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## BLOWING UP THE SELF-MANAGEMENT BUBBLE: YUGOSLAV PROPAGANDA AND ITALIAN RECEPTION IN THE EARLY 1970s

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### ABSTRACT

*Drawing on primary sources from the Archives of Yugoslavia and several Italian archival collections, this article shows that, in the early 1970s, faced with mounting internal problems, the Yugoslav leadership reappraised its self-management propaganda in order to convey the image of a reforming and modernising country. This was functional to the external projection of the country's stability, and to favouring its relations with Western European partners, Italy in primis. This article develops in three sections. First, it reappraises the historical development of Italian-Yugoslav relations after World War II, to highlight their political limitation and their link to Yugoslavia's policy towards Western Europe. Second, it shows how the internal crisis experienced by the Yugoslav federation in the early 1970s led to the rediscovery of self-management propaganda. Particular attention is paid to the organisation of the Second Congress of Yugoslav self-managers in Sarajevo (May 1971) and its clear-cut external dimension. Third, this paper discusses the instrumental dimension of the self-management discourse in Italy until the mid-1970s.*

*Keywords: Yugoslavia, self-management, Italy, Western Europe, Democrazia Cristiana, Partito Socialista Italiano, Partito Comunista Italiano*

## LA BOLLA DELL'AUTOGESTIONE: PROPAGANDA JUGOSLAVA E RICEZIONE IN ITALIA NEI PRIMI ANNI SETTANTA

### SINTESI

*Basato su fonti primarie provenienti dall'archivio centrale jugoslavo (Arhiv Jugoslavije) a Belgrado e da svariati fondi archivistici italiani, il presente articolo dimostra che nei primi anni Settanta, di fronte a crescenti problemi interni, la leadership jugoslava riscoprì l'uso dell'autogestione per rappresentare l'immagine di un paese riformista e moderno. Ciò fu funzionale alla proiezione esterna della stabilità della federazione ed a favorire le relazioni con i paesi dell'Europa occidentale, in particolare l'Italia. L'articolo si sviluppa in tre sezioni. La prima presenta lo sviluppo delle relazioni italo-jugoslave*

*dopo la Seconda Guerra Mondiale, per evidenziare i limiti politici di tali rapporti ed il loro legame con la politica jugoslava verso l'Europa occidentale. Il secondo dimostra come la crisi interna della federazione jugoslava nei primi anni Settanta condusse alla riscoperta della propaganda sull'autogestione. Particolare attenzione è prestata all'organizzazione del Secondo Congresso degli Autogestori jugoslavi a Sarajevo (maggio 1971), e alla chiara dimensione internazionale di quest'ultimo. In terzo luogo, l'articolo discute la dimensione strumentale del discorso pubblico sull'autogestione in Italia fino alla metà degli anni Settanta.*

*Parole chiave: Jugoslavia, autogestione, Italia, Europa occidentale, Democrazia Cristiana, Partito Socialista Italiano, Partito Comunista Italiano*

INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

This article addresses the external use of self-management as Yugoslavia's propaganda tool to foster its *rapprochement* to Western Europe, and Italy in particular, during the early 1970s. Traditionally, Yugoslavia's self-management has been considered as a domestic phenomenon, and historiographical attention has therefore concentrated on its internal origins and later developments (Unkovski-Korica, 2016; Musić, 2016). Only recently have scholars started to assess the reception of the Yugoslav "laboratory" abroad. The very first published studies on the circulation of self-management "ideas" beyond Yugoslavia have taken into particular regard their theoretical dimension (Estrin & Uvalić, 2008) and the indirect influence on the development of industrial relations in Western Europe during the 1970s (Zaccaria, 2018a; Georgi, 2018). However, the use of self-management propaganda as a foreign policy instrument represents an under-researched field.

The present essay aims at filling this historiographical gap. Moving beyond the strictly scholarly dimension of Western debates on Yugoslavia's labour-managed system, this analysis illustrates how self-management was used by the Yugoslav leadership to shape a "modernity label" in order to favour Yugoslavia's relations with its Western European partners, with particular attention to the Italian case. As shown by recent literature, since the mid-1960s Italy had emerged as Yugoslavia's main political partner in Western Europe, as sanctioned by the Treaties of Osimo of November 1975, which settled the border problem between the two countries – a troubled legacy of World War II – and envisaged the development of bilateral relations in the political and economic spheres (Zaccaria, 2018b; Mišić, 2018; Bucarelli, 2013; Škorjanec, 2007; Pirjevec, Klabjan & Bajc, 2006). The *rapprochement* between Rome and Belgrade between the late 1960s and early 1970s made Italy a fertile ground for Yugoslavia's propaganda and the development of debates on self-management in the Italian political arena. This essay investigates the rationale of such debates, focusing on the specific reception by Italy's leading political parties: the Christian Democrat party (Democrazia Cristiana – DC), the Italian Socialist Party (Partito Socialista Italiano – PSI) and the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano – PCI). This article develops in three sections. First, it reappraises the historical development of Italian-Yugoslav relations after World War II, to highlight their political limitation and their link to Yugoslavia's policy towards its Western European partners. Second, it shows how the internal crisis experienced by the Yugoslav federation in the early 1970s forced Belgrade to use self-management as a propaganda tool to convey the image of a reforming country. Particular attention is paid to the organisation of the Second Congress of Yugoslav self-managers in Sarajevo (May 1971) and its clear-cut external dimension. This section also considers the coincidence between the reappraisal of self-management in Yugoslavia and the mounting discourse on "industrial democracy" among socialist and social democratic parties in Western Europe. Third, the article dis-

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1 The research leading to this article is part of the project PanEur1970s, which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant Agreement No. 669194).



cusses the instrumental dimension of the self-management discourse in Italy until the mid-1970s. The study concludes that an indirect and yet converging interest developed between the Yugoslav leadership and Italy's major political parties to foster propaganda on Yugoslavia's peculiar system.

## YUGOSLAVIA, ITALY AND WESTERN EUROPE

After the end of World War II, Yugoslavia emerged as one of the most loyal and orthodox allies of the Soviet Union. Very soon, however, Tito's reaction against Stalin's hegemonic plans in Eastern Europe altered the course of relations between Moscow and Belgrade, leading to the Tito-Stalin split (1948). In Western Europe, the public image of Yugoslavia changed accordingly: from an orthodox Soviet ally to a courageous opponent of Soviet rule. At internal level, the Yugoslav government reformed the country's economic organisation. The *Basic Law on the Management of State Enterprises* was passed (1950), leading to the constitution of workers' elected councils. The newly established system, based on radical economic de-Stalinisation, envisaged the withering away of the state as a central planner, the social ownership of the means of production and, at least in theory, the direct participation of workers in the management of enterprises (Denitch, 1976). This was a political move, linked to the need to legitimise Yugoslavia's national road to socialism, faced with the rise of "anti-Titoist" campaigns in the Soviet bloc (Unkovski-Korica, 2016).

At international level, the rupture with Moscow obliged Belgrade to look for new partners: this meant a renewed relationship with post-colonial leaderships, resulting in the establishment of the non-aligned movement in 1961 (Bogetić, 2006; Rajak, 2014). However, in the immediate aftermath of the Tito-Stalin split, Belgrade's attention turned towards the West. The Western powers, and the United States *in primis*, were not deaf to Yugoslavia's requests for support: Tito was therefore kept "afloat" through financial and military assistance (Laković, 2006 and 2015; Lees, 1997; Heuser, 1989). Since the mid-1950s, the United States were replaced by Western European countries as Belgrade's most prominent economic and political partners. This was the immediate result of the economic boom which had characterised Western Europe since the mid-1950s. Among the member states of the European Economic Community (EEC), Italy gradually emerged as Yugoslavia's most important commercial and political partner. This *rapprochement* was somehow revolutionary. Indeed, since the end of World War II, relations between the two countries had been affected by the definition of the state border and, later, by the implementation of the so-called Free Territory of Trieste (FTT). Envisaged by the 1947 Peace Treaty, the latter was never established due to the direct confrontation between Italy, supported by its Western partners, and Yugoslavia, sided by Moscow. Even after the Tito-Stalin split in 1948, political relations between Rome and Belgrade remained tense. This bilateral tension was resolved due to the mediation of the Western powers, which encouraged the two countries to reach a *de facto* settlement – the Memorandum of Understanding signed in London in October 1954 – based on the division of the FTT into two zones (A and B) to be administered respectively by Rome and Belgrade. The Italian

Parliament did not ratify the Memorandum, as Italy's leading parties were not ready to officially renounce to the Italian sovereignty over zone B<sup>2</sup>. However, the settlement reached in London allowed for the re-launching of bilateral relations: Italy and Yugoslavia had decided to separate the territorial question from economic and political considerations, as both leaderships realised the advantages stemming from enhanced cooperation (Ruzicic-Kessler, 2014, 645–647; Bucarelli, 2013, 33–38).

The Italian industrial boom, reverberating in rapid social modernisation, was a leading factor in the reconciliation between the two countries. Changing patterns in the Italian “way of life” – primarily inspired by the American model (Scoppola, 1991, 291–295) – also affected the Yugoslav cultural scene, during a period when industrialisation and urbanisation in the Yugoslav federation were leading to the birth of a new consumer-oriented middle-class society (Calic, 2011). Italian popular culture – from music to fashion – became a reference model for Yugoslavia's young generations (Rolandi, 2015). Economically, since the mid-1950s Yugoslavia had entered a phase of rapid industrialisation which needed Western financing and technology (Obadić, 2014). As a bordering country participating in the process of economic integration in Western Europe, Italy represented a privileged partner. Rome also intended to expand its economic influence in the Balkan region – a traditional Italian sphere of interest. Moreover, beyond economic interests, relations developed after the establishment of the first centre-left coalition in Italy, led by Aldo Moro (December 1963). This coalition government, based on collaboration between DC and PSI, meant a veritable step forward in Italian attitudes towards Yugoslavia (Bucarelli, 2013, 35–38). Moro, as the representative of the progressive wing of the Italian Christian Democrats, aimed at expanding relations with Italy's socialist partners (Monzali, 2012, 89–114). Yugoslavia soon became the target of the new coalition's foreign policy goals. The Socialist party, a traditional admirer of Yugoslavia's “third way” in international relations, followed and encouraged Moro's attitude. Antonio De Martino, Italian Vice-Prime Minister and Secretary of the PSI, visited Belgrade in 1964, praising the virtues of the country's innovative economic system and its position between the European blocs.<sup>3</sup> One year later, in November 1965, Moro paid the first visit of an Italian Prime Minister to Yugoslavia since the end of World War II. His mission coincided with the launch of a major process of economic reforms in Yugoslavia, which aimed at integrating the country in the international market and envisaged the introduction of market mechanisms in the internal economic system (Obadić, 2014).

Throughout the 1960s, Belgrade also developed direct contacts with the EEC, having Rome as its prominent partner and advocate. The course of Yugoslavia's relations with the Community accelerated after August 1968, as the Soviet intervention in Prague in that month raised Yugoslav – and Western – fears about Moscow's alleged expansionistic plans in the Balkans and the Mediterranean (Bajc, 2016). In October 1968, commercial negotiations between Yugoslavia and the EEC opened, in order to create a contractual

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2 As recalled later, the border question was resolved by the Osimo Agreements (1975) which entered into force in 1977.

3 ASSR, UA 372, *Viaggio della delegazione del Partito socialista italiano in Jugoslavia*, giugno 1964.

link between Belgrade and Brussels. Italy strongly advocated Yugoslavia's trade requests, especially in the agricultural field, confirming its role as a *porte-parole* of Belgrade's interests within the Community up to the conclusion of the first EEC-Yugoslav trade agreement in 1970 (Zaccaria, 2016, 13–46). Soon after the Prague events, the Italian Foreign Ministry also decided to start secret talks with its Yugoslav counterpart to overcome the border problem: the goal was to eliminate the last – and yet cumbersome – factor of controversy between Rome and Belgrade. The Italian political leadership agreed on the initiative coming from its diplomatic apparatus, but insisted that it should be kept secret: it was aware that the country's public opinion still regarded the Trieste question as a sensitive topic. The centre-left coalition was also facing widespread students' and workers' protests and – with them – an overall legitimacy crisis: in this framework, announcing the solution of the border question through the renunciation of zone B of the FTT could shift the political balance of the country. In the late 1960s, Yugoslavia's image in Italy was therefore still affected by the border issue. Overall, this limited the room for manoeuvre of the Italian political leadership in relations with Belgrade, confining the latter to the economic domain (Zaccaria, 2018b, 36–41).

#### REDISCOVERING THE EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF SELF-MANAGEMENT

In the early 1970s, Yugoslavia was also affected by clear-cut internal problems, due to the rise of inflation, turmoil in underdeveloped regions – Kosovo *in primis* – and the rise of the nationalistic discourse, particularly in Croatia. The market-oriented reforms of the mid-1960s were increasingly blamed for being responsible of the economic deterioration of the country (Ramet, 2006, 234–240).

It was in this delicate political juncture that the party leadership discussed the need for a public reappraisal of Yugoslavia's internal system through the re-launching and strengthening of self-management (Deveti kongres SKJ, 143–144, 148–160). This strategy was also intended to foster Yugoslavia's international status. In fact, the Department of Information and Political Propaganda of the Savez Komunista Jugoslavije (SKJ) was noting increasing Western scepticism towards the impact of liberal reforms on the self-management system. A departmental note dated April 1971, summarised Western concerns – based on analysis of specialised press and scholarly works on Yugoslavia – concerning the “degradation” of self-management as one effect of the privatisation and “bureaucratisation” of economic activities, and its limitation to the enterprise sector without effects on social relations. The consequence of this – from the Western perspective – was the loosening of ties between the League and the popular masses, and an overall crisis of Yugoslavia's economic system and internal relations. The decline of self-management, traditionally considered in the West as “the pillar of Yugoslavia's regime”, was also supposed to concern relations between the northern republics (Slovenia and Croatia) and the underdeveloped south.<sup>4</sup> As in the early

4 AJ, KPR, II-5-e-1, Predsedništvo SKJ, Odeljenje za političko-propagandno delovanje i informacije, Pov. Br. 11/40, 26. 4. 1971, 98.

1950s, when the Yugoslav leadership had demonstrated to its new Western partners its independent course through the launch of the labour-managed reforms, the crisis of self-management required to re-launch the public image of Yugoslavia's economic system. This reappraisal of self-management was therefore linked to the importance, for Yugoslavia, to discard Western concerns about the federation's stability and to confirm its image as a *sui generis* socialist country among Western European political and intellectual circles. In particular, what the Yugoslav party leadership expected *vis-à-vis* Italy was to maintain a special partnership based on Yugoslavia's status as a peculiar socialist regime which offered a stable alternative to Soviet bloc economies. In 1970, this was clearly expressed by Italian Prime Minister, Giovanni Leone, during a meeting with Toma Granfil, a member of the Yugoslav government in charge of relations with the EEC. Responding to Granfil's appeals for enhanced cooperation and trade with Italy, Leone noted that it was in Italian interest to support Yugoslavia's "laboratory", that is, an "*experiment [which is] followed in Italy with sympathy and interest: this means indeed the creation of a country with Socialist and Marxist roots, but free and independent*".<sup>5</sup>

The reconsideration of self-management propaganda intersected with the rise of social discontent in Western Europe. Students' and workers' protests, from the French "May" of 1968 to Italy's "Hot Autumn" of 1969 revived intellectual and political debates on the issue of industrial democracy as a way to solve social discontent. The search for a "third way" overcoming the dichotomy between the "state" and the "market" characterised such debates (Balfour, 1973). As shown by recent research, self-management was "re-discovered" by Western European social democratic and socialist parties as an alternative, theoretical model of economic, social and political organisation. In Western Europe the ground was therefore receptive for Yugoslavia's efforts to re-launch the public discourse on self-management. In France, the public debate promoted by the country's leading trade unions on such issue contributed towards establishing the Soudreau Commission (1974) devoted to the enlargement of workers' rights in the workplace. At the same time, in West Germany the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) reformed and expanded the *Mitbestimmung* system. Such debates were not immune from the broader diplomatic aspects of Yugoslavia's international position and, in particular, from Bonn's foreign policy towards Belgrade within the framework of the SPD-led *Neue-Ostpolitik* (Zaccaria, 2018a, 213–235).

This foreign policy dimension is particularly well shown by analysis of the Italian case. Throughout the 1950s, interest in the Yugoslav model had been primarily nurtured by academic and cultural élites. This was the case, for example, of progressive and "lay" journals and periodicals such as *Il Ponte* – which published the first thorough analysis of the innovative characters of the Yugoslav "laboratory" in Italy<sup>6</sup> – and federalist-oriented *Democrazia integrale*, which in the mid-1950s had paid particular attention to the Yu-

5 ASPR, Ufficio consigliere diplomatico, b. 130, Colloquio On. Leone – Ministro jugoslavo per il Coordinamento del Commercio con l'Estero, 20. 9. 1968, 188.

6 *Il Ponte*, XI, n. 8–9, August–September, 1955: Jugoslavia d'oggi.

goslav experience as a model of economic and social organisation (Favaretto, 1965). However, it was only between the late 1960s and early 1970s that the “self-managed discourse” began to shift from the academic to the political arena.

As for the DC, it was the party’s left, inclined to social principles, to be affected by the development of the debates on “industrial democracy” which had emerged within the Catholic world after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) (Sergio, 2009; Taviani, 1972). The DC’s official newspaper, *Il Popolo*, did not ignore the Yugoslav model. The Christian democratic press emphasised the difference between the Yugoslav system and the Soviet model of state-led economic organisation, and the market mechanisms regulating the self-managed enterprises.<sup>7</sup> Such a narrative fitted the political-diplomatic efforts by the party’s leadership to improve Yugoslavia’s image in Italy. The publicity given by the DC leadership to the first (troubled) visit of Tito to Italy in 1971 (Bajc, 2014; Mišić, 2011) bears witness to the attention paid by the party to the public dimension of relations with Belgrade.<sup>8</sup> In these circumstances, public appreciation for Yugoslavia’s system, aimed at “humanising the social environment”, had also been publicly expressed by Pope Paul VI, contributing to the success of the visit (Barberini, 2007, 267–274).

While the DC’s engagement with the Yugoslav question was primarily linked to the latter’s foreign policy dimension, it was the PSI – which participated in the governing coalitions from 1968 to 1969 (Rumor I) and from 1970 to 1972 (Rumor II and Colombo) – which showed a genuine interest in Yugoslavia and its model. In fact, the PSI’s attention to the issue of labour-managed economies had surfaced since the immediate post-World War II years, when the party had unsuccessfully campaigned for the creation of “management councils” (*consigli di gestione*) in enterprises (Pinto, 2008). The issue of workers’ participation had re-emerged on the PSI political agenda in the 1960s, due to the influence of the debate on self-management raised in France by Socialist Gilles Martinet and philosopher Henri Lefebvre (Achilli & Dambrosio, 1976). In the late 1960s, faced with rising social and political unrest, the PSI had therefore set the improvement of workers’ conditions as its main political priority, and attention had focused on the drafting of the Workers’ Statute (*Statuto dei Lavoratori*) (Nenni, 1977, 97–123).

It was not by chance that this Statute, originally conceived by the Minister of Work, the Socialist Giacomo Brodolini, examined the question of workers’ participation (Lanaro, 1992, 360). An axis was created with the DC “left”, as witnessed by the engagement of Carlo Donat Cattin, Brodolini’s successor, to implement the Workers’ Statute in 1970. But, beyond ideological and domestic considerations, foreign policy goals added to the Italian socialists’ attitude towards Yugoslavia and its internal system. In 1969, Pietro Nenni, a leading party member and then Minister for Foreign Affairs, had actively supported the solution of the border problem with Italy and Yugoslavia’s economic integration in the Western system (Zaccaria, 2018b, 48–50). This was reflected in public rhetoric. The Party’s newspaper, *Avanti!*, recurrently praised Yugoslavia’s labour-managed economy as

7 *Il Popolo*, 27. 2. 1970: Democrazia e partecipazione – 1. L’Autogestione.

8 *Il Popolo*, 25. 3. 1971: Tito da oggi a Roma in visita ufficiale; *Il Popolo*, 28. 3. 1971: Il Presidente Tito visita gli stabilimenti della FIAT.

a challenge to the USSR model.<sup>9</sup> In direct contacts between representatives of the PSI and League of Communists of Yugoslavia, Italian socialists were eager to confirm the party's open support towards Yugoslavia's independence and territorial integrity, promising this at governmental level.<sup>10</sup>

It was in this favourable context that the SKJ leadership started to rationalise its propaganda efforts. To achieve this goal, in July 1969 an *ad hoc* office was created – under the leadership of Dušan Petrović-Šane, a member of the League's Executive Committee, to organise the Second Congress of Yugoslav Self-managers.<sup>11</sup> This initiative, later held in Sarajevo in May 1971, had domestic and external goals. Internally, it was a regressive move aimed at overcoming the alleged flaws of the market-oriented reforms; challenging “bureaucratic and technocratic” forces hindering the social power of the working class and, lastly, re-launching a “modern and self-managed society”.<sup>12</sup> Externally – which is of interest for the purposes of this article – the re-launch of self-management aimed at presenting the renewed image of a country able to reform itself and overcome its tense internal situation. In this regard, an internal note of the Group for Social and Political Questions of the Presidency of the Republic, dated 8 January 1971, noted that:

*The preparation of the congress coincides with a moment in which there is a sudden increase of interests in ideas and practice of self-management. It is therefore beyond any legitimate doubt that the Congress will contribute towards strengthening the reputation of our country in the international scene, and to further promoting the concept of self-management all over the world.*<sup>13</sup>

At party level, it was therefore decided to strengthen propaganda activities, involving leading news agencies, radio and periodicals (including *Tanjug*, *Radio Beograd* and *Međunarodna Politika*) coordinated by the Federal Secretary for Information.<sup>14</sup> Informative booklets on Yugoslavia's self-management were also published for foreign visitors and observers.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, the deterioration of the internal situation in Yugoslavia, determined by ever growing strains between the federal centre and Croatia's independent course, strengthened the political dimension of the Sarajevo meeting. After April 1971, the Cabi-

9 Avanti!, 22. 12. 1970: Cooperazione per la pace fra Italia e Jugoslavia. See also press cuttings in: FSSFT, Fondo Mario Zagari, serie 5: Affari Esteri, “Yougoslavie,” 31–03–1973/09–10/1973.

10 See: ASSR, UA 372.

11 AJ, KPR, II-5-e-1, Informacija o dosadašnjim pripremama za drugi kongres samoupravljača Jugoslavije, Beograd, 8. 1. 1971, 3. The first Congress took place in 1950 to celebrate the launch of the new economic system.

12 AJ, KPR, II-5-e-1, Informacija o Prvoj tribini klubova samoupravljača Jugoslavije, 8. 1. 1971, 7.

13 AJ, KPR, II-5-e-1, Informacija o dosadašnjim pripremama za drugi kongres samoupravljača Jugoslavije, Beograd, 8. 1. 1971.

14 AJ, KPR, II-5-e-1, Informacija o izvršenju programa informativne aktivnosti prema inostranstvu povodom održavanja Kongresa samoupravljača, Beograd, 12. 4. 1971.

15 AJ, KPR, II-5-e-1, Odeljenje za međunarodne odnose i veze predsedništva SKJ, Pov. Br. 2405/192, Beograd, 5. 4. 1971.

net of the Presidency of the Republic, headed by Marko Vrhunec, coordinated the public dimension of the event, keeping close contact with the Information Office of the SKJ's Presidency, the Federal Secretariat for Information, the Alliance of Yugoslav Trade Unions, the *ad hoc* Office for the Preparation of the Congress and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As reported by Vrhunec, the major conclusion stemming from the internal debate among the above-mentioned bodies was that foreign observers would not be interested only in the self-management issue, but also in the country's broader political situation.<sup>16</sup>

Accordingly, the congress was designed to be a veritable show of Yugoslavia's system. Beyond the conspicuous presence of foreign journalists in Sarajevo (more than 110 – most of whom came from West Germany (21) and Italy (14)) and the presence of TV teams from Great Britain, Italy, Austria and West Germany, the number of foreign observers from all over the world (almost 200) indicated the success of the Yugoslav initiative.<sup>17</sup> A special information office was established in Sarajevo, to review and analyse the reception of the Congress abroad. Information reports from this office focused in particular on the Western European delegates. Particular attention was devoted to the Italian representatives. The Italian delegation was indeed one of the largest: it was made up of personalities coming from a broad spectrum of political and social organisations, including trade unions (CGIL – *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*, and CISL – *Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori*), progressive political parties (including the PSI and PCI) and Catholic associations (ACLI – *Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratori Italiani*) and, lastly, research centres (*Istituto Gramsci* and ISDEE – *Istituto di Studi e Documentazione sull'Est Europeo* in Trieste).<sup>18</sup> As regards the Italian leftist parties attending the works in Sarajevo, reports showed their great interest and conviction that the meeting would represent

*a new page in the development of self-management. The Yugoslav experience is of fundamental importance for their work, and have therefore paid attention to the work of the [Congress'] Commissions, to listen to what workers think about problems and solutions in our country.*<sup>19</sup>

Such statements recurred frequently in the press analysis carried out by the propaganda office. Its last report concluded that, in line with the original goals of its organisers, the Congress had contributed towards shifting international attention from the political and economic crisis experienced by the federation to the re-launch of self-management as Yugoslavia's internal pillar.<sup>20</sup>

16 AJ, KPR, II-5-e-1, Beleška, Brioni, 27. 4. 1971.

17 AJ, KPR, II-5-e-1, II. kongres samoupravljača, Grupa za međunarodne aspekte, Bilten br.1, Sarajevo, 5. 5. 1971.

18 AJ, KPR, II-5-e-1, Lista inostranih posmatrača na II. kongresu samoupravljača Jugoslavije, Sarajevo, 5.–8. 5. 1971.

19 AJ, KPR, II-5-e-1, II. kongres samoupravljača, Grupa za međunarodne aspekte, Bilten br. 7, Sarajevo, 7. 5. 1971.

20 AJ, KPR, II-5-e-1, II. kongres samoupravljača, Grupa za međunarodne aspekte, Bilten br. 7, Sarajevo, 7. 5. 1971.

The Sarajevo Congress was indeed a stimulus for academic and intellectual debates on Yugoslavia's self-management, particularly in Western Europe. The SKJ's propaganda office continued to follow the evolution of these debates. In a December 1972 report, it concluded that opinions on Yugoslavia's experience oscillated between those who thought that self-management offered solutions to the problems of modern society, and those who believed that this system was "a good idea" which, however, could not work in Yugoslavia, for economic and political reasons. Faced with this polarisation, the propaganda office concluded that it was in the interests of the League to foster its external actions – particularly in Western Europe – to confirm the expansion of self-management as the basis of Yugoslavia's development and internal stability.<sup>21</sup> In Italy, this propaganda assumed an increasing political/diplomatic dimension, which was linked to the need to favour the development of bilateral relations between Rome and Belgrade. This is clearly shown by the attitude of the Italian ambassador to Belgrade, Giuseppe Walter Maccotta. In February 1972, during his first meeting with Stane Dolanc, Secretary of the Executive Bureau of the Presidency of the SKJ, Maccotta emphasised that the Yugoslav propaganda in Italy was still weak (*slaba*) and this affected the knowledge of Yugoslavia's peculiar road to socialism. Accordingly, Maccotta insisted on the need for the SKJ to strengthen its information activity in Italy.<sup>22</sup> As shown by recent research, the Italian diplomacy was not alone in considering the advantages stemming from the public rhetoric on self-management: this was, for example, the case of the Quai d'Orsay, which was aware that relations between Paris and Belgrade would benefit from the political/academic debate on self-management in France. A further example of the diplomatic dimension of self-management also concerned the visit of the President of the European Commission, the Dutch social-democrat Sicco Mansholt, to Belgrade in December 1972. In this circumstance, self-management was used by the Yugoslav representatives to insist on the effectiveness of their economic system, and as an axis of political convergence with Western European social democracy. What was at stake was the renewal of the 1970 trade agreement with the EEC, and the deepening of cooperation with the Community (Zaccaria, 2018a, 215–219).

#### AN INSTRUMENTAL ATTITUDE

The evolution of the self-management discourse in Italy until the mid-1970s bears witness to the convergence of Rome's and Belgrade's interests to improve the "image" of Yugoslavia in Italy. DC leaders insisted on the strategic importance of Yugoslavia's independence emphasising the "public" dimension of relations with Belgrade.<sup>23</sup> In December 1972, the *Centro per le relazioni italo-jugoslave* was established in Rome on the initiative of the DC foreign minister, Giuseppe Medici, to foster cultural and artistic cooperation beyond the diplomatic field.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the PSI continued to stress self-management as Yugoslavia's distinc-

21 AJ, KPR, II-5-c-2-16, Predsedništvo SKJ, Odeljenje za političko-propagandno delovanje i informacije, Br. 13/1, 11. 1. 1972, 8.

22 AJ, 507/IX, Italija, K 12, Pov. br. 2405/59, Beograd, 10. 2. 1972, 17.

23 Il Popolo, 14. 2. 1973: Autogestione per il domani; MAESSD, Testi e documenti sulla politica estera dell'Italia, 1972, Discorso del ministro Moro a Trieste (22 aprile 1972), 265.

24 Il Popolo, 14. 2. 1973: Costituito il Centro per le relazioni italo-jugoslave (Roma, 12 dicembre 1972), 483.



tive feature through *Avanti!*.<sup>25</sup> At internal level, the socialists' stress on self-management was linked to competition with the PCI. As the latter condemned the socialists' participation in the centre-left coalition, arguing that the PSI was renouncing its genuine socialist goals for the sake of power-sharing with DC, Italian socialists needed an ideological reference point – in this case, self-management – to present themselves as genuine supporter of workers' requests to the leftist electorate (Salvadori, 2015; Vaccarini, 1981; Napolitano, 2008, 150–153). This domestic strategy was to linger until the end of the decade.<sup>26</sup>

After 1972, Yugoslavia's propaganda efforts were facilitated by the political *rapprochement* between the SKJ and PCI. For the Italian Communists, fostering political relations with the League – which represented an “heresy” in the international communist movement – was part of an overall strategy aimed at distinguishing itself from Soviet orthodoxy. This was one of the motives behind the “Eurocommunist” international strategy promoted by Enrico Berlinguer, Secretary-General of the party since 1972 (Pons, 2006). Also linked to Eurocommunism was the internal attitude of Berlinguer *vis-à-vis* cooperation with the DC and the search for a *compromesso storico* with the latter after 1973. This strategy required the development of “national solidarity” in foreign policy and, therefore, the PCI alignment with the opening of the main parties of the governing coalitions towards Belgrade, in view of the settlement of the border problem. And yet, beyond such internal and foreign policy considerations, the question of workers' participation exerted a notable fascination on Italian Communists, which went back to Antonio Gramsci's political thought (Napolitano, 2008, 150–153). Within the party, the public discourse on self-management took into consideration the Yugoslav “laboratory”, as demonstrated by the publication in the party's leading periodical, *Rinascita*, of two long articles on the peculiarity of the Yugoslav economic system by Veljko Vlahović, a member of the Presidency of the SKJ, in February (Cavera, 2006, 42). It was *Rinascita* itself which, in a letter sent by its Director, Gerardo Chiaromonte, to Tito, had manifested the “enormous interest” shown by its readers in the role of the party in self-managed society.<sup>27</sup> In 1974, the official party publishing house, *Editori Riuniti*, issued a collection of articles and speeches delivered by Tito in the early 1970s – *Autogestione e socialismo* (Self-management and Socialism) – which followed the innovative course of Yugoslav socialism (Tito, 1974a). This book was the outcome of joint cooperation between the PCI and the Information and Propaganda office of the Presidency of the SKJ and showed Italian Communists' efforts at spreading knowledge of the Yugoslav system among their readers.<sup>28</sup> In the same year, *Editori Riuniti* also published Tito's opening speech at the Tenth Congress of the SKJ (May 1974), focused on Yugoslavia's labour-managed experience (Tito, 1974b).

As in the case of the DC and PSI, the Italian Communists' “admiration” for the Yugoslav system was based more on instrumental interest than the actual intention to develop

25 *Avanti!*, 26. 9. 1973: Belgrado conferma il non allineamento; *Avanti!*, 28. 5. 1974: Fermezza di Tito.

26 *Avanti!*, 20. 9. 1978: Autonomia e autogestione. Una proposta socialista alternativa allo Stato burocratico e accentratore.

27 AJ, 507/IX, Italija, K12, *Rinascita*, Roma, 27. 11. 1972, 96.

28 AJ, 507/IX, Italija, K 23, *Pov. br. 1906/3376/1*, Beograd, 10. 4. 1974.

Italian legislation in the field of workers' participation further. The *compromesso storico*, required a moderate and non-radical posture *vis-à-vis* the issues of social and industrial organisation, which was not to affect dialogue with Italian moderates (Mainardi & Ozella, 2009, 121–123). Accordingly, the PCI did not welcome the appeals for radical changes in industrial organisation voiced by radical workers' (*operaisti*) movements in previous years. No major public campaigns were carried out at national level to support workers' enhanced participation in enterprises, let alone their right to self-management. Beyond the need for dialogue with the DC moderate forces and the business world – which voiced its opposition towards any scheme of workers' participation<sup>29</sup> – the PCI was also aware of the peculiar position of Italian trade unions. The latter – *in primis* CGIL and CISL – interpreted their role according to an antagonistic logic, aiming at “external” control of the enterprise management. This is why the most important reform concerning industrial relations in Italy – the Workers' Statute – sanctioned the actual detachment of workers from the management of enterprises and reinforced the role of trade unions in the field of contractual bargaining (Giugni, 1986, 45–46).<sup>30</sup>

The attitude of the major Italian parties towards the Yugoslav system was therefore instrumental. Internally, it suited the domestic dialectic and was compatible with public debates on industrial democracy (which had developed since the late 1960s independently of the “Yugoslav question”), leaving discussions at an abstract level with no normative engagements. Internationally, it was in line with Italy's foreign policy goals in the Balkans. Amplifying Yugoslav propaganda, Italian political parties made a fundamental contribution to overcoming of the antagonistic rhetoric which had characterised the public discourse on Yugoslavia since the end of World War II. This was to facilitate the development of bilateral diplomatic relations with Belgrade. As territorial negotiations – and their economic clauses – were developed in secret, the public discourse on Yugoslavia was facilitated by the positive public outlook on the “self-management” laboratory.

Assessing the actual impact of Yugoslav propaganda and Italian reception without quantitative data or opinion polls is an impossible task. However, study of the contemporary press reveals that, when the Osimo agreements were signed in November 1975 – overcoming the border issue and providing for enhanced economic cooperation to link Yugoslavia to the Western European market – the public image of Yugoslavia in Italy was that of a reformist and innovative country. This view was conveyed by a broad spectrum of newspaper and periodicals from the moderate-conservative to the progressive political areas (Cavera, 2006, 40–44), with the notable exception of the parliamentary right and local opposition in the Trieste area (Monzali, 2015, 627–629). From an historical viewpoint, therefore, the instrumental convergence of Yugoslav and Italian interests in enhancing self-management propaganda had resulted in a mutual diplomatic advantage.

29 Partecipazione e democrazia industriale, 1977.

30 ASCGIL, Fondo Atti e Corrispondenza della Segreteria, b. 160, fasc. 160, Texte préparé par la Confédération Italienne des Syndicats Ouvriers pour la Table Ronde Syndicale Internationale: «Les syndicats et la Participation des Travailleurs à la prise de décision», Sarajevo, 10.–11. 5. 1971.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the early 1970s, faced with mounting internal problems, the Yugoslav leadership used self-management as a propaganda tool to convey the image of a reformist and modernising country. This was functional to the external projection of the country's stability and reduction of international concerns about the future of the federation. Yugoslavia's self-management propaganda devoted special attention to Western Europe, Italy in particular. For Belgrade, the enhancement of political and economic relations with its EEC partners represented a political imperative even after the crisis of the liberal reforms of the 1960s. The opening towards Western Europe, however, needed renewed internal and external political legitimisation. The latter was found in the re-launch of the self-management discourse. Externally, this policy encroached on the development of debates on "industrial democracy" in Western Europe, which helped Yugoslavia's propaganda to find receptive grounds. Beyond analysis of the theoretical dimension and actual provisions of the self-management system – which was beyond the scope of this work – this article shows the instrumental nature of the self-management discourse. This was particularly the case of Italy, where the labour-managed system became a cheap political "card" to support Rome's *rapprochement* to Belgrade. The image of Yugoslavia as a "laboratory" of industrial democracy was recurrent in the public discourse of Italy's leading political parties, representing the core of the "public" dimension of Italian-Yugoslav relations. Analysis of Yugoslavia's self-management propaganda and its Italian reception has therefore shown that the discourse on "self-management" was artificially boosted for foreign policy goals.

Metaphorically, one could conclude that Yugoslavia and Italy found convergent reasons for "blowing up" the self-management bubble. This metaphor makes sense of the exponential rise of self-management as a fashionable political topic in the early and mid-1970s, and its consequent, gradual decline: the mounting crisis of the Yugoslav federation confined self-management to the theoretical sphere (a dimension which has traditionally characterised analysis on self-management in Yugoslavia).<sup>31</sup> In Italy, as in France and other Western European countries, the political discourse on the Yugoslav system underwent a rapid decline, which was observed by the same protagonists of the political-intellectual debates of the early 1970s (Georgi, 2003, 8). As a fragile, floating bubble, the public dimension of Yugoslavia's self-management was slowly yet inexorably swept away.

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31 In this regard see: Estrin & Uvalić, 2008.

RAZBLINJENJE SAMOUPRAVNEGA MEHURČKA: RECEPCIJA  
JUGOSLOVANSKE PROPAGANDE V ITALIJI V ZAČETKU  
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## POVZETEK

Članek na podlagi primarnih virov iz Arhiva Jugoslavije in več italijanskih arhivov prikazuje, kako je jugoslovansko vodstvo, soočeno z resnimi notranjimi težavami, v začetku sedemdesetih let znova okrepilo propagando o samoupravljanju. S tem so jugoslovanski voditelji skušali Jugoslaviji povrniti podobo države, ki se reformira in modernizira, kar je služilo zunanji projekciji o stabilni državi in spodbujanju odnosov z zahodnoevropskimi partnerji, zlasti z Italijo. Članek je razdeljen na tri dele. V prvem delu ponovno ocenjuje zgodovinski razvoj italijansko-jugoslovanskih odnosov po drugi svetovni vojni s poudarkom na njihovih političnih omejitvah in povezanosti z jugoslovansko politiko do zahodne Evrope. Drugi del prikazuje, kako je notranja kriza, ki jo je jugoslovanska federacija doživljala v začetku sedemdesetih let, privedla do ponovnega odkritja propagande o samoupravljanju, pri čemer je posebna pozornost namenjena drugemu kongresu jugoslovanskih samoupravljalcev v Sarajevu maja 1971 in njegovim očitnim zunanjepolitičnim razsežnostim. Tretji del članka obravnava instrumentalno dimenzijo samoupravnega diskurza v Italiji do sredine sedemdesetih let.

*Ključne besede:* Jugoslavija, samoupravljanje, Italija, zahodna Evropa, Democrazia Cristiana, Partito Socialista Italiano, Partito Comunista Italiano

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