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Giangiaco Feltrinelli – Revolutionary Entrepreneur

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the entrepreneurial life of a controversial figure such as Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, an Italian publisher and political activist who influenced and shaped our culture for a long time.

Giangiacomo was born in 1926 into a very wealthy family, but already in his adolescence years he began to follow the socialist ideal and in 1945 he became a member of the communist party. It was within the communist party that he started his publishing activity.

His entrepreneurial career began in the late 1940s when he established a library specialised in economic and social history and history of the labour movement. In 1955 he established the Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, whose activity was supported by distribution centres, such as the Feltrinelli bookstores. In those years Feltrinelli proved to be a visionary publisher, especially after the publication of the first world edition of *Doctor Zhivago*, whose author Boris Pasternak won the Nobel Prize, and then with the publication of *The Gattopardo*, winner of the Strega Prize.

From a certain moment in his life, his entrepreneurial choices were constantly intertwined with his political passion. In the late 1950s his editorial decisions, not in line with those of the communist party, led him to leave.

The Castro revolution conveyed a new image of revolutionary communism, and Feltrinelli became the major populariser in Italy of this new trend. He convinced himself that the South American revolutionary model could be extended to a developed Western country because of the threat of an authoritarian turn through a coup. At this stage Feltrinelli founded the Partisan Action Groups with the aim of fuelling outbreaks of guerrilla. During one of these guerrilla acts, Feltrinelli died tragically.

In this thesis the phases of life of Giangiacomo Feltrinelli are analysed with particular regard to his entrepreneurial career, but also to his political vocation. This is to better understand who the entrepreneur Feltrinelli was and what really influenced his choices.

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Introduction

Giangiaco Feltrinelli was an Italian revolutionary entrepreneur remembered for his involvement in publishing and in left-wing politics. He was a controversial and influential figure of Italian history of the 20th century.

Perhaps the character he most resembled was the Count of Monte Cristo. The immense riches, the passion for mystery, the overwhelming sense of omnipotence, the belief of being above ordinary men, of deciding their fate to bring justice, also reminded Giangi (Punzo et al., 1972).

He was born on 19 June 1926, into a wealthy family involved in timber processing, banking system and electric power, but he chose a different path from the traditional management of the family business. He was deeply interested in left-wing politics and became known for his political activities. Throughout his life, he financed and supported revolutionary movements and organisations in various parts of the world.

The most important entrepreneurial activity of Feltrinelli was that of Feltrinelli Editore, the publishing house he founded in 1955. Through the publishing activity, Feltrinelli became one of the leading publishers of political and literary works in Italy. He made Italian literature available to a wider audience and promoted intellectual debates. Feltrinelli showed that he was far ahead of other publishers, in line with the main European innovative trends and he was a pioneer in the publishing industry (Grandi, 2012 pp. 182-183).

In the last part of his life, his political activities extended to a more radical involvement. He provided support to left wing guerrilla movements in the 1960s and 1970s. His involvement with these movements led to legal troubles and controversies. The revolution needed Feltrinelli just as much as Feltrinelli needed the revolution (Grandi, 2012, p. 315).

In 1972, Feltrinelli died under mysterious circumstances following the explosion of a bomb he was attempting to place.

According to the judges of the Court of Appeal, the factors and circumstances that led to this were basically three: the strong personality of a generation accustomed to creating and controlling, as leaders of industry, the absolute dedication to an ideology and perhaps most relevant, was the possession and availability of enormous financial resources (Grandi, 2012, p. 529).

Giorgio was a revolutionary entrepreneur and cultural patron in Italy known for his involvement in left-wing politics and for founding one of the major Italian publishing houses. The texts on the life of Feltrinelli are often focused on the revolutionary phase of his life and on his mysterious death. This thesis will analyse the ideology that led him to be a great entrepreneur and what connection there was between the entrepreneur Feltrinelli and the revolutionary.

The image of the revolutionary has long obscured the image of the entrepreneur. Feltrinelli sought change in every aspect of his life, and this became his highest goal.

The spread of popular culture in Italy has been possible also thanks to all the intuitions and companies of Feltrinelli. Much of his wealth came from his family of origin, but he knew how to make use of it and with a critical eye he was always able to see in which activities it was best to invest, where it was necessary to innovate and where there were no opportunities for business growth.

Throughout his life he always thought that books could change the world and that this was necessary to make the world a better place.

Chapter 1 – HOW IT ALL STARTED

1.1. Family history

The history of the Feltrinelli family is about an entrepreneurial dynasty that has influenced the economic scene in Italy and beyond for a long time.

The family takes its surname from its place of origin, Feltre, now located in the province of Belluno, and has its ancestor in Pader da Feltre, who lived between 1409 and 1490.

In the following years the family moved from Veneto to Lombardia, in Gargnano sul Garda, where the family settled for many centuries.

In 1829, in Gargnano, Giacomo Feltrinelli was born. He soon started his own entrepreneurial career. In 1849 his father Faustino, died and in 1854 he, and four of his brothers, established the Ditta Fratelli Feltrinelli fu Faustino.

The company traded wood and charcoal. In 1857 the centre of the business was moved to Milan, where a warehouse was opened in Porta Garibaldi, close to the freight yard. The company was very successful and over the years there was a diversification of activities, especially towards the railway construction industry. Feltrinelli, in fact, did not want to be a mere importer of wood from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Central Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

In 1878, Giovanni Feltrinelli, son of Carlo,¹ was appointed as the manager of the Ditta Feltrinelli and with him began a reconstruction of the business activities. The Feltrinelli became the main timber merchants of the peninsula, but they were also very active in Tyrol and Carinthia. In addition to timber trade and railway construction, the company became a benchmark for many economic operators looking for partners with liquidity, and soon entered the banking and finance world. In 1889 the Feltrinelli became part of the establishment of the Banca Unione Italiana. In October of the same year, together with two partners, they founded a private banking house: the Feltrinelli, Colombo & C. The Ditta Fratelli Feltrinelli was the majority shareholder, as it contributed to three quarters of the initial capital (Segreto, 2011, p. 124-128).

¹ Carlo was one of the twelve siblings of Giacomo. Together with him, Angelo and Don Pietro founded the Ditta Fratelli Feltrinelli fu Faustino.

A key element in the history of the Feltrinelli family has been the constant connection with the Gargnano area. The most important initiative for the territory took place between 1895 and 1896 and consisted in the creation of a cotton textile plant on lake Garda, The Cotonificio Feltrinelli, which employed many people of the area.

In 1896 Giovanni, who was designated by Giacomo as the future leader of the company, passed away. It was at that time that Giacomo understood he had to form a new generation of entrepreneurs: that of the sons of Giovanni. The oldest son of Giovanni was Carlo, and, in 1913, when his great uncle Giacomo died, he was named as his universal heir. With the family bank, Banca Unione, they fostered the growth of the building industry and the electric industry, contributing to the economic development of Milan. In 1913 Carlo was appointed as a member of the board of directors of Edison, which after the war would become the largest electric group in Italy.

Carlo soon became one of the major Italian capitalists, so that by 1921 he was present in 21 companies. Seven years later, he was present in thirty-eight societies, in eleven of which he was president and in three deputy president. In addition to the Italian societies, he was also part of companies that operated exclusively out of the country. Carlo further developed the import of wood of the Società Fratelli Feltrinelli. He acquired the largest Austrian company of forest exploitation and in 1932 he became the exclusive importer of Russian timber in Italy. He obtained from the United States one of the first licences from the Masonite Corporation to produce fibre board. The Società Forestale Feltrinelli, instead, operated in Romania where plants for wood processing had been built and employed about three thousand people (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 16).

Carlo Feltrinelli was marked by the “hard discipline of work” learned by his great uncle, but he was also a simple and melancholic man who loved reading and studying. In 1925 he married Gianna Elisa Gianzana, called Giannalisa, in 1926 he became father of Giangiacomo, and in 1927 of Antonella.

In the late 1920s, he had the peak of his career; he became president of Edison, and president of the second national bank, Credito Italiano.

Carlo Feltrinelli died on 8 November 1935; his death can be attributed to the choices he and his family made regarding investments and assets abroad. In 1934, the Mussolini government re-established the monopoly of foreign exchange and it was made

mandatory for legal entities to report all credits held abroad to INCE². Citizens had to report to the Bank of Italy all credits abroad, foreign or Italian securities issued outside Italy, even if deposited in foreign banks. Under this situation Carlo and Antonio Feltrinelli³ decided to declare only a small part of the funds and securities held abroad by the family. In 1935 it was claimed that Maria Von Pretz, mother of Carlo, had 165 kilograms of gold and securities worth 2.5 million liras in a Swiss bank (Segreto, 2011, p. 373).

Carlo was surprised by the lawsuit against his mother and requested a meeting with Beneduce, president of IRI⁴. Beneduce blamed the Feltrinelli family for their moral actions, and it was at that moment that Carlo Feltrinelli felt ill, and the following evening died.

The political context, the will to reduce his weight in economic and financial balances and the fear of a media exposure influenced the death of Carlo Feltrinelli (Segreto, 2011, p. 381). He had never felt comfortable in the fascist regime. He was, in fact, a visionary entrepreneur who understood that ownership and management of a large company had to be separated. Feltrinelli never achieved this goal; indeed, as mentioned above, he was engaged in a number of commitments that made him a unique character of Italian capitalism.

1.2. Giangiacomo Feltrinelli and his youth

With his handwritten will Carlo Feltrinelli left to his son Giangiacomo three quarters of his estate, to his daughter Antonella a quarter and to his wife the usufruct on a third of the estate. The legacy of Carlo will characterise history and family relationships for many years to come.

Giangiacomo and his sister Antonella did not attend public schools but had private teachers. They had little contact with their peers and could not have contact with children of different social classes. Gianna Elisa was restless, with an impetuous character. Her personality was accentuated by a bad accident during a hunting trip in which she lost her right eye forcing her to wear a monocle. Giannalisa was not a very attentive mother, nor particularly sensitive, and the children often stayed with the staff of the house. Mrs

² Istituto Nazionale per i Cambi con l'Estero (1917-1984).

³ Carlo and Antonio had other two brothers: Pierino who committed suicide in 1913 and Beppi who died of a morphine overdose in 1918.

⁴ Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale: established on January 24, 1933, initially as a temporary public institution, to deal with the banking and industrial crisis of the Italian economy. At the heart of the crisis there were the three major banks: Banca Commerciale Italiana, Banco di Roma, Credito Italiano.

Feltrinelli, however, cared a lot about etiquette. On October 21, 1940, the king granted the title of Marquis of Gargnano to Giangiacomo and Antonella Feltrinelli, transmissible in both cases in the male line, but with the condition, in the case of Antonella, that her descendants added to their surname that of the Feltrinelli family. Giannalisa paid a lot for the noble title of her children, about 5 million liras, in addition to the tax connected with the emanation of the *motu proprio*⁵. Giangiacomo was ashamed of that title all his life.

In 1938 Giannalisa met Luigi Barzini jr., a correspondent for *Corriere della Sera*, and in 1940 she married him. One of the greatest traumas of Giangiacomo was related to the wedding of his mother. The wedding was held in Amalfi and while his mother was descending a grand staircase with her two pages, Giangiacomo and Antonella, stopped at each step and threw silver coins to the Amalfi children. For the first time Giangiacomo was embarrassed to feel different from those children (Grandi, 2012, p. 92-94).

A few days later Barzini was arrested on charges of espionage in favour of the British, but he could spend his detention under house arrest. First, the family moved to Milan, to a hotel, and then in 1942 to the house that Giannalisa built on the Argentario, at Cacciarella.

After his mother's marriage, Giangiacomo and his sister were increasingly left alone and the advent of World War II further aggravated this situation. In 1942, the first daughter of Giannalisa and her new husband was born: Giovanna Ludovica. The following year, they had another daughter, Benedetta.

The only people who listened to Giangiacomo were the gardener, the son of his nanny Ester, the people who worked in the house, and his private maths teacher. The fact that he had a relationship with the servants did not please his mother who did not hesitate to inflict humiliating punishments on him like closing him in the basement on bread and water (Feltrinelli, 1999, p.35).

In 1944 Giangiacomo joined a group of drifters, mostly displaced local young men⁶, and disappeared for a few days.

"He wanted to undertake something, he felt like there was a mission to be accomplished excited by revolutionary ideas. Giangiacomo was not naive, he was inexperienced. Because he had to find his own path" (Grandi, 2012, p.112).⁷

⁵ The act and document of a concession issued directly and solely by the sovereign.

⁶ During the battle of Cassino, Santo Stefano had become the last supply port for the Germans; heavy Allied bombing was frequent.

⁷ Witness of Antonella Feltrinelli.

Armed with a rifle, he hid in the brush at the top of the mountain. Giangiacomo had a 12-gauge shotgun that he used to hunt hares and pigeons with Darvino Baglioni and his father Piero, keeper of the villa. Giangiacomo had a special relationship with Piero, so much so that he was the only one able to convince him to return home, as long as he could stay with him and his family for a few days. In the meantime, Giannalisa and the rest of the family had fled to Rome and a few days later Mrs Feltrinelli Barzini sent the cook to take Giangiacomo and bring him to Rome as well.

When Giangiacomo returned home, he struck a deal with his mother: once he graduated from the convent school of San Giovanni in Laterano he could enlist against the Germans. In November 1944, Feltrinelli joined the Legnano Combat Corps as a volunteer vehicle driver. After a training period in the Neapolitan area, he went up north. He stopped for some time in Bracciano and in early March 1945 he moved to Siena, where he trained militarily and joined the Italian communist party. Feltrinelli was discharged in August 1945, then returned to Rome where he enrolled at the Polytechnic. The time as a soldier was a pleasant moment for Giangiacomo who had the opportunity to know different realities; for the first time he felt free from the constraints of his adolescence. Back home he had an even stronger desire for independence. His mother and her husband were far from his revolutionary positions. Giannalisa was a fervent monarchist, so much so that, on June 12, 1945, she hosted for dinner Prince Umberto defeated by the constitutional referendum and therefore forced to go into exile in Portugal (Grandi, 2012, p.115). Giangiacomo had informed the party that meetings between pro-monarchy political and military representatives were taking place in his house. For this reason, he was used by the party as an informant and had to listen to conversations of guests who visited his mother. On 28 April 1946 the newspaper *l'Unità* published an explicit article reporting news listened in the Feltrinelli household.

In the spring of 1946 Giangiacomo met a young militant of the Socialist Party: Bianca Dalle Nogare. Giannalisa could not accept the acquaintances of her son. Moreover, having a communist son was a real shame for her. For this reason, together with her husband, she devised a plan to remove Giangiacomo from Milan. She sent four fake military uniforms to seize the few weapons and ammunition that her son had brought from the war. The military conducted a fake search and threatened him with arrest, convincing him to leave. Giangiacomo was frightened by a conviction for possession of illegal weapons, so he left for Lisbon via Madrid. Bianca did not hear from Giangiacomo

for about two months, then received a packet of letters in which he expressed deep discomfort. Bianca encouraged him to return to Italy; so, he did. He returned with no money and travelled by train in third class. He was exasperated, with health problems.

The isolation his mother forced Giangiacomo during his childhood, made him not only extremely weak, but also naïve and with little common sense.

On 26 June 1947, Giangiacomo turned 21 and came of age. On 3 July 1947 Giangiacomo Feltrinelli and Bianca Dalle Nogare got married in a civil ceremony.

As he came of age, Giangiacomo also had access to the inheritance of his father. This caused many problems, as Gianna Elisa did everything she could to hide the true extent of the wealth of Carlo to her sons.

1.3 Feltrinelli, socialism & political life

“When I was young, I was very lonely, I used to read, to fantasise. When I would get tired of fantasising, I went down to the garden of Villa Feltrinelli in Gargnano to talk to the gardeners. Day after day, they were old and remembered the old days. They told me about socialism and what the fascists had done. I listened eagerly. And so, began my socialism” (Grandi, 2012, p.112).

From what the workers used to tell him, Giangiacomo understood that there were two different and distinct social categories. The workers told him about the difficult life they had to live, the efforts to support the family, their low salaries, and the enduring threat of unemployment. The war further worsened the living conditions of workers. The sacrifices of war were, in fact, borne by proletarians and not by students or lords who claimed for the war just because with the conflict they had a chance to earn.

In 1940 Giangiacomo met Augusto Sala, a worker from Erba, from whom he learned about the popular struggle sustained by workers in 1921 against the fascists.⁸ For the first time he discovered the existence of the socialist and communist party. Reading the book *Storia della Letteratura Latina* helped Giangiacomo to frame his ideas of justice that led him to be against the fascists and the lords. The book deals with the struggle of

⁸ Between January and March 1921 there was the so-called "Battle of Florence" between the urban proletariat on one side and fascists, royal guards, and carabinieri on the other. With the battle of Florence began the affirmation of fascism in Tuscany, which together with Emilia Romagna and the territories of Trieste was a pivotal point in the conquest of Italy by the fascists, ended with the march on Rome in October 1922.

the Gracchi, in ancient Rome, to demonstrate the existence of two conflicting social classes: the patricians and the plebeians.

With these bases Feltrinelli joined, in 1945, the communist party.

1.3.1 Communist party and activity in the publishing

The communist party always paid particular attention to culture. In the post-World War II political agenda, the communist party included book-publishing activities. The goal of the party was to carry on a precise conception of culture and to ensure that the party had a solid collective identity. As for labour and socialist movements tradition, the book represented a cornerstone of communist cultural policy. Since its foundation, the party wanted to control the whole chain of the book, from the production to the distribution up to the reading and its practices. In the fifties, Italian publishing was moving towards modernization, while that of the PCI⁹ was suffering from the fragility of the internal understanding of the entrepreneurial dimension of the publishing activity.

Feltrinelli began his activities in the communist party in 1947, first in the Bietolini section dealing with the press and propaganda, and then in the Duomo section, where he started to work on youth work, then he moved again to press and propaganda.

In the summer of 1947 Giangiacomo participated at the youth festival in Prague with Bianca Dalle Nogare. Before the elections of 1948¹⁰ Giangiacomo was committed to the popular front. On Sundays he used to walk around the streets, selling *l'Unità*, the newspaper of the communist party. The relationship with the party, which Giangiacomo regularly subsidised, was not easy.

In 1948, after the assassination attempt on Togliatti¹¹ Giangiacomo was arrested, along with other young people, for posting an unauthorised manifest. It was after his arrest that he began to be involved in the press and propaganda branch of the Duomo section. Giangiacomo also attended a party school at the federation for six months. This school was of considerable importance to Giangiacomo: the history of Italy and political economy he studied there framed differently what he had learned during his youth studies.

⁹ Italian Communist Party.

¹⁰ On April 18, 1948, three months after the new Constitution was approved, Italian citizens had to vote to elect the first Parliament of the Italian Republic.

¹¹ On 14 of July 1948, a student, Antonio Pallante, animated by an anti-communist spirit fired three shots at the secretary of the PCI Palmiro Togliatti. The assassination attempt was seen as an attack on democracy and a national strike was proclaimed.

During this time Giangiacomo was offered to head the Financial Commission of the federation in Milan.

In those years, the communist party tried to suppress any force within the party that still wanted to conquer power with revolutionary acts. Giangiacomo, on the other hand, had always had a weakness for the partisan war. His idea was confirmed by the stories of former partisans that were full of regrets and revenge proposals. Many former fighters of the partisan units constituted troops involved in assaults, robberies, kidnappings, and murders. One of these troops was called Volante Rossa and, according to the police, had been one of the first underground groups supported by the communist party after the liberation of 1945. A group of the troop was headed by Calust Megherian and Ugo Ciappina¹² who were accused of setting up an organised crime group for terrorist purposes, possession of weapons and explosives, and for robbery. While investigating this group the police came across the figure of Giangiacomo Feltrinelli. He had known Megherian and Ciappina but always denied that he had given them money. In the fall of 1949 Giangiacomo was arrested and released the day after.

At the end of 1949 the Financial Commission was absorbed by the Administrative Commission, of which Giangiacomo became an activist (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 53-58).

1.3.2 The Capitalist Giangiacomo Feltrinelli

The first real assignment in the communist party for Giangiacomo did not come until 1950. It was in that year that Eugenio Reale thought of him as a capitalist of international stature in the world of East-West affairs. In 1950, in fact, the communist party had no level managers in Italy and this, also in the following years, caused many problems to the business structure of the party.

The party wanted to do business with Eastern Europe, especially with Czechoslovakia. Before World War II the country had been a conjunction for trade relations between Eastern and Western Europe. Even under the communist government, Prague continued to act as a bridge for the trading between the two blocks. The headquarters of the main professional organisations (like lawyers, journalists, students,

¹² Megherian was expelled from the Italian Communist Party in 1946 for political unworthiness, for disintegration and defamation of the party, and for continued and provocative relations. Ciappina was expelled from the party in 1948 for Trotskyism and Titoism.

intellectuals, trade unionists), which were controlled by the communists that wanted to maintain a dialogue beyond the Iron Curtain, moved to the city (Riva, 1999, p. 201).

It was in this scenario that a name like that of Feltrinelli could make the difference. His name was well known in Moscow: eighteen years earlier, the Soviet Union had granted the Ditta Fratelli Feltrinelli a monopoly for Italy over all Russian timber. The tool to get him into the big business with East Europe was a company called SOMICO. Originally it was a small import-export company constituted in Milan some days before the elections of 18 of April 1948. The enterprise was created to legalise imports of newsprint from Czechoslovakia, made as a campaign contribution to print the newspapers *l'Unità* and *Avanti!*. Eugenio Reale wanted to transform the company into the centre of communist finance in Milan with relationships in government, banking, and big business, in the international field. Reale radically transformed the company that assumed the name of SOMICO-Società Milanese di Commercio and increased its capital from 100 thousand liras to 1 million liras; Feltrinelli financed 90% of the capital (Riva, 1999, p. 226-227).

During the Prague negotiations, SOMICO was presented as a major Italian company interested in concluding an exclusive representation contract for the supply of printing paper. From that moment the communist party, thanks to the money of Feltrinelli, could legally receive printing paper: newsprint, book paper and posters. On 31 August 1950 Giangiacomo was appointed as president of the company. In November of the same year, Reale returned to Prague and announced that Feltrinelli would go there on March 15 of the following year to sign contracts under his jurisdiction (Riva, 1999, p. 228-229). In addition to contracts for the import of pulp for printing paper, Riva and Feltrinelli were able to conclude lucrative contracts for the import of timber, crystal, and Bohemian porcelain.

The trip of Feltrinelli was postponed to July 16. Feltrinelli did not know that a few days before his arrival in Prague, a 9-page report had been sent out on "Business Activities of the Sister Societies of France, Italy, Austria, with Monopoly Societies". The report analysed the sister societies that could be criticised. Two of the five Italian companies analysed were owned by Feltrinelli. Behind this whole scheme there was Stalin, who became increasingly suspicious of the communist comrades of Prague, who were too close to the capitalist world. The plot ended with the so-called "Slánský trial" for state conspiracy in which eleven defendants (including those that had done business with Feltrinelli) were sentenced to death and three to life imprisonment. Meanwhile Giangiacomo had managed

to return to Italy without being involved (Riva, 1999, p. 230-231). On 15 September 1954 Giangiacomo resigned as president of SOMICO and on 28 May 1957 the company went into liquidation.

1.4 Colip

The Cooperativa del Libro Popolare (Colip) was a publishing company active between 1949 and 1956. It was intended to defend the secular and rationalist culture and to combat the climate that had been created after the ouster of the communist and socialist parties from the government. Colip ceased to exist on 13 October 1959, but the real ending of the activity was on 22 June 1954 during a meeting of the board of directors in which Giangiacomo Feltrinelli resigned as managing director. The choice was due to the impossibility to follow closely the activities of Colip and to the upcoming birth of his publishing house.

The first two volumes of Colip were released in 1949. Founder of the project was Corrado De Vita who took inspiration from the publishing model of the Albatros collection existing at that time in the Federal Republic of Germany for the realisation of the Colip concept. The symbol of the *Universale Economica* of Colip was a kangaroo with three paperbacks inside the pouch. The cooperative aimed at promoting the circulation of books among members and among popular masses. It wanted to contribute to serve the purpose of raising the cultural level of members and workers in general. It also proposed to increase all types of activities aimed at developing a popular culture (Grandi, 2012, p.172-173).

It was from this idea that Colip began to print low-priced editions of the most important works of art, literature, history, philosophy, and science produced by authors of all times and countries. Cultural vulgarisation books such as manuals and encyclopaedias were printed. The paperbacks of Colip were sold at a price between one hundred and one hundred and fifty liras and distributed mainly by *Centri Diffusione e Stampa* of the party federations. This system showed many limits especially in the distribution of the books. Giangiacomo Feltrinelli paid a lot of money to keep the cooperative alive and in 1950 he became a member of the board of directors; in 1951 he became managing director. The beginning of the editorial career of Giangiacomo Feltrinelli can be traced back to this moment. About two hundred volumes of *Universale Economica Colip* were printed; they were divided into yellow series for literature, red for

history and philosophy, blue for science, purple for theatre and green for children's books. In September 1952 Feltrinelli founded the EDA (Editori Distribuiti Associati), a distribution company to market Colip and other Italian publishers.

During the meeting of the board of directors of 22 June 1954, negative business performance data were provided. The board had to decide whether to develop the publishing activity or to reduce it gradually to not compromise the capital of the partners. Feltrinelli during the meeting presented the program that needed to be conducted to continue the business. His editorial program required only three of the eight people employed at that time by the cooperative. It was decided that only books in progress would be published and the capital of the members who requested it would not be refunded. During that meeting Feltrinelli resigned. Colip was dissolved and liquidated on 21 March 1956.

1.5 Giangiacomo distanced himself from the communist party

In 1956 there was the 20th Congress of the CPSU¹³. The myth of Stalin was destroyed, the fake trials of the thirties, summary executions, beheading of the leaders of the Soviet communist party and mass deportations were revealed. On October 23, 1956, people revolted in Budapest and Soviet tanks came in to restore order. Giangiacomo at that time was outraged that the Red Army had entered a brother Country firing cannons at students and workers. Those were difficult days for all the people who had believed that the Soviet Union was the homeland of real socialism and of workers. During the Hungarian revolt Giangiacomo was on the side of the insurgents.

In those days Giangiacomo Feltrinelli and other intellectuals asked the director of the Milan edition of the newspaper *l'Unità*, Davide Lajolo, to publish a statement condemning the USSR¹⁴. The statement was not published (Grandi, 2012, p.192-193). The letter had been signed by eight communist intellectuals who deplored the fact that the party had not taken a position on the Hungarian situation. They asked the party to recognize the importance that the Hungarian movement had on the socialist democracy. They also regretted that the call-up of Soviet troops by governmental and political leaders had not been judged as a serious mistake, in line with a policy that the 20th Congress of

¹³ Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

¹⁴ Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

the CPSU had condemned. They claimed these positions as the only ones in line with the socialist and internationalist ideals of the party and the development of its political line for an Italian path to socialism.

Despite his doubts, Feltrinelli remained a member of the communist party also for the year 1957, but he refrained from making public comments. Many intellectuals felt betrayed by communist ideals and left the party. Feltrinelli intervened after a statement of Giorgio Amendola, leader of the pragmatic right wing of the party. In an interview to the newspaper *Il Giorno*, Amendola said: “the loss of small fringes of intellectuals is not a relevant phenomenon; only a few suffered from the bad period that the PCI went through, and they were part of the fringe less linked to the mass”. Feltrinelli responded with a letter that remained confidential and reiterated his concern for the attitudes of the party. The detachment from the party was serious and problematic especially after the important premises set by the eighth congress that had arranged a course of action to renew and strengthen the party. The congress posed the need for an original ideological elaboration of the problems of socialism, without neglecting what was vital in the international labour movement. The responses of the PCI to the positions of Feltrinelli were very disappointing for him (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 111-112).

Disappointment and frustration characterised most of the militancy of Giangiacomo in the party. He was in fact appreciated more for his money than for his ideas or his ideological background.

The PCI activism of Giangiacomo Feltrinelli lasted nine years, from 1948 to September 28, 1957. After this date, Feltrinelli did not renew the membership card of the Italian communist party. In that decade Giangiacomo carried out privileged militancy, almost autonomous, yet not for his political ideals but for economic merits. Perhaps this was the thing that displeased Feltrinelli the most, despite his enthusiasm in directing Colip, his initiative in creating the Institute and his esteem for the PCI leadership.

Chapter 2 – THE ENTREPRENEUR

2.1 Labour Movement

In 1949 Franco Della Peruta¹⁵ stated that: “The history of the Italian labour movement is a history that has yet to be written and must be written in local, regional monographs, exploiting the documentary material, which is abundant but scattered through libraries and archives.”

This idea gave rise to the project of Gianni Bosio¹⁶ and Franco Della Peruta of a specialised periodical publication: *Movimento Operaio*, whose release would be announced by the newspaper *Avanti!* on 6 October 1949. The first two numbers came out cyclostyled; from the third issue onwards, the newspaper was printed thanks to the proceeds of the antiques book business.

In 1951, Bosio decided to sell the periodical to Giangiacomo Feltrinelli while remaining its editor. The sale would have ensured economic stability and greater visibility and dissemination; the periodical would have also been part of the organised catalogue that Feltrinelli, Bianca Dalle Nogare and Giuseppe Del Bo¹⁷ had started to set up two years earlier. Only in this way labour movement studies could make a qualitative leap from “an uncertain and occasional phase to one of organic maturity” (Bigatti, 2022, p.25).

According to Della Peruta, the work was aimed at recovering and making available sources of the socialist world that fascism had always tried to boycott. The main goal was to reconstruct the course of the socialist and trade union movement in its various articulations and levels, both national and local, by cooperating with the basic structures.

Della Peruta and Bosio conceived the Bibliography as a service offered to a scientific community that was growing, which could become a tool for consolidation through the development of specific skills and shared practices.

¹⁵ Della Peruta was a young man from Rome who had contributed to *Rinascita* and *Società*, both Communist Party magazines.

¹⁶ Bosio was a socialist intellectual who collaborated in the post-war period with the newspapers *l'Avanti* and *Quarto Stato*, with historical articles and essays.

¹⁷ Giuseppe Del Bo was a priest. During the war he was enlisted as a military chaplain and fell prisoner in Tunisia; from there he escaped and went up the peninsula with the Allies, calling himself Sergio, his battle name. He enrolled at the Philosophical Faculty where he met Antonio Banfi, master, and disseminator of a new and universal culture.

There was a clear division between the first series of *Movimento Operaio*, published by Della Peruta and Bosio, which was mainly documentary and the second one that came with the editions of the Feltrinelli Library. The first studies began to flow in, and a network of collaborators was created in all regions of Italy. The link between these two moments was the project of the “Bibliography of the Italian Periodical and Socialist Press (1860-1926)” conceived by Bosio and Della Peruta.

Bosio wanted to give importance to socialists and anarchists to reconstruct the true history of the labour movement. In this work of revaluation and rediscovery of the working class and socialist roots, Bosio came across the obstacle represented by the communist party. Hence the decision to remove him from the management of his newspaper. The initiative was taken by Giangiacomo Feltrinelli together with the PCI Cultural Commission.

When the journal became part of the publications of the Feltrinelli Library, the subtitle changed to *Rivista di Storia e Bibliografia*. This subtitle confirmed the fact that the work of research of the sources was an essential part of the historiographical reconstruction that had an interpretative nature.

Newspapers were conceived as the first signs of autonomous forms of organisation based on local cultures and traditions. As a result, socialist ideas had managed to penetrate the different provincial realities, challenging taxation and censorship of the liberal state. The workers’ press opened space to a historiography that was not only political, but also aware of the social and subjective aspects of the constituent processes of the labour movement.

The project of the bibliography was announced by *Movimento Operaio* on the first issue published by the Feltrinelli Library. According to the criterion of the workers’ press, it was necessary to look for special editions, newspapers, periodicals, attributable to political formations, trade unions, economic and cultural organisations of the labour movement. Although the word “Socialist” appeared in the full title, the census was also to cover the Catholic, Republican, Democratic and Liberal press when it dealt with issues and problems of the working classes.

The publications of agricultural societies, social security and welfare institutions should also be considered as sources used to study the history of living conditions of workers in terms of health, housing and food. The bibliography was conceived as a catalogue of funds available to researchers and not just as a repertoire.

Through the network of the bibliography, Bosio and Della Peruta created a group of local scholars who solidified their interest in the history of the labour movement. Scholars were given methodological training and the journal was proposed as a natural outlet for their commitment. Correspondents were identified not only among the historical comrades engaged in the university career, but also among the militants or sympathisers of the PCI and the PSI active among the party press and the Cultural Commissions.

The project of the bibliography was initiated simultaneously with a similar initiative promoted by the Ente per la Storia del Socialismo e del Movimento Operaio (ESSMOI). Beating on time the work of the ESSMOI, a group of social democrats, was a goal of the Feltrinelli project.

Compared to party cultural magazines such as *Rinascita* or *Società, Movimento Operaio* had a prestigious institution for its collections, such as the Feltrinelli Library, which claimed a line of external and formal independence towards the PCI.

Starting from 1955 the initiative began to decline, because it was not profitable, but also because Feltrinelli and the management of the Library did not support the project anymore. What led to the collapse of the project was a change of priorities and of the management style. When Feltrinelli founded the publishing house he changed his focus from the original project, which was all about collecting book material.

Giangiacoimo distanced himself from the work carried out by *Movimento Operaio* since he felt that the journal needed to overcome its “limitations of publication of the type: bulletin of homeland history” no longer suitable to host the scientific activity of the Library.

For the publisher, *Movimento Operaio* had remained too specialised, provincial, and too focused on the contemporary age. The focus should have been, instead, modern history. In 1958, *Movimento Operaio* concluded its activity with a series of indexes, the last legacy of a work that was certainly artisanal, at times disorganised, but pioneering and capable of building a disciplinary space starting from the “pneumatic vacuum” left by fascism (Zazzara, 2016, p. 237-238).

2.2 Library and Institute Giangiacomo Feltrinelli

Feltrinelli and his collaborators had begun to systematically collect documentary material on the labour movement, to give cultural dignity, problematic depth and civil function to a segment penalised in the disciplinary and academic panorama in Italy.

Through *Movimento Operaio*, the Feltrinelli Library had a tool and had brought together a group of passionate young researchers. *Movimento Operaio* was proof of dedication for analytical reading of sources and for the reconstruction of their seriality.

The Feltrinelli Library story is about intelligences and skills that have thought or have committed themselves to the construction of a documentary heritage. It is also one of the places where historical awareness has been defined and a historiographical practice has been formed in a backward and little articulated cultural panorama, as it was that of Italy.

Del Bo had proposed to Feltrinelli to “build in Italy a centre of internal documentation on the economic and political history of the eighteenth century until present-day” and Giangiacomo Feltrinelli “accepted and committed himself personally, as well as financially, and often came with me throughout Europe to collect the necessary documentation”.

Franco Della Peruta said “I first met Giangiacomo Feltrinelli in Milan at the end of 1949. The Library was set up in a ground floor with a large cellar in the building that hosted one of the companies of Feltrinelli. Giangiacomo was a generous, altruistic man, linked to the PCI. He bought the books, went abroad with Sergio Del Bo and in Italy he came with me” (Grandi, 2012, p.153-154).

What Giangiacomo Feltrinelli was doing did not interest the Milanese communist federation at first, but over the years it assumed considerable importance. At the Library they were looking for documentary bases and links to resume a historical branch interrupted with fascism years before. The political climate, the cold war, the return of an authoritarian and clerical culture, which could mine the meaning of the Resistance, helped to make Feltrinelli determined in his initiative. Giangiacomo was in love with the idea; he was fascinated both by the research of ancient texts and by politics as a mission.

Among the papers found in the archives of the Institute, there are three summary documents written between January 1951 and the beginning of 1952. It was in this phase, between the formal establishment of the Library and the public and official recognition of

its cultural dignity, that the cultural and programmatic contours of the Feltrinelli Library were defined.

In a document of the 9 of June 1951, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli presented to the PCI secretariat the structure and aims of the Library.

“For about two years, material on the international labour movement and on the origins and evolution of the Italian socialist movement has been gathered in Milan with particular reference to the economic and social history of Italy, France, Germany, Russia and England.

The Italian collection goes from the public economy of the 18th century to the war of liberation. For France it goes from the precursors of the French Revolution to the Liberation of 1944. For Germany it goes from the Hegelian left to the advent of Hitler. For Russia it goes from the crisis of the tsarist regime through the first revolution, to the October Revolution. For England, it goes from classical economists to developments of the labour movement. This programme is already implemented for the German and French parts, and advanced for the Italian and Russian parts. The collected material, mostly first editions, includes newspapers, magazines, publications, and archive material.

The aims of the Library are:

1. Systematically recover all the material that is still scattered in Europe and prevent it from being further dispersed irreversibly or transferred to America. Taken away from democratic scholars or subjected to the distortion of the campaign opponents.
2. Allow studies on the history of the Italian and foreign labour movement, but also on the structure and developments of economic and social movements in different countries. The material for the history of the Italian labour movement and for the necessary research of economic history that must come with it, has never been collected in Italy in an organised way. This library collection tends to serve as a basis for a new orientation of historical and political studies on modern and contemporary Italy.
3. Fit into the overall alliance policy of our party, as an element of attraction and stimulus in the cultural field. In particular, the Library should be linked to Italian university environments, especially to the economic and social research, to the historical seminars that are currently emerging, to those groups of intellectuals and scholars who address themselves to Italian political and economic history; to the party schools and to the PCI history commission.

4. Keep on collecting useful material for the supply of our Library and for other similar initiatives in Italy and abroad” (Bidussa, 1999, p. 953-954).

When Franco Ferri¹⁸ arrived at the Library, at the end of 1952, an operational and managerial definition of the owned material, was launched. This phase, according to Ferri, should have corresponded to a reconsideration on the content and conceptual profile of the collections themselves.

For the creation of the Library, there was on the one hand the identification of a project that was quite articulated, on the other hand there were specific skills, research interests that produced the processes of accumulation of material.

For the foreign section, Feltrinelli sent Del Bo to Paris, where he stayed between 1952 and 1954. With their trips around Europe, Feltrinelli and De Bo soon managed to have a network of scholars, consultants, and merchants. In the Netherlands they turned to Herbert Andreas, thanks to whom the Marx-Engels sections, those dedicated to the Hegelian left and German social democracy, took shape. Herbert Andreas was also the first intermediary with the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow (Imel). For German-language literature, they referred to a passionate research pioneer: the anarchist Theo Pinkus. For England there was Eric J. Hobsbawm. For the Russian events, Franco Venturi dealt with populism and the Decembrist movement. For the United States they contacted Luigi Aurigemma (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 71-72).

During the 1950s the reference frame changed due to the different nature of the Library. What changed was the function of the Feltrinelli Library; until that moment the Library aimed at becoming the centre of a specific political agency, but in the mid-fifties it was increasingly suffering for this position. Starting from June 22, 1955, a book collection brought into the Library changed the profile of the catalogue. The book fund was the Fondo Riccardo Bachi. The Fund contained documentation on economic development, on the debate on industrial investment, and on issues related to the relationship between development and behaviour of economic actors, especially professional classes. It also dealt with monetary policies and credit strategies, it contained collections on salary history and price movements, research on the history of fiscal policies and documentation on the activities and administrative reports of the Chambers of Commerce.

¹⁸ Franco Ferri was directly linked to the communist party. He was a pupil of Delio Cantimori and the oldest of the group of young intellectuals from Rome.

Until that moment the fundamental topic of the Library had been the history of the labour movement but with the acquisition of the Fund, the field of investigation widened to the theme of structures, the history of economic institutions and economic cultures of government. In 1956 Franco Ferri resigned as Director of the Feltrinelli Library and Giuseppe Del Bo took his place.

The model expressed by the Feltrinelli Library experienced a crisis between 1954 and 1955 due to a real transformation of the profile of the Library as a documentary centre, but also a different and more mature reflection on its cultural personality. Two processes were required for this transition to take place: the enlargement or revision of its documentary and book heritage and a general reflection on its identity. At the 1956 plenary session, in which the handover between Ferri and Del Bo took place, Feltrinelli proposed some observations on the cultural profile of the Institute¹⁹.

“For ideal reasons of our own approach and preparation based on the need for an effective cultural renewal of our country in the field of historiography, it is necessary that this becomes an Institute for the history of socialism, its ideal origins, economic, political, and social sciences. We want to develop the Institute in the form of qualification in the history of the socialist movement. [...] In the word Institute, or rather Scientific Institute, it is implicit the development of a scientific activity that began when funds and documents on the Italian and international socialist movement began to be collected. The first result was the establishment of the Library of the Institute, which has considerable weight in the current situation of Italian culture. To make the inclusion of this Library and the ideas that have determined the collection of this material more profitable into Italian culture, it is necessary to take some steps forward: extensively develop the work of preparing reasoned and documented bibliographies. This is to complete the record of the Library, and to allow the knowledge of the sources that we have gathered and that we consider essential to insert in a lively way in the Italian historiographical culture. When we choose a theme for a bibliography, we make a political and cultural choice of great importance, which supposes an examination of what has been done, why it was done and the needs, which in Italian culture are evident or latent, to know or improve the knowledge on a certain topic or problem” (Bidussa, 1999, p. 966).

¹⁹ The Istituto Giangiacomo Feltrinelli was formally established in 1960 as a substitute association of the Biblioteca Giangiacomo Feltrinelli established by an act of 24 December 1951.

Feltrinelli during his speech insisted on the work model of bibliographies as the outcome of a control of the existing, the result of recoveries and achievements, and the setting up of book and documentary archives.

When Franco Ferri arrived, he started the organisation of the Library, based on inventory data filing. No thematic filing was done. With the direction of Del Bo, the disciplinary and the underlying criteria were the fundamental keys of access for the conceptual definition of the entire book heritage.

This new definition of scope and purpose established the independence of the Feltrinelli Institute from the PCI, without opening a conflict between them²⁰. The main strength of the Institute under the guidance of Del Bo was “to allow no closures”. During his “Ricordo di Giuseppe Del Bo”, Leo Valiani said: “Books, journals and dailies of whatever ideological or political tendency, even those most strongly opposing Stalinism, as well as those by or about Trotsky or Trotskyism, were always freely available for reference to the users of the Biblioteca and of the archives of the Istituto long before revelations of Khrushchev” (Petrillo, 1998, p. 524).

The activity of the Institute was focused on the following points:

1. Socialism, as the history of the ideas, political movements, and ideological struggles of the international labour movement;
2. Marxism, as the ideology of Marx and Engels, with its impact on world thought;
3. Economics and the history of economic doctrines in the contemporary era: an era of major social transformations.

This work of description and arrangement of the printed sources constituted the conceptual and thematic framework on which the *Annali* have been created. Much of the work on themes, research hypotheses, historical essays, organisation of sources has been done for this practical objective.

The *Annali* was a periodical of the Institute, published annually, aimed at historical problems of socialism or economics. The cultural operation initiated with the *Annali* arose for two reasons: valorisation of the Library as a documentation centre, subjected to a process of reorganisation and reinterpretation of work and documentation areas; design of a tool in which documentary studies and research could converge. The *Annali* included both the need for critical study and documentary research, and the editing of unpublished

²⁰ This division did not prevent the Istituto from maintaining good relations with the entire leadership of the Party and Del Bo from remaining one of its active members.

documents. This dual operation was driven by the work on the book and documentary heritage of the Library.

There was a triple thematic and design profile:

1. Attention to documenting the cultural history and editorial history of Marx-Engelsian texts;
2. Renewal of studies on the political and cultural history of the Italian labour movement;
3. Connection between the study of social and economic actors, areas of industrialisation or economic districts, and history of technology or technical knowledge.

The uniqueness of this periodical can be seen in various things: in the collaboration specialised in the international field, in the treatment of ecumenical socialism (in particular the Italian one) as well as systematic reviews on new sources and reasoned bibliographies.

The reorganisation of the operating group of the Library contributed to this innovative process. The main change was in the disciplines of research. The focus was no longer the local history intended as study and collection of the relevant sources and referred to the specific social and economic actors on the territory, but it was instead the economy. In October 1957, the Centre for Studies and Research on the Italian Economic Structure was founded. Economics was understood by the organisers of the Centre as an analysis of economic sectors, of territorial transformations, of the systems of mass distribution, of demographic processes. The Centre was an autonomous structure based on research programmes and directed by scholars and young researchers, whose President was Giangiacomo Feltrinelli. The Centre had a circuit of sociability and exchanges with the Italian professional and industrial areas and with investigation and economic centres active outside Italy, particularly in France, the United States and Great Britain.

A financial crisis ensued in 1964, as difficulties arising from an economic downswing in Italy forced Feltrinelli to close the Institute and lay off most of its staff. Feltrinelli was very pessimistic about the future of the Institute and Giuseppe Del Bo did as much as he could to relieve him of part of the financial burden of the Institute. He increased the production of anastatic prints of the classics in first editions and of collections of rare periodicals available only at the Library of the Institute. With copies of the Feltrinelli Reprints, the primary documents on the history of democratic and socialist

thought are now available to scholars and students in hundreds of libraries around the world.

Del Bo also undertook painstaking efforts to win funds for the Institute from public bodies. In 1966, the Institute was opened again and resumed its full operations.

The collections of the Institute extend from 1700 to the present day. They include material on the Soviet Union, the United States, and Third World countries as well as Western and Eastern Europe. At present the Institute contains more than 250.000 volumes and pamphlets, together with 11.000 periodicals, 950 of which are current publications. It adds approximately 10-15.000 volumes annually (De Grazia, 1972, p. 20).

2.3 Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore

The Italian Communist Party was very slow to grasp the full extent of the changes that were happening in Italy. Feltrinelli followed his innate entrepreneurial calling and his ambition to play an international cultural role and became a publisher on his own. Helped by an efficient staff, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore published its first books in 1955.

2.3.1 First years of Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore

The first two volumes of Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore were *Il flagello della svastica* by Lord Russell, translated by one of the editors, Luciano Banciardi, and the *Autobiography* of Shri Jawaharlal Nehru. *Il flagello della svastica*, released in 1954 in the UK, was the first publication on the crimes committed by the Germans in occupied countries during fascism. The *Autobiography* of Nehru was about one of the architects of Indian independence. From 1947 he was head of government and foreign minister of India, proponent of a policy equidistant from the Soviet and American bloc and promoter of the Bandung Conference of Non-Aligned countries of 1955.

In a 1965 television interview, Feltrinelli said that the first two books were not a random choice.

“They corresponded to three of the main strands that were the leitmotifs that the publishing house developed with particular attention: the first, that of a consequent and consistent antifascism; the second was the pursuit of coexistence between countries of different economic and political structures. The third strand was that it did not accept the crystallisation of the existing economic-political geography but gave the possibility for the new forces of the Third World belonging to countries emerging from colonial domination, to find their own structure and to fit firmly into the world political system” (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 79-80).

All the editors of the publishing house came from a common experience: the *Universale Economica*, later taken over by Colip.

The publication of the first two volumes was announced by *l'indicatore* a book information magazine edited by EDA, which Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore joined on 20 July 1955. The content was emphasised, together with the graphic design, which was new for the time, with plastic coated jackets.

The new publishing house based in via Fatebenefratelli aroused a certain curiosity, mainly due to the name of the founder. The situation of Feltrinelli was different from that of the other publishers. This is what Giangiacomo Feltrinelli said in a 1962 interview:

“I had two advantages over the other publishers. One was my previous experiences; since 1945, for several years, I had been involved in the reorganisation of the

companies of the Feltrinelli Group, learning what accounting is, how to evaluate a manager and how to forecast the trend of a market. The other, perhaps the most important, was that the great transformation of the country began in the years around 1955, when we were born. This allowed us to understand the reality of change more quickly than others, and to articulate the cultural and commercial programmes of the House” (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 89).

Feltrinelli Editore wanted to be a real modern company, where books respected the outputs, the accounting centre roared, and in the office being on time was the rule.

Riva said: “Feltrinelli had taught us to argue with Italian authors about arithmetic; circulation, overhead and advertising expenses, cover price, multiplication, subtraction, addition: if the bill comes, we do it, if not, we do nothing” (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 93).

An important testimony was that of Tina Ricaldone, secretary of Giangiacomo, who said: “Feltrinelli had created the publishing house to give meaning to his life and to offer a tool to the left party. He could not stand anyone considering the publishing house like a soup dice factory. With many of the people coming, perhaps signalled by someone, he ended up in disagreements as soon as they betrayed bureaucratic attitudes” (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 93-95).

2.3.2 Publications of the Publishing house

In its first year, the publishing house, looking at both non-fiction and literature, published 20 works, divided into four collections: *Current Events*, *Universale Economica*, *Narrative* and *Biographies*. Feltrinelli was the first in Italy to use in the catalogue division of the publishing house the terms fiction and non-fiction to indicate narrative and biographies.

To ensure visibility on the bookshelves, Giangiacomo introduced a commercial procedure still used today. In technical language it is called a “carry forward”, a system of financing to the bookseller on all the titles of the catalogue.

In addition to the two books already mentioned, Feltrinelli Editore published a series of works that initiated in what can be defined as the second life of *Universale Economica*: *La Baracca* by Vicente Blasco Ibanez; *Alla ricerca dell’anello mancante* by Robert Broom; *Come la musica esprime le idee* by Sidney Finkelstein; *L’uomo macchina e altri scritti* of the author Julien Offray de La Mettrie; *Il film nella battaglia delle idee* by John

Howard Lawson; *L'ora H è suonata per il mondo?* By Charles-Noel Martin with a preface by Albert Einstein; and the miscellaneous volume *La resistenza al fascismo. Scritti e testimonianze*.

The series *Current Events* instead included in its first year of activity titles such as *L'America giorno per giorno* by Simone de Beauvoir, that talked about four months in 1947 around American Universities; *Il gigante in catene* by Dunham Barrows, *Diario di Hiroshima* by Michihiko Hachiya, *Spagna clandestina* by Juan Hermanos and *Una spia del regime* by Ernesto Rossi.

In its second year, the publications of the publishing house increased to 31 works. Major successes included those of Czeslaw Bobrowski with *Il socialismo in Jugoslavia (Current Events)*, Carlo Cassola with *Viaggio in Cina (Universale Economica)*, Colette and Francis Jeanson with *Algeria fuorilegge (Current Events)*, and Ruggero Zangrandi with *La tradotta del Brennero (Current Events)* (Cesana, 2010, p. 26).

The great editorial success of the following years was mainly due to the insights of Feltrinelli, but also to his collaborators who supported him and increased his managerial confidence even though he had already a great consideration of himself.

After 1956, the broad production of the publishing house exceeded 100 titles a year. It was decided to study in particular the literary series with the aim of identifying the most representative features of the cultural orientation of the publishing house.

Feltrinelli established himself in the narrative segment thanks to the publication of the greatest Italian post war best-sellers, but also thanks to the discovery of a group of foreign writers unknown to the Italian public. The strategy of Feltrinelli in the literary field was directed towards authors who could represent, also for the scandalous content of their works, an interesting innovative proposal. In fact, the para-textual apparatuses that came with the works on their release were designed in this direction.

The discovery of the Chinese writer Lu Hsun dated back to the early months of the publishing house and led Feltrinelli to discover new voices in American literature.

Among the authors translated in Italian by Feltrinelli there was Jay Deiss, with *Vivere a Washington* presented, in 1955, as a brave “first work” that many American publishers refused to publish for fear of scandal, but that, when it finally came out in New York in 1950, was accompanied by such a large consensus that it was echoed in Italy as well. Then there was Lars Lawrence, with the work *Mattino, Pomeriggio e Sera*; in America the novel had aroused a series of controversies, which revived the age-old debate on

naturalistic narrative. For the *Narrative*²¹ series in 1957 there was the debut of Lessing, whose *La noia di essere moglie* was a great success, so much so that it had three editions published in two years.

Also, contemporary Indian literature arrived in Italy in the second half of the 1950s thanks to the publication of the novel *Nettare in un setaccio* by Kamala Markandaya.

He also introduced to Italian culture Louis Guilloux, a French writer. When his work *Sangue Nero* appeared in France there was a shock in the Parisian literary world.

Alongside these proposals, the *Narrative* series also wanted to reintroduce famous names such as Theodore Dreiser and Arnold Zweig. The *Narrative* series, the first one of the Feltrinelli Editore, began its publications in 1955 and suspended them in 1960, publishing a total of 34 titles.

In the field of literature, the two series *The Contemporaries* and *Modern Classics* came to the attention of the public and critics in 1958. They were created within the *Library of Literature* by Giorgio Bassani. The contemporaries included 52 titles published between 1958 and 1963 and wanted to offer an updated view of contemporary Italian narrative. The *Modern Classics*, 21 titles from 1959 to 1963, included works that spread abroad between the 19th and 20th centuries, when Italy had been cut off from provincialism and then by fascism which had nipped in the bud the process of Europeanisation. The volume that opened the *Modern Classics* series in 1959 was *Casa Howard* by E. M. Forster. With the publication of *Casa Howard* by E. M. Forster, Feltrinelli marked a new important stage in the research process aimed at finding in past works situations, needs, problems that had a link with the contemporary world.

2.3.3 The first success: Doctor Zhivago

“In 1955, immediately after the foundation of my company, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, I was contacted by Sergio D’Angelo, at that time director of the PCI library in Rome, who was leaving for Moscow as party editor for the Italian-Soviet radio programme. He proposed that I acted as a literary talent scout in the USSR for my publishing house in Milan. A few months later, D’Angelo informed me that an astonishing novel by a Russian poet, Boris Pasternak, was about to be published in the Soviet Union. I asked D’Angelo to get in touch with the author to try to get a copy of the manuscript so

²¹ The series was defined by its publisher and editor Valerio Riva as "the series of foreign and contemporary writers".

that I could start the translation immediately. Russian authors, after their first publication in the Soviet Union, do not have copyright protection. By starting the translation of the manuscript, I would have the opportunity to publish simultaneously with the Soviet publisher and secure copyright for the work in the West. The manuscript, with the consent of the author, was given to me in Berlin in the summer of 1956” (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 118).

Doctor Zhivago was a novel written as a diary set in Russia in the early 20th century. The book had an epic-dramatic theme, the detailed realism during the years before and after the Revolution, the existentialism of its main character that often led to religious issues, the criticism of Socialist Realism, the strong mixture of literature and life of Zhivago. The main character of the novel was the alter ego of Pasternak himself. The novel provoked irritation and embarrassment in the official culture.

The Soviet leadership thought until the end that the novel would not be published in Italy. The issue was not only literary, but it also had a strong political impact. Two and a half years elapsed between the conversation of D’Angelo and Pasternak²² and the world premiere of *Doctor Zhivago* in the Italian translation by Pietro Zveteremich. Everything that happened during that period can be found in the dense correspondence between Feltrinelli and Pasternak. They had a long-distance relationship, which was made difficult by time of receipt of letters. Furthermore, the two agreed in advance that messages would have to be written in French to be considered valid (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 120).

The book had to be published simultaneously in Italy and Russia, but with the Soviet censorship in place, Feltrinelli managed to smuggle the manuscript out of Russia and get it to Milan.

In the summer of 1957, there was a request from the author to proceed with the publication in Italy and in the West, regardless of the publication in Moscow. The agreement was that Feltrinelli would take full responsibility for the publication, thus giving the author protection from the Soviet authorities (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 132). He did so because he was convinced of the book. Pasternak was aware of the consequences that the publication would have had on his life: on the one hand the realisation of an artistic project, on the other the expulsion from the Union of Writers, a violent campaign against him and civilian death in his country.

²² During his trip to Russia, D’Angelo met Pasternak in early May 1956 and expressed his interest in the novel.

On 23 November 1957, *Doctor Zhivago* was published. The first print run of 12.000 copies sold out. After the publication of the novel, Feltrinelli had to endure the offensive of the PCI that had not appreciated the sequence of events of the *Doctor Zhivago*.

The persecution of Boris Pasternak by the Soviet Union continued when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1958. The Soviet Union considered Pasternak a typical representative of bourgeois decadence and an individualist who did not care about the Revolution. Pasternak, because of the denigration campaign against him, could not retire the Prize.

The publication of *Doctor Zhivago* was, for Pasternak and his publisher, a real bargain, both in economic terms and for prestige. With *Doctor Zhivago* there was a novel within the novel, with the publisher defending his copyright and editorial choice. In fact, after the first initial enthusiasm, private interests, opportunism, and speculation entered the scene.

In Russia, Boris Pasternak never saw “the first bestseller of contemporary publishing”. He died in his house in Peredèlkino when he was seventy years old, on 30 May 1960.

2.3.4 The unexpected success: *Il Gattopardo*

The second great success of the Feltrinelli publishing house came in 1958 and it was called *Il Gattopardo*. With this second success, the publishing house got to the top of the publishing world. The author of *Il Gattopardo* was Giuseppe Tomasi, Duke of Palma and Prince of Lampedusa.

The book was a historical novel written between 1955 and 1956, set in Sicily when Garibaldi set ashore in Marsala and it was centred on the figure of his paternal great-grandfather, Giulio di Lampedusa, an astronomer. It was just by chance that Bassani discovered the novel, but also its publication was accidental. As in the case of the *Doctor Zhivago* there was a novel within the novel: the book had already been rejected by Mondadori and Einaudi.

Giangiaco Feltrinelli talking about the publication of the book said:

“The book that had to be published in January (1959), had been postponed to give priority to volumes that seemed more compelling and safe. But by mistake, some copies had already been sent to critics, and on December 15 Carlo Bo reviewed the novel on *La Stampa*; we had no choice but to hasten an edition. Three days later, on the 18th, *Il*

Gattopardo was in the bookstores; on the 24th it was sold out. A second edition of four thousand copies, put on sale on the 28th, was already impossible to find on the 6th of January. And, it has been like that for years” (Grandi, 2012, p. 233).

As in the case of Pasternak, also in this case Feltrinelli never managed to meet in person the author of his second editorial success. Giuseppe Tomasi, Duke of Palma, died of lung cancer in July 1957. He had, in fact, a posthumous success.

2.3.5 The editorial experimentalism

Since 1959, foreign narrative has prevailed among the editions published by the publishing house.

“There was a time when Feltrinelli was an Italian publishing house only because it had its registered office in Milan. I think it has never happened to any other Italian publisher to receive more manuscripts from abroad than from Italy”. Wrote Valerio Riva (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 210).

In that year, the series *Le Comete* was launched as an international literature magazine. The magazine was directed by Valerio Riva. The proposal that Riva wanted to bring to his readers was that of a forbidden narrative that would cause a sensation. The first title of *Le Comete* was immediately a success and recorded two editions in four months. The book was *Zenzero* by J.P. Donleavy, an American writer, introduced in Italy for the first time by Feltrinelli. From the second half of 1961, a new, more ideological parable began for *Le Comete*.

In 1960, it was founded and entrusted to the direction of Valerio Riva, another series of fiction: *Narratori di Feltrinelli*. In this series the most successful works from the *Narrative* series (closed in 1960), from the *Library of literature* of Bassani (closed in 1963), flew in. The series also included the most successful works from *Le Comete*, which closed in 1967. *Narratori* was intended to reintroduce catalogue titles but also to publish original, first-edition works; thus, from 1960, *Narratori* absorbed all the narrative offerings of the publishing house, old and new. The *Narratori* series brought important authors who were still unknown in Italy at the time. There was the case of *Tropico del Cancro* and *Tropico del Capricorno* by Henry Miller: both were translated by Luciano Bianciardi for the first time in 1962 in a clandestine edition printed in Switzerland and that could not circulate in Italy until 1967, when the official edition came out in the series *Narratori* in two volumes. Other than the Miller case there was the Günter Grass case with

Tamburo di Latta which Feltrinelli proposed, preceded by the stir with which it was received in Germany and France.

2.3.6 Life at the publishing house

In 1958, Feltrinelli had two marriages to forget²³ and set off with backpack and tent to Scandinavia. In Hamburg, he met Inge Schöntal, a German photojournalist who soon became his wife.

As soon as Inge could settle in Milan, she had her own desk and carved out her own role in the publishing house. Giangiacomo spoke five languages, but he was grumpy, so she was the one who kept in touch with the writers, who arranged the meetings. This was her first role: to maintain relations with authors, especially foreign ones. To do so, Inge and Giangiacomo travelled the world (Cesana, 2021, p. 6).

With the arrival of Inge, the publishing house became, in the late fifties and early sixties, a place of culture, open to relations with the world. It was a port for writers and intellectuals who wanted to breathe an air of freedom and exaltation that elsewhere was almost impossible to find.

At that time Giangiacomo solved the contradiction between his wealth and his feeling far from the social class he belonged to. In the early 1960s, Feltrinelli made a long trip to Africa where he got to know different political and cultural realities, becoming even closer to Third World problems and liberation movements. He never hid his sympathies for the struggle waged by the Algerian people under French rule.

The publishing house had assumed international dimensions and notoriety and had become unique in Italy. Every book that was published had its own story, made of human relationships, discussions, comparisons, passions.

Valerio Riva once remembered: “Feltrinelli demanded us to invent, and he hated idle systematicity. He had taught us how to travel: and this seems to me his greatest merit: to consider the world as a single city” (Grandi, 2012, p. 244).

He also had fundamental qualities for a publisher: he had no preconceptions and absorbed everything like a sponge, he was receptive and gifted with an infallible flair. He was, however, very closed-minded, he was afraid of people who could take advantage of him or court him; he was generous in spurts.

²³ Giangiacomo was married to Bianca Dalle Nogare from 1947 to 1955; later he married Nanni De Stefani on 19 June 1957 and after a year the two had separated.

The atmosphere of enthusiasm, creativity, friendship, and harmony stopped with the arrival of a generational conflict within the publishing house. The conflict, within the Feltrinelli publishing house, was between Rome and Milan, between Bassani on the one hand, Balestrini with Valerio Riva and Filippini on the other hand. The latter ones together with Giangiacomo Feltrinelli wanted to assert the supremacy of the publishing house of Milan. Feltrinelli wanted to establish himself as a publisher of the Italian neo-avant-garde, a group of young writers and critics opposed to neo-realism. In front of a changing society, the neo-avant-garde literature perceived the unfamiliarity of language, its inability to represent and define the real.

The repositioning of the publishing house was completed in 1963, with the dismissal of the “neorealist” Bassani and the recruitment of Nanni Balestrini, who together with Valerio Riva and Enrico Filippini invented the Group '63. The Group '63 originated from the German Group '47 of Günther Grass, which had begun to come together after the war with the aim of keeping culture alive in Germany, despite the occupation. According to the Group '63, there was a need to experiment, to identify one way of speaking and writing, valid for everyone. Their thesis was that spoken language had no punctuation, and if written it should be read according to breath where there are no periods or commas.

Feltrinelli wanted to see in these innovations another revolutionary stance, breaking the cultural uniformity existing in Italy at that time. He embraced the ideas of Group '63 and began to print its works (Grandi, 2012, p. 264-265).

Feltrinelli wanted to defy the established cultural power. His publishing house had become detached from the protection exercised by the communist party and the party officials who had been hired in the first years of activity. Unlike other publishers, Feltrinelli had proven to be independent from any constraint, and in a short time managed to win a place in the international publishing scene. He had the great advantage of having an enormous wealth that granted him the widest autonomy. Giangiacomo enthusiastically embraced people or projects worthy of his interest, but then he often retreated from them, tired and bored. He had no friends, only collaborators. He rarely went in human relationships, beyond the surface of things.

2.3.7 Not only publishing house

Feltrinelli had the idea to combine the publishing house with a network of bookshops. With this initiative, Giangiacomo proved to be far ahead of others and in line with the main European innovative currents. He acted as a trigger for the stagnating publishing industry.

Feltrinelli bookshops experienced their main evolution in the first part of the sixties. During those years, the formula that enabled the development of a bookstore chain was better defined.

The thesis of Feltrinelli is expressed in a letter published on 2 August 1964:

“For some time, I’ve been trying to get rid of prejudices and I wanted to see if it was true that the worst way to sell books was through bookshops. [...] I have made some quite interesting discoveries and the first of them is that the criticisms made to this tool, that is the library, are often unfair, unfounded, and even defamatory. In recent years in Italy many new things have been done. I thought we should change the way books are displayed, and the choice of stocks. In my bookshop in Milan, in Manzoni Street, I am not afraid to display two or three times in two or three different places the same book, to put front books instead of coast ones, to put the price tag above each of them, or even to present them inside the iron baskets that the greengrocers use to present fruits and vegetables. [...] The staff has also improved in recent years. There are no schools for booksellers yet, which exist, for example, in Germany and the Netherlands, but there are already young booksellers who are not satisfied with memorising the catalogues of publishing houses. If we had a modern school for booksellers, many of our problems would be solved: and I wonder what costs more, whether giant machineries of propaganda, complex customer administrations and heavy public relations organisations or a beautiful school from which every year fifty new booksellers could come out with new ideas and a modern experience” (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 259).

Also the furniture arrangement of the bookshops was studied. The furniture, the lighting, the use of colours: everything was prepared to break prejudices and approach potential readers. Compared to traditional family bookstores, those with the counter between customer and shop assistant, the Feltrinelli stores were an innovative reality: no

school textbooks, massive presence of paperbacks and the catalogues of the best publishers displayed frontally.

Readers entering one of the Feltrinelli stores should have found a welcoming, stimulating, inviting environment. The project of Feltrinelli was a novelty in the Italian publishing system and proved to be a valuable tool for self-financing. In a market subject to periodic crises, owning shops that could sell books independently of the publishing house allowed them to count on constant revenues (Grandi, 2012, p. 258-259).

Around 1960 Feltrinelli realised the idea of a self-service stand designed in Germany. Several stands were placed in Milan and in seaside resorts but, without a licence to sell newspapers, they went out of business. However, the initiative suggested many ways to use all the space available on the bookshelves when between 1963 and 1965 the second-generation bookstores were created.

Feltrinelli looked for larger spaces in central and busy streets. The watchword was to get people to buy books at all costs. Unconventional methods were used to attract customers. In Florence, roasted chestnuts were offered, in Milan once Joan Baez went barefoot, in Bologna the first major meetings with authors were organised. A pinball machine was installed in Rome, with a Coca-Cola container, dartboard shooting, lots of posters on the walls and even a jukebox. Giangiacomo had a parking disc with the words “make love and not war”. He also created a spray can with the slogan “paint your cop yellow?”.

2.3.8 Nose for business

Although Feltrinelli was editorial director of an enterprise whose corporate purpose was to publish works of culture, he never forgot that he also held the position of commercial director. In his idea also a publishing house had to make profits. In a calm world, like that of publishing, Feltrinelli had brought a wave of aggression, unknown until then. He had shown that the arm’s length principle really existed. The big national publishing houses paid their tribute to political power, in terms of economic and cultural subjection; because of this, they gave up spreading knowledge in Italy. They left the risk to others, to those like Feltrinelli who had the courage to expose themselves personally. Feltrinelli, acting like an earthquake, revolutionised the distribution and sales system. He multiplied the number of bookshops spread throughout the country. He put young, capable directors in charge of them and he motivated them. For their part, the employees

guaranteed him absolute loyalty, a team relationship that went beyond the pure and simple professional interchange. The consciousness of belonging to a common project was born and developed, with the goal of reviving Italian culture.

2.4 What is a publisher

There was a time in which Feltrinelli Editore found itself in a climate of permanent revolution: the opposition of young people is our opposition, and the youngsters are increasingly to the opposition. Between 1967 and 1968 Feltrinelli travelled a lot, but he always came back with clear ideas.

In an article he tried to explain what his role meant to him: that of the publisher.

“The Feltrinelli publishing house was born out of cultural intentions, needs and desires. I try to do publishing that is wrong in the historical moment, but right in the sense of history.

[...] The proliferation of printed paper risks taking away the editor function of any sense and destination and I believe that the only way to restore this function is something that I do not hesitate to call “morality”: there are necessary books, there are necessary publications.

[...] A publisher lives under attack, which is the attack of the printed press in a world with no borders and true distances and is dedicated to attacking. Among the bombs that fall on his table, he has to choose the ones to release and explode in the minds of readers. An editor lives surrounded by collaborators, who are often nervous because they are intelligent and sensitive: during office hours, a publisher must use all of himself and especially his eyes and nose. Manuscripts and already printed books often materialise in the form of a man: the author, who is often intelligent, nervous, and brilliant: the publisher must use all himself. A publisher is a man who spends money to buy titles, to pay percentages, to pay production costs and overhead costs to publish books. A publisher has to deal with people who move money, with banks, with accounting, with data centres: he must use all of himself and I don't know what part of all of it.

The publisher is a vehicle for messages. a publisher has to publish books that have to be sold.

[...] Can a publisher change the world? Hardly: a publisher cannot even change publisher. He can publish certain books that become part of the world of books and

change it with their presence. [...] My mirage is the book that puts its hands on, the book that flaps in the air, the book that does something to people who read it, the book that has a receptive ear and collects and transmits mysterious but sacrosanct messages, the book that in the jumble of everyday history listens to the last note, the one that lasts once over the inessential noises.

[...] What is a publisher? I don't know what the publisher is, the publisher himself, but I try to listen to the reasons why I am a publisher. And I admit: the publisher has nothing to teach, he has nothing to preach, he does not want to catechize anyone, in a way he knows nothing. And I admit: the publisher, in order not to be ridiculous, must not take himself too seriously, the publisher is a cart, he carries written paper, he is a vehicle of messages, he is at best an advocate of messages that are also messages. And I admit: that the publisher is nothing, purely a place of meeting and sorting, of receiving and transmitting. And yet: it is necessary to meet and sort the right messages, it is necessary to receive and transmit writings that are up to reality. And therefore: the publisher must throw himself, dive with the risk of drowning into reality. Without knowing anything, he has to make everything known, everything that is needed at the various levels of consciousness. Dive into reality: try your luck. Fortune then becomes a meaning, a horizon, a life released and triumphant. And then: a publisher is nothing, he is a vehicle that can also define himself as a cart, but a publisher can also approach his work based on a very risky working hypothesis: that everything must change and will change" (Feltrinelli, 2015, p. 11-21).



Figure 1 Feltrinelli in his publishing house (Berasi et al., 2012).



Figure 2 Presentation to Nehru of the Italian edition of his Autobiography. Next to the Indian premier, his daughter Indira Gandhi (Berasi et al., 2012).



Figure 3 Giangiacomo Feltrinelli with Max Frisch and Enrico Filippini (Berasi et al., 2012).

Chapter 3 – THE REAL REVOLUTION

3.1 World history is intertwined with publishing

It was 1964: the Italian Economic Miracle was taking place. The publishing house had existed for almost a decade and took great resources and energy. The publishing house and the Institute were globally recognized, but it was the kind of adventure that was difficult to sustain alone. In fact, in 1964 Feltrinelli seriously considered selling the Library. In the meantime, he closed the service to the public, reduced staff, and research programs. For Feltrinelli it was time to make choices: relaunch, look for new alliances or dismiss some activities.

La Havana became a good alternative. The goal of Feltrinelli was to pursue a great book: the memories of Fidel Castro that had to be the new editorial success, all international as it happened for *Doctor Zhivago*.

Giangiacomo Feltrinelli in 1964 said: “Two years ago we were approached by two Castro emissaries in Milan. They asked us if we were interested in his diaries. We replied that we were very interested in them, although at that time we had a nebulous, rather vague idea of what might come out of them. We were flattered that the choice had fallen on our publishing house. Then the personality of the author and the events of the Cuban Revolution made us think that the book would represent something exceptional, in itself and for the public around the world” (Grandi, 2012, p. 288-289).

The memories of Castro consisted of a block of notes ranging from 1953 to 1959, containing daily notes relating to the years preceding the conquest of power. Castro, after the rise to power in Cuba of the dictator Batista, served in the opposition, participating in the failed riots of 1953. He was arrested by the police and sentenced to 15 years in prison; after two years he was granted amnesty and went to Mexico. From there, with his brother Raul and with Ernesto Guevara, he went to Cuba, hiding in the mountains of the Sierra Maestra.

After a struggle conducted using guerrilla techniques, the Revolutionary Army marched to Havana in December 1958. In early 1959, Castro proclaimed himself prime minister of Cuba (Grandi, 2012, p. 287).

Feltrinelli had sent Valerio Riva to Cuba to assist Castro in drafting and organising his work.

To write the memoirs of Castro, Feltrinelli and Riva had to do a sorting job, as there was a lot of material to work on. The book consisted of two parts, one made from the diaries and the other from an autobiographical story.

Feltrinelli and Inge arrived in Cuba in early 1964 and stayed there for about two weeks. They had flown from Italy to the United States, then to Mexico, and from there they had taken off for Havana.

Inge and Giangiacomo met Castro for the first time on February 10, 1964. After two weeks on the island Feltrinelli and Riva had managed to have only one meeting with Castro. The next meetings were planned, but then they were invariably postponed. Given the situation, Feltrinelli was determined to leave and let things take an undefined course. Suddenly, a turning point: Castro showed up and authorised Feltrinelli and Riva to go to his home every morning at 9 a.m. to work on the publication of his autobiography.

From a certain day, almost every morning, they could knock on the Commander's door.

On the roof of the house there was a small henhouse and a basketball hoop. In the breaks Giangiacomo and Fidel played basketball and Inge photographed the game one on one.

They went on with the question-answer system on various topics. "When he is in a good mood, he talks a lot. It is necessary to divert him from his favourite theme. That of cows" (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 291).

After a month of work on the autobiography Feltrinelli returned to Italy; he let Riva continue. The impressions of Feltrinelli about that time spent with Castro were not all positive:

"I have very mixed feelings about this man. He is a sort of Garibaldi, utterly inapt to government work, incapable of working, reasoning, and hard thinking. Impulsive, rhetorical. High pitched. Ideologically confused" (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 294).

With the departure of Feltrinelli, the work on the memoirs of Castro stalled almost immediately. Riva stayed in Cuba two more months but struggled to stay focused. The one who lost concentration was above all the author, enthusiastic about the project but always with something else to do. The result was that the book was not finished, and Riva was recalled to Italy. The publishers Atheneum of New York, Heinemann of London, Hachette

of Paris, with whom agreements had already been concluded, were informed that the time of the work would be longer than expected (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 295).

Cuban contacts continued throughout the year 1964, and in 1965 Giangiacomo returned to Havana with Riva. The situation in Cuba had changed a lot. In October 1964, Cuba had participated in the Conference of Non-Aligned Countries in Cairo and succeeded in changing the conference resolutions in a more combative direction. Cuban leaders employed every effort to create a new alliance: that of the three continents. The conference to promote national liberation's movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America was being prepared (January 1966).

Giangiacomo had with him ten copies of the memoirs of Castro. He printed them in Spain as a demonstration: the work was not finished. But the book became for Feltrinelli only an excuse to talk about politics. The two visits in 1964 and 1965 had a very strong impact on the editor.

He spoke about it in 1967 during an interview:

"In 1964 when I became a friend of Castro, I didn't believe in anything anymore. Commitment of any kind, neither ideological nor political. Then..."

"Castroism?"

"No but being face to face with a head of state, discussing world politics and in direct contact with a concrete environment like Cuba, can change something in life."

"What do you mean?"

"I talk about myself, of course. We live in times when we cannot give a content, a perspective to our anxieties. We talk about politics, and we talk about it abstractly. [...] Not in Cuba. Cuba is there, and politics is made up day by day with immediate response. And what is most important is that it is built outside the usual schemes: Capitalism, Soviet Socialism and so on" (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 305-306).

In April 1967 Feltrinelli went to Cuba again for two weeks. Then he left for Bolivia, first following Régis Debray²⁴, then Ernesto "Che" Guevara and his guerrilla.

In the spring of 1967 Régis Debray who was with Guevara in Bolivia was captured by the police. On 1 June, Feltrinelli wrote a letter to the President of the United States,

²⁴ Debray was a French intellectual who wanted to popularise the idea that "Guevarism" was the only road to the revolution.

Lyndon B. Johnson, asking for the immediate release of Debray. The arrest of the French author was proof that Guevara was in Bolivia (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 307-308).

Fidel wanted to draw international attention to the Debray case and asked Feltrinelli to commit himself personally. He invited him to go to Bolivia where the trial of the French Revolutionary, Debray, had to take place. Feltrinelli prepared his mission to Latin America and convinced his new partner, (that would become his 4th wife) Sibilla Melega, to go with him.

Feltrinelli arrived in Bolivia on 9 August and settled in a large hotel in the capital, La Paz. Since the morning of 17 August Feltrinelli had noticed that he was being followed and in the afternoon of the following day two plainclothes officers showed up at his hotel and took him to the offices of the DIC (Departimiento Investigaciones Criminales). There was a long interrogation and then they sent him to prison.

Feltrinelli reported that episode in an article that appeared on *l'Espresso* on September 3, 1967.

“When they arrested me, I would bet they had no idea what they could charge me with. For four hours, from 5:30 to 9:30, they kept me in an office of the Ministry of the Interior, asking me questions about everything, even sports and music: perhaps they hoped I would be the one to suggest charges to them. In fact, the only thing I was challenged in those first four hours was to have tried to go to Camiri, where Régis Debray is being held prisoner. Imagine: all the foreigners who had arrived in those days in La Paz from all over the world were asking to go to Camiri. [...] The truth was different, and I was perfectly aware: the Bolivian police were waiting for something. They were waiting for the results of the search that a team of police were doing in the hotel room. [...] But even after the search, when at 10 o'clock, they took me to the DIC headquarters, the only concrete charge they made was that I had received that very morning \$4,000 from Italy. They asked me what I had done with it, to whom I had given it: and I had no trouble at all in proving to them that they had that \$4,000 in their hands, in the wallet they were seizing from me. Later on, they accused me of having had contact with the Vàsquez²⁵ family. [...] But they were absolutely groping, they were still in the deepest darkness. They were only trying to get me to fall into some trivial admission they wanted to build against me, a castle

²⁵ Jorge Vàsquez Viana, was a young man, son of a well-known Bolivian historian who was arrested and later killed by the police.

of guilt and accusations. But I kept silent, systematically, refusing to answer any of their questions, even the most innocent” (Feltrinelli, 1967).

The interrogations were conducted directly by the CIA²⁶, with no result.

In Italy, President of the Republic Giuseppe Saragat and Minister of Foreign Affairs Amintore Fanfani intervened immediately. Thanks to their intervention, the Bolivian authorities decreed the expulsion of Feltrinelli, after a day and two nights in prison.

Del Bo talking about the experience of Feltrinelli in Bolivia said:

“I was almost like a brother to Feltrinelli. He confided in me and told me his problems and concerns. It was from the experience he lived and perhaps suffered in Bolivia that he changed almost completely. He told me that he had been subjected to interrogations by Bolivian authorities that he identified as CIA. He told me about the interrogation system, he said that they had asked him questions that had nothing to do with the immediate fact, the Debray trial, but activities concerning revolutionary actions in Latin America. He gave me the feeling, when he returned, that this experience had deeply affected him from an ideological point of view” (Grandi, 2012, p. 322).

A few days after returning from La Paz, Giangiacomo and Sibilla travelled to Algeria. During the African expedition, Feltrinelli wrote two long articles about his Bolivian adventure. In his piece for *L'Espresso* he denounced the massacres of the Barrientos regime, the misery of the peasant population, and US interference. His memorial concluded with a conviction: “There are no doubts: another Vietnam has begun” (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 312).

When he came back from Bolivia, Feltrinelli found many messages of support, he received invitations for public meetings everywhere. When he went to Genoa, he was approached by Giovanbattista Lazagna, awarded with the Silver Medal for the Resistance. Lazagna had invited him to speak about Latin America at the ANPI²⁷ circle of Novi Ligure. The conferences of Novi Ligure soon became an important event. Feltrinelli and Lazagna were both comrades who thought it was time to get ready to take up the guns again.

²⁶ Central intelligence Agency: Civil intelligence agency of the federal government of the United States of America.

²⁷ Associazione Nazionale Partigiani Italiani.

3.2 Birth of the guerrilla

On 9 October 1967 at La Higuera, in Bolivia, Ernesto “Che” Guevara was involved in a gunfight, wounded, and captured by the Bolivian army. The day after his capture, he was killed with a close shot to the heart. Fidel Castro, on October 15, 1967, gave confirmation of the death of the hero of the Cuban revolution Ernesto “Che” Guevara and proclaimed three days of mourning. After the admission from Havana of the death of “Che” an event was organised in Milan. Feltrinelli printed one hundred thousand posters of the photo taken by Korda with the words “Che lives”.

When Feltrinelli went to Cuba in 1967 he met the Cuban photographer Alberto Diaz Gutierrez “Korda”. In the days they spent together they spoke for a long time about “Che”. Korda saw in Feltrinelli “a friend of the revolution” and gave him the negative of a photograph taken on March 5, 1960. The image had never been published. The photo showed Ernesto Guevara, the Guerrillero Heroico. After the death of Guevara, the publisher marketed the poster with the image and sold more than a million copies worldwide (Grandi, 2012, p. 301-302).

The death of Guevara was a great loss for Feltrinelli that did not slow the struggle; indeed, he would have started it again with more vigour. Cuban empiricism had yielded more results than the doctrines elaborated by the various communist parties loyal to Moscow, and even the Italian communist party, according to Feltrinelli had become an instrument of conservation. According to his ideals the concept of “political guerrilla” was valid, not only for Latin America, but for the whole Third World and for any country with advanced capitalism. Especially where the shadow of an authoritarian regime loomed (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 321).

In January 1968 Feltrinelli went to Cuba again for three weeks. This time Enrico Filippini went with him. About those days he said: “[...] I understood he wanted to signal to the Cubans that his function as a European publisher was over, that he considered himself only “an anti-imperialist fighter”.

During his stay on the island, Giangiacomo wrote an essay entitled “Guerrilla and revolutionary politics” referring to the Italian perspective. In his text Feltrinelli proposed some examples of avant-garde strategies, starting from South Vietnam and Venezuela, to guide the future conflicts of the Italian working class. The language ranged between catatonia and obsession (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 312-313).

It was at that time that Feltrinelli began to talk about his theory. He compared the Italian situation to that of the Latin American countries. He argued that there was a progressive return to fascism of the State and that democracy was in danger. He proposed as an antidote, an armed struggle to be launched in Sardinia, Calabria. Feltrinelli went beyond simply joining assemblies or protest marches, financing magazines or printing pamphlets. The coup d'état of the colonels of April 1967, in Greece, had happened with the blessing of the United States in total absence of political and popular reactions. This had not only upset, but also convinced Feltrinelli of the possibility and risk of a similar experience for our country, whose conditions did not seem so different to him.

3.2.1 Cuba of the Mediterranean

At the end of 1967 Feltrinelli was thinking about Sicily but above all, about Sardinia where he went personally. Feltrinelli made a conference in Cagliari about Latin America and left everyone stunned with the question: "Sardinia as Cuba of the Mediterranean?"

In 1968, a pamphlet entitled *Sardegna: rivolta contro la colonizzazione* was published by the Feltrinelli publishing house. It wanted to propose federalism as a political perspective. The book was published by Eliseo Spiga under the pseudonym of Giuliano Cabitza. Spiga left the communist party in 1966 and chose Sardinia as a cultural universe. Feltrinelli and Spiga had distant positions regarding the armed struggle. According to Spiga, the guerrilla had no chance of succeeding in Sardinia. Instead, both thought about the need for a reform in a regionalist sense of the State. In this view, Sardinia could assume, within the framework of a socialist revolution, the representation through assemblies and organs of direct democracy, of farmers, workers, and shepherds.

In Sardinia the feeling of independence had always been well established. In those years there were strong elements of dissent against the military presence on the island. The resurgence of crime, starting from the mid-sixties, in fact, forced the state to send reinforcements, carabinieri and "blue helmets" to stop the phenomenon. It was in banditry circles that Giangiacomo Feltrinelli identified Graziano Mesina as the Sardinian Che Guevara. Graziano Mesina was a criminal of Orgosolo called "king of Supramonte". He escaped from prison in 1966 and held a bounty of ten million on his head that the state was ready to pay to secure the "Julius Caesar of Barbagia".

Massimo Pugliese, the head of the counterintelligence centre in Sardinia, remembered how he came to the name of Feltrinelli. "A person who knew many things

pointed out to me how I was looking almost everywhere but I had not yet thought of an intellectual: Giangiacomo Feltrinelli. Feltrinelli not only printed pamphlets about Sardinia and distributed them, but also published sabotage training volumes. I had the response I was looking for, from Messina; in one of our meetings, which were four or five, I put photographs of some people, including that of Lazagna and one of Feltrinelli with Sibilla Melega that I had taken from one of the inserts de *Il Borghese*, on the table. At the sight of Feltrinelli, Messina took a leap. "There he is, he is the one who offered me weapons", he said. However, it was never ascertained whether Feltrinelli and Messina knew each other personally (Grandi, 2012, p. 351).

The secret services began to follow with attention not only pamphlets, magazines, and manifestations of Sardinian separatism, but especially the movements of the Milanese publisher. They began to control funding to cultural circles that proliferated in those years on the island (Grandi, 2012, p. 351).

Feltrinelli did not think only about Sardinia. Feltrinelli also thought of South Tyrol, where the Schuetzen, a paramilitary institution established in 1511 as a defence corps for Tyrol, had returned in the mid-1950s. In South Tyrol there was a difficult coexistence between the two ethnic groups established. The claims of South Tyrol attracted the attention of Feltrinelli especially after the beginning of the relationship with Sibilla Melega, born in Merano. Sibilla and Giangiacomo agreed on the claims of minorities and the analysis of the structure of South Tyrolean society, whose division into classes and the consequent exploitation, were like those of other underdeveloped regions of Italy (Grandi, 2012, p. 367).

3.2.2 Publishing of the revolution

Feltrinelli differentiated the "militant" production from the programs of the publishing house. Those books became for Feltrinelli the most compelling thing to do.

Edizioni della Libreria debuted with a memo personally viewed by the publisher in May 1967. The pamphlets were generally short, and the average price was 250 liras. The first ones were about Italy, but then there was the series on Latin America. Quickly the series was enriched with new sections: Africa, Asia, Italian debate, south of Italy, student struggles. The standard circulation was four thousand copies. There was a big sale of the book *Sangue dei leoni* of Edoard Marcel Simbu which dealt with guerrilla in Congo and *Scuola agli studenti* (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 277).

In August 1967 he also published the first issue of *Tricontinental*, the bimonthly edition of Solidarity Organization of the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America. *Tricontinental* was the new informative paper, made in Cuba, with co-editions in English, French and in Italian it was published by Feltrinelli. The magazine appealed to those who thought that: the duty of every revolutionary is to make revolution (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 278).

In 1968, the world premiere edition of the *Bolivian Diaries* of Guevara was published with a photo taken by Korda on the cover and a long introduction by Fidel Castro (Graham, 2008, p. 52).

In the same year the Feltrinelli publishing house, published: *Rivoluzione nella Rivoluzione* of Régis Debray and *Liberazione o morte. Antologia degli scritti* of Father Camilo Torres. In the same year a Latin American author, Gabriel García Márquez with his *Cent'anni di solitudine* was discovered and had a resounding success. Still in 1968 also *Citazioni* of Mao Zedong, *La ribellione degli studenti in Germania*, *Critica della Società repressiva* of Herbert Marcuse were available in the bookstores (Grandi, 2012, p. 341).

As the political process of maturation of Feltrinelli went on, he neglected his editorial activity; he was little interested in it at the beginning, and then he completely delegated the management to his staff. Feltrinelli was becoming less and less a publisher and more and more a controversial political figure.

3.2.3 Feltrinelli and his revolutionary publications

With the coup and guerrilla phase, Feltrinelli began to express his ideas in a series of pamphlets. The first one was entitled *Italia 1968: guerriglia politica*. He prepared it in January 1968 in Cuba, but a friend suggested him not to publish it because it still seemed raw material.

The second booklet was *Persiste la minaccia di un colpo di Stato in Italia!* A thirty-page pamphlet sold for 60 liras and published in April 1968. Feltrinelli wrote that the Italian leaders were just tools, puppets of aggressive American politics. The theory of Giangiacomo was that the planet was already into World War III, a conflict without borders. In the conflict, American imperialism together with the bourgeoisie of the satellite countries, was opposed to the revolutionary forces of liberation. Feltrinelli pointed out that, unlike other continents where guerrilla and the example of “Che” had found followers, Europe was absent.

It was necessary to organise the Marxist-Leninist vanguards, to form cells, committees of resistance and develop a political guerrilla. It was necessary to destroy the power of the monopolies, the political institutions of the capitalist state, make active resistance in the present, the counter-offensive in the future, in Italy as in Vietnam: it would be a long struggle of David versus Goliath. With these statements Feltrinelli intended to make the Resistance first, the counterattack later.

The title of the third volume of Feltrinelli was *Estate 1969* which appeared in bookstores in July 1969. In this book, the idea of a coup had become an obsession. An appendix by writer Vassilikos removed any doubt about the underlying thesis; the beginning was: “we didn’t think it was possible in Greece” (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 349).

He wrote: “It is possible that the coup organised by the American CIA, NATO²⁸, large industries, the military and international forces will be implemented this summer. It will be facilitated by the summer exodus, the lack of interest, and the unpreparedness of traditional organisations of workers such as the PCI and trade unions”. This book was not limited to just theorising a coup, it also tried to explain its causes. Feltrinelli stated that the causes were: “the political crisis we are experiencing in Italy with the current power vacuum. The prospects of industrial action for contract renewals, for the decoupling of wages from productivity and for securing better living conditions, greater and more direct political and economic power to the working classes who do not identify anymore with the top leadership of parties and trade unions. Finally, at the international level, the struggling American economy led certain right-wing forces to prepare and implement a precise political and military plan aimed at imposing a radical and authoritarian turn to the right, an Italian coup. These plans, and their partial implementation, took new impetus from the visit of Nixon to Italy”²⁹ (Feltrinelli, 1969).

Estate 1969 theorised the application of a new scheme for the coup, an Italian scheme, between the White Coup (French style) and the Greek solution, with the suppression of democratic freedoms. The scheme was flexible, ready to adapt as needed. The possibility of a two-stage coup was raised, distinguishing between the political and repressive phases, without neglecting the possibility of some agreement with the opposition to save the institutional framework.

²⁸ The North Atlantic Treaty Organization also called the North Atlantic Alliance, is an intergovernmental military alliance.

²⁹ The American President Richard Nixon visited Italy on the 27th and on the 28th of February 1969.

3.3 Relationship between entrepreneurial life and political ideals

3.3.1 Year 1969

1969 was a fundamental year for Italy. On April 25, a device exploded at the Fiat stand at the trade fair in Italy. Five people were wounded. The attacks were attributed to anarchists. The alibi for some of the main accused was to have spent that Sunday, April 25, with the Corradini family in via del Carmine. Downstairs neighbour, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, confirmed everything. The prosecutor accused him of perjury. The judicial case for the bomb at the fair dragged on for the whole 1969 and part of 1970; then they were all cleared of charges (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 348).

In August 1969 Feltrinelli was getting ready to face the coup. On the Apennines behind Genoa, he had rented a farmhouse. The message was to be prepared for guerrilla actions if a coup would occur. In the farmhouse there were three sealed boxes, a Winchester carbine, and a Cobra revolver.

At the end of August Giangiacomo left again for Cuba with Sibilla. The so-called “warm autumn” was beginning. A conflict between the vanguards of workers and the trade unions was taking place in Italian factories when the contracts for metalworkers, chemists, and construction workers had to be renewed. This situation led to strikes, protests along with unrest. In Turin Fiat suspended 35.000 workers after a long sequence of chain strikes. At Fiat Mirafiori, workers were protesting against non-compliance of the company on category upgrades. The conflicts continued throughout the year.

At 4.37 pm on Friday 12 December 1969, a metal box filled with explosive detonated in the large circular hall of the National Bank of Agriculture in Piazza Fontana, Milan. Thirteen people died (in the end the victims were seventeen) and about a hundred were injured. A second bomb remained unexploded at the headquarters of the Italian Commercial Bank in Piazza della Scala, in Milan. In the same afternoon, two other devices exploded in Rome at the Altare della Patria (four injured) and another at the National Bank of Labour in Via di San Basilio (fourteen injured). The authorities in Milan immediately suspected people among anarchist circles (Ventrone, 2019, p. 107-108).

Giangiacomo knew about the Piazza Fontana massacre through the news. He was in the lodge in Oberhof, in Austria, with Sibilla Melega. He immediately decided to leave for Milan. But in those hours, something changed. They warned him that the newspapers

were talking about him. They told him that via Andegari was manned by plainclothes police officers. He had to decide whether to return to Milan and make himself available to the police to defend himself or take another underground route.

As it was predictable the name of Giangiacomo Feltrinelli ended almost immediately in the investigation on the massacre of Piazza Fontana. His absence was an aggravating circumstance in the eyes of those who attributed him the direction of the attack. On 14 December 1969, Commissioner Antonio Allegra asked the judge, Ugo Paolillo, for permission to search the house of Feltrinelli and the publishing house; permission was refused.

Giangiacomo hid in Genoa in the house of Giovanbattista Lazagna. From there he sent a letter to the staff of the publishing house, to the bookstores, and the Institute, where he announced that he had decided on “unavailability”:

“It is the only condition that allows me to serve the cause of Socialism, the cause that I chose 28 years ago, when in 1942, at sixteen, I wrote on the walls of Milan “to death fascism”, when in February 1945 I joined the communist party, when I created the Feltrinelli Institute in 1948 and the publishing house in 1954. When we finally developed with the publishing house a political and cultural theme increasingly related, increasingly a direct expression, of the working classes in Italy and in the world. [...]

My predictions were not unfounded. At the first opportunity, taking cue from the criminal fascist attacks, the campaign of hatred, denigration, slander, persecution of the right against the publishing house, bookstores, and against me exploded with the anger and violence of a hatred that has been repressed for over twenty years. Journalists, policemen and magistrates have been shaking hands and trying, by using all sorts of infamies, to involve me in facts and situations to which I am unconnected and that are far from that revolutionary strategy of which some, it is not clear in what capacity, honour me” (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 358-359).

A week later Giangiacomo Feltrinelli was interviewed in Paris by the German writer Josef Mueller-Marein, who described him as follows: “He is not the Feltrinelli we know, with the aggressive moustache and the bright gaze behind the horn-rimmed glasses. He changed his face: off his moustache, he wears light glasses, he shaved the tuft of hair between his temples, and has a very high forehead”. Giangiacomo told the

journalist: “My fault is to not be silent, but to say, to print and spread what I and many others think”. “Why don’t you go back to Italy if you are innocent?” He answered: “Because it makes no sense to stand next to the Reichstag while it is burning and declare: I have nothing to do with this” (Punzo et al., 1972).

3.3.2 A new management for his companies

When Feltrinelli decided to leave, his choice did not provide for a possibility for him to come back. He wrote to the companies he was managing. He said he was increasingly absorbed in “editorial” commitments. Since these commitments conflicted with the interests of the companies, he begged for his resignation to be accepted. Between November 1969 and April 1970, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli decided to sell several thousand shares in Pirelli, Bastogi, Montedison, and Edilcentro worth one billion four hundred thirty-four million liras. A portion of the titles, amounting to five hundred and twenty-six million were sold to unidentified buyers. Feltrinelli sold twice to Caboto, respectively on 6 and 7 April 1970, over eight hundred thousand shares of Edilcentro amounting to about nine hundred million liras. The sale of Edilcentro shares was carried out by the publishing house, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore Spa. The sale permitted to reduce the debts owed by the publishing house to credit institutions. The subsequent revaluation of the Edilcentro titles that remained in the publishing house, made it possible, in the balance sheet, to reduce the loss for the year bringing it from one hundred and fifty-nine million to fifty-one million liras. This loss was covered by a full non-repayable payment by the shareholders.

With the money raised, Feltrinelli extinguished some passive situations at Banca Unione and Banca Lombarda. The decision of selling the shares had been determined by his desire to acquire as much liquidity as possible for any sudden need and to facilitate the publishing house running out of cash and with management problems.

In 1969 the publishing house was restructured. The number of board members was increased to six with the participation of Inge Schöntal who took over as vice-president of the publishing house. Giangiacomo retained the role of president.

Professor Giuseppe Del Bo became CEO and Giampiero Brega became editorial director. All had the broadest proxies. Even the legal representatives of the other societies had complete authority.

On February 1, 1970, Feltrinelli expressed his desire to transform the Institute and Library into a foundation carrying his name.

Although Giangiacomo had been unavailable since December 1969, he maintained periodic contacts with the top management of the publishing house, in particular with Del Bo and Brega. Both had disagreed with his choice to go into hiding. The main theme of their meetings was the difficult management of the publishing house. Giangiacomo thought that a traditional development of Feltrinelli Editore was no longer possible, everything had to be reported for political purposes. The editorial proposal had to be consistently “terroristic”, bypassing even the legal conventions of copyright. In January 1971, Feltrinelli met Giampiero Brega. The economic situation was not good, only the bookstores balanced their economic accounts, the rest of the activities were doing badly, and the banks were putting pressure on them. Brega and Del Bo proposed to Feltrinelli a program of scheduled loans. To manage the downsizing of activities they set a budget, proposed to reduce expenses and securities. For Feltrinelli, it was not possible to resize the activities. Against the hostility of the capitalist groups and the PCI, the publishing house had to continue its political struggle.

At the end of January, he asked his staff to make a choice, comply and cooperate, or leave. He also thought of another solution: a collective could govern the editorial line, and selected political figures could form a union pact and become shareholders. For these objectives he proposed a last substantial funding with a balance fund that would have served to supplement the lowest wages. Then the publishing house would go on with its own resources (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 387).

3.3.3 Feltrinelli went into hiding

For Feltrinelli, the December 12 massacre constituted the inevitable outgrowth of the year that had passed, 1969. He refused to believe in the value of cultural and political intermediation and did not consider relying on Italian justice.

No one from then on could make him reconsider or recede from his radical intentions. Feltrinelli felt responsible for the world and what would have happened to it. Concrete participation in the revolutionary war began for Giangiacomo in 1970.

In March 1970, another pamphlet by Giangiacomo Feltrinelli came out: *Contro l'imperialismo e la coalizione delle destre – Proposte per una piattaforma politica della sinistra italiana*. A program of action was displayed on the back cover and stated: “on the

initiative of the adversary, which is the class enemy, the Italian political situation has reached a dramatic turning point. Either you advance with all the forces of struggle to defeat the coalition of the right and you have the courage to start a revolutionary process, or there will be a period of repression and fascism in which the partial achievements of the working classes will be nullified. By the initiative of the opponent, this is not a period of reforms: it is either a period of revolutionary struggle or of burning, tragic defeat of the working classes” (Grandi, 2012, p. 443).

In June 1970 the first issue of *Voce Comunista* appeared in Milan; it was a monthly magazine in which the theme of guerrilla was recurring. Feltrinelli denounced the climate of repression and intimidation against workers, the increasingly frequent episodes of fascist squads and attacks. It also attributed responsibility for the December 12, 1969, bombings by accusing “the government, the state, the police, and large sectors of the judiciary of having made themselves accomplices because the inspirers and organisers were within the state apparatus itself” (Grandi, 2012, p. 445).

He explained again his latest political theses within the magazine *Compagni*. *Compagni* was a monthly political newspaper that came out in 1970 with three issues, whose director was Nanni Balestrini. Giangiacomo said: “While in the past my participation in politics had always been mediated by editorial activity, I now expect a more direct action in the course and development of events” (Punzo et al., 1972).

3.3.4 Gap and revolutionary war

In 1970 Giangiacomo began his concrete participation in the revolutionary war. He began to make contacts and meet people willing to join the armed struggle. In Paris, he attended a course for the falsification of documents, learned to steal cars, to force locks, to disguise himself for not being recognized, to eat very little and not to wash for days.

In northern Italy, a clandestine organisation called Gap was active since the spring of 1970. The operating base of the Gap was Genoa, but then also in other cities such as Milan, Trento and Teramo similar groups emerged. The main objective was to root in the Italian struggles the logic of partisan action while maintaining the offensive against the imperialist right (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 380).

The Gap debuted on April 16, 1970. It was 8:33 p.m. when a voice interfered in the audio channel of the television that was broadcasting the news (Punzo et al., 1972).

Giangiaco did not participate directly in the action, but the voice that overlapped that of the journalist was his (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 373).

A document written by Feltrinelli in 1970 in the form of an interview appeared and he explained the reasons for the establishment of the Gap and the choice to take the path of armed struggle and revolutionary war. For him this was the only response to fight the repressive, political, and military counter-offensive of the blockade and foreign imperialism. The task of preparing and anticipating the advent of the revolutionary insurrection had to be entrusted to a popular liberation army. The latter would function as a military vanguard supported by large sectors of the proletariat. Feltrinelli blamed the PCI for having abandoned all revolutionary aspirations, for having contributed to the spread of scepticism about the possibilities of achieving the revolution. Giangiacomo was picking on the new political formations of the extra-parliamentary left because in his opinion with the legal forms of struggle nothing could be obtained more than partial successes immediately cancelled by the enemy offensives. The popular liberation army became the core of the theory of Feltrinelli. But this would come after the first groups had triggered an urban guerrilla (Grandi, 2012, p. 451-452).

Giangiaco Feltrinelli, comrade Osvaldo (this was the nom de guerre of Giangiacomo), had become an exponent of that popular liberation army, which, however, was never fully realised. The editor would have wanted the role of military commander or political leader of the insurgent movement. He failed in becoming a leader because those who had to support him did not share his approach.

Between spring and autumn 1970, the Gap carried out several bomb attacks on some construction sites in the Milan area where there had been several work-related injuries.

Feltrinelli personally participated in some of these actions and became familiar with clockwork and handling explosives. Osvaldo thought that all military instruments should be handcrafted because they could be reproduced on a large scale. On 22 September there was the action at the construction sites of the Fratelli Proverbio and Sacogen, on 24 October at the sites of Torno and on 26 to those of Stefi (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 381).

In Milan Feltrinelli, through the two Swiss companies he had set up on purpose, had bought and then equipped to Gap bases, five properties (Grandi, 2012, p. 509).

Giangiaco and Inge Schöntal secretly met several times during his hiding, sometimes also with their son Carlo. It was during one of those meetings that Inge noted in her diary: “No one can understand him anymore, not Brega, not Del Bo, he is lost” (Cesana, 2021, p. 10).

In February 1971 the book *Feltrinelli guerrigliero impotente* was published. The text had been commissioned by Federico Umberto d’Amato, head of the Confidential Affairs Office of the Italian Secret Service. The pamphlet wanted to show to the world that Giangiacomo Feltrinelli was mentally unstable and powerless, both physically and politically (Cesana, 2021, p. 11). D’Amato wanted to provoke Feltrinelli because he suspected that the publisher was dedicated to armed struggle and that he financed insurrectional movements.

Meanwhile, Feltrinelli began to appreciate the initiatives of the Red Brigades and wrote them a letter on 20 May 1971 in which he hoped for collaboration and political consensus. He proposed to work together on a political, strategic, tactical platform with the intention of specifying what they were fighting for and how they were fighting. However, differences between the two groups emerged almost immediately. For the Red Brigades, the constitution of the armed party implied a long-lasting struggle, a gradual process to reach the heart of the state. The analysis of Feltrinelli was different: the involution of Italian democracy suggested an immediate revolutionary perspective that had to unify forces and invite part of the PCI to participate (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 402-403).

On October 1, 1971, in Hamburg, at the consulate of Bolivia, a woman showed up with the excuse of asking about the South American country. She managed to get received by the consul general Roberto Pereira Quintanilla, former colonel of the Bolivian police, involved in the arrest of Feltrinelli and Sibilla Melega, but especially in the murder of Ernesto Guevara. When she reached Quintanilla, she drew a gun, a Colt Cobra 38 Special and fired three times, killing the consul. The gun turned out to have been purchased by Feltrinelli in 1968 from an armoury in downtown Milan. (Grandi, 2012, p. 475). The involvement of Feltrinelli in the murder was never fully clarified. In the weeks following the assassination, rumours about where Feltrinelli was grew and so did the interest that police throughout Europe showed for him.

In October 1971 Feltrinelli wrote a new essay entitled *Lotta di Classe o Guerra di Classe?*. Feltrinelli in this text was no longer the rural Gappist with the coup obsession. The revolution was class struggle, and the struggle was war: the revolution was war. It

was in this way that the class became equal to the state in terms of strength: the class through the war introduced its power as true political power, not just opposition. Feltrinelli feared nothing would be done, the dissolution of the revolutionary opportunity. Hence the need to better define the revolution.

In January 1972, the CIA and the FBI³⁰ pointed the finger at Feltrinelli, who was defined as the main Castro agent in Europe. In early 1972 Feltrinelli confided to those who met him that he had to increase his surveillance, he stopped using the car and the plane and he used only the train in the coach. It could be understood from his movements that he was mainly staying between Oberhof, Switzerland, and Milan (Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 419).

By mid-March Feltrinelli could count on a small number of men for his revolutionary army. On March 14, Feltrinelli and two other men organised an action with the aim of sabotaging two high voltage pylons in Segrate, Milan. Three other members of the GAP had similar objectives on the Naviglio towards Abbiate Grasso. The weather reports of that night reported weak and intermittent rain until 7:44 p.m. in various parts of the city.

On March 15 at 1:00 p.m. Inge and Carlo were waiting in a Cafe in Lugano for Giangiacomo to arrive. Giangiacomo never arrived at that appointment.

At 4 p.m. on that March 15 at the bottom of a pylon in Segrate, a body was found. Giangiacomo had died on the night of March 14 during a demonstration that was supposed to cause an electric blackout in the northern area of Milan.

3.4 Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli

When Feltrinelli died, the Institute he founded began its final phase. In 1970 he initiated together with Giuseppe Del Bo, the transformation of The Institute into an institution recognized by the State under the law and subsidised by the government. The Institute was converted into a Foundation on April 27, 1974. Official recognition had above all moral and cultural weight, which had allowed the Fondazione to be considered as a highly valued entity deserving financial aid and support according to the usual provisions of law.

In the first years of the archive, from 1951 to 1954 there was an initial phase of archive processing; the programmatic scope, resources and a network of contacts and

³⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation; intelligence-driven and threat-focused American security organisation.

relationships were identified. The second phase, between 1956 and 1964, was when the activities of research, organisation of sources and the network of collaborators acquired a new shape, and the librarian field was defined. In the third phase, which began in 1973 and lasted until 1984, new ways of working and researching were adopted.

This new approach initiated a new physiognomy of the *Annali* series and the birth and structuring of the *Quaderni* series. Research centres in the form of autonomous structures of study and work arose. Then, they became real autonomous bodies with their own structures and whose research results gave rise to independent publishing initiatives (Bidussa, 2000, p. 677).

During the first years of activity the archive was in close connection with the communist party. Nevertheless, in the years that followed, it became the most important centre in Europe for first-hand documentation of the events leading to the overthrow and elimination of communist regimes in the major Eastern European countries and the transformation of the People's Republic of China into a "socialist market economy" (Petrillo, 1998, p. 528).

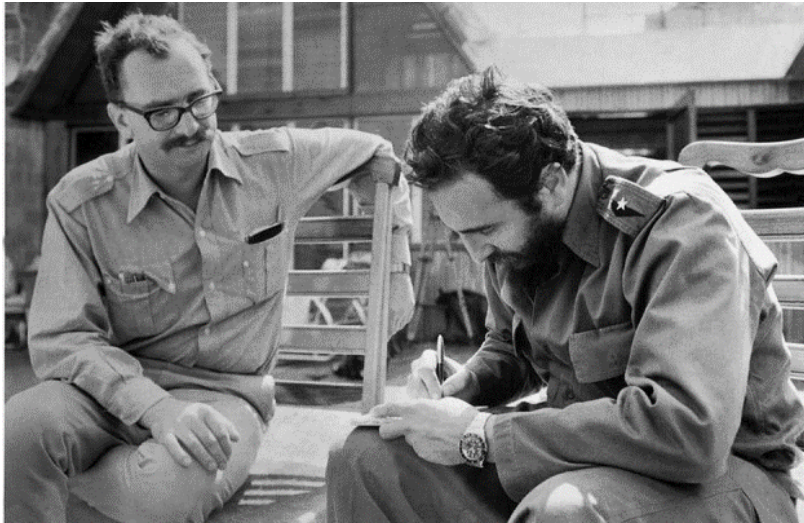


Figure 4 Giangiacomo Feltrinelli and Fidel Castro in Havana in 1964 (Casa Editrice Feltrinelli).



Figure 5 Giangiacomo Feltrinelli and Sibilla Melega at a demonstration (Anonymous, 1972).



Figure 6 International Congress on the Vietnam War, Berlin 1968 (Berasi et al., 2012).

Conclusions

The life of Giangiacomo Feltrinelli can be summarised in three phases: the first one concerns his youth, the second is linked to his entrepreneurial activities and the third concerns his revolutionary turn.

In the first years of his life, Giangiacomo suffered the death of his father Carlo. After his death, Giannalisa, his mother, became harder and more authoritarian. Giannalisa used to punish and mortify her children. The education Giangiacomo received was very rigorous, he lived in isolation, and this made his youth unhappy. It resulted in a great inclination to rebellion, which manifested itself in the teenage years when Giangiacomo started friendly relations with the many workers of the Feltrinelli household. It was in those years that Giangiacomo approached socialism and then the Italian Communist Party. The years of militancy in the PCI were full of initiatives and meetings for Feltrinelli. In his militia Feltrinelli made a total commitment also to show that he was not socially different from the other militants. Giangiacomo at that time often felt a sense of confusion.

The impulses that operated in this first part of life of Giangiacomo were a corporate pragmatism that came from his family origins and personal practices, a political militancy that was both fighting against injustice and taste for freedom and adventure, and a strategic planning matured with independent spirit through the entire experience in the PCI section in Milan (Ferretti, 2004, p. 202).

A fundamental meeting in the life of Feltrinelli was the one with Giuseppe del Bo. With him, Feltrinelli succeeded in putting into practice the idea of a library on the history of the labour movement. The first publishing activity of Giangiacomo began under the leadership of the communist party. The takeover of Colip in 1951 represented for Giangiacomo a starting point in his career. The aim of the company was to promote culture at a low price. Despite many efforts of Feltrinelli, including economic ones, the initiative came to an end in 1956. Because of the failure of the Colip initiative, in which he had believed, Feltrinelli decided to create something on his own, the publishing house Feltrinelli. The founding values that Feltrinelli wanted to give the publishing house were those of anti-fascism and freedom, combined with a Marxist research approach and an international outlook.

It was at the beginning of his entrepreneurial activity that the attitude of Giangiacomo towards politics became evident. Although he always claimed values close

to left-wing ideals, he was never able to fulfil the duties demanded by party rules. In fact, the rebellious, revolutionary, nonconformist temperament, already matured in the early years of life, resulted in autonomy for what concerned editorial choices. This attitude was confirmed by the titles he decided to publish, often in contrast to any form of obligation.

As he stated in an interview of 1962 in his entrepreneurial activity he was favoured by some factors. First of all, he had had similar experiences before and he had the intuition to establish the publishing house in a period of deep change for the country. With the early successes of the publishing house, especially with the success of *Doctor Zhivago*, the figure of the militant-entrepreneur took shape, capable of both organising research and production, and of making politics. This happened with the ambiguities of the billionaire-communist and the boss-comrade.

Feltrinelli made his last break with the PCI with the publication of *Doctor Zhivago*, a novel that became a political issue of worldwide resonance.

The 1960s represented a turning point for Feltrinelli. For what concerned the editorial aspect, Feltrinelli became the reference point for the group of intellectuals known as Group '63. Neo-avant-garde movement, composed of young writers and critics who wanted to break with traditional literary models, experimenting new forms of expression.

In those years Giangiacomo began to travel to Latin America, to Cuba and then to Bolivia. At the beginning the journeys of Feltrinelli had the aim of collecting the memories of Castro, but then the book became just a pretext to talk about politics. After Cuba there was Bolivia in Feltrinelli's mind, where he went following the arrest of Régis Debray, a French intellectual. Feltrinelli was arrested by order of the American Secret Service. But the interrogations gave no results and Feltrinelli was expelled from the Country.

When Giangiacomo returned from Latin America, he found a place where he could apply his revolutionary ideas. In Sardinia in those years there was a strong sense of independence and Feltrinelli thought of making it the "Cuba of the Mediterranean".

In addition to the Sardinian adventure, Giangiacomo financed various groups of the extreme left, also in the belief of an imminent neo-fascist coup. According to his beliefs, the real responsible parties for the massacres and bombings of those months were not the anarchists, but the state and the right wing.

The turning point in his life was 1969, the year of the Piazza Fontana massacre, and the year in which Feltrinelli decided to go into hiding.

In hiding, he founded the Gap, a paramilitary organisation based on partisan logic. Feltrinelli actively participated in all the actions. On 14 March 1972, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli died. That night, one of the leading political and entrepreneurial figures of the 1950s and 1960s had died. A man who throughout his life refused to belong to a pre-established category.

Giangiacomo had a typically shy and aggressive character, very puritan and capable of outbursts of exaggerated joy, but almost incapable of relaxation. Feltrinelli was always afraid of being frequented only for his money and had always difficulties in engaging in simple and relaxed relationships.

The founding values of his entire life were anti-fascism and freedom. The relationship that Giangiacomo had with politics, and especially with the communist party, was not linear.

In 1955 he wanted to modernise Italian culture, giving his publishing house a completely original vision, open to the world, in a geographical and political sense, without any prejudice. Feltrinelli was able to exploit a historical context of strong economic and social development, during which the level of education of the population increased. In the 1950s, after the fall of the fascist regime, young people increasingly felt the need to develop their political and social consciousness through books.

Feltrinelli was a great editorial innovator. He had a strong intuition. He was aware of the importance of choosing the different titles to be published, which could therefore be interpreted as the consequence of having aligned and having taken a position within the world and history.

Before him nobody had ever talked about ecology in Italy. The first book, *Primavera Silenziosa* by Rachel Carson, explained how pesticides and other sprays would destroy the planet and it was published by Giangiacomo in 1963. When he published *La rivoluzione sessuale* by Wilhelm Reich, it was a scandal, but millions of copies were sold. This also happened with the bestseller *Il Gattopardo*, which was published by Feltrinelli after it had been rejected by other publishing houses (Berasi et al., 2012).

He also understood that he had to take care of the entire book supply chain, including distribution and sales. He believed in books and the need to make them accessible, so he gave priority to paperbacks.

Giangiacomo could understand what the reactions of the people could be about a book, what could interest them and also the texts that were worth publishing because

they opened new paths. He was able to identify the right novels, thanks to his understanding of politics, society and the personal implications that emerge in a book.

This was what prompted him to publish *Doctor Zhivago*. The publisher challenged censorship and overcame obstacles dictated by the USSR. He can be defined as a “cultural fighter”.

Feltrinelli had the ability to choose collaborators, to know who to rely on in his editorial choices. He was able to directly assess the cost-effectiveness of operations, with a managerial statement of cost and revenue calculations.

Even though he had all the privileges from an economic point of view, there was something that he had been looking for, in his whole life: a fair world in which to live. When communism no longer seemed a solution to achieve this, he sought other means.

Feltrinelli bequeathed the dream of a world in which culture can play its part in stirring consciences and tangibly changing reality and society.

This ideology led him to have more and more revolutionary ideas, to seek justice for the proletarian class, even through unusual methods. He began to prefer disorganised and miserable countries, where injustices were more evident and scorching, like South America or Sardinia, where he was more powerful, where it was easier to impose his will (Punzo et al., 1972).

What changed the fate and the revolutionary spirit of Feltrinelli, however, was the attack of 12 December in Piazza Fontana. He had been engaged in the Resistance as a boy, he had strong ties with Cuba and Guevarism, he believed that it was inevitable to prepare to take up weapons. His life and death were decided by that 12 December 1969 (Sofri, 2012, p. 101-102). From that day on, he began his life in hiding and his constant search for a better world for his ideals.

Feltrinelli was a rebellious boy in his adolescence, an innovative publisher, and was also an uncommon revolutionary. Throughout his existence there were the contradictions of his origin that clashed with the interest he wanted to cultivate in the proletarian class. The strong civil passion, the revolt to every form of oppression and injustice pushed him to skip times and mediations.

The revolutionary spirit of Giangiacomo, in fact, emerged since his youth. At first, he used his wealth to financially support left-wing movements and parties, including the Italian Communist Party. He financed demonstrations, publications of political works, and the organisation of political events. Through his publishing activities, Feltrinelli

became known for publishing works of left-wing authors and thinkers. He published books that promoted revolutionary political ideas about communism, but also literary works that expressed criticism of capitalism and Western societies. Feltrinelli also had a personal political involvement, in which he participated in the protests and left-wing movements of the 1960s.

Giangiaco Feltrinelli can be considered a visionary man for his role as a publisher. At the same time, he was a committed revolutionary due to his active involvement in supporting left-wing and revolutionary movements. These two aspects of his life and career were interconnected and helped to define him as one of the most influential personalities of his time in the Italian political and cultural context.

The theme of the revolution recurred throughout the life of Giangiacomo. In his youth, it led him to seek something new, to rebel against his family, and to get involved in politics. But the real revolution began when he started to follow the ideal of a collection on the labour movement and then founded his own publishing house.

In every field he tried to distinguish himself. He succeeded in innovating and revolutionising a stagnant sector such as that of publishing. He gave a turning point to the layout of the bookstores, which he wanted to be innovative, disruptive; he saw them as places of encounter and transit. He sought to market books aggressively and innovatively, using advanced marketing strategies to promote his titles. He wanted culture to be accessible to everyone at all costs.

In his entrepreneurial activity Feltrinelli managed to be an independent publisher, free from any kind of constraint. He wanted to make a revolution in publishing, and he achieved his goal.

He was like a crazy ball in those pinball machines he had installed in some of his bookstores and where, when he went there, he loved to stop and spend some time.

Genius like few, experimenter like nobody else.

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