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The story of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) has been told extensively, with the usual controversy that a CIA-backed organization would warrant: praised by some for keeping, despite everything, its main promise of promoting a transatlantic community of intellectuals free from totalitarian ideology;¹ reviled by others for its clandestine nature disguised as a cause for liberty, serving primarily U.S. interests rather than a genuine transatlantic debate founded on freedom.² Others still, most notably Giles Scott-Smith, noted how the CCF, conscious of the influence of Antonio Gramsci's thought over European intelligentsia, emulated and applied the Communist philosopher's concept of cultural hegemony, trying to forge a consensus around a shared cultural heritage that would stress not so much Atlanticism per se, but 'free-thinking' as the real European tradition, free, above all, of totalitarian thought, whether fascist or Communist.³ Authors focusing on single countries found that such hegemony was limited, if not even denied by local resistance and national prerogatives or traditions.⁴ Andrea Scionti places himself in this group of authors. He elaborates on the now widely (some would say too widely) tested argument that "local actors involved helped redefine the character and limits of U.S. cultural diplomacy" (89). And it is by stressing the *adapted* 'character' of anti-Communism, more than simply just the 'limits' of American influence, that Scionti adds a significant point to the debate.

Neither sinister nor benevolent, the CCF, we are told, became rather an organization painfully conscious of its limitations; and, I would add, gaining traction, ironically perhaps, not because of its hegemonic nature but because of how multifaceted it became, based on each national circumstance. That national diversity somehow mitigated its reputation of unredeemed

¹ See especially Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1989), and Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

² See especially Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 1999), and Joel Whitney, *Finks: How the C.I.A. Tricked the World's Best Writers* (New York: OR Books, 2017).

³ Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA, and Post-War American Hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2002). I also largely concur with this view in Alessandro Brogi, *Confronting America: The Cold War between the United States and the Communists in France and Italy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 180–186.

⁴ For ex., Hugh Wilford, *The CIA, the British Left and the Cold War: Calling the Tune?* (London: Routledge, 2003); Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015). See also essays in Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte A. Lerg (eds.), *Campaigning Culture and the Global Cold War: The Journals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

pro-Atlanticism. It also gave it a degree of sophistication worthy of its targeted audience: the elite intellectuals. Along the lines of Volker Berghahn's argument, Scionti frequently alludes to the twin cultural Cold War waged by the CCF: against the influence of Soviet Communism and against Europe's deeply rooted negative views of America as a civilization. The two aspects were mutually nourishing.⁵

Scionti covers a gap in the historiography of the CCF by looking at the French and Italian intellectuals' response to the Congress's strategies and pressures. Although the French and Italian responses to the United States' early cultural Cold War strategies in general have been amply analyzed, Scionti adds important insights on the cultural and political resistance to U.S. pressures by unearthing new evidence from the International Association for Cultural Freedom (as the CCF was renamed from 1967) records gathered in the Special Collections of the University of Chicago, plus the papers of top CCF members, and by focusing on the work of the CCF's affiliates, the *Amis de la Liberté* in France and the *Associazione Italiana per la Libertà della Cultura* (AILC) in Italy. It is a significant gap to fill. While active in thirty-five countries, the Congress paid foremost attention to France and Italy, because Communist influence, particularly in the intellectual world, was greatest there. Indeed, the AILC and the *Amis de la Liberté* turned out to be the most enduring European organizations born under CCF auspices. Among the sources of power and prestige for the two nations' Communist parties, the *Parti communiste français* (PCF) and *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI), was their intellectual clout, which further corroborated their legitimacy. Regardless of the number of actual Communist-affiliated intellectuals, it was the pervasive pro-Marxist cultural milieus in both countries that the CCF targeted. Fellow-travelers who were key public intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Alberto Moravia (neither of whom the CCF succeeded in wooing) mattered as much, if not more than the actual party militants. The two major aspects Scionti invites us to consider are how the resistance by local affiliates revolved around diverging views on "the nature and legitimacy of anti-Communism" (95), and—more implicitly—what effects on U.S. broader strategic interests this resistance could have had. The argument is sound and engaging, though it leaves some questions unanswered.

Either for instrumental or philosophical reasons, the CCF always looked left. Its main thrust consisted of drafting intellectuals who were, in Richard Pells's words, "sufficiently left wing that they could not be ignored by their fellow intellectuals, yet they rejected both communism and neutralism."⁶

There is a relative consensus that the success of the CCF was mainly due to its cooption of large numbers from the Non-Communist Left (NCL). This orientation also meant the tolerance of "dangerous opinions," according to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., one of the organization's founders.⁷ Almost rebuking Alexis de Tocqueville's "tyranny of the majority" dictum on America—a view of U.S. politics and culture shared by many contemporary European intellectuals—Schlesinger championed the power of dissent, arguing that conflict and contradiction were the truly creative aspects of a free society. Indeed, many American intellectuals who, like Schlesinger, remained loyal to the New Deal legacy, underlined that freedom could never be harmonious and consensual. It had to be removed from utopian or idealist tendencies in American and European political culture. Ironically, the Congress, while under U.S. guidance, ostensibly promoted a democratic world in which intellectuals and artists worked free from political interference. Culture had to be 'apolitical.' In fact, this transatlantic dialogue—even when unaware of its highly strategic covert support—was rife with highly politicized debates

⁵ Volker Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe: Shepard Stone between Philanthropy, Academy, and Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). See also Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists*, and Eugenio Capozzi, "L'opposizione all'antiamericanismo: Il Congress for Cultural Freedom e l'Associazione italiana per la libertà della cultura," in Gaetano Quagliariello and Piero Craveri (eds.), *L'antiamericanismo in Italia e in Europa nel secondo dopoguerra* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2004).

⁶ Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, And Transformed American Culture Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 69.

⁷ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*, rev. ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998), 199.

on what constituted legitimacy, or the extent to which the Western cultural heritage ideologically justified Atlanticism and excluded Communism.⁸

What we can discern from Scionti's new evidence is that the CCF's strategy was flexible not primarily because of its architects' predilection for open debate, but because of its recipients' imperviousness to its most blatantly anti-Communist agenda. Although the author does not explicitly argue this point, he does allude to the fact that the "practical boundaries of acceptable disagreement were not always evident, and Italian and French members repeatedly tried to redefine and negotiate them" (95). For all the 'apolitical' discourse and Schlesinger's invitation to an 'open conflict' of ideas, this was quite a politicized way to define the terms of dissent and legitimacy.

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Most evidently, this occurred in Italy. The article's headline title is drawn from a letter by Alberto Moravia to CCF founding member Nicola Chiaromonte. The complete phrase reads: "I am afraid Americans cannot understand what it means to live in a country that has been fascist" (107). Political legitimacy in Italy was based on the fascist vs. antifascist binary, not the Communism vs. anti-Communism dichotomy. This was the premise for much of the AILC's objections to the CCF's directives: even for Italian intellectuals who were drawn to the CCF, the PCI, Scionti notes, was, "a legitimate enemy to defeat rather than an irreconcilable one to eliminate" (102).

The mild and elusive character of anti-Communism in both France and Italy became even more apparent after the 1956 events in Hungary caused several intellectuals' defections from the two countries' Communist parties. Even when notable opinion molders as Sartre or novelist Italo Calvino publicly denounced the Soviet invasion and distanced themselves from the PCF and PCI, they remained in the fold of a self-professed 'anti-anti-Communism.' For all its sins, socialism, in their view, was still redeemable. So the CCF failed to shape a front of anti-Communist intellectuals of its own guise. Falling short of creating a French Association for Cultural Freedom in conjunction with the *Amis de la Liberté*, the CCF then decided to rely on local magazines and organizations, in which members of the Congress would be able to operate without being identified officially as such. These organizations, however, "followed their own logic beyond the Congress's control" (114). An irony persisted: local NCL intellectuals earned prestige in their community thanks to their autonomy from, not collaboration with the CCF. Most notably, the AILC harshly criticized the Italian government's legislation that aimed at curbing the freedom of expression of Communist intellectuals—a position that "strengthened the organization in the eyes of neutralist and undecided intellectuals" (119). This was, according to AILC's president Ignazio Silone, a far more subtle way to erode the PCI's popularity; but to CCF Administrative Secretary Michael Josselson, the strategy seemed to apply a double standard, condemning fascist but not Communist totalitarianism.

Just as disappointing, and perhaps even more indicative of the CCF's own ideological limits, was the AILC's refusal to include Catholic intellectuals in its rosters, thus failing to match the record of the *Amis de la Liberté*. The CCF's Secretary General Nicolas Nabokov was forced to admit that in Italy there were hardly any liberal Catholics in the style of French philosopher Jacques Maritain. But the question went deeper for the AILC's leaders, who contended that the Church in Italy stood against religious freedom and followed a deliberately anti-intellectual line (and we are led to wonder how much these claims alluded to America's own traditions of anti-intellectualism).

In this view, the problem with the Vatican as much as with the bourgeoisie in general in France and Italy was about their recent past readiness to condone, if not collude with, fascism. Marxism in both countries attracted intellectuals who were only too eager to reject their own bourgeois past as the main culprit for Europe's recent tragedy. Scionti notes this crucial difference between American and—especially—Italian intellectuals; he also invokes Tony Judt to explain the full emergence of left-wing thought in postwar France, which was steeped in long-term traditions of radical thought. His insights, though,

⁸ Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture*. This paragraph draws in part from the points I raised in Brogi, *Confronting America*, 181-182.

would have gained from further integrating Judt's argument on the soul-searching ways of European (especially French) intellectuals who condemned or atoned for the recent past.⁹

If differences in this transatlantic dialogue were of such magnitude, can we then say, as Scionti does, that, especially in France, they “were not so much about fundamental disagreements over anti-Communism [...] but about tactics” (115)? Is it plausible that, even in Italy, “policy disputes did not diminish the underlying agreements” (115) of this community of intellectuals? The question of Communist legitimacy seemed to be a fundamental one—one that both French and Italian intellectuals linked to broader issues of national experience, prerogatives, even identity. Also, as Scionti only briefly acknowledges, those differences had profound potential repercussions on U.S. strategies. Nabokov or Josselson did not beat themselves up over nothing. The CCF's inability to coopt French existentialists meant losing much of the intellectual debate over the emerging *tiers-mondisme* in French cultural circles; the stubborn anti-clericalism of the Italian affiliates, as Scionti notes,—“posed a threat to the U.S. policy of maintaining friendly relations with the Vatican, a natural ally given its visceral anti-Communism” (123). And what then about the risk of alienating the Christian Democrats, America's prominent political allies in Italy who also seemed to need some coopting, given their own cultural (if not political) misgivings on America? The measure of the relative success of the CCF—which Scionti ascribes precisely to the “tactical” adaptations to each national peculiarity—may be more accurately assessed against its broader expectations of a large ‘strategic’ success, one perhaps resulting in ‘The End of Ideology,’ the leading theme of the CCF's Milan Conference of 1955. That meeting, particularly under the guidance of French philosopher Raymond Aron, invoked Daniel Bell's thesis that urged, if not a perfect consensus, the end of ideological warfare in the Western world.¹⁰ Again, the irony of this agenda under a heavy cultural Cold War seemed all too palpable to many left-wing European intellectuals.

Finally, the reader may find some omissions inexplicable. If the magazines *Preuves* and *Tempo presente* “were one of the main achievements of the CCF” (92), why should they receive only a passing mention here? And why would a conference as the one held in Milan in 1955 that showed so much transatlantic divergence (the focus of this article) receive no attention at all? The chronology is also fuzzy, particularly omitting how the CCF got its start in either France or Italy. Trimming some redundancy, the article could have afforded some space to elaborate on these events. Still, Scionti's new evidence and the subtlety of his argument provide an important, stimulating contribution to the debate on the cultural Cold War in Europe.

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⁹ Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944–1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

¹⁰ See Raymond Aron, *L'Opium des intellectuels* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1955). Daniel Bell elaborated on his thesis first presented in Milan in Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: Free Press, 1960); see also Giles Scott-Smith, “The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the End of Ideology and the 1955 Milan Conference: ‘Defining the Parameters of Discourse,’” *Journal of Contemporary History* 37:3 (July 2002), pp. 437–455.