial exceptionalism in the post–World War II period had a healthy “entanglement” or symbiosis with Cold War anti-Communist ideology and policies. Using the Philippines as a case study, Woods highlights how the United States formally “freed” the Philippines from colonial rule but in reality continued to exercise significant power and influence in the country. U.S. and Filipino political elites worked closely together in an ideologically driven, global standoff against Communism and suppressed local insurgencies in the name of this effort. The United States wielded extensive influence in the Philippines and used the country as both an ideological justification and a practical asset to expand U.S. influence in other countries in the region.