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Obituary

Sergio, the irreplaceable comrade

Wednesday 25 September 2019, by [MALABARBA Gigi](#) (Date first published: 24 September 2019).

Sergio d'Amia died on 16 September 2019. His mother, an Italian Communist Party activist under fascism, then in the Resistance, signed him up at the age of 10 for the Pioneers, the organisation for the youngest communists (organising youth up to the age of 15), after which they could go on to the Fgci (Federation of Italian Communist Youth).

Later, he joined the PCI (Italian Communist Party) and soon found himself in opposition to the Party in 1956, when the Russian tanks crushed the Hungarian Revolution. He was already an anti-Stalinist, not out of an ideological affinity to Trotskyism but because he did not support Soviet policies or Togliatti's approach. He encountered the Fourth International only after 1968 – an experience he lived to the full – and definitively broke from the PCI. A decisive moment was meeting a Trotskyist from Pisa expelled from the Party. Silvio Paolicchi, who worked at the Mondadori publishing firm, where Franca Cambié worked (for many years she would be his life companion after Pina Sardella), and Davide Danti, organiser of the first Works Council at Mondadori.

Sergio was a teacher of Italian language and literature. School and more generally training and education were always central to his political activity. With Pina and sectors of the union left of the time he was among the founders of CGIL Scuola – initially opposed by the PCI who preferred an organisation not affiliated with this bit of the “middle layers”! – convinced of the role of education in raising working-class consciousness. At San Giuliano Milanese, where he taught, he was an advocate of self-managed people's schools to enable workers to gain the middle school diploma. This was a notable experience in terms of the number of worker-students involved, for the programme explained maths by reading pay envelopes, and history as the history of class struggles. And he later carried all this experience in the victorious national metalworkers' negotiations in 1972-73 for the right to 150 hours within the work schedule enabling all workers to attain the middle school diploma “paid for by the boss”.

Along with Pina Sardella, he was among the founders of the Rousseau Centres, in 1968. These were summer recreational and educational centres for teen boys and girls, absolutely revolutionary for the time (boys and girls could sleep together and the monitors were slightly older youth).

Sergio joined the Gruppi comunisti rivoluzionari (GCR – Revolutionary Communist Groups) of the Fourth International during the Hot Autumn of 1969 along with a very small group around Silvio Paolicchi and the students in a base community from Volta scientific secondary school, and a few academics, later some employees of Mondadori and the Rizzoli – Corriere della sera group. He was the other “adult”, already over 30!

For the younger people, listening to the conversation between Sergio and Silvio, perhaps after a PCI central committee meeting or on the course of ongoing struggle, was a sort of permanent cadre school, alongside the possibility to meet and get to know during their meetings historic activists such as Livio Maitan and revolutionary leaders from many countries. Livio was the one who definitively won Sergio over to this new militant experience.

Sergio always took charge of political education, but was also very involved in organising teachers' unions. The attempt to normalise CGIL Scuola had already been challenged at the second congress by the so-called Foggi motion, the first national organised tendency (it had never had been possible to organise one before within CGIL, in any sector). Sergio was the protagonist in Milan and Lombardy along with Pina, Maria Teresa Rossi and other comrades, including Giulietta Banzi, torn apart soon after by the fascist bomb in Piazza della Loggia, in Brescia. The current's bulletin in Milan was named, No longer servants of the State, as Sergio had proposed.

After Paolicchi's home and a Volta student's, and a brief period in a cellar near Corso Buenos Aires, the GCR opened their historic headquarters in Via Varchi alla Bovisa, which was already a meeting-place for the Milanese class-struggle left and also the headquarters of Christians for Socialism (near Pino Pinelli's Ponte della Ghiolfa anarchist circle).

The headquarters, which also went on to become the national headquarters of the GCR and later the LCR (Lega comunista rivoluzionaria - Revolutionary Communist League), with contributions from the Fourth International and its Belgian section in particular, was a very important place for Sergio. A decision was made to install a proper printing house to ensure the autonomous composition and printing of the historic journal *Bandiera rossa*. In the 1980s, he became its editor until the end of its publication in 2002, and of other revolutionary left publications. Sergio took charge of all the organisational and administrative aspects, founding a cooperative, as he took charge of administration of via Varchi for decades, even after the printing house shut down.

Sergio's union activity in the educational field was always linked with union struggles among factory workers, from the early 1970s. For years, Sergio was among the driving forces of the Coordination of what was known as the "industrial left" in the Romana/SudMilano zone (with OM-FIAT, TIBB, Lagomarsino, etc). Finally, he became a teacher in the 150 hours of study programme, to Alfa Romeo workers in Arese, where the LCR had an important base.

Sergio had a clear foresight about a key political element; the environmental question. This is what spurred him in recent years to be among the protagonists of the movement for public water. But this began very long ago, from an undogmatic, attentive and curious approach, which led him to take sharp and clear positions on feminism, the ecological movement itself, and a great openness to a project undertaken by the Fourth International in the early 1980s, to build youth organisations and build the International Youth Camp. Among his lesser-known commitments was organising important international meetings with participation of revolutionary activists from different countries, mostly from the 1970s to the 1990s. Moreover, at the end of the 1980s he spent three months at the educational sessions at the newly founded IIRE, the Amsterdam international research institute, which is still fully active.

Under Sergio's leadership, *Bandiera Rossa* represented the Fourth International's voice even after the LCR entered *Democrazia proletaria* (Proletarian Democracy - he became a member of DP's national leadership) and later - alongside all of DP - *Rifondazione comunista* (Party of Communist Refoundation), a process and change that he always supported without hesitation. He was a dedicated *Rifondazione* activist, participating and chairing debates and discussions in his regional circle (the Romana zone of Milan). He took part in the activities of *Arci Belleza* social club, the ANPI (Italian partisans' association) and militant anti-fascism, and later, building the political-cultural circle "*Rosso si spera*".

The love of books; reading them and publishing them, was an integral part of his activist commitment. He was very happy to publish through the editorial co-operative founded in the 1970s, the NEI (Nuove edizioni internazionali - New International Editions) books such as the story of Gaspere Bono, first a farm labourer and later a street sweeper for Campobello di Mazara, in Sicily,

who later – after emigrating to Switzerland – became the mayor of his own city. This story is told in *La lista del gallo*, and Sergio was very proud to have contributed to getting this little-known story told. Indeed, he published a great many books, brochures and resources with NEI. Later, when Edizioni Alegre was born, he offered his skills as a consultant, an organiser of presentations, and supporter of projects such as the republication of *La mia guerra di Spagna* by Mika Etchebéhère, which his former companion Pina Sardella dearly wanted (Pina has also died recently, only three months ago) and for which Sergio wrote the postface.

After Sinistra Critica (Critical Left) was founded, born of a split from Rifondazione comunista, Sergio decided to get involved in what appeared more akin to social work, but was actually extremely political. Along with the Communia national network, he supported and took part in the RiMaflow struggle. Soon after his involvement, and not by chance, he set up their first library (but he was not above lending a hand to bottle tomato sauce if necessary). In Milan, he was an activist from the first in the Ri-Make social-political project. Although he had reached the age of 80, he was among those who were dragged off by the police when the second occupation was cleared out. Finally, he enthusiastically took part in the Fuorimercato national self-management and mutual aid network. With constant and relentless attention to the ecological question, which he saw as natural in a network in which many were to a great extent taking part in agroecology. With his Marxist background, and vivid curiosity, Sergio fully grasped that as the political left was drying up, rebuilding living forces disposed to class struggle meant building concrete experiences of solidarity, through social action with strong political undertones, and his contribution to this delicate passage was constant.

Sergio's comrades at Ri-Make did well to dust off Bertold Brecht for his 80th birthday with a quote that is more relevant than ever:

There are men who struggle for a day and they are good. There are men who struggle for a year and they are better. There are men who struggle many years, and they are better still. But there are those who struggle all their lives: These are the indispensable ones.

Farewell Sergio.

[Salutiamo Sergio tutt* insieme](#)

Together, we will pay tribute to Sergio on Wednesday 25 September in Milano, at Ri-Make, via del Volga 4, from 6 p.m, with his family members, comrades and friends.

Gigi Malabarba

P.S.

• Translated for **International Viewpoint** by Marie Lagatta from **Communia Network** "[Sergio, l'imprescindibile](#)".