

Mauro de Agostini, Pietro de Piero,
Italino Rossi, Marco Rossi,
Giorgio Sacchetti

PRISONERS & PARTISANS

ITALIAN ANARCHISTS IN THE
STRUGGLE AGAINST FASCISM

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Prisoners and Partisans: Italian Anarchists in the struggle against Fascism

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What is Anarchism?

Anarchism is a political theory which opposes the State and capitalism. It says that people with economic power (capitalists) and those with political power (politicians of all stripes left, right or centre) use that power for their own benefit, and not (like they claim) for the benefit of society. Anarchism says that neither exploitation nor government is natural or necessary, and that a society based on freedom, mutual aid and equal share of the good things in life would work better than this one.

Anarchism is also a political movement. Anarchists take part in day-to-day struggles (against poverty, oppression of any kind, war etc) and also promote the idea of comprehensive social change. Based on bitter experience, they warn that new 'revolutionary' bosses are no improvement: 'ends' and 'means' (what you want and how you get it) are closely connected.

ANARCHISTS AGAINST MUSSOLINI

THE ROOTS OF ANARCHIST OPPOSITION TO FASCISM 1920-1932

Anarchist opposition to fascism, as indeed the opposition from other political groupings seeking to defend the exploited and their interests, began well before Mussolini took power and it took the form not only of actions but also of analyses of fascist ideology. Fascism's roots and aims are examined, for instance by a commentator alive to all the changes in Italian society, namely, Luigi Fabbri, who in his 1921 work *The Preventive Counter-Revolution*⁽¹⁾ depicted fascism as

“...The most natural and legitimate product of the war... and the prosecution of the world war in each country,” and thus “the guerrilla war between fascists and socialists – or to be more precise, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – is merely the natural culmination, the material consequence of the class hostilities aggravated during the war”⁽³⁾. And, finally, fascism was seen by this anarchist commentator as “...primarily the organisation and enactment of the violent, armed defence of the ruling class against the proletariat which it has come to see as too demanding, too cohesive and too intrusive.”⁽⁴⁾

Indeed the bourgeoisie's backlash against the ‘red biennium’ and especially the factory occupations was not long in coming and, availing of its ‘long arm’ (in this instance, fascism) it was extremely violent in its repression of the workers' struggles. “Invasion of trades councils, wrecking of party and co-operative premises, violence against the House of the People”⁽⁵⁾ were episodes which, beginning in the latter months of 1920, persisted with ever increasing violence.

THE ‘ARDITI DEL POPULO’ (PEOPLE'S COMMANDOS)

The necessity of organised opposition to fascist actions was appreciated by many on the left. Anarchists too, emphasised the need for some umbrella organisation, but one removed from official organs, be it understood. Thus, they were among the sponsors of the ‘*Arditi del Populo*’, a grassroots movement set up for the purpose of fighting fascist violence with its own weapons.⁽⁶⁾ The organisation led a stunted existence primarily on account of lack of funds and, notwithstanding successes scored in resisting fascist arrogance, its validity was recognised neither by the Socialist Party nor by the nascent Communist Party, whether out of opportunism or sectarianism. Yet the ‘*Arditi del Populo*’ was the only movement capable at that point of effectively halting fascism's progress because, being organised at grassroots level, it was thus immune to politicking. It sprang from the real needs of the population who were tired of fascist violence and mistrustful of the organs of the State who were all too often

absent or, worse, conniving with such episodes. For them too the '*Arditi del Popolo*' were but a tiny shooting star in the firmament of the struggle for social emancipation

Another body, this time exclusively trade-union based, emerged in February 1922 to defend itself against the fascist terror: this was the Labour Alliance. It had the backing of the Italian Syndicalist Union (USI) which was "...in a way the anarchists' vehicle on the terrain of class struggle"⁽⁷⁾, and *Umanita Nova*, the anarchist daily paper run by Errico Malatesta, commented favourably upon its emergence. On 2 August 1922 the Alliance called a nation-wide general strike in protest against the fascist violence that July in the Cremona, Novara and Ravenna areas⁽⁸⁾. There were countless skirmishes between the people and the fascists during the strike which held firm and should have been kept up to the 'bitter end.'⁽⁹⁾ But incomprehensibly, on 4 August the Committee of the Alliance called for a return to work. "Thus was the movement cut short when the thing to do was to expand it and escalate it – and the fascists, duly abetted by a conniving government, were able to muster in the most important sites and carry out the actions that everyone knew they would"⁽¹⁰⁾ commented a bitter Errico Malatesta. And that strike was also the last act of any significance before the 'march on Rome'.

THE ADVENT OF FASCISM

With its formal conquest of power, fascism stuck to its repressive policy vis a vis its political opponents and so anarchists also suffered the personal restrictions, violence and limitations upon political activity as every other opponent. La Spezia's *Il Liberario* ceased publication in October 1923 and *Umanita Nova* shut down the following December⁽¹¹⁾.

Many anarchists, especially those most prominent in the Italian Anarchist Union (UAI) and trade-union movement, were obliged to flee the country in order to escape persecution. Those who stayed faced imprisonment, beatings, internment and yet they kept up the political struggle, having as their means of formal internal liaison the reviews *Fede* and *Pensiero e Volunta* up until their publication was finally suspended (1926), on account of repeated confiscations. In 1925 the UAI was still in the breach of the fight against fascism and in July issued an appeal to anarchists who had fled abroad, briefing them on the situation in Italy and seeking their financial and moral support.⁽¹²⁾

Albeit with the problems caused by clandestinity or semi-clandestinity and the risk of arrest and the danger of being discovered and interned, the anarchists carried on the fight. Aside from the actions of individuals designed to take the life of Mussolini

(about which more later), a re-reading of history as seen by the vanquished indicates that the opposition to fascism had not ceased and was not left solely to anarchists operating from exile and that, though they lost, they were not ready to surrender their freedom of thought. It should be noted also that the initiatives of exiled anarchists were effective in that other comrades who stayed in Italy received propaganda material and managed to distribute it clandestinely, using anyone not yet on the files of the political police, thereby helping to keep open contacts between militants.

The obvious limitations of this short account do not allow us to dwell upon all of the episodes that characterised anarchist activity at this time. A list of sources dealing with the subject appears in the notes below. ⁽¹³⁾ Let us cite, by way of example, only the attempted uprising of 1930 in Sicily. The anarchists Palo Schicci, Salvatore Renda and Filippo Gramignano who had left the island to escape fascist harassment between 1924 and 1926 had stayed in touch with Sicilian antifascists and had come to appreciate the growing discontent among the populace who were oppressed by the regime and by the landowners. Upon learning that agitations were underway in several areas in the region they issued a declaration to Sicilians and landed in Palermo in the aim of promoting a general uprising. But they were quickly arrested and given heavy sentences.

INTERNMENT AND IMPRISONMENT

The opposition to fascism is also borne out by the sentences handed down by the Special Tribunal. Many anarchists were imprisoned or held in internment sites. Lampedusa, Lipari, Favignana to begin with and then Ustica, Ponza, Ventetone and Themi were the sites where anarchists were held. This provided the opportunity to re-constitute groups, to evaluate the political struggles of recent times, to work out a minimum programme of campaign and valid political action. “Thanks to Bruno Misefari and Alfonso Failla,” notes Gino Cerrito⁽¹⁵⁾, “on Ponza in 1931, among around 80 comrades divided into groups the Italian Anarchist Federation (FAI) was formed, along the tried and trusted post-world war lines of the Italian Anarchist Union (UAI)”. Later on Ventetone, among the anarchist internees there, following several meetings approval was given to a resolution, crucial to the revival of the whole anarchist movement when fascism collapsed (which collapse was believed to be imminent.) ⁽¹⁶⁾ wherein among other things an invitation was issued “...to all comrades to join their trades or industrial union so as to have direct contact with the labouring masses, leading them in the truly revolutionary struggle for the conquest of proletarian demands, publicising the liberation order through establishment of

Factory, Company and Industrial Councils in the sphere of production and of Town and Provincial Councils that are to regulate and answer the needs of the community.”
(17)

ATTEMPTS ON THE DUCE'S LIFE

Anyone who opts to take the life of a tyrant is often driven, not just by a strong moral conviction but also by a conviction that his action may prompt the masses into rebellion against the oppressor.

It is in this light that we have to view the individual actions taken several times against Mussolini by the anarchists. The series opened with Gino Lucetti from Avenza on 11 September 1926 and his attempt in the Porta Pia square in Rome. Lucetti hurled a bomb at the car carrying Mussolini from the Villa Torlonia to the Palazzo Chigi. The device however bounced off the Duce's car and went off only when the vehicle had long since passed. As he was arrested, Lucetti stated: "I did not come with a bouquet of flowers for Mussolini. I also meant to make use of my revolver if I failed to achieve my purpose with the bomb." At the end of his trial he was sentenced to 30 years in jail whilst another two anarchists, considered his accomplices, Stefano Vatteroni and Leandro Sorio, received lesser sentences.

The bids by Michele Schirru and Angelo Sbardelotto, however, never got beyond good intentions in that they were arrested before they could carry out their plans. Schirru was picked up on 3 February 1931 and sentenced to death by a Special Tribunal before being shot on 29 May. Sbardelotto, who had travelled from Belgium, was captured on 4 June 1932, confessed his intentions, was sentenced to death and shot on 17 June.

In our chronology of the attempts on Mussolini's life we have deliberately left out the incident that occurred in Bologna in October 1926 and credited to 15 year old Anteo Zamboni, the son of anarchists; he was stabbed to death on the spot by the fascists surrounding the fascist leader. The whole episode is obscure. "Many believe that it was one of his own retinue that fired the revolver shot that grazed Mussolini's jacket and that young Zamboni was sacrificed to divert any possible suspicion from the fascists".⁽¹⁸⁾ Others, however, do credit the attempt to the youth, for want of "...sufficiently credible evidence of the thesis of 'sham assassination attempt' really planned by extremist fascists who intended to force Mussolini's hand".⁽¹⁹⁾

To conclude this brief account let us adopt as our own a comment made by Gino Cerrito ⁽²⁰⁾ on the period in question: "it is utterly pointless to debate what the assassination bids might have brought the country to. Their failure triggered no

collective movement but the many arrests that followed, the trials and the sentences handed down, based on various expedients, show that the attempts helped to keep public opinion alert and to give heart to antifascists and to the labour movement opposed to the regime. Without these events, without the many attempts at clandestine reorganisation, without the distribution of leaflets and graffiti on walls... we would probably not have had the strikes that marked certain years of the 20 years of fascist rule, nor would we have had a Revolution that for the first time in our country's history directly involved not only minorities, workers, yes, and peasants as well”.

Italino Rossi (*Umanita Nova*, 1 May 1987)

NOTES:

1. Luigi Fabbri *La controrivoluzione preventiva*, Collana Vallera, Pistoia, 1975.

2 Ibid, p12.

3 Ibid, p13.

4 Ibid, p15.

5 *Un trentennio di attivita anarchica* Ed. Antistato, Cesena, 1953, p. 48. See also: Adriana Dada *L'anarchismo in Italia fra movimento e partito*, Toti Editone, Milan, 1984: p.78.

6 On the 'Arditi del Popolo', see Renzo Del Carria *Proletari senza rivuluzione Savelli*, Rome, 1977 (3rd edition) vol. 111, p.215.

7 See *Umanita Nova* No. 149, 30 June 1922, in Errico Malatesta *Pagine di lotta quotidiane*, Geneva, 1935, vol. 11, p.105.

8 See *Un trentennio di...* op. cit. p 73.

9 See *Umanita Nova* No. 181, 10 August 1922.

10 Ibid.

11 A. Dada, op. cit. p.89.

12 *Un trentennio...* p 84.

13 On anarchist resistance to fascism from 1920 to 1945, see: Gianfranco Careri, *Liberta contro fascismo* in *L'Internazionale* No.10, October 1983. It is useful also to refer to *Un trentennio...* pp62/109. In particular for local actions, see... for Carrara and Lunigiana, Gino Cerrito *Gli anarchici nella Resistenza Apuana*, Mario Pacini Fazzi Ed., Lucca 1984, p.25ff. On Florence, Luigi Di Lembo *Il Movimento Anarchico a Firenze (1922-1930)* in *Cilta e Regione* No.6, Florence, 1980, pp 163-200. For the position in Turin see Mauro De Agostini, *Gli anarchica torinesi nel 1930* in *L'Internazionale* August 1981: by the same author, *Il Movimento anarchico milanese nel ventennio fascista* in *L'Internazionale* April-May 1981. Notes on Sicilian anarchist antifascism can be found in Pippo Gurrieri *Liberta contro fascismo* in *L'Internazionale* January 1984 and Pape Trippilli *Gli anarchici siciliani durante il fascismo* in *Sicilia Libertaria* No.14. August 1980. Finally on

anarchist antifascism and resistance in Tuscany see the supplement to *Umanita Nova* No.14, 12 April 1981.

14 See *Sicilia Libertaria*, year IV, No. 13, May 1980.

15 G. Cerrito, op. cit. p.32.

16 The complete text of the resolution is in *FAI – Congressi e convegni*, Genoa 1963, pp 16-17

17 Ibid.p17.

18 Giovanni Berneri *Gli anarchici nella lotta contro il fascismo*, in *Volunta*, year XIV, No. 4 1961, p.206.

19 G. Cerrito, op. cit. p.23.

20 Ibid. pp.22/23.

LIVORNO: ANARCHISTS VERSUS FASCISM

In Livorno (Leghorn) as elsewhere fascism betrayed its true, counter-revolutionary nature from the moment it emerged by its assaults upon the Labour Movement and its organisations. But in the city itself the goon squads and strike breakers fell upon particularly hostile and dangerous ground. ⁽¹⁾

It was primarily the young anarchist groups... The League of Subversive Students (inspired by anarchists, but also including in its ranks socialists and republicans), and the *Arditi del Popolo* (People's Commandos) based in the 'Venezia' district near the USI premises... that made life impossible for the fascists, who after a few beatings, no longer dared venture into the working class districts. In 1921, anarchists ensured that the 17th National Congress of the Socialist Party (at which the Communist Party of Italy was to break away) could proceed, by beating off the fascist gangs aiming to prevent it. ⁽²⁾

In August 1922, right after the end of the strike called by the reformist Labour Alliance, the fascists resolved to punish rebel Livorno and, thanks to reinforcements brought in from Florence, they seized the town hall and murdered leftist militants. On their way home they were attacked by a band of *Arditi del Popolo* and during the ensuing gun battle the anarchist Filippo Filippetti was killed. ⁽³⁾

But notwithstanding the murder of another three anarchists, Gilberto Catarsi, Nardi and Amedeo Baldesseroni and numerous woundings and attacks upon their premises, including those of the anarchist newspaper *Il Seme*, the libertarian organisation was not broken up. Until the passing of the Special Legislation of November 1926 the Livorno branches of the Italian Anarchist Union (UAI) and the Labour Chamber of the USI (Italian Syndicalist Union) remained active.

Only when they were assured of the unconditional assistance of the machinery of state were the fascists able to get the better of the anarchist opposition: as early as September 1926, at the end of an all-embracing meeting designed to organise aid to antifascist prisoners, nearly all of the membership of the UAI was arrested, and with the introduction of new legislation what few remained at large were kept under close surveillance and hauled off to jail from time to time for pre-emptive reasons.

But the regime did not have it all its own way: not even during its 20 year rule. Leaflets attacking fascism or marking the anniversaries of the Commune or May Day or in opposition to the war in Ethiopia continued to be printed clandestinely and were circulated among the workers, while plentiful graffiti on the walls bore witness to the fact that the regime's consensus was far from unanimous.

But antifascist opposition showed itself more spectacularly as in the turn-out for the funeral of the socialist Capocchi and the communist Camici whose lives were ended by fascism: or the sabotaging of the launching of the cruiser Trento at the Naval Dockyards and the bomb attacks mounted by anarchists against the Militia barracks and Fascist Party premises.

Many Livorno anarchists participated in the Spanish Civil War, as did Armano Bientines, Lanciotto Corsi, Arrigo Catani, Enzo Fantozzi, Egidio Fossi and Guglielmo Nannucci, who served with CNT-FAI combat units.

After the outbreak of the second world war, contacts were re-established between the anarchists in the city and those in different areas like Florence, Genoa, Milan and Bologna, and even before 25 July 1943, the anarchists were stockpiling their own weaponry.

After 8 September, whilst the people's fury erupted against fascist personnel and the symbols of fascism, anarchists led by Virgilio Antonelli, along with two communists and the republican Ramaciotti, set about the confiscation of machine-guns, bombs, sub-machine guns and even a small calibre piece of artillery (part of the coastal defences) removing it to a cache near L'Ardenza. Even the barracks of the X-MAS in Ardenza was 'cleaned out'.

On the morning of the next day, some army units mustered on the Aurelia, ready to block it off. The populace gave a warm welcome to these troops who were ready to take on the Germans, whilst some members of the Antifascist Concentration oversaw the action of armed antifascists.

Some German trucks were stopped and some troops taken prisoner. In the afternoon, again in L'Ardenza, there was a gun-battle involving some civilians while, along the sea-front, a German armed truck came under fire from the captured artillery piece and was set on fire, with the death of two of the crew.

The absence of organisation and the disintegration of the army units however were defects that could not be made good by heroism alone and by 10 September the Germans were militarily in control of the city.

Meanwhile the barracks had been swamped by the people who emptied their arsenals: antifascists set about recovering fresh weapons. This led to the outbreak of a real partisan war of resistance after 3 or 4 days. The first National Liberation Committee (CLN), heir to the earlier 'Inter-party Committees' was nonpartisan and a genuine expression of the antifascism of the people of Livorno. Its make-up reflected the city's 19th century traditions, and was very different from that of the central CLN. It comprised communists, anarchists from the Libertarian Communist Federation – FCL (like Virgilio Antonelli and Giovanni Biagini), republicans and

social-christians. Towards the end, the Action Party also joined it: whereas the Liberal Party and Christian Democrats, who were in any case politically insignificant, only joined at the liberation. ⁽⁴⁾

In view of the dire circumstances in which Livorno had come to find itself on account of the continual indiscriminate air-raids ⁽⁵⁾ that had led to the almost total evacuation of the population and the dismantling of most industries, the organisation of strong urban corps of Partisan Action Squads (SAP), like the ones elsewhere was not feasible in Livorno.

The decision of the German command to install a so-called 'black zone' in the heart of Livorno, and the subsequent obligatory expulsion of all the residents, represented the final obstacle to the organisation of resistance. Consequently, only in outlying districts like Ardenza, Antignano, Colline, Salviano and Montenero where a fair number of Livorno residents had taken refuge was it possible to set up a discreet military apparatus with the establishment of SAP and some GAP squads.

Later many of those organised flooded into the Castellaccio 'Area Command' to be passed on to the partisan organisations in the province and in the Maremma, and in part they came to make up the complement of the No.10 'Oberdan Chiesa' detachment.

It was not unimaginable that the Castellaccio Command, maintained since September 1943 by a few armed GAP personnel and which had been removed there because it had been 'blown' by the Republican (Fascist) Police would cease to operate as a marshalling-point to become, first, a detachment operating independently and shortly thereafter, in view of its growing strength, assume the status of a Brigade (3rd Garibaldi Brigade, the 'Oberdan Chiesa'). But despite the fact that the area was geographically unsuited to guerrilla warfare (being unwooded terrain criss-crossed by passable roads) and the extremely grave problems with provisions, the detachment, which boasted a rather original tactical/organisational structure, grew to assume the proportions of a brigade of 130 men, 50% of them armed with automatic weapons and shotguns while the rest had rifles. The Brigade covered the 'Quarata' area between Nibbaia and Chioma and held sway over the intervening plateau right up until 19 July 1944. Also operational in the Livorno area and its surrounds were the 3rd 'Val de Cecina' Garibaldi Brigade and the 3rd 'Val de Cornia' Garibaldi Brigade. All three units could together field upwards of 700 partisans and had 700 SAP personnel used for various missions and dangerous operations in the towns. Altogether these three units gave rise to the Livorno Garibaldi Division, called after Lanciotto Gherardi (an anarchist partisan killed in action) attached to the CLN of Livorno and province.

From the outset, the 'Oberdan Chiesa' stood out on account of its structure and its unmistakable revolutionary political complexion. Aside from the anarchist presence in its ranks, it was made up primarily of communists, the vast majority of whom in Livorno were still followers of Bordiga. It was no accident that two officers from the army that was stood down after 8 September 1943 quit the unit shortly after they had been admitted to it on account of their inability to accommodate themselves to the revolutionary ethos which prevailed there, quite unlike the climate in the barracks that they were used to. But quite apart from their contribution to the antifascist armed struggle the anarchists were at this time protagonists of other, no less heroic actions. Indeed on the instigation of some anarchists, including Bientinesi and Antonelli, a burned Australian pilot who had parachuted out of his crippled aircraft was taken to safety.

Defying, under cover of darkness, the German patrols that were searching for him, and in collaboration with some communists from the area, the anarchists managed to keep him safe from the Germans and then to hand him over to a partisan band in the Gabbro area, with whom he stayed even after his recovery, until the Americans showed up.

But perhaps the most spectacular feat was the freeing of 32 hostages, which the anarchists accomplished unaided. These were a group of Livorno people, (who included the anarchists Arrigo Catani and Mario Batini) who had been rounded up by the Germans and taken to Bologna to work on military installations. Their release was secured by Virgilio Antonelli and Giovanni Biagini and Romolo and Egisto Antonelli and Biagini's sister and female cousin were also involved.

The first to be freed was Arrigo Catani who had been taken to the German Area Command. Virgilio Antonelli walked in, while the other comrades waited outside for him, and informed the Germans that the Command was surrounded: and that they had five minutes to release the prisoner. This bluff worked and, little by little all the other hostages were helped to get away ⁽⁶⁾ thanks to the help supplied by some Bologna-based anarchists and communists. Also the latter helped in the escape of deportees from Bologna railway station while en route to Germany.

In the course of similar operations in Lucca and thereabouts, the anarchists Nello Malacarne from Livorno (freed at the end of the war) and Libero Mariotti from Pietrasanto (freed in Piacenza, just as he was about to be shot, thanks to a prisoner-of-war swap forced upon the Germans by the anarchist partisan commander Emilio Canzi) were captured.

When the 'Allies' arrived, Livorno was in ruins: the anarchists promptly set to work and began to lay the first social services – theirs was the first transport service

– and helped revive the port, the glassworks and the dockyards under the supervision of Management Committees.

But Livorno's anarchists also set about the elimination of fascist criminals and collaborationists and when the American order to surrender all weapons came, they refused at all times to comply, just as in the ensuing years they refused to abandon the revolutionary initiative and organised their own Federation, taking an active part in the life of the Italian Anarchist Federation (FAI) to date.

Livorno Editorial Centre. Historical research by Marco Rossi.
Umanita Nova, 22 September 1983.

NOTES:

1. The Interior Ministry's 'Order for the Supervision of Public Order' (8 August 1922) transferred civil powers to the military Authorities in the provinces of Milan, Genoa, Ancona, Livorno and Parma.

2. This episode, which socialist and communist 'historians' persist on ignoring, was confirmed by Livorno anarchist Virgilio Antonelli, recently deceased. On that occasion he met with Amadeo Bordiga whom he was to happen upon again years later while interned.

3. Not all Livorno anarchists belonged to the *Arditi del Popolo*: according to a report from the Prefect in July 1921, the membership, divided into squads, numbered 800 and about 90 were anarchists who made up the 3rd Squadron, led by Augusto Consani.

4. This sort of opportunism and the role that these political forces assumed as refuges for those who had nothing in common with the Resistance, created among anarchists and communists a harsh backlash that culminated on 27 November 1945 following the collapse of the Resistance-based Parri government – a collapse contrived by the Christian Democrats and Liberals. At the end of a general strike called by the local trades council, the Liberal Party's headquarters in the Piazza Cavour were attacked and wrecked.

5. During the war, Livorno was among Italy's most bombed cities. Apart from those raids made between 2 June and 2 October 1944 (concerning which no records are available) the French, British, Americans or Germans between them carried out 76 heavy raids, 24 light raids and 24 incendiary raids.

6. Originally there had been 35 hostages, but 3 who attempted to escape unaided were caught and shot.

GINO LUCETTI AND THE ATTEMPT ON MUSSOLINI'S LIFE

Anybody who maintains that wherever in Italy there are anarchists there are republicans as well (on account of their common individualist, libertarian roots) has a telling example in Avenza. Although very different from Menconi, his countryman, contemporary and friend, the anarchist Gino Lucetti, with his very individualistic outlook is the other outstanding figure of local antifascism, and not just local.

Many of those who knew him remember him continually in thought, with a book under his arm, strolling along the riverbank. Of working-class background, he was virtually self-taught and on the basis of this self-procured education he took part in the political struggles of the 1920's, confronting the fascists on many occasions.

In one skirmish, rougher than the usual, in the popular 'Napoleon Cafe' he was wounded in the neck by a shot from a pistol following an exchange of shots with a fascist (one Perfetti) who was shot in the ear. He went to ground near Montignoso, unable to find a doctor prepared to remove the bullet. After a few days he was smuggled aboard ship for France where he was finally given treatment.

There he schemed the attempt on Mussolini's life that was to make him famous: albeit hard up (an unsuspecting countryman of his, Lina Squassoni, who lived in Aubagne near Marseilles, lent him the money for the trip) he returned to Italy and Rome there to make his attempt on the Duce's life on 11 September 1926.

He loitered near the Porta Pia waiting for the Duce to pass by: when the famous Lancia carrying Benito Mussolini drew near, Lucetti hurled a bomb of the SIDE type which smashed against the windscreen. But it failed to explode, bounced onto the running board and only exploded when it was some metres away on the pavement.

In the ensuing confusion, Lucetti sheltered in the doorway at No. 13, Via Nomentana, but the Duce's police bodyguards soon caught up with him, kicking and punching him: they found him in possession of a second bomb of the same make, a handgun with six dum dum bullets poisoned with muriatic acid, and a dagger.

At police headquarters, under ferocious questioning, he let it be known that his name was Ermete Giovanni, from Castelnuovo Garfagnana. On account of this phony story, he led the regime a merry dance, as a result of which their enquiries focused solely upon uncovering the leaders of the conspiracy of which he was allegedly part, in Garfagnana and nowhere else! Road blocks were thrown up and dozens of people arrested: when Lucetti at last gave his true particulars the whole investigation was shown up as ridiculous.

At the end of his trial in 1927, he was sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment. Two others, held to have been his accomplices, Leandro Sorio and his countryman Stefano Vatteroni were sentenced to 20 years and 19 years 9 months respectively.

Lucetti was lodged in the Santo Stefano prison where he spent nearly 17 years before being moved to Ischia where he died on 15 September 1943, according to some sources in a US air raid. Others claim (and among them was Mauro Cacurna who went to recover the body and picked up information on the spot) that the shells that killed him had been fired by the Germans who were still in occupation of Procida, nearby.

Let it be noted for the record that some years ago L'Unita carried a piece in which it was claimed on the basis of testimony by one of Lucetti's fellow inmates that Gino Lucetti had become a communist in his later years. But Carrara anarchists adamantly deny this and are supported by the testimony of Lucetti's brother and his fiancée who visited him right up to the end.

So much for the overall story, drawn from a variety of writings and evidence. But on the basis of statements made to this writer by Ugo Mazzuchelli of Carrara, on the basis of statements made to him in turn by Stefano Vatteroni interesting details can be added.

Let us say first of all that the assassination plan was hatched in the climate of antifascist Italian exile circles in the south of France... not just anarchists but also members of the '*Giustizia e Libertà*' groups of the Action Party and others, of differing persuasions but all convinced of the need to eliminate the fascist leader physically.

This helps give the plan hatched by Lucetti connotations different from other anarchist actions, such as the attempt by Gaetano Bresci on the life of King Umberto; in this instance the urge to kill Mussolini was the expression of a convergence of opinion among other popularly representative political groupings regarding what was commonly perceived as a necessity at that point in time: thus the method also differs in some respects from the individualist spirit in which other anarchist assassinations had been carried out before that.

In fact, though in exile, Lucetti never lost contact with his comrades in Carrara and twice returned for clandestine meetings with them. Another meeting, at which the assassination was decided upon, was held in Livorno, obviously in maximum secrecy, aboard a ship at sea. Mazzuchelli escorted Lucetti as far as Genoa before Lucetti went back to France to tidy up the loose ends with the comrades in exile. There he organised as best he could and upon arrival in Rome called upon the back-up of comrade Stefano Vatteroni who was working in the capital as a tinsmith.

In point of fact Vatteroni's role in the organising of the attack was crucial; indeed Vatteroni, capitalising upon his friendship with the secretary of Mussolini's library, a former colleague of his, supplied all the essential details right down to the route that the Duce's car would be following on 11 September. Errico Malatesta, briefed about the plan, gave it his endorsement.

Vatteroni made considerable sacrifices, albeit telling nobody on account of his typical modesty, and he went so far as to sell a plot of land belonging to his mother in Avenza to finance what was being organised.

He also saw to the question of logistical support and came to an arrangement with the Reggio anarchist Leandro Sorio, a waiter at an inn where the owner was also in cahoots with the group, so much so that he even offered to put up the money to get them out of the country following the attack. Vatteroni, however, declined the offer, because the organisers had agreed among themselves that everyone was to let himself be arrested so as to stand trial.. extreme proof of the anarchists' solidarity and determination. Gino Bibbi, another Arenza antifascist whose house the fascists wrecked and whose motorcycle they set on fire was supposedly to have been part of the team also.

Following the sentencing at the end of the trial, Vatteroni served the first three years of his time in complete isolation and the only company allowed him was that of a sparrow which visited his cell.

Out of this testimony emerges the portrait of a fighter for freedom whom official historians have slighted and whom Carrara anarchists sought to honour alongside the great anarchists from the area... Lucetti, Meschi, and the Milanese Giuseppe Pinelli in whom the comrades saw one who carried on the fight for freedom and truth, as is clear from the verses by Edgar Lee Masters placed on his monument.

Pietro de Piero (*Umanita Nova* 26.10.1986)

TURIN 1930: THE ANARCHISTS, THE UNEMPLOYED & THE STATE

In 1930 the Great Depression was having a tragic impact on Italy. In the city of Turin alone the number of unemployed quickly soared from 13,000 in January, to 20,000 by November and 25,000 by December.⁽¹⁾

On 26 July *Il Risveglio Anarchico* of Geneva carried a letter from Turin signed 'Germinal' (Cesare Sobrito).

"The mass sackings continue at FIAT and other establishments. Itala has shut down and Ansaldo shut down last Saturday. Hours have been cut in all the offices, wages are forever shrinking whereas the cost of living is still rising. As of 1 July rents have gone up also. The more upright (landlords) have made do with an increase to six times the pre-war figures."⁽²⁾

At FIAT, sackings and the introduction of piece-rates with the Bedaux System (with its heavy depressive effects on wages) sparked sporadic, spontaneous protests which sometimes resulted in workshop closures, go-slows or even assaults on foremen.⁽³⁾ There were protests elsewhere in the country also. These episodes were fated to remain isolated but they created great expectations among antifascists. It looked as if the flames of revolt were sweeping Italy, ready to erupt at any moment.

In Paris, a special issue of *Lotta Anarchica* for smuggling into Italy was prepared for the presses. It was of small format, on tissue paper.⁽⁴⁾ In Turin too there were signs of an organisational revival and the police were on its trail with a vast array of spies and informers.

On 30 April 1930, Inspector Membrini was able to report that he had managed to plant a nark among the anarchists⁽⁵⁾ and on 4 August a report from the Political Police Division spelled out the findings of their enquiries. According to the fascist police there were three groups in Turin, named '*Barriera di Nizza*', '*Barriera di Milano*' and '*Campidoglio*'; their activities, though, seemed slight; confined for the most part to keeping up contacts between members through minor propaganda activities. Whereas no information was forthcoming about the '*Campidoglio*' group which apparently escaped the infiltration drive, the report spoke at length about the make-up of the other two groups.

THE 'BARRIERA DI NIZZA' GROUP

Belonging to this group were... Cesare Sobrito... "an individual much talked of in the circles in which he moves, since he has been active in anarchist circles for years... he is in touch with the well-known anarchist Luigi Bertoni in Geneva and

periodically sends correspondence under the pen-name of 'Germinal' to the libertarian papers *Il Risveglio* in Geneva and New York's *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*."

Emilio Bernasconi, an individual... "truly dangerous and capable of reckless acts... has already been sentenced to 10 years and 8 months imprisonment plus 2 years surveillance... (on 10 May 1921) for the crimes of robbery, attempted murder and illegal possession of weapons... a fervent anarchist... rabid opponent of the regime."

Michele Guasco... "of pronounced anarchist sympathies, a shrewd, untrustworthy person. As a street-hawker, he tours the province engaging in petty propaganda and takes care to keep up liaison with trusted comrades, to collect news damaging to the regime and, as the need arises, to assist with illegal departures from the country."

Eugenio Martinelli... "described by anarchists themselves as a trustworthy and dependable comrade..."

Michele Candela... "who allegedly sees to the distribution of subsidies to the families of political prisoners." And Vittorio Levis.

THE 'BARRIERA DI MILANO' GROUP

The 'Barriera di Milano' group was made up of Tuscan immigrants... "who have quit their native soil so as to escape possible police measures, in that they are known as subversives."

Among the group were... Settimo Guerrieri, labelled as their 'boss' and the active organiser of unlawful departures from the country. There were also Dario Franci, Arduilio D'Angina, Dante Armanetti, the Giacomelli brothers, Mario Carpini and the brothers Muzio and Vindice Tosi. In order to keep in touch, the report went on... "they used to use as liaison a female newsagent with a stand in the Corso Dante on the corner with the Corso D'Azeglio... whenever anarchists pass by her kiosk, this woman, as agreed, alerts them to the whereabouts of their friends... One place where the aforementioned anarchists frequently gather is a sweet factory at No.6 Vicolo S. Maria, run by... Mario Carpini."

There were contacts between the two groups named above and a group set up in Lyons by exile Tuscan anarchists like Giovanni Saroglia, Alvaro Pietrucci, Luigi Ravenna, Gemisto Vallesi, Mario Garello, Tito Salvatori, Marcello Basso, Marino Risolo, Socrate Franchi and Giovanni Maneozzi. Such contacts were of necessity hit-and-miss, in view of communications problems.

DISCONTENT GROWS

In the ensuing months, as the sackings spread, so the anarchist movement became more active: in September 1930 there arrived from Paris an envoy sent, according to Inspector Membrini, by the “central committee” (sic!), following which a committee was formed comprising Guerrieri, Armanetti, Guasco, Muzio Tosi and others; it aimed “to capitalise upon the economic disarray created by unemployment among the workers to exploit any possible demonstration and indeed, if the chance presented itself, to organise one so as to ensure outbreaks of violence and to create disturbances... the aforementioned committee reckoned that in Turin it could rely upon the possible connivance of around 120 supporters.” Its meetings were held in No.13 in the Via Montenero, at the premises of the ‘foundry workers’ mutual association’, of which Arduilio D’Angina was vice-chairman.

THE BIG NOVEMBER DEMONSTRATIONS

The situation seemed to have come to a head on 24 November: for four successive days there were protest demonstrations by the unemployed. Here is the account given by ‘Germinal’ in the report published in the 13 December issue of *Il Risveglio Anarchico*:

“The grave unemployment crisis has begun to bear fruit. The recent shut-down of certain plants, including Ansaldo and Spiga, as well as numerous other dismissals have only swelled the ranks of the jobless even further, triggering numerous incidents.

“A substantial number of unemployed, tired of pointlessly queuing for whole days outside the employment offices in the hall of the Camera del Lavoro, flooded into the Piazza Castello where they mounted a demonstration outside Police Headquarters.

“Carabinieri and police rushed to the scene and dispersed the demonstrators who spilled down side-streets shouting: bread and work!

“Another attempt to march directly on the city centre was broken up in the Via Pietro Micca by numerous police with revolvers at the ready. Meanwhile many carabinieri dispatched with lorries seized the strategic positions in the centre of the city, forcing citizens to keep on the move.

“Some demonstrators tried to free several arrested persons who had been taken to the Via Giannone police station.

“Two or three fascists who happened to be in the area were manhandled and roughly thrashed until the demonstrators scattered upon the arrival of reinforcements. We have learnt that at several points on the outskirts, and especially in the Milano and San Paolo districts, three trucks from the Cooperative Alliance that were

transporting foodstuffs to various districts, were attacked by the unemployed who had been joined by women, and they looted what they could.

“In the Nizza district some sacked Spiga workers, upon seeing the plant manager arrive, set upon him and smashed all the windows of his car.

“This morning (27 November) a procession of nearly 2000 demonstrators formed up in the environs of the old Camera del Lavorno, filing along the Corso Galileo Ferraris towards the city centre.

“Dispersed by police upon reaching the Corso Vittorio Emanuele, the demonstrators nonetheless reached the Via Roma where the procession reformed to cries of ‘bread and work!’

“When it arrived in the Piazza S. Carlo, where police headquarters is located, numerous police charged with unparalleled viciousness using batons and sabres, forcing the demonstrators to disperse. Many arrests were made. The impression made in the city was tremendous. Seriously worried, the authorities have taken extreme security measures. Day and night, patrols of carabinieri and police criss-cross the city...”

THE REACTION

The eruption of the wrath of Turin’s jobless was short-lived, however, and instead of ushering in the anticipated revolution, it remained an isolated episode. The agitation was confined to the unemployed only and failed to penetrate any of the factories. The authorities stepped in with the usual carrot and stick approach: they handed out food and subsidies to placate and divide the jobless while attempting to force immigrants to go back home and carrying out swoops in ‘subversive’ circles in order to neutralise all possible agitations.

The hammer also fell on the anarchist movement, with arrests being made and persons banished; this broke up the movement.

It was not the end for Turin anarchism, however: in the middle of 1938 police uncovered an underground group, led by the brothers Ilio and Giuseppe Baroni and involving Giuseppe Russo, Mario Neggia, Eugenio Botto, Antonio Garino, Spartaco Bastoni, Carlo Caccolato, Giuseppe Bollin, Giovanni Gracela and others. The group was organising illegal departures from the country (including some for militants bound for Spain to take part in the fight), distributing aid to political prisoners and engaging in propaganda.⁽⁶⁾ Later, during the resistance, the anarchists took an active part in the partisan war and among the most active militants we find Ilio Baroni,

Dante Armanetti, Antonio Garino and Italo Garinei... Baroni was killed on 26 April 1945 during the fighting to liberate the city.⁽⁷⁾

Mauro De Agostini.

NOTES:

(1) See G. Sapelli, *Fascismo, grande industria e sindacato: il caso di Torino 1929 – 1935*, Milan, Petrinelli, 1977, pp223-224.

(2) Other correspondence from Turin and signed ‘Germinal’ appeared in the same paper in issues No.741 (1928), 767 (1929), 768 (1929), 791 (8 March 1930), 795 (1 May 1930), 801 (quoted), 803 (23 August 1930), and 811 (13 December 1930).

(3) See D. Bigazzi Gli opera della catena di montaggio: la FIAT, in *La classe operai durante il fascismo*, Annali Feltrinelli, 1979-80, pp.934-935.

(4) L. Bettini, *Bibliografica del anarchismo Vol 1., tome 2 Periodici e numeri unici anarchici in lingua italiana pubblicati all estero (1872-1971)*, Florence, CP, 1976, pp.130-131.

(5) The police reports quoted are in the Central State Archives (Rome). Letters from the Interior Ministry, General Directorate of Public Security, General and Confidential Affairs Division, section one, year 1930-1931, Case 24, Turin folio.

(6) Above mentioned archival sources, year 1938, case 23, Turin folio.

(7) *Un trentennio di attivita anarchica (1914-1945)*, Casena, Antistato, 1953.

ANARCHIST ACTIVITY IN ITALY IN THE 1939-1945 PERIOD

UNDER THE FASCIST STATE

Umberto Marzocchi, Camillo Berneri, Enzo Fantozzi, Virgilio Gozzoli, Rivoluzio Giglioli, Leonida Mastrodicasa, Umberto Tommasini, Mario Mantovani... just a few of the better known militants who attended a symposium of Italian anarchist emigres from France, Belgium and Switzerland held in Paris in October 1935. The resolutions passed and the reports read at the gathering are undoubtedly of the utmost interest to any wishing to learn of the choices made by the Italian anarchist movement in the ensuing decade and indeed in the postwar years. The agenda (unanimously endorsed) discarded the possibility, considered by other antifascist groupings, of bringing down the dictatorship by playing upon the regime's internal contradictions and disagreements. Moreover the decision was made to establish an 'Anarchist Committee for Revolutionary Action' with the task of co-ordinating contacts in Italy and among exiles, not least through a clandestine 'press agency'. The reports submitted to the 1935 symposium also looked into the problems inherent in the insurrectional stage, with an eye to a possible 'free compact' with Syndicalists, *Giustizia e Libertad* and Republicans; and at the tasks of reconstruction in the period following the insurrection. All with the declared intention of "destroying the machinery of the fascist state and ensuring that no government of demo-social-liberal restoration or Bolshevik gains a foothold tomorrow, behind the back of some pseudo-revolutionary provisional government." The path to follow was still the pursuit of a free federation of anarchist communities.

After "Anarchy's short summer" in Spain, in which Italian militants featured prominently, came the trauma of world war. The period of the first few months of war was more than enough to expose the hollowness of Mussolini's bragging and of the so-called blitzkrieg. In Africa and in Greece, Italian troops had to be buttressed by the militarily more efficient Germans. War propaganda based on falsehoods and designed to disguise the toll being paid in lives by the ordinary people, as well as complete military failure, no longer cut much ice with Italian public opinion. Indeed it may be said that by late 1940/ early 1941, the political and social situation in Italy was becoming less controlled and less controllable by the fascist regime, much to its annoyance.

Thus it was against the background of such distress that the anarchist movement set about re-establishing links by means of clandestine reunions. One of the most important of these was held as early as June 1942 at Sestri Fonte (Genoa) under

the aegis of Emilio Grassini. It proved the occasion to restate some of the issues tackled earlier at the Paris convention some seven years previously, but which were now more pressing matters: above all there was the question of alliances with other antifascist parties. The document that resulted from the Sestri Fionte meeting anticipated that there would be two stages to the revolutionary struggle: the first against fascism, the 'number one target', to be routed "piecemeal, with weapons in hand, alongside elements whose goals are at odds with ours or are undefined": the second stage, once fascism had been toppled would be against those antifascist currents "eager to rescue capital and take the reins of the State into their own hands".

Already, with Italy's entry into the war, the numbers of political internees on the islands of Fonza, Tremiti but above all Ventotene had swollen immeasurably: these islands were quarantine areas for anarchists, catering partly for those who had come through French concentration camps: Ventotene was thus swamped by nearly 800 internees and the anarchists were the second largest political persuasion among these. Despite the harsh living conditions imposed on the prisoners, not least on account of the irregular issue of water and food brought over from the mainland, they did at least enjoy a bare 'freedom' to mix. At many of their meetings there was a discernible air of anticipation, due to the widespread view that the war had exacerbated the regime's difficulties. Of fundamental importance was the document drawn up by the assembled antifascist internees on Ventotene... "after several meetings in which comrades from every region in Italy, organisationists and anti-organisationists, participated." In that document, note having been made of the repressive circumstances facing the movement as well as of experiences gained and of the damage done by internecine squabbling among the comrades, militants were urged to get involved in the unions so as to spread the word about the libertarian council-based order and steer the labouring masses towards the revolutionary struggle.

Fascism collapsed on 25th July 1943, and the Badoglio government was set up. In point of fact the proclaimed abolition of internment on Ventotene was only partly implemented. Those released came primarily from antifascists affiliated to the more moderate political sectors, followed by the communists and the socialists once their respective representatives, Roveda and Buozzi had been co-opted by Marshal Badoglio. As far as the anarchists were concerned (180 interned anarchists remained) they were deported to the concentration camp at Rencicci d'Angliari (Arezzo) where many Slavs were already confined. There were many attempts to escape during the transfer journey by ship and train, but most failed. Harsh living conditions in camp and Italy's military surrender on 8th September, which opened the prospect of the imminent arrival of the Germans, prompted the prisoners to attempt a violent revolt

aimed at securing their freedom. Among those most active in the revolt was Alfonso Failla, who was wounded when bayoneted by a carabinieri. Most of the internees thus managed to break free, making their way back to their areas of origin or joining up in surrounding areas with their own comrades already committed to establishing partisan groups. “That group of comrades,” – Failla himself tells us... “split up, each one heading off in a different direction, taking the path whereby, in life or in death they left their mark upon the story of the struggle for liberation.”

IN THE PARTISAN STRUGGLE

Twenty years of fascist dictatorship which, perhaps deliberately, labelled any sort of opposition as ‘communist’, exile, imprisonment and not least the quite special treatment that the post-fascist Badoglio government reserved for them certainly helped make any immediate rebuilding of the organisational ranks of the anarchist movement all the more difficult. It was in this especial context, marked by confusion and disorientation, that there took place a far from negligible haemorrhaging of some libertarians in the direction of the Action Party, the Socialist Party and sometimes the Communist Party. At the same time anarchist participation in the partisan struggle was conspicuous, especially in terms of blood shed, but it also exercised little influence. This because of the complete hegemony of the democratic spectrum ranging across an arc of political groupings from liberals through to communists. Following 8 September 1943 anarchists threw themselves into the armed struggle, establishing where possible (Carrera, Pistoia, Genoa and Milan) autonomous formations, or, as was the case in most instances, joining other formations (the socialist ‘Matteotti’ brigades, the communist ‘Garibaldi’ brigades, the ‘*Giustizia e Libertà*’ units of the Action Party). The resistance developed in those areas of central and northern Italy which had remained in the hands of the Germans and of the fascist Salò Republic.

In Rome, anarchists were to be found in several resistance formations, especially the one commanded by the republican Vincenzo Baldazzi who was well known to comrades as an old friend of Malatesta. In many cases they gave their lives in the Roman resistance. Among such were Aldo Eluisi, who perished in the Andentine Caves; Rizieri Fantini, shot in Fonte Bravetta; Alberto Di Giacomo alias ‘Moro,’ and Giovanni Callintella, both of whom were deported to Germany, never to return; Dore, a Sardinian by birth, perished in a mission behind the lines.

In the Marche anarchists served in several partisan formations in Ancona, Fermo, Sassoferrato and Macera (where Alfonso Pettinari, ex-internee and political commissar of a ‘Garibaldi’ brigade, met his death).

Piombino, a steel town with a great libertarian tradition and a tradition above all of revolutionary syndicalism, was behind a popular uprising against the Nazi-fascists on 10 September 1943: among several of our comrades who took part in the uprising, Adriano Vanni, who operated as a partisan in the Maremma and who was called upon to join the local CLN (National Liberation Committee, a body made up of a spectrum of anti-fascist parties) stands out.

In Livorno, anarchists were among the first to seize the arms stored in the barracks and in the Antignano Naval Academy – arms used later against the Germans and the fascists. Organised inside the GAP (Patriotic Action Groups), they took part in guerrilla operations in the area surrounding Pisa and Livorno and were represented in the city's CLN. Virgilio Antonelli distinguished himself in the task of liberating hostages and prisoners.

In Apua, the libertarian contribution to the resistance was consistent as well as crucial. The anarchist partisan formations active in the Carrara area went by the names 'G. Lucetti' (60-80 persons), 'Lucetti bis' (58 strong), 'M. Schirru' (454 strong), 'Garibaldi Lunense' and 'Elio' (30 strong). After 8 September, anarchists (including Romualdo Del Papa, Galeotti and Pelliccia) led the attack on the Dogali barracks, seizing the weaponry and urging the Alpine troops to desert and join the partisan campaign. In the nearby Lorano Caves, Ugo Mazzuchelli used these weapons to set up the 'G. Lucetti' formation of which he became commander: in the context of the Appian Brigade, its task was to see to its own funding and to help the populace in obtaining provisions by means of properly accounted for expropriations. Having gone through the bitter experience of Spain, the most 'experienced' comrades were rightly mistrustful of communist units which in any event featured in episodes bordering on impropriety. But it should be emphasised that the presence of libertarians and anarchists was discernible in virtually every formation, wherever they did not have a unit specifically their own, under one set of initials or another. Among the incidents of 'discourtesy' we might mention the one that had Mazzuchelli and his men coming within an ace of death under machine-gun fire after they had been ready to lead the way across the Casette bridge, as the communist partisans had been curiously insistent that they should. In November 1944, following a sweep that cost it the lives of six men, the 'G. Lucetti' unit moved into the province of Lucca, which had by then been liberated. Mazzuchelli, along with his sons Carlo and Alvaro then crossed the front lines again to set up the 'Michele Schirru' unit which helped liberate Carrara before the Allies showed up. Among the many who distinguished themselves and whose names make up a list that we do not have the room here to catalogue were commandant Elio Wochiacevich, Venturini Perissino and Renato Machiarini. The

blood-price paid by the people of Carrara was a high one: the anarchists managed to stamp the seal of social struggle upon the armed struggle for freedom and this endured for years after the liberation, with the co-operatives like the 'Del Partigiano' (consumer coop), the Lucetti (rebuilding co-op) and several undertakings of a social nature (e.g. profit-sharing farming, teams of volunteers to work on the river channels, etc.)

In Lucca and in Garfagnano, in whose mountains comrades from Pistoia and Livorno also operated (like Peruzzi, Paoleschi, etc.) the anarchists were to be found in the autonomous unit commanded by Pippo (Manrico Dicheschi). The province's CLN had been founded by comrade Federico Peccianti in whose home it held its meetings. Pippo's unit captured a good 8000 Nazi-fascist prisoners and sustained 300 losses. Libero Mariotti from Pietrasanta and Nello Malacarne from Livorno spent a long time behind bars in the San Giorgio prison in Lucca. Among the best known comrades down there were Luigi Velani, adjutant-major of the Pippo formation, Ferruccio Arrighi and Vittorio Giovanetti, the last two in charge of overseeing contacts between the antifascist forces in the city.

Pistoia was the theatre of operations of the 'Silvano Fedi' anarchist unit, made up of 53 partisans who especially distinguished themselves in rendering assistance to displaced persons. An initial resistance group had been formed thanks to the work of Egisto and Minos Gori, Tito and Mario Eschini, Tiziano Palandri, Silvano Fedi and others; it performed a variety of missions which included procurement of weapons for other resistance units and the release of prisoners. The figure of its young commander, Silvano Fedi, was legendary: he perished in an ambush, (the circumstances are obscure) laid by Italians, as Enzo Capecchi who was there at the time has testified. (Capecchi was then commander before being wounded). The Fedi unit, under Artese Benesperri was the first one to enter Pistoia at the liberation.

In Florence, where Latini, Boccone and Puzzoli had earlier published a first, clandestine issue of '*Umanita Nova*' the first armed band was formed on Monte Morello under the command of the anarchist Lanciotto Ballerini, who died in action. Official historians have rightly portrayed Lanciotto Ballerini as a hero but have 'forgotten' to mention he was an anarchist. Among others who perished in the fighting were, Gino Manetti and Oreste Ristori, both shot: Ristori, from Empoli, had earlier been active as an emigrant in Brazil and Argentina before fighting in Spain.

In the province of Arezzo the anarchists were especially active in the resistance in the Valdarno, in view of the rich antifascist tradition and tradition of social struggle in that area. The miner, Osvaldo Bianchi was part of the CLN in San Giovanni Valdarno, as a representative of the Anarchist Groups: furthermore, Renato Sarri

from Figline and Italo Grofoni, the latter in charge of explosive supply for the Tuscan CLN in Florence, distinguished themselves. Later a crucial contribution was made by Guiseppe Livi from Angliari who was active in the 'Outlying Bands' that operated in Vultiberina and who helped unmask a German spy who had infiltrated the partisans of Florence... and just in time.

In Ravenna, many anarchists fought in the 28th Garibaldi Brigade. Among the best known of them were Primo Bertolazi, (a member of the provincial CLN), Guglielmo Bartolini, Pasquale Orselli (who commanded the first partisan patrol to enter liberated Ravenna), Giovanni Melandri, (in charge of arms and food supply, and the victim, along with one of his daughters, of a German reprisal).

In Bologna and Modena province the following were especially active... Primo Bassi from Imola, Vindice Rabitti, Ulisse Merli, Aladino Benetti and Atilio Diolaiti. Diolaiti, shot in 1944 in the Carthusian monastery in Bologna had had an active part in the foundation of the first partisan brigades in Imola, the 'Bianconcini' and in Bologna, the 'Fratelli Bandiera' and 7th GAP units. In liberated Modena, the very young Goliardo Fiaschi marched at the head of the 3rd 'Costrignano' Brigade of the 'Modena' Division, commanded by 'Aramano' In Reggio Emilia, Enrico Zambonini, who had been active in the Appenines around Villa Minozzo, was shot after being captured along with the group of Don Paquino Borghi: he died shouting 'Long live Anarchy!' at the firing squad.

In Piacenza, prominent among others were the anarchists Savino Fornasari and Emilio Canzi who are linked, apart from anything else, by their all too curious deaths in road accidents. Emilio Canzi had earlier fought fascism back in 1920 in the ranks of the *Arditi del Popolo* and later in Spain: he had been captured by the Germans in France and then deported to Germany and then interned in Italy. After 8 September 1943, he organised the first partisan bands. Captured by the fascist Black Brigades, he was exchanged for other hostages. Resuming his post, he commanded 3 divisions and 22 brigades (a total of more than 10,000 men), with the rank of colonel and used the nom de guerre of Ezio Franchi.

The La Spezia-Sarzana units operated in close conjunction with those of neighbouring Carrara. Two partisan groups were commanded by the libertarians Contri and Del Carpio. The La Spezia anarchists, Renato Olivieri (who had earlier been for 23 years a political prisoner), and Renato Perini died during gunfights with the Nazi-fascists while covering a withdrawal by their own comrades.

In Genoa, anarchist combat groups operated under the names of the 'Pisacane' Brigade, the 'Malatesta' formation, the SAP-FCL, the Sestri Ponente SAP-FCL and the Arenzano Anarchist Action Squads. The attempt to set up a 'United Front' with

all antifascist forces failed due to the communists' attempts to impose their own hegemony. Furthermore, anarchists had their own representation only in the outlying CLN's and this obliged them to engage in the armed struggle while relying on their own devices. Activities were promoted by the Libertarian Communist Federation (FCL) and by the underground USI which had just resurfaced in the factories. The Genoese anarchists' blood sacrifice in the resistance was really substantial with several dozens killed in gun battles, shot or perished in concentration camps. Omitting many others, we recall among the most active of them: Grassini, Adelmo Sardini Pasticio and Antonio Pittaluga. Pittaluga died on the eve of liberation: before surrendering and being killed, and finding himself alone, he threw a hand grenade at the German patrol that captured him. Also, the anarchist partisan Isidoro Parodi died in neighbouring Savona.

In industrial Turin, especially at the FIAT plants, the anarchist unit that went by the name of the 33rd 'Pietro Ferrero' SAP Battalion operated. Among our fallen comrades was Dario Cagno, who was sentenced to death by firing squad for his involvement in the killing of a fascist; there was also Ilio Baroni, originally from Piombino. Comrade Ruju, a partisan with the 'De Vitis' Division, turned down the military medal of valour which the State later offered him to mark his capture of no less than 500 German soldiers.

In the Asti area and in the Cuneo area, anarchists had a presence in the Garibaldi Brigades: the best known of them was Giacomo Tartaglino who had previously been involved in the Spartakist movement in Bavaria in 1919. In the Vencelli district, among several anarchists who distinguished themselves with their courage and daring was Guiseppe Ruzza who served with the 'Valsesia' unit commanded by Moscatelli.

In Milan the threads of the clandestine struggle were taken up initially by Pietro Bruzzi who died after five days of torture, but without disclosing anything to the Nazi-fascists. After his death, anarchists founded the 'Malatesta' and 'Bruzzi' brigades, amounting to 1300 partisans: these operated under the aegis of the 'Matteotti' formation and played a primary role in the liberation of Milan. Commanded by Mario Mantovani during the 1945 uprising, the two brigades distinguished themselves by their various raids on fascist barracks and also by their aid to the general population. Among the very youngest comrades was Guiseppe Pinelli who served with the GAP.

In Pavia province operated the 2nd 'Errico Malatesta' Brigade led by Antonio Pietropaolo, who participated in the liberation of Milan. In Brescia, the anarchists were to be found in the mixed GL (*Giustizia e Liberta*) – Garibaldi formation: among the most active of them were Borolo Ballarini and Ettore Bonometti.

In Verona, the anarchist Giovanni Domaschi was founder of the National Liberation Committee (CLN). Arrested by the SS, he was tortured, had an ear cut off but refused to talk and so was deported to Germany where he disappeared in the concentration camps.

Finally, in the Venezia Giulia-Friuli region many anarchists worked with the communist formations like, say, the Garibaldi-Friuli Division. In Trieste, liaison was maintained by Giovanni Bidolo who later perished in the German camps along with another Trieste anarchist, Carlo Benussi. Also active was Turcinovich who, following a sweep, fled to Genoa where he fought with the local resistance. In Alta Carnia, where Petris and Aso (who perished in the attack on the German barracks in Sappada) had prominent positions, anarchists helped set up a self-governing Liberated Zone.

In all probability the number of anarchist fighting partisans who perished in the whole of central and northern Italy is in excess of a hundred.

The amnesty granted to fascists and the social injustices of republican, democratic Italy later let anarchists (and not just anarchists) know that the spirit of the National Liberation Committee had been abandoned and the Resistance betrayed.

Giorgio Sacchetti. (*Umanita Nova*, 7th April 1985).

ANARCHISTS IN THE RENICCI D'ANGHIARI CONCENTRATION CAMP

Of the more than 100 ex-internees shipped from Ventotene to the camp at Renicci di Anghiari, the vast majority belonged to the anarchist movement: militants who had been on record as subversives as long ago as the years right after the Great War.

Prior to the advent of fascism the Italian-speaking anarchist movement had had an honoured place in the revolutionary strand of the labour movement in Italy. It had had its own specific nationwide organisation, the UAI – the Italian Anarchist Union founded in 1919 in Florence and comprising about 700 groups and federations that embraced almost the entire movement. It influenced the railway union and above all the USI – Italian Syndicalist Union, an association with half a million members in 1920, professing the principles of self-management and direct action, as opposed to the reformist CGdL (General Labour Confederation). It published a good 66 titles, periodicals and one-offs, in the period between 1919 and 1925, including a daily paper, *Umanita Nova*, run by Errico Malatesta for over two years. After participating in the *Arditi del Popolo* movement (prototype partisans) many anarchists, especially the better known ones, had taken the road into exile. So that instead of revolutionary and trade union mass action, the movement was thrust again into the climate of conspiracy.

Of the various Italian antifascist groupings abroad, only '*Giustizia e Libertà*' was to see eye to eye with the need to effect exemplary actions against fascism and against the person of the Duce himself. There was a long series of unsuccessful or attempted anarchist assassination bids against Mussolini; Gino Lucetti in 1926, Michele Schirru and Angelo Sbardelotto (sentenced to death in 1931 and 1932 respectively). To this day the circumstances of the attempt involving Anteo Zambonini in Bologna in 1926, the 15 year old son of anarchist parents, remain obscure. While traditionally relations with the republicans were good, the same could not be said of those with the reformist socialists and communists, and towards the latter especially there was a lot of suspicion. Despite the initial great enthusiasm of Italian anarchists for the victorious soviet revolution, the unbridgeable difference with the communists, a replay of the Marx-Bakunin dispute of the First International, very quickly showed itself. The July 1920 meeting in Moscow between the anarchist Armando Borghi, the young USI secretary-general, and Lenin, availed nothing. The 1922 overtures by Italian anarchists to Chicherin, Commissar for Foreign Affairs, seeking the release of anarchists arrested in Russia, came to naught. And these events made themselves felt in relations inside the labour and antifascist movement, so much

so that they flared up later in the tragic conclusion to the Spanish revolutionary experience of 1936.

The Bulletin of Fugitives, relating to Italian antifascists who had emigrated illegally, confirms that throughout the 1930's the anarchists still held second place in terms of numbers wanted by the fascist political police, coming second only to the communists and ahead of the socialists and republicans. It could be said that almost the same proportions were to be found among the followers of the various political persuasions interned on the islands of Lipari, Lampedusa, Ustica, Ponza and above all Ventotene. Altiero Spinelli of the Federalist Movement, himself an internee, has reckoned the anarchist presence on the latter island at around 140, many of them extradited from France after the Spanish Civil War.

The governor of the internment island was one Marcello Guida who was to make a career for himself after the war until he became chief of police in Milan by 1969, the time of the Piazza Fontana outrage. Despite the harsh living conditions to which prisoners were subject, on account of irregular deliveries of water and food from the mainland, they did enjoy a basic 'freedom' of association, the famous 'messes'. At many such meetings there was a notable air of expectancy, given the widespread view that the war would aggravate the regime's problems.

Meanwhile the communist leadership on Ventotene had drawn up a document, a little before 20 July 1943, in which... "with an eye to a Popular Front for the organisational unity of the working class..." it denounced... "the maximalists' and anarchists' role in splitting and hindering this process of unification," and urged a "battle without quarter against enemies of proletarian unity... Modigliani and Tosca in the PS(I), the anti-soviets and anti-communists among the maximalists, and the anti-communists among the anarchists."

From the assembly of anarchist internees on Ventotene also emanated a resolution that was polemical but also programmatic in tone:

"Given that the collaborationist stance of various proletarian political groupings between the 1914-1918 war and the advent of fascism, did not cater for the interests and wishes of the labouring masses and those of the Italian people as a whole,

"Bearing in mind, that differences between comrades in respect of the philosophical and ideological grounds of anarchism or over mass organisational matters led to divisions damaging to the... spread of anarchist ideas and thwarted the formulation of a common programme of struggle and action:

"Accepting, that on the basis of its experiences over the past two decades, the anarchist movement should welcome the assistance of all comrades in the creation of a homogenous co-ordinating body;

“All comrades are hereby invited to enlist in their trades or professional unions so as to have direct contact with the working masses, directing these in the truly revolutionary fight for the conquest of proletarian demands, propagating the libertarian format through the establishment of Factory, Plant and Industrial Councils in the sphere of production, and of Town or Provincial ones in the political sphere, which bodies will have to regulate and meet the needs of the community.”

When fascism collapsed, Marshal Badoglio ordered the release from internment of the supporters of moderate parties, followed by the socialists and finally by the communists once Buozzi and Roveda took their places in the government. Despite the lobbying on their behalf by the socialists Pertini and Jacometti (who had been internees themselves), anarchist and Slav detainees were not released but moved to the concentration camp at Renicci d’Anghiari. Along with them were some communists such as Jaksetich from Trieste, who was mistaken for a Slav. During the lengthy transfer journey there were plenty of escape attempts. There were also those like the Emilia anarchist Enrico Zambonini who simply refused upon reaching Arezzo to travel on to Anghiari, remaining in the jail at Arezzo up until December 1943. One month after that, Zambonini was taken to be shot in San Prospero Strinati along with eight other antifascists, including the partisan and priest Don Paquino Borghi. In the Renicci camp, already occupied by other Slav prisoners, there was a climate of violence and bullying confronted by the spirit of the resistance on the part of the inmates. A hunger strike aimed at securing their release had been broken by the arrest of the alleged ringleaders. Terror was imposed, as Jaksetich has testified, even by recourse to mock executions by firing squad. Italy’s military surrender on 8 September and the prospect of the imminent arrival of the Germans led the prisoners to revolt in the hope of securing their freedom.

Among those most active in the revolt was Alfonso Failla who had already been wounded by a bayonet thrust from a carabinieri. Most of the inmates managed to get free, making their way to their home areas or joining up in the surrounding areas with their comrades who were already involved in the formation of partisan units. Generally speaking, the anarchists joined the ‘Matteotti’ or ‘Garibaldi’ formations, as well as the ‘*Giustizia e Liberta*’ units of the Action Party. Furthermore, according to recent research by Mario Rossi from Livorno, there were the following anarchist combat groups as well:

In Milan, the ‘Malatesta-Bruzzi’ Brigades.

In the province of Pavia, the ‘Errico Malatesta’ Brigade.

In Carrara, the 'G. Lucetti' formation, the 'Lucetti bis' formation, the 'M. Schirru' formation, the 'Garibaldi Lunense' formation, the 'Elio' formation, the 'R. Macchiarini' SAP unit, the SAP-FAI unit.

In Genoa, the 'Piscane' Brigade, the 'Malatesta' Brigade, the SAP-FCL unit, the (Sestri Ponente) SAP-FCL, the Anarchist Action squads (GE-Arenzano).

In Pistoia, the 'Silvano Fedi' formation.

In Turin, the 33rd 'Pietro Ferrero' SAP Battalion.

In the province of Como, the 'Amilcare Ciprioni' formation.

In Florence, the 'Lanciotto' formation.

Rossi also offers a list of names which he admits is less than complete, of 103 anarchists martyred by the Nazi-fascists during the Resistance. Despite the political position of most of the movement's being in favour of non-participation in the CLN's, leading anarchists were featured in some local liberation committees, alongside other parties, this was the case in Piombino, Livorno, Lucca, San Giovanni Valdarno, Ravenna and Genoa. Other leftwing minority groups had opted to decline any role in the CLN's: Bordigists, Trotskyists, councilists, libertarian communists, radicals, revolutionary socialists and that motley group described as 'leftwing' Stalinists.

As for the anarchists, they had displayed, during the period 1940-1945 a discreet activism in the propaganda field also, publishing around 30 titles, what with occasional periodicals and one-off issues in clandestinity, despite persecution by the Nazi-fascists, by Badoglio and by the Allies.

And apropos of the Allies, and given the presence at this symposium of authoritarian and prestigious Anglo-Saxon historians, let me close by putting some questions to which answers may perhaps be found in the correspondence in British military archives. As is common knowledge, the Allies adopted a suspicious attitude towards the partisan formations, especially towards the leftwing formations and revolutionary elements. But there are also episodes which, though dubious, are reminiscent of a real, outright campaign of repression which, in this case could have two aspects: the physical elimination or political and moral sweeping aside (with the aid of connivance) of the awkward ones among the Resistance. So what was the role of the Allied secret services in relations with the Resistance?

Colonel Emilio Canzi (among other things an internee at Renicci) anarchist and commander of the XIII Zone of the Volunteers for Freedom Corps (CVL) – upwards of 10,000 partisans – and who used the nom de guerre 'Franchi' was killed in an as yet obscure accident between his motorcycle and an Allied vehicle. The very same

fate befell another Piacenza anarchist, Savino Fornasari. As for the second aspect of this repression (the political dismissal), although various factors may have been at work here, one has the case of Giuseppe Livi, a partisan from Anghiari who, on the basis of some documents 'exhumed' conveniently some years later, was accused of having been a spy for the OVRA. But the very same charge had already been levelled at others among the most celebrated leftwing dissidents in Italy.

Giorgio Sacchetti. (*Umanita Nova*, 21.2.1988)

Part of a paper delivered at a symposium on "World War 2 and mass extermination. Outrages and reprisals in the liberation struggle in Arezzo province", held in Arezzo in November 1987.

MEN OF THE RED FLYING COLUMN (VOLANTE ROSSA)

*“Let me introduce you to the Red Flying Column
We are partisans from the old formations
Reunited for new actions
Against an enemy that still breaks our hearts.”*

So runs the opening verse of the song that antifascists gathered around the communist Giulio Paggio used to sing, to the air of *‘Fischia il vento’* in the People’s House in Lambrate (Milan province) where the Flying Column was based and had its own colours.

The Red Flying Column came into existence in May 1945. In all probability, at the start, its founders had in mind only a political organisation to flank the parties of the left in their antifascist propaganda and resistance, in a revival of the partisan spirit. The worker, Giulio Paggio, named by police as the group’s leader, had fought the Nazi-fascists in the hills of Lombardy and nearly all of those named in the trial against the Flying Column as its team leaders were themselves ex-partisans... Eligio Trinchieri, Natale Burato, Luigi Canepari, Angelo Vecchio, Primo Borghini and Otello Alterchi.

The decision to take up arms against the fascists probably came at a point when the connivance of the judiciary and the government had allowed the fascist party to reorganise and countless criminals and torturers of the RSI (Salo Republic) to go unpunished. The PCI itself bore a very heavy responsibility for this policy: one need only recall the amnesty signed by Togliatti, the then minister of Justice. A few months later, fascists jailed for their crimes were to profit by this amnesty.

An indefinite number of fascist bigwigs and bullies were targeted by the Red Flying Column. These included militia general Ferruccio Gali, and Brunilde Tanzi... both of them neofascist organisers; the fascist journalist Franco De Agazio; Felice Ghisalberty, found not guilty of the murder of PCI leader Eugenio Curiel; the fascist and factory manager Leonardo Masza. More fortunate were Angelo Marchelli the local MSI secretary who escaped an assassination bid and engineer Tofanello Della Falck who was kidnapped from his home and left stark naked in Milan’s Piazza Duomo.

But the Flying Column’s actions were not confined to GAP-style operations; at a time when police and fascists did not shrink from opening fire on labour demonstrations they acted as stewards at leftwing meetings and mounted pickets outside strike-bound factories. It is worth remembering also its attack upon the premises of the neofascist newspaper, *‘Il Meridiano D’Italia.’*

In 1949, when even the PCI had run out of tolerance for this armed group, the State's repression called a halt to the feats of the Flying Squad which was outlawed. A mechanic, Eligio Trinchieri was sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment whilst Paggio, Burato and Finardi got away to Czechoslovakia. And fascists were able once again to rely upon protection from the State.

Marco

Rossi (*Umanita Nova* 7.4.1985)

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The Kate Sharpley Library is a library, archive, publishing outfit and affinity group. We preserve and promote anarchist history.

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Our collection includes anarchist books, pamphlets, newspapers and leaflets from the nineteenth century to the present in over twenty languages. The collection includes manuscripts, badges, audio and video recordings, and photographs, as well as the work of historians and other writers who have documented the anarchist movement.

What we do

We promote the history of anarchism by reprinting original documents from our collection, and translating or publishing new works on anarchism and its history. These appear in our quarterly bulletin or regularly published pamphlets. We have also provided manuscripts to other anarchist publishers. People come and research in the library, or we can send out a limited amount of photocopies.

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