

Class War, Reaction & the Italian Anarchists

A study of the Italian anarchist movement in the first quarter of the 20th century, its influence on the labour movement, its history of organization and its struggles and strategies.

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At the start of the twentieth century, the Italian anarchist movement was rediscovering its ability to appear as an organized presence thanks in part to its work among the masses and the organic links which many militants had established since the 1890s with the new workers' and peasants' organizations. In the 1880s, as a result of the move to the tactic of "propaganda by the deed" by the international anarchist movement in reply to government repression, the path had been cleared for a tendency which was far from the established Bakuninist line. This was the anti-organizationalist tendency, which brought to an extreme the concept of the autonomy of the group and of the individual, with the result that any remaining organizational structures were destroyed...

Part I: Introduction

At the start of the twentieth century, the Italian anarchist movement was rediscovering its ability to appear as an organized presence thanks in part to its work among the masses and the organic links which many militants had established since the 1890s with the new workers' and peasants' organizations¹. In the 1880s, as a result of the move to the tactic of "propaganda by the deed" by the international anarchist movement in reply to government repression, the path had been cleared for a tendency which was far from the established Bakuninist line. This was the anti-organizationalist tendency, which brought to an extreme the concept of the autonomy of the group and of the individual, with the result that any remaining organizational structures were destroyed.

This revision (which took place at the same time as the social-democratic revisionism within the Marxist camp) was greatly influenced in many ways by an extremist reading of the revolutionary optimism and scientific determinism of Kropotkin who, in turn, had been profoundly influenced by positivism. While this revision did not reject Bakuninist ideas, it did in effect stop them from being put into practice by denying the importance of organization as an indispensable element of revolutionary action and the building of a future society. The anarchist communist project was replaced by a harmonistic vision of society. This vision relied on a hypothetical casual, fatalistic coincidence of common interests in order for there to arise the possibility of a collective agreement on the need for revolution and the running of the post-revolutionary society which would follow it. The rejection of any form of organization, brought to an extreme by those who fell under the influence of Kropotkin, had as its result the exaltation of individual action, the most exasperated spontaneism and the use of terrorism and led to isolation from the masses, something which was enormously deleterious. On a theoretical level, it led to a split between the pro-organizational anarchist communist tendency and the various other harmonistic and deterministic tendencies, the anti-organizationalists or individualists.

Just as the bombs of the 1880s and '90s had been the desperate reaction to the frustration produced by the bloody crushing of the Commune and the repression of the First International, anarcho-syndicalism became the response to the blind alley into which anarchism had been forced by terrorist action (which "propaganda by the deed" had degenerated into). In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the workers' movement was developing in leaps and bounds

¹ On the anarchist movement between the end of the nineteenth century and the First World War, see: M. ANTONIOLI, *Introduzione a Dibattito sul sindacalismo. Atti del Congresso internazionale anarchico di Amsterdam (1907)*, Florence 1978; M. ANTONIOLI, *Introduzione a L. Fabbri, L'organizzazione operaia e l'anarchia*, Florence 1975; M. ANTONIOLI, *Il movimento anarchico italiano nel 1914*, in "Storia e Politica", 2, 1973, pp. 235-254; G. CERRITO, *Il movimento anarchico dalle sue origine al 1914. Problemi e orientamenti storiografici*, in "Rassegna Storica Toscana", 1, 1969, pp. 109-138; G. CERRITO, *Dall'insurrezionalismo alla Settimana Rossa*, Florence 1976; G. CERRITO, *L'antimilitarismo anarchico in Italia nel primo ventennio del secolo*, Pistoia 1968; P.C. MASINI, *Storia degli anarchici italiani. Da Bakunin a Malatesta*, Milan 1969; P.C. MASINI, *Storia degli anarchici italiani nell'epoca degli attentati*, Milan 1981; E. SANTARELLI, *Il socialismo anarchico in Italia*, Milan 1973; S. TARIZZO, *L'anarchia. Storia dei movimenti libertari nel mondo*, Milan 1976; G. WOODCOCK, *L'anarchia. Storia delle idee e dei movimenti libertari*, Milan 1966.

both in Europe and in the United States, moving from mutualism to resistance. Given the “degeneration” of the anarchist party, a large number of its members (above all the more obscure ones and particularly those who were workers, or close to them) favoured this path. By doing so, they were in effect maintaining an ideological and strategic continuity that was characteristic of this tendency (also at an international level) at the start of the new century. Nonetheless, in the 1890s, alongside this rebirth in favour of organization which was to manifest itself in every country after the Capolago congress (1891), there were now various other tendencies: insurrectionalists, anti-organizationalists and individualists. At the start of the twentieth century in Italy, the modest presence of the anti-organizationalists and the weak “individualist provocation” current were unable to stop the anarchist communists (active for the most part in the class organizations) from pushing ahead with their process of organization with the founding in 1907 of the Italian Anarchist Party. This experience, though filled with difficulty, succeeded in establishing structures at local and regional level which were to get stronger and stronger during the struggles of the crisis years of the Giolitti system.

Part II: War On War

Thanks to this effort, in the period between the last decade of the 19th century and the First World War, the Italian anarchist movement had grown both in numbers and in political influence, above all through its massive presence in the *camere del lavoro* (Labour Clubs) and in the professional structures of the *Confederazione Generale del Lavoro* (CGdL – General Confederation of Labour) and the *Unione Sindacale Italiana* (USI – Italian Syndical Union)¹. Furthermore, in 1914 it had to dedicate itself to intense organizational activity in order to make the most of the large influx of new members as a result of the struggles against the Libyan campaign and in defence of the working classes². This need was matched also in other countries, to such an extent that the idea of an international congress was raised. By way of preparation, in March 1914 the editorial group of the journal *Volontà* and the *Fascio Comunista Anarchico di Roma* (Rome Anarchist Communist Group) promoted a congress, to be held in Florence which, because of its markedly pro-organization line, was met with some suspicion by the promoters of the unity of the various currents such as the editors of *Il Libertario* and the individualists of *L'Avvenire Anarchico*³. However, neither the Italian nor the international congresses came about due to the worsening international situation and the preparations for war, though there were eight regional meetings between April and June dealing mainly with “questions relating to the specific organization of the movement and its relations with the workers’ organizations”⁴.

Despite the war, debate between the various positions and the construction of a national organizational structure continued to develop with the conventions in Pisa in 1915 and Ravenna in 1916⁵. It must be said that in Italy, both on an ideological level and on other levels, the effects of the conflict were less damaging to the anarchist movement (and to the left in general) than in other countries. This is partly because of the choice of the *Partito Socialista Italiana* (PSI – Italian Socialist Party) – a choice in itself influenced by the strong anti-militarist and libertarian element of the proletariat – which was summed up in the fairly ambiguous motto “neither support nor sabotage” but which was frequently contradicted in daily practice by the collaboration with the industrial mobilization by the CGdL which was controlled by reformists. In fact, “interventionism in the Italian anarchist movement was not a phenomenon, or a current, or even a question of debate or the basis of a split. It was only a series of sporadic, unconnected personal cases”⁶,

¹ See: M. ANTONIOLI, *Il movimento anarchico* cit.; G. CERRITO, *Il movimento anarchico* cit.; G. CERRITO, *Dall'insurrezionalismo* cit.; C. COSTANTINI, *Gli anarchici in Liguria durante la prima guerra mondiale*, in “Il Movimento Operaio e Socialista in Liguria”, 2, 1961, pp. 99–122; E. SANTARELLI, *Il socialismo anarchico* cit.

² See: M. ANTONIOLI, *Il movimento anarchico* cit.

³ On the projected congress in Florence see: *Congresso Comunista Anarchico Italiano*, in “Volontà”, 8 August 1914; C. COSTANTINI, *op.cit.* p. 102

⁴ M. ANTONIOLI, *Il movimento anarchico* cit.

⁵ On the two conventions see: C. COSTANTINI, *op.cit.* pp. 107–112; G. CERRITO, *L'antimilitarismo* cit., pp. 46 and 54; and *Un trentennio di attività anarchica 1914–45*, Cesena 1953, p. 13.

⁶ P.C. MASINI, *Gli anarchici tra “interventismo” e “disfattismo rivoluzionario”*, in “Rivista Storica del Socialismo”, 5, 1959, pp. 208–212.

which in general were to be found in the Nietzschean-Stirnerite individualist fringe which had already been in difficulty at the time of the Libyan campaign⁷. The anarchist presence was crucial to the clarification of the USI's position on intervention. The clash with the revolutionary syndicalist group, a part of which favoured Italian participation in the conflict, delivered the organization into the hands of the anti-militarist majority in September 1914, with the passing of a motion by Alberto Meschi, secretary of the Carrara Labour Club, which expressed "their trust in the proletariat of all countries to rediscover in themselves the spirit of class solidarity and the revolutionary energy required to take advantage of the inevitable weakening of State forces and of the general crisis caused by the war in order to act to sweep away the bourgeois and monarchist states which have been cynically preparing for this war for fifty years"⁸.

In reconstructing the positions of anarchism regarding the problem raised by the conflict, alongside the condemnation approved by the Pisa convention in January 1915⁹, one must also consider those of the various local groups which had newspapers and could therefore influence militants and a wider range of readers. Of the most important magazines, *Volontà* had the strongest anti-patriotic and anti-war line and in no way questioned the internationalist and anti-capitalist role of anarchism¹⁰. It was in its pages, in fact, that the international anarchist manifesto against the war was published in March 1915¹¹ as a response on the part of the majority of the movement to the "Manifesto of the Sixteen", the pro-French interventionist declaration of certain individuals such as Kropotkin, Grave, Malato, etc.¹². For some time, instead, *Il Libertario* allowed room for debate, for example publishing articles by Jean Grave and Maria Rygier, although the line of its editor, Binazzi, and its contributors had been made clear as far back as July 1914 with the article "*Né un uomo né un soldo per l'iniqua guerra*" (Not one man, not one penny for this unjust war)¹³. But there really was not much debate. While anarchism's greatest exponents published widely-distributed pamphlets against the conflict¹⁴, the "interventionist anarchists were unable even to raise the question 'intervention: yes or no' within the anarchist movement and were even unable to constitute a minority. They did eventually form as a group, but only after their position had been demolished by the immediate and spontaneous reaction of a healthy organism"¹⁵.

But, whereas the vast majority was united by the anti-militarist struggle, on a whole range of other questions there continued to be theoretical differences which came to the surface even on the occasion of the Pisa meeting promoted by the individualist newspaper *L'Avvenire Anarchico* and the editorial group of *Il Libertario*, who had in other times been against permanent organizational forms and, consequently, sceptic on the usefulness of congressional decisions. In

⁷ See: G. CERRITO, *Dall'insurrezionalismo* cit., passim.

⁸ Reported in R. DEL CARRIA, *Proletari senza rivoluzione. Storia delle classi subalterne dal 1860 al 1950*, II, Milan 1970, p. 18.

⁹ See: *Un trentennio*, cit., p.13.

¹⁰ See in particular: the column *Contro la guerra* published in "Volontà" starting in October 1914, later substituted by the polemical column *Gli interventisti e noi*.

¹¹ *Manifesto internazionale anarchico contro la guerra*, "Volontà", 20 March 1915.

¹² Published in "Freedom", London 28 February 1915.

¹³ See: "Il Libertario", 30 July and 3 September 1914.

¹⁴ Amongst many others the most notable are: E. MALATESTA, *Réponse de Malatesta au "Manifeste des Seize" Anarchistes du Gouvernement*, no publishing information but Paris 1916; UN GRUPPO DI ANARCHICI, *La guerra europea e gli anarchici*, edited by L. Fabbri, Turin 1916. Amongst those published by the Italian anarchist community in the United States see: P. ALLEGRA, *Disonoriamo la guerra*, New York 1916, p. 278.

¹⁵ P.C. MASINI, *Gli anarchici tra "interventismo"*, cit., p. 209.

fact, *Volontà*, the mouthpiece of the anarchist communist current declined to participate, holding such conventions to be academic¹⁶ and drawing a response from Fabbri, who instead considered it “indispensable to meet in order to discuss, to decide [...] Past experience has shown that a large part of our movements failed because we did not know what to do”¹⁷. The Zimmerwald Conference provoked great enthusiasm as a sign of the internationalist renaissance in the workers’ movement, but with strategic evaluations which differed on the question of relationships with revolutionary socialism. While recognizing the importance of the event, Fabbri and Borghi were inclined to assign anarchist organization a fundamental role in the reconstruction of internationalism. The more eclectic Binazzi was somewhat more positive regarding the renaissance of the Socialist International, while the individualist Renato Siglich accused everyone of deviationism in the pages of *L’Avvenire Anarchico*¹⁸. Dissent re-emerged during the clandestine meeting in Ravenna in August 1916 – “the first [...] since the one in Rome in 1907 which represented such a wide range of views within the Italian anarchist movement”¹⁹ – where, while welcoming the re-birth of the socialist international and the establishing of good relations between socialists and anarchists, the latter were considered to have the task of creating an International “which would be open to all the workers and every current of socialist and internationalist thought”²⁰, forming an Anarchist Internationalist Committee which was to carry out badly-needed work on the internal coordination of the movement, above all in organizing support for the victims of repression, for internees and for exiles. However, it met with some difficulty in carrying out its primary and institutional tasks. The clash between the various tendencies on the role, scope and limits of any agreement with the socialists and the constant efforts of Binazzi to bring together the various factions, ended up paralyzing it to the point that it became impossible to participate in the 3rd Zimmerwald Conference.

The movement developed during the difficult war years, even at the level of nuclei of varying strengths (depending on location), and there was intense activity of class opposition. The anti-militarism of the movements was translated into desertions, single and collective mutinies²¹, the promotion of and participation in popular demonstrations, all of which was tangible evidence of the proletariat’s resistance to the war. In particular we should mention the protests and public meetings in support of Carlo Tresca (the Italo-American anarchist who was under threat of execution along with other members of the Industrial Workers of the World for having organized strikes in the mining sector)²² which culminated on 8th September 1916 in a national demonstration in Milan that was massively attended, given the limits imposed by the state of war²³.

¹⁶ See: *Il Congresso di Firenze*, in “*Volontà*”, 26 December 1914.

¹⁷ CATILINA [L. FABBRI], *Per il Convegno anarchico*, *ibid*, 1 January 1915.

¹⁸ See: C. COSTANTINI, *op.cit.* pp. 109–111.

¹⁹ G. CERRITO, *L’antimilitarismo* *cit.*, p. 54. Participating in the convention were delegates of groups and federations from Bologna, Ravenna, Piacenza, Ferrara, Parma, Modena, Florence, Pisa, Piombino, Carrara, Ardenza, Livorno, Naples, Turin, Milan, Genoa, Sestri Ponente and Valpolcevera, La Spezia, Terni, Vicenza, Venice, Rome, Pesaro.

²⁰ The committee members were: Pasquale Binazzi, Torquato Gobbi, Virgilio Mazzoni, Gregorio Benvenuti and Temistocle Monticelli (see: “*Avanti!*”, 12 August 1916).

²¹ See: G. CERRITO, *L’antimilitarismo* *cit.*; *Un trentennio* *cit.*; E. FORCELLA-A. MONTICONE, *Plotone di esecuzione*, Bari 1968; and the significant work by F. SBARNEMI [B. MISEFARI], *Diario di un disertore*, Florence 1973.

²² Regarding this, see: A. DADÀ, *I rapporti dei “radicali” italo-americani con il movimento operaio statunitense e italiano*, in “*Italia Contemporanea*”, 1982, p.146.

²³ See: *Comunicazione del 10 ottobre 1916 della Prefettura di Milano al Ministero dell’Interno*, in ACS, Casell. Pol. Centr., b. 5208.

The USI, the greater part of which was anarchist, began a series of important struggles such as the action by Valdarno miners directed by the local secretary Riccardo Sacconi. This action began in September 1916 and demanded an 8-hour day which was granted the following May²⁴. In Sestri Ponente, too, where there was a strong anarchist presence, action by metalworkers seeking the same goal and beginning in January 1917, led to violent clashes and to demonstrations against the war and was followed by repression and the arrest of many militants including Alebrando Giovanetti, one of the leaders of the organization who would later be interned²⁵. The enthusiasm sparked off by the “February Revolution” in Russia gave further impetus to mass action²⁶. In the Turin revolt in August 1917 – which brought together all the discontent, the open hostility of the Italian proletariat to the war and the desire for social change, but which also made it clear that any spontaneous insurrection was bound to fail – “some anarchists here and there tried to give the uprising a more decidedly insurrectional direction”²⁷, as demonstrated by one leaflet which was later used during a trial and contained in the court’s final judgement:

“Bring the rifles you make onto the streets and the barricades. Let all the forces of the proletariat rise up and arm themselves. Let us put an end, by force of arms, to the systematic destruction of the human race. Proletarians! Raise now your axes, your picks, your barricades, the social revolution! Proletarian soldiers, desert! If you must fight, let it be against those who oppress you! Your enemy is not at the so-called border, but here. Proletarian women, rise up! Impede the departure of your loved ones! Let it be you, O worker of the factory and of the field, conscious and strong, let it be you who throws down your tools and cries: Enough! No more! We workers no longer wish to make rifles which bring death to our brothers in struggle and in suffering”²⁸.

The final year of the war saw a noticeable weakening in anarchism, as in the rest of the left, due to repression. Arrest, trial and confinement was the fate for a great many anarchists, who had been at the forefront of the popular revolts. All the movement’s newspapers were closed down, with the sole exception of the individualist paper *L’Avvenire Anarchico* which was published in Pisa and edited by the ambiguous figure of Renato Siglich. The internationalist action committee was broken up with the arrest of Binazzi, Gobbi and Monticelli (who were all sent into confinement) and the death of its fourth member, Gregorio Benvenuti. Even in Switzerland, the numerous colony of exiles, draft-dodgers and deserters was decimated by arrests and deportation to concentration camps. “Over a hundred refugees, many of whom were closely involved in the local workers’ movement, [found it] impossible to act for many months, though they were later cleared of all charges”²⁹.

²⁴ See: “Guerra di Classe”, 2 September 1916 and 13 January 1917.

²⁵ See: *Sempre*, Almanacco n.2 of “Guerra di Classe”, 1923, pp. 86–87.

²⁶ See: P.C. MASINI, *Gli anarchici italiani e la rivoluzione russa*, in “Rivista Storica del Socialismo”, 15–16, 1962, pp. 135–169.

²⁷ G. CANDELORO, *Storia dell’Italia moderna. VIII. La prima guerra mondiale, il dopoguerra, l’avvento del fascismo*, Milan 1978, p. 172.

²⁸ Quoted in *Un trentennio* cit., p.18.

²⁹ G. Cerrito, *L’antimilitarismo* cit., p.63.

Part III: The Post-War Organizational Boom

Despite all this, the end of the war marked a return to mass activity and organization within the movement. The October Revolution had awoken in anarchists (and not only them) hopes that Italy could replicate events in Russia. Historians are still unclear on the extent of such expectation and on the role that parties and labour unions played in feeding, directing or moderating these hopes, but some studies have been made on the causes and the international dimensions of the phenomenon¹. However, from 1917 until the end of 1920, the libertarians' internationalism led them to be convinced of the possibility of revolution in Italy², bearing in mind the differing positions of the various currents and individuals — from that of Malatesta (still insurrectionalist but conscious of the roles assigned to the anarchist organization and the mass organization) to the more articulate views of Fabbri, passing through the myriad nuances of all the various individuals and groups reflecting their geographical differences, social composition and involvement of militants with the class.

In February-March 1919, two important periodicals resumed publication — *Il Libertario* in La Spezia and *Volontà* in Ancona which, edited by Luigi Fabbri, made a notable contribution to the analysis of the problems of the post-war period together with a lucid and critical defence of the Russian Revolution³. In April, the process of re-organization was already well under way with the convention held in Florence in the rooms of the local Labour Club⁴. A significant point regarding was the fact that it was preceded by a series of preparatory regional meetings (amongst which one in Umbria-Marches and one in Emilia-Romagna which were notable for the efforts made to emphasize the question of political and economic organization before and after the revolution and relations with other parties on the left)⁵ and also the lively debate in the press which sought to ensure that delegates were really representative and came from groups which were active among the masses. The *Unione Anarchica Anconetana* (Ancona Anarchist Union), a strong organization,

¹ For information about anarchist involvement in the *Biennio Rosso*, see: L. FABBRI, *La contro-rivoluzione preventiva*, Bologna 1922, now in *Il fascismo e i partiti politici italiani. Testimonianze del 1921–23*, edited by R. De Felice, Bologna 1966; A. BORGHI, *½ secolo di anarchia*, Naples 1954; A. BORGHI, *La rivoluzione mancata*, Milan 1964 (revised edition of A. BORGHI, *L'Italia fra i due Crispi*, Paris 1921); E. MALATESTA, *Scritti*. I. "Umanità Nova". *Pagine di lotta quotidiana*; II. "Umanità Nova". *pagine di lotta quotidiana e scritti vari del 1919–23*, Geneva 1934–1936 (reprint, Carrara 1975); *Un trentennio cit.*; P.C. MASINI, *Anarchici e comunisti nel movimento dei consigli a Torino (1919–20)*, Turin 1951 (reprint, Florence 1970); P.C. MASINI, *Antonio Gramsci e l'Ordine Nuovo visti da un libertario*, Livorno 1956; P.C. MASINI, *Gli anarchici italiani e la rivoluzione russa cit.*

² On the positions of the Italian anarchist movement regarding the Russian Revolution, *ibid.*

³ L. BETTINI, *Bibliografia dell'anarchismo*. II, *Periodici e numeri unici anarchici in lingua italiana pubblicati in Italia (1872–1970)*, 1, Florence 1972, pp. 167–171, 277–278; and P.C. MASINI, *Gli anarchici italiani e la rivoluzione cit.*, *passim*.

⁴ For a report on the convention see: "Il Libertario", 17 April 1919.

⁵ On the conventions in Umbria-Marches (Fabriano 22–23 March 1919) and Emilia-Romagna (Bologna 23 March 1919), *ibid.*

was in the frontline of this battle, demanding that those who were to participate in the convention be really representative of organized anarchist forces”⁶.

The organization which grew out of the convention took the significant name *Unione Comunista Anarchica d'Italia* (UCAdI — Anarchist Communist Union of Italy) and marked a separation from the humanistic and individualist currents which in general were composed of a series of groups and often individuals but which possessed journals such as *L'Avvenire Anarchico*, *La Frusta* and *Cronaca Sovversiva* that had a certain influence over some sectors of the movement which had not yet been integrated into the various territorial organizations. The convention also re-affirmed the urgency of re-establishing international contacts (the UCAdI considered itself to be the Italian section of an International Anarchist Union) and it therefore began the necessary preparations for participating in the founding congress of the Third International “which [censored] would support anarchism’s heavy demands”⁷. Together with the directing committee, a correspondence commission was created, which functioned as a secretariat⁸. But attention was focused mainly on the situation in Italy in an attempt to establish what propaganda instruments and political action were most needed.

“With regard to workers’ organization the convention holds that workers’ organization and struggle against the bosses is essential for the revolutionary movement and that therefore it is in the interests of anarchists to participate in this in order to promote revolution and anarchism. We must remember that the destruction of the capitalist and authoritarian society is only possible through revolutionary means and that the use of the general strike and the labour movement must not make us forget the more direct methods of struggle against state and bourgeois violence and extreme power. We note that the *Unione Sindacale Italiana* is currently (and was during the war) the closest [labour organization] to the cause of internationalism, without compromise or wavering. Without wishing to create binding duties which are incompatible with the conviction that political groups and class organizations must be autonomous and independent, this convention recommends that its worker comrades assist the *Unione Sindacale Italiana* to the best of their abilities and each within his or her own trade category, so that it may continue to hold to its revolutionary, anti-State and anti-centralization positions”⁹.

In other words, the motion expressed a precise position in favour of labour intervention, while confirming the need to preserve a precise, autonomous role for the anarchist political organization. As for how Italian anarchists were involved in the labour struggle, there was great variety in the unions to which they belonged. A large number were members of the USI, which in the following two years would reach a membership of 800,000 workers and 27 Labour Clubs. Others were active in unions belonging to the Confederation, with a significant number in the FIOM (the metalworkers union which was federated to the CGdL), even appearing at the confederal confer-

⁶ *Per un convegno fra gli anarchici*, *ibid*, 13 March 1919.

⁷ *Ibid*, 17 April 1919.

⁸ G. BIANCO, *L'attività degli anarchici nel biennio rosso (1919–20)*, in “Il Movimento Operaio e Socialista in Liguria”, April-June 1961.

⁹ “Il Libertario”, 17 April 1919.

ence of 1921 as a single group¹⁰. Others still were members of independent unions such as the *Sindacato Ferrovieri* (Railworkers' Union) and the *Federazione dei Marittimi* (Maritime Workers' Federation). But it was above all in the struggles that the anarchist presence grew and strengthened.

The attack on *L'Avanti!* in April 1919 gave impetus to the anarchist proposal for the creation of a revolutionary single front, in other words the union of all workers and organizations of the left (which was to become a fundamental element of the tactical-strategic line in the mid-term), approved during the Bologna congress in 1920¹¹. The first real test of the practicality of this came about during the protests against the rising cost of living, adjudged by some commentators to be the peak of the revolutionary tensions of the *Biennio Rosso*, the Two Red Years. Borghi would later say: "It was the moment when we were best placed for a revolution"¹². For Fabbri too they represented, together with the Ancona revolt of June 1920 and the factory occupations, moments when the "monarchical institutions were on the point of being overthrown. It was only because their adversaries were lacking order that they were not overthrown"¹³. Furthermore, Fabbri attributed the principal responsibility for the failure of the revolution to the socialists without, however, hiding the shortcomings of the anarchist movement:

"This did not exclude the fact that in many places and in various spontaneous ways, revolutionaries of the different schools of thought acted, prepared and agitated. But what was missing was coordination of their efforts, concrete facts and wide-ranging preparation which could have initiated the revolution even in spite of the reluctance and passive resistance of the more moderate socialist elements"¹⁴.

Anarchists were without doubt closely involved in the workers' and peasants' demonstrations which marked 1919 "as a period of preparation, clashes and an indication of a much deeper and radical crisis which was affecting the country's institutions and structures"¹⁵. But the movement (which was still regrouping after the constitution of the UCAdI) did not yet have a solid, definite strategy to offer its member groups in an advanced stage of organization, at least in regions such as Liguria, Lazio and especially Emilia-Romagna, where delegates from 80 different groups met at a congress in Bologna in September 1919¹⁶. On its part, the USI was enjoying a boom in its membership following the war years and was acting more as a collateral organization that as an autonomous force¹⁷, in effect mimicking the role of the CGdL with respect to the PSI.

¹⁰ See the pamphlet *Sulle direttive della Confederazione Generale del Lavoro. Il pensiero dei comunisti anarchici confederati*. Febbraio 1921, Rome 1921, p. 10.

¹¹ *Infra*, pp. 391 ff.

¹² A. BORGHI, *½ secolo cit.*, p. 153.

¹³ L. FABBRI, *La contro-rivoluzione cit.*, p.19.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 21.

¹⁵ E. SANTARELLI, *Storia del fascismo I. La crisi liberale*, Rome 1973, p. 157. On the activity of anarchists in 1919, see also: ACS, Min. Interno. Dir. Gen. P.S., Affari Gener. e Riservati, K 1, 1920, b. 79.

¹⁶ See: *Un trentennio cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁷ See the motion from the the Florence convention, above.

Part IV: The Role of Malatesta

The return of Malatesta at the end of 1919 was a turning point in the development of the Italian anarchist movement. Exiled for the umpteenth time after the “red week”, he had been vainly attempting to return to Italy since 1917, even declaring himself willing to stand trial for charges outstanding against him just so he could be present in the place where he believed a favourable situation for revolutionary action was developing. However in November 1919, after the government had been forced into giving him a passport due to a series of protests (especially by the USI), the authorities continued to place innumerable obstacles in his path¹. He was only able to return thanks to the help of Giuseppe Giulietti and the *Federazione dei Lavoratori del Mare*². He thus arrived clandestinely in Taranto aboard a Greek cargo ship and headed by train to Genoa where he pretended to have disembarked.

“Our dear comrade Errico Malatesta has finally joined us. The Genoese proletariat gave him a warm and enthusiastic welcome. On Saturday at 1.00pm the sirens sounded giving the signal for work to stop. The workers thronged to Via Milano whence they marched towards Piazza Carignano, where a public meeting was due to take place. The impressive rows of marchers with hundreds of flags flying crossed the city singing our anthems. In the huge square and the adjoining streets over 60,000 people were crammed in. The enthusiasm was indescribable. The untiring president of the *Co-operativa Facchini* (Porters’ Cooperative), Ravaschio, spoke to the crowd and introduced our dear Errico Malatesta who in turn spoke a few, short words and was loudly acclaimed”³.

His prestige among the masses raised hopes and enthusiasm. He was testimony to the continuity of the Italian proletariat’s struggle for emancipation. The steadfastness and consistency of his work made him the natural leader of a huge section of the workers. Furthermore, this old internationalist’s ability to unify the whole anarchist movement and his unchallenged fame facilitated (as in 1897 and 1913) this unity which, as would be seen in the following months, was based on the enthusiasm of the movement’s various components and agreement between them. His ideas for maintaining unity⁴ was mostly based on his optimistic reading of the situation in Italy — a view which, though shared by a good portion of the masses at the time, was perhaps overly influenced by personal factors which are useful to examine.

¹ See: L. FABBRI, *Prefazione* to E. MALATESTA, *Scritti* cit., I, p. 49.

² On the return of Malatesta to Italy, see: ACS, Casell. Pol. Centr., b. 288 Malatesta, fasc. 31568 sottofasc. 6; L. FABBRI, *Prefazione* cit., pp. 9–10; and A. BORGHI, *½ secolo* cit., pp. 199 ff.

³ “Il Libertario”, 29 September 1919.

⁴ These ideas were already to be seen in the first issue of “Umanità Nova” (see: E. MALATESTA, *I nostri propositi*, in “Umanità Nova”, 27 February 1920, now in E. MALATESTA, *Scritti* cit., I, pp. 29–33).

Malatesta, the revolutionary par excellence, lived a large part of his life and most of the recent years in exile, with links to the international revolutionary socialist and anarchist movement⁵. His returns to Italy coincided with upturns in the class movement which could be described as insurrectional uprisings. As a result of these, he understood that “despite their differences in tendencies and parties, the masses were willing to act for a common goal”⁶. These hopes, however, were followed by periods of repression, forcing him back into exile. The insurrectionalist experience of the First International, of the Matese band, were critically re-examined after 1894⁷ with the development of the strategy for anarchist action within the organizations that the masses were building. It was something that Gori, Fabbri and many others would develop and put into practice with their activity not only in the Labour Clubs and trade federations but also through the re-organization of the anarchist party⁸. But Malatesta was not in Italy between the end of the century and 1914 and it was only from abroad that he could keep track of the process and experiences that were causing the Italian anarchist movement and its ideology to develop. And a significant indicator of his “detachment” from the latter was the position he took at the international congress in Amsterdam in 1907, where his opposition to Monatte differed (marked as it was by humanistic anarchism) from that of Fabbri, who better than any other expressed the growth in the Italian anarchist movement in the awareness of the need for the party and a presence within the mass organizations, thereby returning to the genuine Bakuninist tradition⁹.

In 1914, Malatesta was still bound to this optimistic, humanistic and insurrectionalist conception. His vision of anarchist action principally as propaganda and vigilance while waiting for those occasions “which can occur when least expected”¹⁰ and his trust in the “spontaneous drive” of the masses for revolution¹¹ certainly gave impetus to anarchist agitation in that year, though he himself would come to understand that the main limit on revolutionary action was the lack of coordination before, during and after the insurrectionalist outbursts. In fact, while still in exile in London in 1919, he warmly welcomed the proposal for a daily newspaper (which had only minority support at the April convention in Florence), which he considered as an essential instrument for propaganda, agitation and pre-insurrectional preparation. Like other militants, mostly involved with mass activity, Fabbri displayed “an opinion which was at the time rather

⁵ On Malatesta see: U. FEDELI, *Bibliografia Malatestiana* in L. FABBRI, *Malatesta, l'uomo e il pensiero*, Naples 1951, pp. 261–304; L. FABBRI, *La vida y el pensamiento de Errico Malatesta*, Buenos Aires 1945; M. NETTLAU, *Errico Malatesta. Vita e Pensieri*, New York 1922 (revised edition: *Errico Malatesta. El Hombre, el Revolucionario, el Anarquista*, Barcelona 1933); A. BORGHI, *Errico Malatesta in 60 anni di lotte anarchiche*, Paris undated (later, Milan 1947); G. CERRITO, *Sull'anarchismo contemporaneo, Introduzione* to E. Malatesta, *Scritti scelti*, Rome 1970.

⁶ G. CERRITO, *Sull'anarchismo* cit., pp. 51–52.

⁷ In particular see: E. MALATESTA, *Andiamo al popolo*, in “L'Art. 248”, Ancona 4 February 1894.

⁸ A positive contribution to this process came from the magazine “Il Pensiero” which was edited by Fabbri and Gori from 1903 until 1911; G. CERRITO, *Dall'insurrezionalismo* cit.; G. CERRITO, *Il movimento anarchico dalle sue origini* cit.; M. ANTONIOLI, *Introduzione* to L. FABBRI, *L'organizzazione* cit.; M. ANTONIOLI, *Il movimento anarchico italiano nel 1914* cit.

⁹ At the Amsterdam congress (1907), though a signatory of the Monatte motion, Fabbri also voted for Malatesta's, later declaring: “In the Monatte motion there was an explicit affirmation of the concept of class struggle which was lacking in Malatesta's; on the other hand, Malatesta's motion contained a statement of the insurrectional nature of anarchism which was lacking in Monatte's” (see: L. FABBRI, *Il Congresso di Amsterdam*, in “Il Pensiero”, 1 October 1907). On the congress, see: *Dibattito sul sindacalismo* cit.

¹⁰ E. MALATESTA, *E ora?* in “Volontà”, 20 June 1914.

¹¹ E. MALATESTA, *Movimenti stroncati*, in “Umanità Nova”, 22 June 1922 (now in E. MALATESTA, *Scritti* cit., I, pp. 101–105).

contrary” to the newspaper¹², in the belief that the growth of the movement had to be more gradual and complex, bound to precise organizational structures and with a solid rooting in the proletariat’s grassroots organizations. Putting all one’s energies into the creation of a single unifying grouping of all the various tendencies seemed to him to be a waste. He therefore remained “from the start one of the few who looked at the initiative with few illusions”¹³. Malatesta, instead, “found [his] practical and principled objections well-enough founded for normal times, but [...] completely surpassed by the current conditions and by the greater need for an imminent revolution”¹⁴.

The debate between the two confirmed their different viewpoints. While Fabbri (who not even in January 1920 let himself fall victim to the “general giddiness” of the left)¹⁵ sought to convince his opposite of the need for a detailed, long-term strategy, Malatesta maintained the impossibility of “following that path. He had not thought he would find such effervescence. It was no longer a case of preparing the terrain, which was ready. Instead, it was essential to do what could be done as soon as possible, because the revolution was on the way, nearer than he had thought [...] I agreed with him and it was only later that doubts struck me about the revolutionary character of that impressive popular enthusiasm and that this might have made him blind to the real state of affairs”¹⁶.

Fabbri’s perplexities between late 1919 and early 1920 seem to have been overcome by events, by the expectations Malatesta inspired among anarchist ranks and further afield, so much so that in order to avoid the overly-personalized manifestations of esteem and trust endowed on him, he felt the need to publish a letter which said, amongst other things: “Thank you, but that’s enough”¹⁷.

With the birth of the daily newspaper, *Umanità Nova*, in February 1920, the role of Malatesta of “understanding and reconciling all the anarchist tendencies”¹⁸ became all encompassing. Fabbri closed down *Volontà* that summer as “all its contributors, from then on, had to dedicate their attention to the newspaper”¹⁹. *Umanità Nova* did, however, meet with great success. It had a network of correspondents and contributors covering the whole peninsula and a distribution which reached 50,000 copies a day with a turnover of over a million lire²⁰. One unbiased witness of its importance among the masses was Anna Kuliscioff, who in August 1920 wrote to Turati:

“The working class is going through a bad period of anarchist contagion. By now *Avanti!* is almost being boycotted and the workers are reading only *Umanità Nova* [...] This is confirmed by members of the Labour Clubs and the passengers on the morning trams where one can no longer see workers without a copy of *Umanità Nova* in their hands”²¹.

¹² L. FABBRI, *Prefazione* cit., p. 9.

¹³ U. FEDELI, *Luigi Fabbri*, Turin 1948, p. 55.

¹⁴ L. FABBRI, *Prefazione* cit., p. 9.

¹⁵ L. FABBRI, *La controrivoluzione* cit., pp. 18 ff.

¹⁶ L. FABBRI, *Prefazione* cit., p. 11–12

¹⁷ “Umanità Nova”, 16 January 1920.

¹⁸ L. FABBRI, *Prefazione* cit., p. 14.

¹⁹ U. FEDELI, *Luigi Fabbri* cit., p. 55.

²⁰ L. FABBRI, *Prefazione* cit., p. 13.

²¹ F. TURATI-A. KULISCIOFF, *Carteggio*, IV, Turin 1953, p. 386.

Part V: The Struggles & Strategy Of The Anarchists

The daily was only one of the ways the anarchist voice could be heard. “Throughout the *Biennio Rosso* the anarchists were able to participate in force in the popular and workers’ movements, first mixing in with them and then aiming at a more marked distinction”¹. As was observed,

“they are not external to the working class, but represent a precise sector of it, the most unstable sector, newly formed and not linked to the reformist tradition. They have their greatest support among the new, young working class, among the proletarianized middle class of office workers and posts and telegraphs workers, and also among the old islands of traditional anarchist support (the railway workers, independent trades, etc.)”².

Actually, they were also present in other sectors such as the metalworkers. They were already in the majority in the USI, but in some regions formed independent unions and were often in charge of or well represented in autonomous Labour Clubs in places like Sestri Ponente, Sampierdarena, Savona-Vado, Livorno, in various parts of Emilia-Romagna and the Marches. They had militants in the *Sindacato Ferrovieri*, the *Federazione dei Lavoratori del Mare*, and others. In places where it was not possible to create independent unions or where their creation would have provoked artificial divisions, they worked in the Labour Clubs and within the professional unions of the CGdL, for example in Turin, where they formed a conspicuous and active component of the important metallurgical sector. The anarchists in the Piedmontese capital gave, in fact, high importance to action in the confederal mass organization. According to the anarchist Pietro Ferrero, secretary of the local metalworkers’ union:

“In Turin there was no branch of the *Unione Sindacale Italiana* at the time and the anarchists, with the exception of the anti-organizationalists, were members of the FIOM branch and, as convinced partisans of proletarian unity, actively participated in this new movement [the factory councils], in the hopes of their bringing results”³.

Anarchism was able to establish itself “at the heart of the class struggle in the city of Turin during the four years after the end of the war and provided one of the best militants in the course of the resistance in the person of Pietro Ferrero, who was murdered by the fascists on 18 December 1922”⁴. Particularly significant was the influence anarchists had on the theories expressed by *Ordine Nuovo*, thanks especially to Maurizio Garino and Pietro Mosso an assistant

¹ E. SANTARELLI, *Il socialismo anarchico* cit., p. 189.

² G. MAIONE, *Il biennio rosso. Autonomia e spontaneità operaia nel 1919–1920*, Bologna 1975, pp. 225–226.

³ *Le lotte metallurgiche a Torino*, in “Umanità Nova”, 18 July 1921.

⁴ P.C. MASINI, *Anarchici e comunisti* cit.

in theoretical philosophy at the local university and author of the book “*Il Sistema Taylor ed i consigli dei produttori*” (The Taylor System and the producers’ councils) under the pen-name of Carlo Petri⁵. It comes as no surprise that the *Gruppo Libertario Torinese* (Turin Libertarian Group) was one of the signatories of the manifesto “*Per il congresso dei consigli di fabbrica. Agli operai e ai contadini di tutta Italia*” (For the congress of factory councils. To the workers and peasants of all Italy), launched in March 1920 by *Ordine Nuovo* in order to promote the use of councils⁶. Even at the meeting of the Labour Club in December 1919, Garino and the anarchists had been decisive in the victory of the pro-council current. As Gramsci wrote:

“When Garino, the anarchist syndicalist, spoke [...] on the matter and spoke with great dialectic efficacy and warmth, we (unlike comrade Tasca) were pleasantly surprised and felt a deep emotion [...] The attitude of comrade Garino, a libertarian, a syndicalist, was proof of the profound conviction we have always had that in the real revolutionary process the entire working class spontaneously discovers theoretical unity and practical unity”⁷.

The struggle of the metalworkers in the spring of 1920 began in February in Sestri Ponente and reached its peak with the “*sciopero delle lancette*” (a series of strike actions in protest of the introduction of summer time) in March in Turin. Anarchists constantly dedicated their efforts to expanding the councils, in an attempt to transform the labour action into insurrectional action. Undoubtedly, the conception developed in anarchist circles of this new institution (the factory council), bore noticeable differences from that of the supporters of *Ordine Nuovo*, set out in the motion presented by Ferrero and Garino at the Turin Labour Club meeting in June and detailed in the report presented to the anarchist national congress in July of that year in Bologna. At the congress, Garino confirmed the need to promote the creation of factory councils as “they bring the class struggle into its natural terrain, endowing it with the strength to conquer”. He considered their primary tasks “first, immediate action; second, to guarantee the continuity of production in the insurrectionary period; third, to be perhaps the basis for communist management”. Basically, for anarchists the importance of the councils lay in the fact that they ensured the participation of all workers “without distinction [...] organized or not, on the basis of their various sectors” and that they could operate as unitary instruments of struggle and management: “the Council as an anti-State organ and the Council as an organ of power”⁸.

The common point between the anarchists and the Ordinovists was their demand that every worker, whether belonging to a union or not, had an equal voice within the councils. However, they differed in that the former refused to consider the councils as the basis for a new State, a soviet State. Other differences lay in stressing the criteria that only in the revolutionary phase could the councils act as effective instruments of class struggle (and, therefore, spread to all sectors of social life) and in pointing out the risks of their degenerating into joint management bodies of a non-communist system. Endorsing these points, the anarchist congress in Bologna approved a motion which read (in part):

⁵ “L’Ordine Nuovo”, 25 October and 22 November 1919.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 27 March 1920.

⁷ A. GRAMSCI, *L’Ordine Nuovo*, Turin 1954, pp. 128–129.

⁸ M. GARINO, *Consigli di fabbrica e di azienda. Relazione presentata al Congresso dell’Unione Anarchica Italiana (Bologna 1–4 luglio 1920)*, in “Umanità Nova”, 1 July 1920.

“While noting that the factory and departmental councils are important above all in light of the proximity of the revolution and of the fact that they can be the technical organs of expropriation and of the necessary, immediate continuation of production, but that, by continuing to exist within the current society, they would be prey to the moderating and accommodating influence of this society, we believe that the factory councils and suitable instruments for grouping all manual and intellectual workers in their workplaces, for communist and anarchist purposes and that they are absolutely anti-State organs and possible nuclei of the future running of industrial and agricultural production. They are useful for developing in the waged worker the consciousness of producer and also, for the purposes of the revolution, for helping to transform the discontent of the industrial and agricultural workers into a clear desire for expropriation. We therefore invite comrades to support the formation of factory councils and to participate actively in their development in order to maintain their organic structure and their functions as outlined here, to fight any tendency towards collaborationist deviations and to ensure that when they are formed all the workers in each factory participate, whether they are organized or not”⁹.

As far as the soviets were concerned, the meeting relied on the report by Sandro Molinari which, in effect, repeated what was said regarding the councils. They were adjudged to be important bodies during the revolutionary phase but mention was made of the risks of authoritarian, collaborationist or statist deviations¹⁰. The introductory report on workers’ organization was made by Fabbri, who stressed the need to “let workers’ organizations and political organizations remain independent of each other” and to “occupy ourselves with the work of anarchist comrades [within the unions] to ensure that it increasingly promotes revolutionary and libertarian goals”¹¹. Fabbri had already written on the subject in *Umanità Nova* during the days leading up to the congress, proposing that the motion on the matter approved at the Florence convention the previous year be presented again, and suggesting that “a statement in favour of proletarian unity be added”. In recalling this principle, he criticized the split between the *Unione Sindacale* and the CGdL which, he said, though “provoked by the evil designs of the reformists [...], was a mistake”, as it had not produced the effects desired by the reformists, given that “in many places the anarchists remained as members of the confederation”, because of their “desire for unity”. He also negatively considered the USI’s propensity for encouraging others to leave the CGdL:

“If I had to give advice, I would ask the comrades to avoid provoking splits within the unions, the Labour Clubs, etc., to which they belong [...] Workers’ organization, which is based on the workers’ interests, tends to adapt itself to its environment in order to obtain the best results for its members. It is not, as was once said, automatically revolutionary or libertarian”.

The real question lay instead in the strategy anarchists should have within the unions: an anti-collaborationist and anti-reformist strategy, able to involve non-anarchist workers, to create

⁹ *Congresso dell’Unione Anarchica Italiana. Terza giornata (3 luglio 1920)*, ibid, 6 July 1920.

¹⁰ ARGON [S. MOLINARI], *I Soviet e la loro costituzione. Atti del Convegno (Relazione al Congresso Anarchico di Bologna)*, ibid, 3 July 1920.

¹¹ *Secondo Congresso dell’Unione Anarchica Italiana. Seconda giornata (2 luglio 1920) Seduta pomeridiana. Rapporti con le organizzazioni operaie di resistenza*, ibid, 10 July 1920.

“that revolutionary minority whose function is to give the first blow on the closed doors of the future” and to coordinate themselves within the structures of the party¹². But there were other positions argued during the meeting, such as Fantozzi’s, which held that it was “disgraceful that anarchist workers are still members of the Confederation of Labour”, Borghi’s, which extolled the virtues of the USI without demanding that people join it, Binazzi’s (poorly supported) middle-of-the-road position, which saw no difficulty with people joining either union. Then there was the Turin group’s position, which insisted on the importance of action within the confederation, if possible forming “opposition groups of anarchists, syndicalists and revolutionary communists”. Garino maintained that it was because “this was not the moment to force a split in those places where there was proletarian unity, given the times that were in it”. At the end, a motion prevailed (with the support of Malatesta) which did not take into account the breadth of debate and in effect took an easy line of exclusive support for the USI.

“This Congress [...], given the current situation where several workers’ organizations exist, once more considers that the *Unione Sindacale Italiana* is the one which today best embodies revolutionary and libertarian ideals. Our solidarity goes to those comrades who devote their activity to it with a spirit of abnegation. We advise comrades to promote the action of the USI as and as long as it remains on the terrain of revolutionary, anti-State action, both by becoming members and helping to form new branches, and (where this is not possible due to local conditions and in order not to provoke damaging splits) by uniting into direct action groups or committees to oppose reformism all those revolutionary elements who are still (as a result of the above needs) members of other organizations, and ensuring that these groups or committees act together with the USI”¹³.

In more general terms, though marked by lively and complex debate, the Bologna congress was an indicator of the internal difficulty in the growth of the post-war movement where recourse was made to compromise between the various tendencies. In effect, the “pact of alliance” approved at the meeting was an attempt to hold together federations, groups and individuals with different ideas, binding them through a “programme”, which would become impossible to realize given the total local and individual autonomy which the pact itself guaranteed. Discussion on the subject revealed at least two well-defined positions. The first position was hostile to any form of organization, tied to the guarantee of absolute freedom of the individual or the group. The second position was that in order to guarantee that the *Unione Anarchica Italiana* (UAI – Italian Anarchist Union) – the new name of the UCAdI – could function well, only those who accepted an organization which though not centralized, operated on the basis of federations according to a programme that would have to be binding for all once approved.

“The contradictions in the UAI’s action and in the ‘Pact’ it approved are evident, and are obviously the consequence of the instrumental function which the UAI was to have had at that particular political moment. Thus it tried to bridge the gap between the founding principles of anarchism and operational efficiency, in order to reach certain goals, by artificially overcoming the contrasting methods and strategies of

¹² CATILINA [L. FABBRI], *Anarchismo e azione sindacale*, ibid, 27 June 1920.

¹³ *Secondo congresso cit.*

its militants. It reminded its members of the moral obligation attached to decisions reached but recognized, on the other hand, the right to full autonomy. It gave its members a series of practical regulations regarding the working of groups, the payment of dues, the process for convening assemblies, expulsions, etc., while on the other hand confirming that every group or circle which was a member of the UAI could establish its own internal constitution and decide its own activity in whatever way it chose and in full autonomy, thereby automatically permitting the various groups to establish their own regulations even if they differed from those set out in the ‘Pact’¹⁴.

Furthermore, the Programme itself, which should have provided cohesion for all the components of the movement, limited itself to outlining the project for a future anarchist communist society without defining the tactics and strategy required in order to reach this objective, trusting practically exclusively to the insurrectional moment, for which it was necessary to “prepare oneself mentally and materially so that the outbreak of violent struggle would lead to a victory of the people”¹⁵. Instead of an organic line, the congress created a badly-connected series of strategies and failed to create adequate mechanisms for the main proposal, the *Fronte unico rivoluzionario* (FUR – Revolutionary Single Front). In Fabbri’s words, approved by the congress:

“it is not a single front of revolutionary parties, but between revolutionary elements in various places, even in opposition to the will of the leaders and without the blessing of the various organizations, the UAI included. It is a matter of local agreements made possible by an affinity of intent, especially with regard to action”¹⁶.

Given such a set-up, if it were to be practicable there would have to be theoretical, objective and organizational unity together with a good level of efficiency, on the part of the whole movement. But within the *Unione Anarchica Italiana* this unity was only apparent, not real.

Alongside the official pronouncements, the congress was also the scene of a secret meeting in order to agree (it would seem) a plan of operations in light of the expected insurrection¹⁷. In this area the anarchists showed themselves to be full of initiative and capable of acting as advanced nuclei of attack and defence in the waves of popular and workers’ uprising, and in extreme resistance to fascism with an effect that was superior to their numbers. The group from La Spezia had established relations with sailors and soldiers and in May 1920 they launched an assault on the Monte Albano fort in Migliarino and, in agreement with some of the guards, tried in vain to take possession of an arms depot. Significantly, the police did not make any arrests even though they were well aware of the incident, for fear of provoking “a general strike of protest”¹⁸. The *Fascio Libertario Torinese* (Turin Libertarian Group) formed close ties with soldiers (even with officers and junior officers) who secretly frequented the Labour Club. “The anarchist communists of Turin”, according to a June 1919 report by General Scipioni, “have well-defined tasks for action: to blow up railway bridges, to cut telegraph and telephone communications and to isolate local

¹⁴ G. CERRITO, *Il ruolo dell’organizzazione anarchica*, Catania 1973, pp. 87–88.

¹⁵ UNIONE ANARCHICA ITALIANA, *Programma adottato dall’UAI in Bologna 1–4 luglio 1920*, Bologna 1920.

¹⁶ *Secondo Congresso dell’Unione Anarchica Italiana. Seconda giornata (2 luglio 1920). Seduta antimeridiana. Il fronte unico*, in “Umanità Nova”, 4 luglio 1920.

¹⁷ See: L. FABBRI, *Malatesta* cit., p. 139.

¹⁸ G. BIANCO, *op. cit.*, p. 147, which includes the *Nota del Sottoprefetto di La Spezia del 18 aprile 1920*.

authorities from any outside contact”¹⁹. In April 1920, anarchists from Piombino, Livorno and Genoa blocked a convoy of troops being sent to Turin, the scene at the time of the “*sciopero delle lancette*”. Not to mention the role of anarchists in the Ancona revolt the following June where “soldiers armed the workers”, as Borghi reports, “and the workers defended the soldiers”²⁰.

The FUR was prepared to put into application temporary, local agreements which were often imposed by events, with socialists, republicans and subversives. Its best prospects seemed to lie in national initiatives and conventions jointly called by the mass organizations in defence of political victims and of the Russian Revolution, which fostered fervid hopes. Nonetheless, even the convention in Bologna in August 1920 called by the railworkers’ union, which was massively attended, did not lead to the creation of unity. Certainly, a large part of the blame was due to the unwillingness of the PSI, but in part also thanks to the attitude of Malatesta who was reluctant to accept a permanent committee for fear of the power it could have assumed²¹. Once again, then, we see the uncertainty of his position (shared at the time by a large part of the movement) whose roots lay in uncritical trust in spontaneity, in the imminence of the revolution and in the intent to leave the people to do things by themselves.

Above all, it was the workers’ and peasants’ struggles (which reinforced the conviction of their leading automatically to a revolution in society) which provided anarchists with fertile terrain to push for the immediate putting into operation of the FUR. The effect was the transformation of a mid-term strategy into the only strategy and the loss of understanding of the need for an organization of anarchists which would function as a centre of coordination and a reference point for the masses. However, their work went well beyond their intense operational activity, encompassing well-aimed analysis of the situation and the reformist attempts at limiting the initiative of the proletariat with the usual rules and regulations. Even after the end of the Mazzonis case (a conclusion effectively stage-managed by the government, which re-possessed factories occupied by workers in order to hand them back to their owners after agreeing new contracts with the workers), *Umanità Nova* wrote:

“We regret that those who we believe to be sincerely revolutionaries have acted with complicity in this affair. What have our friends of *Ordine Nuovo* got to say about this parody of communism of the Factory Councils, which they support so warmly? Or about this loudly-acclaimed attempt at communism in a bourgeois regime with the blessing of a minister of the king? And what about the abstentionist communists in the *Partito Socialista*?”²².

It must be stressed that this denunciation anticipated (and perhaps led to) the position of the Ordinovists laid out in Togliatti’s article “New Tactics”²³. In more general terms, it has been noted, with respect to the views of the other forces on the left, that

¹⁹ *Rapporto del maggior Generale Scipioni sull’organizzazione rivoluzionaria a Torino del 15 giugno 1919*, reported in R. VIVARELLI, *Il dopoguerra in Italia e l’avvento del fascismo (1918–1922)*. I. *Dalla fine della guerra all’impresa di Fiume*, Naples 1967, pp. 584–586.

²⁰ A. BORGHI, *La rivoluzione mancata* cit., p. 129.

²¹ See: L. FABBRI, *Prefazione* cit., p. 18.

²² *Note torinesi, Vertenza Mazzonis*, in “*Umanità Nova*”, 7 March 1920. See also: *I nuovi orizzonti della lotta operaia*, ibid, 4 March 1920, and *L’espropriazione degli stabilimenti Mazzonis. Una nuova mistificazione*, ibid, 6 March 1920.

²³ *Tattica Nuova*, in “*L’Ordine Nuovo*”, 13 March 1920 (article attributed to Togliatti). G. MAIONE, *op. cit.*, p. 102, states that the Ordinovists were the only ones who understood the real implications of the Mazzonis case: when one considers what was written in “*Umanità Nova*” this statement seems overly biased.

“the position of the anarchists during the period of the factory occupations was always one of revolutionary intervention and extension and, at the same time, of conflict with respect to intervention on practices. It is not a hurriedly cobbled together political position, just a step in the development of an analysis and tactics rooted in a wider background and in decisions and choices which are particularly referred to the period following the First World War”.²⁴

In fact, right from the very start of the metalworkers action, it was followed closely and commented, its development was examined, the position with regard to the reformists was examined and there were attempts to extend the struggle and connect it to other categories of industry and agriculture²⁵. Equally, attention was focused on the new proletarian grassroots organizations which had developed out of the need to organize and manage production in order that the revolutionary transition could begin²⁶. When the action culminated in the occupation of factories, the anarchists showed themselves to be aware that there were no longer sufficient economic margins for negotiation and that the clash with the bourgeoisie had shifted onto the political terrain. They understood the particular nature of the moment when the masses, overcoming the traditional insurrectional methods, took possession of the means of production, actually putting revolutionary expropriation into practice (on 7 September, after calling for the factories not to be abandoned, *Umanità Nova* stated that “never again will such a favourable occasion present itself to begin expropriating the capitalists with the minimum loss of blood”)²⁷. Seeing the risk of isolation, they proposed expanding the movement to other sectors up to the level of local administration. This was the situation in which a convention was called by the USI for 7 September in Sampierdarena, with the participation of the rail, sea and port workers, grocers and CGdL delegates. “All these workers”, wrote Borghi²⁸, “are in favour of a courageous decision: to do the deed, to occupy immediately Italy’s biggest port, Genoa, the other Ligurian ports, and other branches of industry”. Equally perceptive was the prediction that the abandonment of the factories would inevitably spark off the fury of reaction²⁹.

²⁴ G. BOSIO, *L'occupazione delle fabbriche e i gruppi dirigenti e di pressione del movimento operaio*, in 1920. *La grande speranza. L'occupazione delle fabbriche in Italia*, special issue of “Il Ponte”, 31 October 1970, p. 1182.

²⁵ In connection, see: “Umanità Nova”, 28 March, 1 and 4 April, 9 and 12 June 1920.

²⁶ In connection, see: *ibid*, 7 April, 6 and 22 June, 8 and 19 August, 4 and 5 September 1920.

²⁷ *Metallurgici attenti*, *ibid*, 7 September 1920.

²⁸ A. BORGHI, *La rivoluzione mancata* cit., p. 143 ff.

²⁹ See: *I pericoli*, in “Umanità Nova”, 8 September 1920.

Part VI: The Preventive Counter-Revolution

The end of the great wave of struggle that had culminated in the factory occupations added to the repercussions in Italy of the international economic crisis to create the conditions for the defeat of any revolutionary hopes that anarchists had had during the *Biennio Rosso*. At the same time, the wounds produced by the war in the capitalist world were healing, while it was becoming ever-clearer that there would be no further spreading of the Russian Revolution in its Bolshevik version. At this point, the anarchist movement (which had provided, both in Italy and elsewhere, a not irrelevant contribution to the blocking of episodes of armed counter-revolutionary intervention) was losing the reserve which it had thus far maintained for the sake of unity of the left, and began to voice its dissent regarding the management of and the road to revolution and to protest against the persecution of anarchists in Russia. The basic criticism lay in the degradation of the soviets, proclaimed by the Bolsheviks as the basis of revolutionary action and the instruments of the new order, but which were instead suffocated by the “dictatorship of the proletariat”. This, in practice, was a dictatorship of the communist party which, with its centralizing apparatus, crushed the truly democratic structures. This was the line taken by Fabbri in his “*Dittatura e rivoluzione*”, written in August 1920 but, significantly, only published the following year¹. So it was that the 3rd Congress of the UAI (in Ancona, November 1921) confirmed “its enthusiastic solidarity with the Russian revolution and its firm intention to rise in its defence against any reactionary attempt to destroy it by governments of other countries”, while declaring however that it “in no way recognized the so-called communist government of Russia as the representative of the revolution” and expressing “its heartiest solidarity with the anarchists of Russia who are being denied all freedom and who are imprisoned and persecuted for the [...] crimes of publishing, meeting, organizing and propagating their ideas”².

But the debate on the conduct of the Bolsheviks and the Anarchists on the dictatorship of the proletariat would only later have any sort of notable influence on attempts to revise strategy. In the years from 1920 to 1925, instead, attention was fixed on the re-emergence of State repression and on the spread of fascism which was unleashing armed acts of aggression against the workers’ movement, destroying the organizational structures which the masses had devoted untiring energies into building. The more dedicated militants were being assassinated or forced out of their home towns into exile or temporary refuge elsewhere. Already in October 1920, that is to say practically immediately after the abandoning of the factories, the offices of *Umanità Nova* in Milan were twice subjected to searches. The police arrested some of the best-known members of the UAI and the USI, such as Malatesta and Borghi, for “conspiracy against the State”. Prepa-

¹ L. FABBRI, *Dittatura e rivoluzione*, Ancona 1921 (most recent edition Cesena 1971). For an anarchist historiography of the Russian Revolution, see: VOLIN, *La révolution inconnue*, Paris 1947 (English edition: *The Unknown Revolution*, Detroit/Chicago 1974); P. ARCHINOFF, *Historia del movimento machnovista*, Buenos Aires 1926 (English edition: P. ARSHINOV, *The History of the Makhnovist Movement (1918–1921)*, London 1987); N. MAKHNO, *La Révolution Russe en Ukraine (mars 1917-avril 1918)*, Paris 1954, 3 vols.; *La rivolta di Kronstadt*, Florence 1971.

² “Umanità Nova”, 8 November 1921.

rations for the trial dragged on for a long time as the prosecution struggled to find a plausible charge on which to prosecute and the trial did not begin until July 1921³. The prisoners began a hunger strike in March, which led to a series of solidarity protests and strikes led by the USI. The unease created by the arrests and by police measures drove some individualists into isolated action. On 23 March 1921, a bomb at the Diana Theatre in Milan, designed to hit the police chief, missed its target and killed around twenty people⁴. The resulting shock in public opinion led to the most violent repression, while fascist squads ransacked the offices of *L'Avanti!* and of *Umanità Nova* (which in May had to move to Rome where it was able, with some difficulty, to continue publication until December 1922)⁵ and began a vicious hunt for “subversives”.

Anarchists have long debated the episode and it is still difficult to establish to what extent infiltrated agents provocateurs were involved in the attempt on the life of the police chief. “If E. Malatesta had not been arbitrarily detained in prison for such a long time”, declared one of the men sentenced for the slaughter, “the bombing would never even have been thought of”⁶. And though Malatesta (who, together with his comrades, had immediately suspended the hunger strike) totally disagreed politically with the bombers, while demonstrating a certain comprehension from a human point of view, the position of others was much more severe.

“Let it be perfectly clear”, wrote Fabbri, “that given the choice between the bourgeois judges and the prisoners, between the accusers and the accused, we will defend the latter — in full accord with our function as defenders of the downtrodden and the weak, but we defend them for superior reasons of humanity and justice, as irresponsible victims and not as defenders of an idea. We defend them and help them, but we by no means celebrate them”⁷.

The affair contributed to some extent to weakening the anarchist movement and, more generally, the whole workers’ movement, exposing its weaknesses which were already to be seen with the first signs of repression. The convention of popular forces which was quickly called in Florence in order to promote protests and active solidarity with Malatesta, Borghi and the other prisoners, brought no results (Serrati even went so far as to describe the arrest as a “sporadic episode”)⁸, demonstrating the inability to reach agreement, even on common defence, among the parties and organizations of the Italian left, their incomprehension and their unreadiness to face up to the reaction and fascism. For anarchism in particular, this shortcoming was closely linked to the basic fact that “it had not been able to develop a strategy for the revolutionary transition which would place it in a position to lead the masses”⁹. Certainly, as we have already seen, the Bologna congress had established certain points, a number of partial policies. And in fact, the supporters of that strategy had involved themselves in the class struggle which, during the *Biennio Rosso*, was at its height in exactly those areas where they were concentrated — and it was

³ See: T. TAGLIAFERRO, *Errico Malatesta, Armando Borghi e compagni davanti ai giurati di Milano. Resoconto stenografico del processo svoltosi il 27, 28, 29 luglio 1921*, Milan 1979.

⁴ On the Diana affair, see: V. MANTOVANI, *Mazurca blu. La strage del Diana*, Milan 1979.

⁵ See: L. BETTINI, *op. cit.*, pp. 289–291.

⁶ G. MARIANI, *Memorie di un ex-terrorista*, Turin 1953, p. 46.

⁷ Mentioned in E. MALATESTA, *Vittime ed eroi*, in “Umanità Nova”, 24 December 1921 (now in E. MALATESTA, *Scritti cit.*, I, p.312).

⁸ L. FABBRI, *Prefazione cit.*, p. 20.

⁹ E. SANTARELLI, *Il socialismo anarchico cit.*, p. 180.

no coincidence. But just as these actions, though widespread over some while, failed to lead to a more generalized revolt, the Italian anarchist movement too (fooled by a false theoretical unity and unity of purpose which undermined any chance of debate or organizational growth within the UAI) was unable, as a political movement, to work out a strategy which could face the various stages of development, based on experience and political development. This insufficiency did not escape Malatesta, who remarked on it with great clarity in January 1920:

“On the streets, in action, the masses are with us and are ready to act; but at the moment of truth, they allow themselves to be sweet-talked, becoming disheartened and disillusioned; we always find ourselves defeated and isolated. Why? [...] Because we are disorganized, or not organized enough. The others have the means to transmit news, be it true or false, quickly and everywhere, and they use these means in order to influence opinion and direct any action in whatever way they want. By means of their leagues, their sections and federations, by having trusted elements in every area, safe houses, and so on, they can launch a movement when it serves their purposes and halt it when the goal is reached [...] The situations I have described will certainly be reproduced in Italy and in the not too distant future. Do we really wish to find ourselves in the same unprepared state, powerless to successfully oppose the manoeuvres of tricksters and to obtain the best possible results from any revolutionary situation?”¹⁰.

But the project of an alliance of leftist forces, built mainly from the grassroots at local level, was matched by an inefficient synthesis between the various anarchist currents, founded on a “pact” and a “programme” which should have served to unify through a common appeal to the principles, but which instead were avoidable and avoided thanks to the autonomy of individuals and groups. Undoubtedly, experiences and the rapid worsening of the situation were an incentive to overcoming the contradiction. The Milan nucleus, which was gathered around the journal *Il Demolitore* stated in 1922 that

“the *Unione Anarchica Italiana* [...] must not limit its work to studying the situation and carrying out the modest task of ‘correspondence commission’. It must hold (if it really wants to be strong) under its control everything that regards the anarchist movement, its day-to-day expressions, its press, its oral propaganda, its manifestoes to the proletariat, its labour action, international relations, periodicals, its relations with the other vanguard parties, absolute control of the direction of every delicate organism and, above all, responsibility”.

And it rightly attributed the functional shortcomings of the organization to the presence of

“two distinct currents which block each other out: on the one hand the pro-organization anarchists who, though convinced of the need for solid political and labour organization, make tremendous efforts to free themselves from the fear of denominations and from the terror of having to be (and about time, too) nothing more than disciplined militants; on the other hand, the individualists struggling

¹⁰ E. MALATESTA, *Movimenti stroncati* cit.

along from day to day on the margins of the two manifestations of anarchism – communist and terrorist”¹¹.

Nevertheless, the dark years of total resistance to fascism were not best suited to a process of profound revision. Thus, the anarchists faced the test with the policy of the single revolutionary front, with the various leftist parties each bringing their own specific elements; engaging (with no great success) in action designed to unite, with appeals to the need for “direct agreement between all the active elements, over and above the official organizations”¹², and urgently appealing to the proletariat for an “organized resistance”¹³, of which they felt themselves to be the vanguard; promoting the formation of the *Arditi del Popolo* (seen as the military application of the FUR) who, despite the diffidence of the PSI and the *Partito Comunista d’Italia* (Communist Party of Italy – PCdI), tried to react blow for blow. They were the protagonists of episodes of armed opposition both to the fascist squads and to the armed forces and police and also arms raids on military barracks, but paid a high price in deaths and jail sentences¹⁴. They were, however, fully aware of the need not to become isolated and to fight with the masses: if the fascist attack represented the reaction of capitalism, “the need of the leading elements in modern society to defend themselves”¹⁵ against the proletariat which had continued to grow after the Great War, it was becoming indispensable for the resistance to be massive and for the defensive phase to become an offensive, a revolution which could overthrow the bourgeoisie and establish a new society.

Ultimately, Fascism was able to win easily simply because of the deficiencies of the Italian left. And in the eyes of many anarchists, these deficiencies were added to in no small way by the absence of any appropriate strategy by the anarchist party and above all by the lack of revolutionary initiative during the *Biennio Rosso*¹⁶. But Fabbri looked further than most and realized that the success of the adversary and especially the way this success was consolidated depended a great deal on international factors. As he wrote in December 1923:

“The worst reaction is predominating all over Europe, and this is the principal reason why the Italian reaction is so strong; this is the most important reason why Italian fascism has cause to hope that its triumph can be longer-lived than would be the case if it depended solely on its material strength and the conscience, the state of mind and the spirit of the Italian people [...] The miserable state of freedom in Italy depends much more than is thought on the whims of plutocrats in Paris, London and Washington”¹⁷.

¹¹ T.T. [T. TAGLIAFERRO], *Il senso della realtà*, in “Il Demolitore”, Milan 14 February 1922.

¹² E. MALATESTA, *Il dovere dell’azione*, in “Umanità Nova”, 25 June 1921 (now in E. MALATESTA, *Scritti cit.*, I, pp. 97–98).

¹³ E. MALATESTA, *La guerra civile*, *ibid.*, 8 September 1921 (now in E. MALATESTA, *Scritti cit.*, I, pp. 217).

¹⁴ On anarchist resistance actions against the reaction and fascism, see: A. TASCA, *Nascita e avvento del fascismo (1918–1922)*, Bari 1965, *passim*; R. VIVARELLI, *op. cit.*, *passim*; A. BORGHI, *La rivoluzione mancata cit.*, *passim*; *Un trentennio cit.*, *passim*.

¹⁵ L. FABBRI, *La controrivoluzione cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁶ See: L. FABBRI, *La controrivoluzione cit.*, *passim*; A. BORGHI, *½ secolo cit.*, *passim*.

¹⁷ L. FABBRI, *La reazione europea e l’Europa*, in “Il Martello”, New York, 22 December 1923.

Part VII: A Re-Think On Strategy

For many years in Italy, anarchists “made up, after communists, the largest contingent of political prisoners, internees and subjects of police survey”¹. In the meantime, the emigrant community had begun a tortuous process of reflection on the causes of their defeat, on a review of their strategic lines and their operational decisions which, apart from the various tendencies singing their own praises, saw the initial basis for a clarification.

Some pounced on the negative judgements of the FUR to contest even the need for any agreement with the left, which had shown itself to be “untrustworthy” during the *Biennio Rosso*. Consequently, they sought to put their energies into the construction of an exclusively “libertarian” coalition, seen as a vast and undefined series of alliances (allowing as much room as possible for initiative by individuals and groups, held together by a generic reference to libertarian principles and methods) which would take the place of the existing anarchist organization which had revealed itself to be inadequate. The choice was reflected in the instruments of the struggle against fascism. In fact, after the unhappy experience of the *Comitato d'azione antifascista* (Committee for Anti-Fascist Action), led by Ricciotti Garibaldi, the *Comitato dell'alleanza libertario* (Committee of the Libertarian Alliance), made up only of anarchists, was formed in Paris².

The same positions had already been adopted in 1922 by the group behind *L'Adunata dei Refrattari*³. Heirs to the worst individualist tradition of *Cronaca Sovversiva*, which it was inspired by, this newspaper was founded during a difficult period of bitter repression which followed the war and which affected the local revolutionary-inspired workers' movement, involving the Italo-American anarchists. Examples of this were the cases of Sacco and Vanzetti, sentenced and executed for crimes they had not committed, of Salsedo, who was arrested and “committed suicide” in prison, and of Galleani, who was deported back to Italy and immediately sent into confinement by the regime⁴. Such a situation should have led to the formation of the widest possible proletarian movement with a union of anarchist forces as an integral part of it. Instead, *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* from the beginning set itself up to “disturb this cosy harmony theorized within the family and which has been fashionable for some time now, in the guise of a Single Front and an alliance of labour”. As far as struggle against fascism was concerned, it postulated an ideological “purity” which, rejecting workers' organization as “more a hindrance than an help to the emancipation of the workers”, promoted pure and heroic individual action⁵.

¹ E. SANTARELLI, *Il socialismo anarchico* cit., p. 195.

² On the birth and the programme of the Committee of the Libertarian Alliance, see: *Comitato Alleanza Antifascista di Parigi*, 2-page pamphlet with attached 4-page pamphlet *Compagno ascolta*, deposited at the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (abbr. IISGA), Fondo Ugo Fedeli, b. 109.

³ See: G. CERRITO, *Sull'emigrazione anarchica italiana negli Stati Uniti d'America*, in “Volontà” (Genoa) 4, 1969.

⁴ See: *Un trentennio* cit., passim. On the repression against the US workers' movement after the First World War, see: W. PRESTON, *Aliens and Dissenters*, New York 1963; and R.C. BOYER-H.M. MORAIS, *Storia del movimento operaio negli Stati Uniti*, Bari 1974.

⁵ *È permesso*, in “L'Adunata dei Refrattari”, New York 15 April 1922; and *A che serve l'organizzazione*, ibid, New York 15 May 1922.

Having arrived in the United States, Armando Borghi accelerated the convergence of the anti-organizationalist currents and launched a campaign against any united anti-fascist agreement which, in his opinion, would only have repeated the failed experience of the FUR⁶. At that stage it was becoming inevitable that there would be a clash with the organizationalists who in 1923 had promoted the *Alleanza antifascista del Nord America* (Anti-Fascist Alliance of North America), with an autonomous and original line, with the aim of combating fascism in Italy and its spread to the United States, grouping together all those political and labour organizations who agreed with that goal⁷.

The increasing bitterness of the polemics (which reached crisis point starting in 1926) provoked a split among Italian anarchist immigrants into two opposing camps. It was a split which would spread from the US towards Europe, where with the help of various factors, amongst which the stress of exile, the anti-organizationalist faction was to gain greater momentum. Although in his public statement Malatesta took a prudent line in order not to accentuate the divisions, he felt that it was necessary to take a more decided position in private. Writing to Borghi in July 1926, he said:

“As far as I am concerned, organization between men with the same goals and who want to reach them with the same means is always the first thing to do. Since the UAI has a programme that I accept and seeks to unite only those who accept its programme, I am for the UAI. Cordial relations with anarchists of all tendencies, specific agreements for specific aims, general cooperation in everything on which there is agreement, yes; but fusion and confusion, no. Uniting on any other basis with the so-called individualists and anti-organizationalists would effectively mean putting oneself under the control of these people who, when they are not *je m'en fautiste*, are authoritarians who reject the word organization but who in reality aim at creating personal organizations, dependent on the uncontrollable wishes of a few people [...] Apart from anything else, what is important to me is not organization as such, but the spirit of organization; when there is this spirit of organization, organization arises when it is needed and takes the forms that circumstances require and permit. Now, it is the spirit of organization which is generally lacking among anarchists; and mixing together the organized and the ‘anti-organizationalists’ is no way to develop it. My wish would be for all anarchists to organize themselves according to their various tendencies and that the various organizations would establish cordial relations of mutual aid. And this would naturally be without stopping individuals or small groups, whether they belong to the general organizations or not, from acting separately for specific purposes. They would be free to do so and would also receive, when possible, any necessary aid. If only they would do it, instead of acting stupidly!”⁸.

⁶ On the positions taken by A. Borghi in the United States, see his *Gli anarchici e le alleanze*, New York undated [but 1927]. Later, he was to deny his involvement in the FUR during the Biennio Rosso in Italy (see: A. BORGHI, *Mezzo secolo cit.*, p. 314).

⁷ On the organization’s programme, see: *Alleanza Antifascista del Nord America*, in “Il Martello”, New York 24 October 1925.

⁸ *Lettera di Errico Malatesta ad Armando Borghi dell’11 luglio 1926* in IISGA, Fondo Nettare, b. Adunata-Malatesta, Borghi-Malatesta correspondence.

It was a bitter realization of the failure of the attempt made in 1920 to keep the various tendencies united by omitting the very things that provide that clarity which is indispensable for the life of a political organization if it is to be successful and be a point of reference for the masses. In fact, the nature of a synthesis (more in name than in fact) of the non-homogeneous positions of the emigrant anarchist organizations could not bestow on them the presence and strength which even the UAI, with all its faults, had demonstrated during the *Biennio Rosso*, as they were lacking the essential elements which the UAI had: a programme and a strategy for creating the necessary alliances in order to carry it out. In these circumstances, the intransigent opposition to fascism by the anarchists, even though fiercely waged under various forms both inside and outside the country, sorely lacked coordination and, even more so, a united strategy.

However, there was now growing awareness of the need for a critical re-think on the causes of the defeat of the revolution in Italy and elsewhere in the world, the need to come up with a plan, a strategy, an organizational and operational concept which could firmly establish anarchism on the left and allow it to regain its dominant position in the revolutionary process. A firm step in that direction was taken by the “Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists — Draft” published in Paris by the Delo Truda group of exiled Russian anarchists⁹. Its programmatic points were: the principle of the class struggle and anarchist communism, labour activity as an indispensable method of revolutionary struggle and the creation of a positive programme for the period of transition of the revolution. It also promoted an organization whose members would have to be fully responsible with regard to the common strategy.

Leaving aside the excessive importance attributed to the organizational structures, it has to be admitted that the “Platform” was the first constructive re-thinking on the international defeat which the anarchists had suffered in the 1920s, and it was to be received with enthusiasm by some groups, such as the French and Bulgarian federations. Clearly, such a proposal sparked off debate in Italy’s libertarian circles. One group of militants joined the initiative and formed the 1st Italian Section of the new organization¹⁰. Fabbri gave a calm and balanced view when he wrote that

“it places under discussion a number of problems inherent to the anarchist movement, to the place of anarchists in the revolution, to anarchist organization in the struggle, and so on. These need to be resolved if anarchism is to continue to provide answers to the growing needs of the struggle and of present-day social life”¹¹.

Nevertheless, the majority of the Italian movement, though accepting that it had committed some of the errors indicated in the document, refused to accept its organizational proposals which were essential if a new direction was to be taken. And the lack of receptiveness to this essential point was to be one of the principal causes of the decline in the anarchist presence within the class struggle in Italy.

⁹ The document was published in Paris in 1926 by Edition des Œvres Anarchistes. Librairie internationale. The Platform and material concerning the successive debate are contained in Italian translation in G. CERRITO, *Il ruolo dell’organizzazione anarchica*, Pistoia 1973, pp. 259–360. Available in English at The Nestor Makhno Archive

¹⁰ See: *Manifesto Comunista Anarchico della I Sezione* in IISGA, Fondo Ugo Fedeli, b. 175. For information on the group, see: G. CERRITO, *Il ruolo* cit., p.92. Available in English at The Nestor Makhno Archive

¹¹ L. FABBRI, *Un progetto di organizzazione anarchica*, in “Il Martello”, New York 17 and 24 November 1927 (now in G. CERRITO, *Il ruolo* cit., pp. 315–324). Available in English at The Nestor Makhno Archive

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