

The Preventive Counter-Revolution

Essay by an Anarchist on Fascism

Luigi Fabbri



1922

Contents

Foreword	3
The Preventive Counter-revolution	5
I.	6
II.	16
III.	31
IV.	47

Foreword

In spite of all the good intentions to the contrary which I brought to this essay, I have in fact failed, in examining the dark issue of fascism, to stand “above the fray.”

Many a time I have tried to suppress the pain and outrage that stirred my hand, but immediately thereafter wounded feelings surged back to offer me counsel in tune with a disturbed and aggravated state of mind. The fact is that I do not really stand above the fray. If only for personal reasons, as a matter of temperament and custom and, to a slight extent – confined to the climate in which I live – out of a professional obligation, I stand slightly apart from the active, militant movement, which is to say that my involvement in the bitter social struggle is all too slight and almost exclusively confined to my writing, even though I too am in this fight with all of my heart and mind.

For around thirty years now I have been an anarchist and revolutionary and I regard myself as another obscure soldier in the proletarian army fighting the old world: and whereas this was something in which I took pride, when fortune was smiling upon us and the working class looked, after victory upon victory, to be on the verge of the ultimate victory, I was all the more proud to feel that I was one of its own come the grey and yellow hour of disappointment and defeat. And I cherished the hope of fairly imminent revenge, since, whilst troops easily enthused about the prospect of imminent excitement were disappointed, I stood firm in my belief in the inevitable victory of an egalitarian, libertarian justice for all.

Maybe we needed this harsh lesson from reality. For some time past too much detritus had been building up along the way, too many thoughtless things had been said and done and unduly easy successes had attracted to our side insincere and self-seeking persons out to turn our ideal into a cloak or a kiosk. And upstarts eager to use it for self-advancement. Maybe it was good luck that made many of them less kindly and less fair, or overly complacent and indulgent of the onset of the sort of degeneration that always besets movements that look to be the strongest and on the verge of success. And, when the storm struck, and the gale swept away the detritus and all the trivia, it also swept away the insincere self-seekers. We may well lament the fact that the lightning also struck the old sturdy, fruitful tree that had borne good crops, but on the other hand, the soil will have become more fertile under the plough of pain and the whirlwind will have left the air purer and fresher.

However, whilst it is true that it is an ill wind that blows no good, evil is always evil and as such, must be resisted. To resist it we need to look it in the face and take the measure of it. And the modest pages that follow may prove of service to that end. They make no claim to the prize of impartiality and the most Olympian serenity, for I too am *partipris*, committed to the ranks in which I march and I identify profoundly with all the oppressed, whatever their particular political background, against those who beat, murder, torch and destroy in such cavalier fashion and with such impunity today. But, however much passion may have prompted me to speak thus, I hope that I have not done any injury to the truth.

What I have written here is not a history of fascism; I have merely made the occasional reference to certain specific facts, more in support of my thesis than with any real narrative intent. So lots of my assertions may appear unduly absolute and axiomatic. However, not one of those assertions does not have precise corresponding facts, many specific facts with which the newspapers have been replete for the past year or so; and I do not mean just the subversive press. One can draw up the harshest and most violent indictment of fascism on foot of documentation drawn from the conservative papers most well-disposed towards fascism and from the fascist press proper.

Moreover, the fascist phenomenon is not peculiar to Italy. It has surfaced in even more serious form in Spain and has raised its head in Germany, Hungary, the Americas and elsewhere. Nor were persecution and unlawful reaction mounted by private citizens unknown prior to the World War. In certain respects, they had precedents in the pogroms in Russia and the lynchings in the United States. What is more, the United States has always had a sort of private police in the service of the capitalists, acting in cahoots with the official police, but independently of government, in troubled times and during strikes.

Italian fascism has its own characteristics, motley origins, positions, etc. In some instances it is an improvement upon its brothers or precursors beyond the mountains or across the seas, and in some cases worse than these. But it is not entirely a novelty. From a detailed reading of Italian history from 1795 and 1860, we might well be able to trace its historical ancestry. Take, for example, the Sanfedisti: in the context of the secret societies, these seem to have begun as a patriotic, reform-minded sect, albeit *sui generis*; but later they turned reactionary and pro-Austrian establishment against the “red” conspirators from the Carbonari and Young Italy.

Especially in the Papal States, in Faenza, Ravenna, etc., the Sanfedisti warred with the Carbonari: but the government heaped all the blame exclusively upon the Carbonari. De Castro (*Mondo Secreto*, Vol. VIII) recounts: “An armed, bloodthirsty rabble wrought havoc and looted throughout the city and countryside of Frosinone in the name of defending the throne and hunted down liberals: *and the government dispatched the liberals to the gallows and acquitted the brigands.*”

There is nothing really new under the sun, or so it seems! And if, in the past, the most violent conspiracies against freedom and against the people proved unable to fend off new ideas, prevent the downfall of old institutions and the emergence of new ones, then today too, they will not succeed and they will not succeed in the future.

*The living step into the shoes of the dead,
Hope follows mourning,
The army is unleashed and goes marching
Blithely lashing out at the vanquished.*

Bologna, 15 October 1921

Luigi Fabbri

P.S. – *More than two months have elapsed since I completed this essay: but lots of new events have come to pass which would require a fuller treatment of my subject, discussion of new developments, etc. Since that was not feasible, I have restricted myself to adding, as I reviewed the by then published text, a few lines here and there (in the case of the more significant matters) and some short footnotes.* (December 1921)

The Preventive Counter-revolution

Studying historical happenings from too close a quarter or, worse still, while they are in progress, is harder than one might imagine. Furthermore, there is the danger of falling into serious error, both because passing emotions wield too great a sway upon us and because things seen from too close a quarter are almost as hard to distinguish as they would be from too great a distance.

Yet just such a monograph relating to contemporary developments is material of use to the future historian who will have access, not just to the dry catalogue of events in the newspapers, but the view of these taken by someone who was an onlooker and was more or less personally implicated in them and he can therefore arrive at a clearer idea of the events themselves, seeing them more completely and in the round and thereby arriving at a reconstruction of the historical picture of an entire period that comes as close as possible to the truth.

But for such source materials to be truly useful, those who supply them must strive on the one hand to remain as level-headed and objective as possible in their relation of events, and, on the other, offer comment on the events and set out their own thoughts and feelings with complete honesty, so that the outside reader may appreciate not only the skeletal material event but also the climate of opinion in which it occurred or which was inspired by it in a variety of contexts.

Despite my best efforts, I cannot say whether I will succeed in being objective and level-headed enough in my treatment of a subject that moves me deeply. I am certain, though, that I will set out my thinking honestly and holding nothing back, confident as I am that in so doing I will be doing the only thing I can on behalf of an Idea that I cherish and which in my view represents the very cause of justice.

I.

Fascism is the most natural and legitimate product of the war; I will go further and say that it represents the continuation at national level of the world war begun in July 1914 and not yet finished in spite of all the partial or overall peace treaties.

The war of 1914–1918 was fought not just on the borders but also on the inside of every nation. On every side the so-called “sacred union” against the enemy without was a lie agreed upon, a lie that everybody formally embraced even in the knowledge that it was a fiction. State and military coercion precluded the eruption of hostilities at home and thus prevented the fear of worse damage to follow in the event of foreign invasion; but the class conflict and factional strife and animosity was all the greater because it was unable to find a suitable outlet. In reality, inside every country everybody had something that he despised more profoundly than the enemy without.

That conflict and those hostilities found a thousand ways of expressing themselves, on the most varied occasions and most varied circumstances even while the war was on. But, once the armistice had put paid to the war and the military coercion and threat of invasion ceased, internal conflicts and hostilities quickly showed themselves as they truly were and in all their intensity.

And the war between the nations has not ended: the terms and forms, etc. may have changed, but on the borders of Germany and Russia in the Balkans, in Asia Minor, etc., the war carries on. Albeit on a different scale. Whereas, prior to 1918, the war on the borders predominated and the civil strife within each country remained latent or was pursued at a subtle level, storing up resentments for the future, the opposite is the case today. It is civil war that makes the greatest fuss and claims the most attention, in Italy at any rate: whereas the other sort of war, dormant, erupting barely perceptibly here and there, more or less sustained and dragged out by official congresses and diplomatic vanities where the pretexts, rationales and causes of future wars stack up.

Fascism, guerrilla warfare between fascists and socialists – or, to be more accurate, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – is nothing but the natural unleashing and material consequence of the class hostilities honed during the war and aggravated by a number of secondary circumstances and factors which only appear – and then only briefly – to have distorted its character, which triumphs and comes to the fore when least expected.

Fascism is a response to the defensive needs of modern society’s ruling classes. As such, it need not be unduly equated with the official, numbered, monitored and card-carrying members of the “Fasci di combattimento.” The latter may have provided the phenomenon with a name and blazed a trail for it and furnished its organised central core, woven its rallying colours and offered or tried to offer a idealistic motive for the fight: which is to say they have done a lot for it – but they have not done everything. In reality they are not the whole and all of fascism: and occasionally it happens that fascism reneges, in fact and cruelly if not in words, a number of the presumed ideals and agendas that the first fascists brandished like a flag.

With the war, there emerged the greatest proletarian unanimity against the ruling class and this led to an extraordinary deepening of the gulf between the classes, with the one regarding the other as its declared enemy. And in particular, the ruling class, seeing its power threatened, lost its head. What disturbed it most, perhaps, was the feeling that it could not defend itself except through recourse to violence and civil war, which, in theory and through its laws, it had always condemned: it was undermining the very foundations and principles upon which the bourgeoisie had been constructing its institutions for upwards of a century.

The proletarian menace welded the ruling class, of which fascism today constitutes a sort of militia and rallying point, into a bloc. And the ruling class is not comprised solely of the bourgeoisie proper: it comprises and is made up also of the most backward-looking strata, all of the castes that eke out a parasitic existence under the aegis of the state or who man its ramifications; those who supply the government and the protected industries, the police (grown to mammoth proportions these days), the upper bureaucracy and judiciary and are – all of them – more or less fascistic in outlook. Add to these the landowning bourgeoisie, which is backward-looking by nature and tradition, and always has its back to the wall of peasant demands, which in the long run it could not withstand except by renouncing all profit, which is to say the very privilege that property confers.

Around the ruling class proper there also cluster classes or sub-classes and categories for whom the existing state of affairs actually holds out no inviting prospect but which, due to their wrong-headed mind-set delude themselves that they live, or might yet, better than the workers thanks to the bounty of the state and the favours of others: the petite bourgeoisie, many employees and teachers, certain professions and so on. The line-up is swollen further by all the would-be politicians and journalistic hacks, the flotsam and jetsam left behind by the disappearance of semi-democratic and radical parties and the like, annoyed with the working class that wants nothing to do with them and their quack panaceas.

Naturally, the old parties which are conservative by definition and tradition profit from this state of affairs and this spontaneously generated out and out conservative bloc and are coming back with a vengeance. Fascism is pretty much the standard-bearer to them all and is well received and courted everywhere: in the barracks and in the university, at police headquarters and at the court-house, in the plants of heavy industries and the landowners' counting-houses. Nor is there any shortage of more or less cautious and covert tributes emanating from the mainstays of several parties such as the republican party or the clerical party, even though they may in principle be competitors in that it has its mass following.

The fascists proper, the ones with the badges on their lapels, are relatively few in number but derive their strength from the closed ranks, direct and indirect aid and poorly concealed complicity of all of the various conservative forces in society.

It is primarily as the organisation and agent of the violent armed defence of the ruling class against the proletariat, which, to their mind, has become unduly demanding, united and intrusive, that fascism represents a continuation of the war.

It would be too simplistic to say that the world war was a sort of international war on the proletariat and against revolution. There were other equally important factors and motives behind the war; but it is a fact that one of the things that triggered the conflict in Europe, one of the

factors why no ruling class in any country – not in France, not in Germany, not in Russia, not in Austria, not in England, not in Italy – did what might have been necessary and what it might have done to avert war – was precisely the hope that each of them had of being spared revolution, decapitating a working class that had become overly strong, defusing popular resistance through blood-letting on a vast scale, consolidating crowned heads and especially the rule of the banking and industrial plutocracy.

Many have, as the saying goes, paid the price of this: once the floodgates were opened, the surging currents have swept away many of the crowned heads of Germany, Russia, Austria, etc., but everybody played his hand in the hope of emerging as the winner: which is to say, of defeating not just the enemy on the other side of the border, but also the enemy within, the organised proletariat, socialism and revolution.

And I do not believe that I am exaggerating here. As long ago as 1912, Prof. G.A. Laisant from the Polytechnique in Paris was denouncing the plutocrats' war-mongering, reporting confidential remarks by a leading Parisian financier who had explained to him why, during the Balkan war that year, France's high financial circles had funded all of the various warring factions simultaneously. It was known that the flames would spread – as indeed they did – from the Balkans to the whole of Europe and this was a conflagration that was sought.

"We" (the informant stated) "wish to become the sovereign arbiters of the situation. Inevitably, war in Europe is going to be the upshot of events: because we wish that and there is no way that we can be resisted. We seek war and need it for a variety of reasons. The chief one being the gathering energy of the organised working class, especially in France and in Germany ... If the advances in labour organisation continue, nothing will be able to stop it: and we shall be confronted with certain revolutionary catastrophe, irreversible universal ruination... The war will be a huge blood-bath, it is true ... But the great interests which we represent cannot be defended with humanitarian sentimentality. We shall rebuild upon the ruins. Labour organisation, the source of economic disorder, will be shattered the world over ... Anyway, we cannot be choosy about our methods: using the ultimate weapon of a European war we have the benefit of certain victory. We care not who the losers or the winners may be, for, in the final analysis, our enemy is the proletariat, which is going to be defeated: and we shall emerge as the real winners."¹

Laisant may well have over-egged the pudding somewhat, but the essential idea remains: the war was needed in order to halt the advances being made by the proletariat at the expense of capitalism. And, let me say it again, capitalism got its sums wrong: the blow struck more than its target and not every ruling class in every nation has reason to celebrate the success of the war. But as a general international fact, the proletariat looks as if it has been defeated everywhere – although there are a few lingering hopes for it and there may yet be a chance of its fortunes being revived.

As we have said, we are watching developments from rather too close quarters: and perhaps what looks like a defeat to us is merely a set-back, the prelude to a proletarian victory to follow. But it is pointless to play at prophecy. As things stand today, it has to be acknowledged that right now things are going rather badly for the proletariat everywhere.

All of the democratic, liberal and egalitarian ideas trumpeted during the war have been banned. In France as in England, in the United States as in distant Japan, it is the reaction that has emerged triumphant in political as well as in economic terms. Governments and the capitalists are stronger

¹ *La Bataille Syndicaliste* (Paris) 18 December 1912

than before: and, in terms of its well-being and freedom, the proletariat is rather worse off than in 1914. The same holds true for the Yugoslav countries, Spain, etc.

It would appear that, in political terms, the countries which were defeated militarily – Germany, Austria, Hungary, Turkey and Russia – represent an exception. Of Hungary and Turkey, bedraggled and at the mercy of the victors and of worsening domestic militarism and with the threat of further wars hovering over them, we shall say nothing. Germany, Austria and Russia nominally do enjoy free regimes: but Austria is hemmed in on all sides and now has no life of her own: and Germany which was able to hold enemy armies at bay, had to smother a revolution of her own and reduce it to a token affair. In none of these nations, no matter how it might appear, can it be said that the proletariat is today more free and emancipated than prior to the war in Europe: instead, it is indirectly enslaved by foreign capitalism.

It would seem that Russia is an exception to all this. But as time goes by the more disappointments that revolution seems to hold in store for us. True, the Russian revolution was on the verge of undoing and wrecking all of international capitalism's hegemonic schemes; and it appeared that there was still the threat of rescue from that quarter. But the likelihood of a Russian revolutionary swoop on Europe diminishes with every day that passes. A self-styled socialist and proletarian party holds power there, that is true; but the worker and peasant proletariat have thus far earned only a change of yoke, the replacement of private capitalism by state capitalism and of tsarism by a harsher military dictatorship.

Up until last year, the most revolutionary country in Europe, after Russia, seemed to be Italy: and whilst the state and capitalist backlash was gaining the upper hand everywhere by the end of 1920, Italy was looking like an exception.

In fact, Italy was best placed for revolution by the end of the war. On the one hand, she emerged from the war not just militarily undefeated and with no enemy armies on her soil, but also lost no territory and had no war reparations to pay and no foreign threats to prevent her from suiting herself at home. But on the other hand, due to the ineptitude of her rulers and the cynical bullying of the other victorious Allies, capitalising upon Italy's scarce natural resources to place her in the noose of the worst usury, Italy has been treated almost as one of the vanquished in the comity of nations: and her ruling class emerged from the war spent and downcast in the face of a proletariat asserting its rights.

Whereas the other victorious states emerged from the war strengthened, the Italian state emerged weakened. And with the state, of course, capitalism's power with regard to the workers was undermined and would have collapsed but for support from an armed force of gendarmes and soldiers. With every passing day the power of the employer class seemed to be diminishing.

Hence the upsurge by the workers' movement and all the revolutionary parties, their ranks swollen by the backlash against war, which in Italy had been fought in absolute defiance of the wishes of the popular masses. Those masses, however, ought to have been broken by the war waged against their wishes. They should have learnt once and for all that being in the majority is no guarantee of success and of not having someone else's wishes foisted upon them. Instead, the illusion that in order to overcome any problems one needed only to have strength of numbers persisted.

From the beginning of 1919 onwards, there was a real intoxication. Hundreds of thousands took to every public square in Italy: the socialist and revolutionary press was snapped up: subscriptions to subversive newspapers reached figures that had previously been regarded as fabulous. The proletarian parties, especially the socialist party, and the trades unions were becoming huge, massive. Revolution was on everybody's lips: and in fact revolution had the support of the majority and its adversaries were girding up for it. The November 1919 elections, fought on an extremist programme, quadrupled the number of socialist deputies and saw the rout of the war parties, carried this intoxication to rapturous heights.

But the revolution did not come and was not made. There were only popular rallies, lots of rallies; and along with them, demonstrations, marches and countless choreographed parades. It was as if the Italian proletariat was expecting a re-enactment of the miracle of Jericho: expecting the bourgeois stronghold and the capitalist state to collapse and come tumbling down at the mere sound of revolutionary anthems and the waving of red flags. In principle, the spectacle was splendid and impressive: even the privileged, the powerful and the wealthy were taken with it and expected a collapse. But that collapse never came. As was only natural, since nobody actually set about it.

Moreover, the intoxication lasted too long, at nearly two years: and the other side, the ones who daily faced the threat of being ousted from their thrones and stripped of all privilege, began to wake up to the situation, to their own strength and the enemy's weaknesses. There had been no shortage of openings for the oft threatened revolution. Why had they not been seized? Was it because of bad faith, ineptitude, weakness, or fear?

On three particular occasions among so many, the institutions of the monarchy came within an ace of being overthrown. And were not, simply because their adversaries were lacking in ardour. The first occasion was in the spring of 1919, during the cost-of-living riots that spread like wildfire across the whole of Italy, abetted in certain locations by military personnel. The Royal Guards had not yet been set up, the militias were weary from being held under arms and the state had no serious forces to deploy against a quite vast uprising. The second occasion came in late June 1920 during the military revolt in Ancona that threw the government into disarray: one daring push would have been enough to have a republic proclaimed and at the time a segment of the bourgeoisie was well disposed towards a republic. The third occasion was during the factory occupations in August-September 1920, which, had it spread to every other trade and secured the support of proletarian parties and organisations, might have sparked one of the most radical and least bloody revolutions imaginable.

In this last occasion, the working class was full of enthusiasm and well armed. The government, no less, later admitted that it had not had at the time sufficient resources to capture the many strongholds which the factories in which the workers had dug in had become.

But nothing was ever done!

And the responsibility for that is shared by pretty much everybody, especially the socialists who represented the strongest Italian revolutionary party. In June 1919 there was no will to act, lest it prejudice a pro-Russian demonstration scheduled by the socialists for the coming 20-21 July, which, in the event, proved a damp squib. During the Ancona revolt in 1920 the communists in charge of the socialist party rejected any suggestion of a republican uprising because that would have resulted in a moderate social democratic republic, whereas they wanted a communist dictatorship: all or nothing. They got nothing! We know how the factory occupations ended: with Giolitti's trick promise of factory controls! And on that occasion, there was particular opposition

to the continuation and extension of the revolt from the reformists of the Confederazione del Lavoro afraid that, in order to win, the government might resort to savage repression which, they argued, would have put paid to any labour and socialist movement. Alas! It was plucked out worse and more violently – as we shall see – precisely because the courage to act was lacking at the time!

The greatest responsibility for this “sweet inactivity” let me say again, belongs to the socialists. But some of the responsibility – minor, of course, in accordance with their lesser presence – must also be laid at the door of anarchists, who had recently acquired a remarkable sway over the masses but did not know what to do with it. Having said it a thousand times before and having reiterated it at their congress in Bologna in July 1920, they knew *what needed doing*. The government and judiciary indeed believed that the anarchists had put in the spadework for which they had lobbied so hard.² Later, when the backlash came, and Malatesta, Borghi and others had been arrested, an attempt was made to bring indictments in respect of the spadework that had supposedly been done: the whole of Italy was scoured for evidence and hundreds of searches and interrogations were carried out. Not a thing could they find: and the examining magistrate, no less, had to concede that all that the anarchists had done was ... hold rallies and print newspapers!

I am talking, clearly, in broad terms, of the movement as a whole. Which does not rule out the possibility that, locality by locality, in a variety of ways, unsolicited, revolutionaries of various stripes had acted, made preparations and struck. But there was no concerted effort, no concrete agreement, no preparations on a wider scale that might seize the revolutionary initiative, in spite of the bad faith and passive opposition from more moderate socialists.

The abandonment of the factories in the wake of the CGL-Giolitti agreements was like the beating of the retreat by an army that up to that point had been marching forwards. Immediately a feeling of depression ran through the workers’ ranks, whereas the government, conversely began to become sensible of its own strength. Here and there searches began to be mounted and then came the arrests. Barely a month after the factories were abandoned and the reaction’s first blow was struck, to the detriment of the smaller revolutionary faction, the anarchists.

Between 10 and 20 October, on laughable pretexts,³ they arrested Borghi, several of the editors of administrators of *Umanità Nova* (the Milan-based anarchist daily), Malatesta and other anarchists in a variety of localities – something that would not have been feasible three months before. There was the odd protest, the odd local token strike in Carrara, the Valdarno and the Tuscan Romagna, but from the leadership came the order not to move and, generally speaking, the worker masses made no move. The socialists assembled in Florence and told someone who approached them looking for advice and assistance that there was nothing that could be done. The anarchists were left to their own devices.

The conservative backlash now had a free hand and it pressed ahead, slowly at first but then at an accelerating rate.

² I should point out that many of my fellow anarchists do not accept their share of the responsibility. When I put the point above at a recent anarchist congress in Ancona in November 1921, a number of friends upbraided me for putting the cat among the pigeons. Whereas I contend that there were a few points at which the anarchists could have seized the initiative for a revolutionary movement, others, more numerous perhaps, argue that this was not a possibility; that without the direct and willing partnership of the Socialist Party and its economic organisations, there was nothing to be done; and that therefore the entire responsibility for the missed chance of revolution belongs to the socialists.

³ So laughable were these pretexts that all of those arrested were later acquitted and released, some at the trial preparation stage and others after trial.

But the classical backlash in the shape of states of siege, emergency laws, mass arrests and banning of associations was no longer feasible. The police crackdown might well be enough to deal with the anarchist and ultra-revolutionary minorities: but it was powerless and inadequate and might prove counter-productive where the great masses of the proletariat were concerned. It was too much and yet not enough.

But the ruling class needed to capitalise upon the momentary pause in the proletarian onslaught in order to target the proletariat in an onslaught of its own.

The delusions, depression and disarray in workers' ranks might be short-lived and those masses could spring back to life and recapture lost ground and press forward again. What is more, the *status quo* had become untenable: workers' pay was too high if the bosses were to be left the desired margin of profit: and the employers' position as such was untenable in the face of the workers, given that the latter's disrespectful and insubordinate attitude was increasingly limiting and diminishing the former's authority and, together with their authority, their prestige and their profits.

And, in view of the crisis, the workers' other gains were becoming a burden beyond the ability of the employer class to bear, a hindrance, an eating away of its property rights that could be likened to a slow strangulation. The eight hour day, the shop steward commissions in the factories, the partial or general strikes, the placement bureaux, compulsory shift work, limits set on piece-work, the ban on war production, the fines imposed for breaches of agreements, etc., etc., and, along with them all, the government's levies, the ceiling set on food prices and rents, finally gave the employers the impression that they were bosses no longer.

All of which was even more true in the countryside where the well nigh comprehensive organisation of all the farm labourers, abetted by the take-over of common lands and a whole, dense network of production and consumer cooperatives, placement bureaux, etc., so circumscribed the landlords that they were denied all control and made them afraid lest they might die from suffocation. Hence the landlords' wrath and their complaints that they were being ruined. And in actual fact it could well have spelled the end for them, as landlords: not, let us be clear, the ruination of productivity – which was given a tremendous boost now that every labourer had an interest in squeezing as much profit as possible from his labours. Let it be said in passing that this was not, however, (as lots of socialists deluded themselves it was) a stride towards collective ownership. More than anything else it was a slow transfer of ownership and the formation of a whole new propertied class which in time would have become a force for conservatism.

But in the mean time the injured interests were screaming, incorrigibly, that what was happening was socialism or anti-socialism. And all of these interests coalesced, biding their time before making their move against the proletariat and pushing it as far back as they could manage – in order to wrest back as many of the gains and rights it had thus far achieved. This effort of the part of the ruling class, begun a year ago, is still in progress and does not look like finishing just yet. In this ruling class onslaught, fascism plays the part of the outrider, performing what used to be described in military terms as the commando function in assault battalions. In a way, the fascists could be described as the *bersaglieri* of social conservatism, the counter-revolution's freebooters.

The solid strength of fascism is the sort of strength that corresponds to a broad coalescence of interests – all the interests, ambitions and powers under threat from revolution, socialism and the proletariat. In a sense it was just what the conservatives needed precisely because (as was

stated earlier) the classic forms of reaction were inadequate or damaging. On the one hand, the state had to be allowed to keep up the appearances of legality and liberalism, but at the same time, it had to be paralysed: so that, outside the state, there would be a free hand to attack the proletariat on every front, even the most lawful and moderate, by any means necessary, including the most violent, heedless of democratic, legal or sentimental concerns or prejudices. In terms of conservatism, fascism – further abetted (and this has perhaps been its greatest stroke of luck), not merely by circumstances but by the very mistakes of the workers' and socialistic parties and organisations – has provided an outstanding answer to this need on the part of the bourgeoisie.

Lots of sectors, and not merely bourgeois ones, had become hostile to the socialist-minded proletariat on a range of counts, great and small, which ultimately came to surround the workers' movement with an irritated climate, a seething, weary public opinion. The barbed remarks, innuendo, insults and vague threats made by working men and women on the streets or on the trams and directed at those who looked like – but often were not – a gentleman or a gentle-woman; the bossy, watchful and vigilant air adopted by workers in their performance of certain duties in socialist public administrations; the mocking of beliefs and symbols other than or opposed to socialist ones; the blatant hostility displayed towards strata already known to have supported the war, strata such as students, officers, etc. – all of these things alienated broad swathes of public opinion.

With only a few exceptions, when the law intervened, such actions, behaviours or displays did not go beyond the mere tokenism and did not amount to violence against person or property. Let me say again that there may have been a few exceptions, especially in moments of mob hysteria; but it was not these exceptions that caused the greatest annoyance, but, rather, the drip, drip of vague, impersonal, nebulous, unfathomable hostilities that could not be squared with one another – every single incident was avoidable – given lack of education in masses who were beyond the control even of their own leaders and labour organisers. Nonetheless, it was the build-up of these that added to the feeling of malaise in all who were not formally part of the socialist ranks or did not appear to be so.

Next came the most serious causes, especially the very frequent public service strikes of which very many workers eventually tired. My own view is that public services workers too have the right to strike, be it economic or political, for the simple reason that the first freedom is freedom of the individual to do what he will with his labour power, to deploy it or not to deploy it as he sees fit. But from the vantage point of class interest and the interest of the revolution – for the sake of which we should try to build as broad a consensus as possible, reducing the number of persons hostile to it – the workers themselves should impose a limit upon the use of this double-edged sword, which can be highly effective at certain times and in certain circumstances, but by its very nature, tends to alienate public opinion and limit support for the movement, not just among the ruling classes, but in every class.

That the working class of a city should down tools by way of a protest, over some grave trespass against public freedoms, over some unjustified outrage, over some serious trespass against the right of organisation, etc., was perfectly reasonable and understandable. Thus, for the railway workers to bring services to a halt, in order to prevent shipment of war materials for use by the Entente against Russia, or to hinder the bringing in of police or troop reinforcements to a

city in revolt was wholly understandable from the viewpoint of the workers and the revolution. I appreciate the disruption that such measures may have caused and the outrage felt by adversaries and conservatives and the rigours of the law which protect privilege and the status quo; but a revolutionary, a socialist, an anarchist could scarcely disapprove and any honest, enlightened opponent must have appreciated the logic behind these things.

The most irritating thing, though, and it created upset among workers themselves, was certain general strikes declared on various, trivial pretexts, simply for the purpose of making everybody sensible of the power of a single party. The wearisome thing was the unexpected stoppage of the most important public services, for the sake of petty sectional interests or on other, even more ridiculous pretexts, in order to hold a rally, some commemorative event ... or because someone had trodden on the toes of some leading organiser! I am not exaggerating! Certain tram disputes, stoppages in the local posts and telegraphs services, etc. were utterly unjustified. Sometimes trains were halted because they were carrying insignificant cargoes of war materials, which were being carried away from the border, or because there were, at most, eight or ten carabinieri simply on the move from one place to another for no particular purpose. I will not second guess the excessive zeal of these tram-workers or railwaymen, who were certainly prompted by the noblest intentions. But this was akin to setting the hay loft ablaze just to get a light for one's pipe! There was no proportionality between cause and effect: and this lack of proportionality gave an incalculable boost to hostility towards the labour movement.⁴

Something else that eventually wore many people out was the rash of public rallies. After the war-time constraints and restrictions, a certain proliferation was to be expected: this was one way for the toiling masses to breathe free, manifest their own feelings and aspirations, get together and gauge their strength. But, after a few months had gone by, it should have petered out or at least eased off and given way to good husbandry and laying the groundwork for efficacious action. As I have already said, this was not the case: instead, the more time passed, the more rallies were held; and the more rallies were held, the more inconclusive they became, even as they fuelled the irritation of the opposition and especially drove the security forces (carabinieri, Royal Guards and Public Security agents) into an irrepressible fury, the latter being constantly on duty, day and night, without a break, deployed hither and thither⁵ and continually targeted by the mobs for their contempt and insult, to boot.

This latter fact is a logical consequence of the unpalatable role performed by the security forces in political upheavals. Especially when such upheavals display the features of revolution, the security forces are there to repress them and can scarcely expect kisses and smiles from the mob against which they are deployed. Furthermore, nine tenths of clashes between the mob and the security forces are due to the latter's excesses and because they struck the first blows. That said,

⁴ That hostility would have remained impotent, had it not spread widely through the middle classes, which are very sizable in Italy, and where the industrial wage-earning proletariat represents an absolute or overwhelming majority in very few places such as Milan, Turin and a few others. The Marxists or those who style themselves such, Lenin for one, are fond of dismissing the anarchists as "petit-bourgeois" and I should not be surprised if these remarks of mine were used to resurrect that hoary old chestnut. But it certainly was not the anarchists who were to blame if the process of proletarianisation of the middle classes which Marx anticipated has not come to pass and if the latter continue to exist and make their presence felt in public life, even if there are those would rather ignore it out of doctrinal prejudice!

⁵ This same irritation on the part of security forces obliged to remain on duty for unbearably long shifts accounts for the fact that in several places they ran out of patience even with the fascists, as they did in Sarzana and Modena, when the latter represent the most direct cause of their having to work over-time.

we should not make any bones about the fact that in the post-war period revolutionaries lacked any of the requisite sense of understanding where such clashes were concerned.

In particular, two things should be kept in mind: that many of the carabinieri were carabinieri because of the war and have not all as yet acquired a typically praetorian *esprit de corps* and that the recently established Royal Guards, made up largely of proletarians, were not yet wholly and entirely reliable as far as the ruling classes were concerned.

And that the workers assaulted, clubbed or shot by the security forces, tried to defend themselves. Understandably. Rational thought is out of the question in the heat of the conflict, when one is being beaten up or hurt. But, besides these exceptional instances, that a systematic if futile effort should be mounted by word of mouth, in writing, by offensive or insulting behaviour, to provoke the lower ranks of the security forces which at least have the excuse that they do not know what they are doing and are acting under orders, while civilised and even overly polite and courteous discussions are reserved for the inspectors, police chiefs, prefects and ministers who are very different and much more terrifyingly responsible for the security forces' displays and misconduct, that – from the revolutionary point of view – was insanely unreasonable.

Such conduct on the part of revolutionaries partly explains why the security forces today stand four square alongside and collude with the fascists, even to the extent of being dismissive of orders from police chiefs and ministerial circulars: “The fascists are our friends and stand by us and shake our hands (I was told by one group of Royal Guards in whose company I happened to find myself after I was arrested for a few hours) and you would have us turn on them, for the sake of you who call us *royal brutes* and so mistreat us by word and deed? You must be crazy! We are ready to do anything against you and our superiors can go to hell if they tell us to turn on the fascists!” These were their actual words, to which I could only respond with vague remarks. Yet, in my heart of hearts, I could not find fault with them.

Which explains how the excessive number of rallies held often closed with bloody skirmishes with the security forces, to no effect other than to produce a long series of proletarian corpses. Between April 1919 and September 1920, Italy saw upwards of 140 deadly clashes, large and small, with a toll of more than 320 dead on the workers' side. And every killing was greeted by a fleeting eruption of outrage on the part of the masses; but in every instance this was followed by increased disappointment, a growing sense of malaise and weariness, greater hesitancy and increased lack of confidence in their own strength. So that, coming after the retreat represented by the abandonment of the factories, the toiling masses lost the will to fight at the first sign of increased resistance from the government.

Now the very facts that helped demoralised and weary the labouring masses, had irritated, bolstered, stiffened and closed the ranks of their enemy. Moreover, a segment of the masses had lost something of its fighting spirit after securing comparative well-being: content with this, which made it desirous of calm. Not realising that that very degree of well-being had been attained by dint of earlier exertions and that that well-being was fated to be whittled away and to vanish just as soon as the exertions through it had been achieved might end!

II.

The much preached and yearned for revolution had failed to arrive, in spite of all the favourable openings: and in a sense it could be argued that it was not wanted. But the fact that it had hovered like a threat for nearly two years was enough to trigger counter-revolution. Thus there was a counter-revolution without there ever having been a revolution, a real preventive counter-revolution proper, of which fascism has been the most active and impressive factor.

The struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, a struggle that was one of the determining factors in the world war and one facet of it, and which might have had consequences favourable to the proletariat in Italy, instead carried over the aftermath of the war itself to the detriment of the working class. The bourgeoisie which had not managed to weaken the proletariat through the indirect weapon of war – and had instead achieved the opposite effect, due to peculiarities of the Italian situation – renewed its pledge to succeed this time through the three-pronged concerted activity of illegal fascist violence, lawful government repression and economic pressures deriving from unemployment, partly inevitable but also in part deliberately contrived as a means of tightening the noose on the workers.

Before all of the reactionary factors which I have mentioned helped afford it scope to expand and a favourable atmosphere, fascism was a wretched, dismal thing; tiny scattered groups here and there around the peninsula, with no following of any consequence and in bad odour with the ruling class itself. The newspaper which had raised, helped and organised them no longer enjoyed the sort of circulation it had during its war-mongering days and had not yet achieved the circulation that it would through its expansion in the wake of fascist successes. At that point, fascist personnel were drawn mostly from students and ex-army officers, a few professionals and that segment of the so-called “interventionist” element from 1914 on which, having unduly distinguished itself for its enthusiasm for militarism and the government while the war was on or having become too hostile to the older parties from which it had parted company over the war – the socialists, syndicalists, anarchists and republicans – was left as a displaced person in public life, from which it refused to withdraw at any price.

This latter element, a tiny minority within a minority, was fascism’s real author and organiser: and the best equipped to be such. Nearly all of its members had been journalists, organisers, public speakers and influential members of the various proletarian bodies and organisations; they were conversant with the techniques of organisation, the rhetorical language that stirs the imagination and rouses resentments, crowd psychology and rabble-rousing, as well as the shortcomings and weaknesses of erstwhile comrades who had since become adversaries. And furthermore they were driven by hatred for the latter, a hatred fed by four years of contempt and mortification; and this hatred invested their efforts with the sort of fire and ardour needed for the fray, and which other people draw from belief in a higher ideal.

In spite of their aversion towards the socialist masses which seemed to have won or been on the brink of victory, all these folk were malcontents with grudges against the establishment and the bourgeoisie, of whom they readily spoke ill. Not only did former subversives import

into fascism habitual old attitudes and old mind-sets, but all the others too, with more or less honesty, looked askance at a government that was enthroned, victorious yet indifferent, upon the successful outcome of a long war, without lifting a finger to profit from it and indeed frittering it away at home and abroad with its inept and slavish policy; and at the same time they had nothing but contempt and envy for the recent war profiteers who had made their fortunes from the war without contributing or risking anything and who were now running scared from the spectre of Bolshevism looming menacingly in the East.

This discontent, though, did not bring them closer to the workers because theirs was a discontent with a different root, one that was essentially bourgeois and petit bourgeois and, in a few instances, aristocratic and, in every instance anti-socialist. Anti-socialism was proclaimed as a patriotic necessity if the authority of the state was to be restored, the state being regarded as the living embodiment of the nation. Many sincere fascists were in reality merely nationalists. They had no sense of freedom; and that is why fascism's initial quasi-republican veneer rather quickly faded and wore off, once it had served as a bully and virtual redeemer for the pusillanimous government when, on parliamentary grounds, the latter seemed to want to hamper certain unlawful methods of rescuing capitalism.

But up a point fascism seemed relatively independent, as long as the fascists were few in number and the socialists powerful and on the rise. It had its central and strongest nucleus in Milan, with ramifications petty much everywhere, but nowhere was it preponderant – and this was very far from the case in Bologna, where, after a while, it grew strong, so much so that it was from there that it began to spread throughout Italy as a violent coercive force. I cannot recall who the fascist was who wrote, in a polemical argument, that whereas it is true that fascism was born in Milan its cradle has been Bologna, but he got that right.

Fascism became strong in Bologna before anywhere else, both because it was there that circumstances and the mistakes of socialists helped it most, and because the Bologna fascists were the first, in spite of the unrestrained and pseudo-subversive language of their newspaper, to establish a relationship of collaboration and aid with that conservative force par excellence – the police – effectively ruling out any notion of political opposition. In those early months from October [1920] onwards, fascism found the Bologna police to be its most visible ally, official ally at that, and enjoyed open protection from the chief of police and the barely disguised protection of the prefect.¹ Public Security inspectors would stroll along the Corso arm in arm with fascist leaders, Royal Guards and fascists would patrol together and at police headquarters the fascists found a home from home and police officers and Royal Guards stood guard outside the Fascio headquarters. I have been assured that on more than one occasion also the fascists used police and army trucks to replenish and transport their weapons.

Of the military authorities proper I will say nothing. They, of course, are rather more cautious; but it is known that nearly every officer is a fascist and that the Army General Staff itself is no stranger to fascism. Many newspapers have spoken of the responsibility of minister Bonomi,

¹ Such cooperation has so far been pretty much universal, albeit occasionally disguised for reasons of government. The Royal Guards dispatched to protect the Old Camera del Lavoro in Bologna and housed in one of its rooms on a rainy night last spring scrawled on its walls – among lots of other threats against socialists and anarchists ; “The Fascio and the Royal [Guards] will shortly torch this Camera too.”

during his time as minister of War, in organising and arming the fascists. It was on his instructions that in 1920 Colonel A.R. roamed backwards and forwards through Italy laying the groundwork for the anti-socialist backlash. In his report, which was published, the colonel argued for the establishment of a *militia of idealists made up of the most proficient, courageous, strongest and most aggressive persons which could, along with the police and army, mount joint resistance and political operations.*² To wit, the militia of fascist irregulars.

In some places, military cooperation with the fascists became, as it did in Trieste, as blatant as could be, until the fascists were being issued in broad daylight with arms and bombs for use in their punitive expeditions.³ And in the provinces of Modena and Grosseto, there were even instances of joint fascist-carabinieri expeditions commanded by a Public Security inspector. Remember how the socialist deputy Ventavoli was forced to leap from the window as a joint force of fascists and carabinieri burst angrily into his room!

But, to return to Bologna as the cradle of fascism. Let me say that none of these factors would have been enough to undermine socialist positions and build up fascist might, but for a few fortuitous circumstances and, above all, certain more serious mistakes on the part of socialists. The skirmishes in the square in Bologna on 20 September 1920 and the bloody clashes on 14 October when a mob mounted a demonstration outside the prison in solidarity with political victims next to the Royal Guard barracks⁴ failed to undermine the socialists' preponderance. That began to crumble on the night of 4 November, when, after a few fascists turned up at the door and hallway of the Camera Confederale del Lavoro behaving in an aggressive and threatening manner, its then secretary, the parliamentarian Bucco, though surrounded by a number of armed youths, could not think of anything better than making a call to the pro-fascist police headquarters asking for assistance! The police arrived in some strength, only to arrest the socialists and make deputy Bucco an even greater laughing-stock ... Whereupon the fortress had fallen: in a sense the fascists gained unimpeded access to it.

Had the socialists been a little more prudent that evening – I am told that at almost midnight the doors of the Camera del Lavoro was still open, for no good reason, almost inviting the enemy to barge in – and at the same time, if actually attacked, had vigorously defended themselves with their resources, not excluding punches, then perhaps the Bologna Camera del Lavoro might have been invaded at that point rather than three months later, but it would probably have been the first and last time in Italy. It would have been overrun, not by fascists, but by the security

² See *L'Ordine Nuovo* (Turin) No 274, 2 October 1921

³ I have this from someone from Trieste who was an eye-witness to it. But the fact that it happened elsewhere other than just Trieste is shown by a report from Florence in the October newspapers, to the effect that the fascists “allegedly sent the Hon. Capanni, the fascist deputy, in Rome, a telegram asking him to secure from Bonomi, the minister, the suspension of arrest warrants issued against their colleagues, failing which they would publicly expose the names of many Carabinieri functionaries and officers who had helped them out a short time earlier by delivering arms and munitions.” (See Bologna’s *Il Resto del Carlino*, October 1921). In many places, in the Mantua district and the Casentino area, for instance, the carabinieri and Royal Guards brazenly sport the fascist symbol on the breasts. On lots of occasions police and fascists together mount law enforcement operations, searches, arrests, etc. In Bologna, when a Royal Guard was killed – by criminals operating by night, it is thought – the fascists put up a manifesto stating that the dead man had been a card-carrying colleague of theirs.

⁴ On this count there was talk, and the Royal Guards took it seriously, of an out and out popular and revolutionary attack on the barracks. In the courts no evidence was adduced to substantiate this rumour; and in fact the mob had no such plan in mind. The fighting erupted nearby quite by coincidence; and anybody who has ever visited the location will know just how unfeasible and crazy any such projected attack would have been, not to say pointless and out of place.

forces; which, having seized the initiative, would have stripped the government of the mask of non-existent neutrality, the disgraceful ensuing farce rendered impossible and fascism stripped of its leading role in anti-socialist operations. Had the backlash come, it would have been state-run; and the struggle would have retained its traditional character as a clash between subjects and government, without any deviation in the direction of the senseless, savage and pointless factional guerrilla war that followed.

But there is no point in speculating on the basis of hindsight. The fact remains that that painful yet laughable episode alerted the political authorities and the fascists that the whole much trumpeted revolutionary preparations, of which Bucco and others were fond of bragging about, was only a bluff and that the socialist army, already beating a retreat on the economic and political scenes, had not just deferred its onslaught but had failed even to exploit its numerical advantage, which was indisputable, to defend itself through its own direct action. Had it resisted the first fascist attacks promptly with the requisite vigour and violence and the necessary commitment, fascism would have been still-born. Instead, once the proletariat opted instead to appeal passively to the law, even that weak trench was demolished by the enemy from many sides, since – given that the socialists proved to be the weaker – the police and security forces no longer had any scruples about showing themselves allied with the fascists in the light of day; and the concerted onslaught by illegal and lawful forces, to which the judiciary would shortly be added, began.

Nor was success in the administrative elections in late October and early November 1920, in which the socialists triumphed, capturing control of nearly 3,000 townships enough to stop it. That too was yet another spur to the ruling classes to encourage the fascists along the back roads of illegality. Initially reluctant, capitalism and the government – those in government, by which is meant, if not this or that minister personally then definitely the higher civil service, the prefects, the chiefs of police, etc. – realised that fascism was a useful weapon and soon ensured that it was given every assistance in terms of funding and arms, turning a blind eye to its breaches of the law and, where necessary, covering its back through intervention by armed forces which, on the pretext of restoring order, would rush to the aid of the fascists wherever the latter were beginning to take a beatings instead of doling one out.

Events in Bologna on 21 November 1920 accelerated this process of backlash.

There was a palpable feeling in the air that something serious was in the offing. Even during election rallies, it was realised that the extremist socialists' dogged commitment to formality and elections would secure them victory, but to no avail. The programme set out in Bologna was extravagant and impracticable, given that the climate and atmosphere throughout Italy had altered greatly: it was a real house of cards. Furthermore, the Bologna bourgeoisie, no longer fearful of the socialists and the workers, would give no more ground. For upwards of a month there had been no strikes and the odd attempt at one had seemed strained and ineffectual. During the election campaign, one radical speaker (who later became a fascist) assured me that at one rally he had bluntly declared that if the Bolsheviks were to capture the city council, their administration would be prevented from working.

In the wake of their success in the elections which had given a whopping majority to the extremist socialists, the latter were rather preoccupied with the investiture ceremony. Doing

without it, doing without the display of their red flag at the victory rally would seem the easy option today; back then it would have looked like cowardice and in everybody's eyes would have been the first retreat from the bombastic programme on the basis of which they had won. But that was precisely what the fascists wanted; they were eager to drive the crowd of workers from the squares and have that red flag dip in a signal of surrender. What was the solution to this dilemma?

Some socialists who were in charge at the time descended to unseemly negotiations with the police authorities, and may well have promised more than their followers would have delivered; but by the eve of 21 November, the day when the inauguration was due to take place, it was looking as if things might pass off smoothly, when a printed notice was spotted at police headquarters and on street corners; in it the fascists predicted a big fight the following day, cautioning women and children to keep well clear of the city centre and off the main thoroughfares. By that time there was no way that the socialists could withdraw honourably and of course the more hot-headed of them (who might well have been the most reckless ones as well, judging by the results at any rate) thought of improvising some sort of defences against the threatened potential attacks. Now only a miracle could have averted tragedy.

But no miracle was forthcoming: quite the opposite! The next day, after the ceremony had begun peaceably in the city hall, no sooner had the newly appointed mayor and some red flags appeared on the balcony overlooking the square that the first revolver shots were fired in their direction. Tragedy followed immediately. Anybody who was armed, including the security forces, began to shoot madly; some bombs were thrown and inside the City Hall, amid the bullets flying in through the windows and shattering the glass and pictures, there was screaming and the most frightful confusion. Some people lost their heads entirely (it seems unlikely that this was premeditated, that being acceptable only in an act of private and personal vengeance) as tragedy followed upon tragedy. Shots were fired at the minority benches, hitting those whose physical condition prevented them from moving as quickly as the rest and from taking cover, throwing themselves to the floor and looking to their defences. Whoever fired just then at the lawyer Giordani not merely left one man dead but plunged a family into desolation; he inflicted an irreparable, cruel, disastrous loss upon the Socialist Party.

I shall not dwell upon this incident, which can be reconstructed only the basis of various newspaper reports and regarding which the court authorities have yet to complete their inquiries.⁵ True, leaving their origins to one side, events could not have gone worse for the socialists; even blind fate allied itself against them and with the fascists. But, independently of the individual personal responsibilities for the minor episodes referred to, anyone wanting to deliver a verdict on the overall general responsibility for what happened on 21 November cannot but chalk it up to the fascists and the police authorities, their essential accomplice. If in fact fascism had not stepped in that day with their armed disruption of a lawful socialist demonstration and announced that intervention with detailed and provocative threats, no tragedy would have occurred.

But in politics, the winner is in the right, even if he is wrong; and whoever leaves the field comes off worse. The socialists were not strong enough to defend themselves nor to cling to their incontrovertible motives for resisting; a succession of such circumstances sapped their spirits. By

⁵ I stand by my view of what happened on 21 November, in spite of the subsequent pronouncements to the contrary by the court authorities, which seem to have accepted the most fantastic and unlikely version; that there was outright pre-planned rioting and killing on the part of socialists!

which point it was no longer a case of striking a blow against them; that blow had been struck much, much earlier. The fact is that 21 November was a fascist victory; the fact that the fascists were responsible for those events does not diminish their victory at all. Indeed, it enhances it. In the real world, being wrong but winning is tantamount to a double success. Maybe it was that that gave the public a greater impression of fascist strength and socialist weakness.

What came next was natural and what always happens in such cases. Fascism, a negligible force before September, swollen somewhat after the first weaknesses of socialism, turned into a giant in the wake of 21 November. Its ranks grew at an indescribable rate. All of the cowards who up until the day before had courted the socialists and sought to join them, suddenly became their adversaries and switched sympathies to the fascists.⁶ The very people who earlier had been calling for socialist cooperation and criticising the socialists for their lack of daring and for not wanting to take power, etc., screamed “liberation from the red tyranny.” In particular, certain rubber-spined sectors, white collar workers, journalists and minor professionals made a cynical and brazen volte-face.

This of course led to an unleashing of every sort of personal resentment, old and new, professional and commercial rivalries and jealousies. Furthermore, all of the interests damaged by long-time city administration which could accommodate many interests but not all of them, came to the surface again. The shortcomings, injustices and bias of the socialist administration, the pretty much brazen bullying that cannot be separated from any exercise of power came home to roost and fed the anti-socialist tide. The struggle against one party turned into a witch hunt designed to demolish its standing and snatch away its hold on public office, in the courts, in the hospital administrations and in education. By then the torrent was running out of control, beyond the wildest hopes of organised fascism.

In Bologna where socialism was almost entirely synonymous with the labour movement, the defeat of socialism represented a defeat for the working class; and this had national implications, precisely because it was happening in the heart of the Emilia where the proletariat is better and more solidly organised in the towns and, even more so, in the countryside. No sooner had the anti-proletarian backlash spread to the provinces, focusing on Ferrara, Modena, Reggio Emilia, etc., than the example was aped elsewhere – especially in Tuscany, the Veneto and Puglia, etc. – and by then the rout of socialism and the workers really was no longer an Emilian phenomenon, but an Italian one.

As I was saying, in the wake of the aforesaid events in Bologna, fascism’s ranks expanded tremendously within just a few days. A number of people defected to it who had previously had reservations about it and the odd workers’ organisation unexpectedly defected; professionals, especially lawyers who in the past had courted the socialists but who now sensed the chance of better political fortunes with fascism also crossed over.

Especially after the tragic end of D’Annunzio’s venture in Fiume, when his legionaries were left by the fascists to face the government on their own, or offered the cold comfort of just a

⁶ A labour organiser from the upper Bologna district told me that among the most fervent fascists, in his district, there are some ex-socialists who only the year before had been among the most enthusiastic Bolsheviks, as given to violence back then as they are now. Elsewhere too, I later discovered that some of the most violent fascists were folk who, only a year earlier, had been among the most aggressive socialists, communists and anarchists. This is the case in Lugo, Massalombarda, Carrara and in the Maremma Toscana, etc.

few cheers and some platonic resolution – resulting in a complete rift and ill-disguised hostility between the two factions ; once it became known that the fascists had no desire to cause the government serious embarrassment and were dropping any vestige of their old anti-monarchism, the conservatives simply flooded into the fascist ranks. Despite the republican leanings still professed by the odd fascist leader, fascism increasingly became a force supportive not only of capitalism’s economic and military institutions and of nationalism, but also of the monarchy as an institution.

It was in Trieste that fascism served especially as an instrument of the monarchist government rather than as a class instrument, operating as an out and out occupying force manning enemy territory. The talk was of the *liberation* of Trieste whereas really it was just a *conquest*. We know that in economic terms this “liberation” spelled ruination for Trieste; but it is true that, in political terms, nobody in Trieste would have wanted to stay under Austrian rule, aside from the professional pro-Austrians. Who could deny, though, that now, with the war at an end, politically too, Trieste might be a little better off in a federation with republican Austria, offering economic advantages she now lacks, and relishing her economically privileged position as the only outlet to the sea of a huge territory?

Notwithstanding that, Trieste asked nothing better than to be left in peace to live as best she could in the new kingdom. A genuinely fraternal policy might have prevented the emergence of any separatist notions, in which even the local Slavs (nearly all of them workers) had no direct interest. Instead, Trieste was ground down for two years and more under a military government rather reliant upon the old stalwarts of the House of Austria; and the “liberated territories” endured the double damage from the old Austrian repressive laws and the Italian government’s arbitrary practices. Above all, an attempt was made to falsify and gerrymander the situation for electoral purposes. There was a fear that the first ever elections for deputies from Trieste might return to the Chamber mostly socialist representatives in the city and Slavs in the countryside (given the proletarian majority and the results of earlier elections), which would certainly have been the case under a comparatively free system.

An effort was made to forestall this at all costs. And since government action alone would not be enough, and since, if the intention was to proceed with elections that looked free, all semblance of military occupation had to be removed, fascism was encouraged in Trieste as a real instrument of government. Needless to say most of these fascists were drafted in from outside or had flooded in during the occupation: once upon a time they would have been described as “camp-followers.”

And in Trieste fascism has done what it could, just as it has elsewhere, torching the Camera del Lavoro several times along with the editorial and printing offices of the socialist daily newspaper, cooperatives and bookshops; doling out beatings, shootings and enforcing terror. Just as it did in Pola and in Monfalcone, etc. Then, out in the countryside and with the blatant connivance of the army, it has mounted real “beats,” hunting down Slavs, destroying entire villages, forcing the inhabitants to flee into the hills or end up behind bars.

And so, just as Rome wanted, the “wishes of the area” emerged from the elections: and Trieste managed to return a majority made up of patriotic-fascist deputies!

The landowners of Emilia were quick to realise, from that October or November, that fascism could be of service to them as a catapult deployed against the solid walls of the peasant organ-

isation that was strangling them; this in spite of the verbal hostilities expressed towards them in some fascist newspapers. Within a few months it was almost universally the case that the fascist chapters in the country districts of the Emilia, the Veneto and Puglia were made up of lackeys of the Agrarian League. Fascism's make-up had by then changed remarkably from what it had been prior to October; and student personnel no longer accounted for the greater part of the membership. And, here and there, positions of leadership among the fascists were changing hands too.

In the cities too, the membership had ceased to be what it had been some time earlier. As far as the most disinterested majority of the latter is concerned, they despised the socialists partly out of class instinct, partly out of resentment of the workers whom they saw as having overtaken them, and partly out of ignorance (the fact is that hardly any of them knew what socialists were or what they wanted and they drew no distinction between socialism and anarchism, reformism and bolshevism, trade unionism and communism, crediting them with the most extravagant notions and far-fetched aims): but they were all motivated by that no doubt half-understood, vague but sincerely held patriotic outlook. Over time, however, these became a minority as new elements flooded in, recruits attracted by success, real eleventh hour converts to fascism; and this certainly was not likely to do anything for the enthusiasm of the former. More than one of them lost his fire and a number of others dropped out.

As fascism's prospects brightened, it also attracted more unscrupulous elements who were out for the main chance. In the big cities, especially in Tuscany, the dregs, the rootless and the prejudiced turned to fascism; the cruelty and savagery of certain punitive expeditions mounted in that region can be credited to these. Often fascists felt the need to distance themselves from responsibility for unduly compromising acts and to disown men and deeds more or less arbitrarily passing themselves off as fascist. But as I have said before, fascism by then meant a whole system, a whole movement that transcended and overspilled the parameters of card-carrying, registered fascists. And the ruling class, of which it is the lackey, makes no distinction between the two and bestows its indulgence and aid most cynically upon them all.

One need only read the press, not the admittedly fascist press, for which this would be only natural, but the other newspapers most of which, the big best-sellers and most widely distributed ones that purport to be independent of the parties, perhaps because they want to be free to serve whichever one suits them best at any given moment. There is scarcely any bragging in the editorials – with their often hypocritical sham calls for calm and condemnations of violence – about class or caste solidarity with fascism, but in their polemical pieces and above all their reportage, where every fascist outrage is described in apologetic and tendentious terms, provoking and inciting further strife, any care for truthfulness and conception of fairness is eschewed, again to the benefit of the fascists and to the detriment of the socialists and the workers.

The same can be said for the partisanship of the courts. No act of violence, whether truthful or phoney, serious or slight has ever been charged against socialists or subversives in general but numerous arrests were made and the accused still languish in prison, regardless of guilt or innocence. No one bothers about their trials, the preparation of which never ends; what matters is that the alleged offenders should remain in jail. But in the case of the fascists, the scene on the Gran Via is re-enacted: those arrested almost always have the charges dropped prior to trial, especially where the crimes are most serious – arson or homicide. In recent times fascists have been arrested more often; but in its dealings with them the inquiry is universally solicitous and

well-intentioned. In very rare and exceptional instances, no one is ever convicted of fascist crimes carrying serious sentences;⁷ only where the charges are minor are arrests made and trials held.

So, in exceptional instances, when the real culprits are sent for trial, they are *always* triumphantly acquitted. Take the typical case of those who killed Inversetti in Milan. The fascists had burst in upon a socialist club in March 1921, shooting and killing one of those present. Some arrests were made; they were brought to trial and acquitted to a man. One suspect who had gone on the run was sentenced to a few years in prison. After a short while, the fugitive was detained, re-tried and ... he too was acquitted! And in Turin fascists who mistakenly killed an industrialist, having mistaken him for a subversive, were acquitted. And there has been a whole, endless succession of such acquittals. To my knowledge, none of them has ever been convicted.

I place all of this on record without regret or lamentation. I am not a believer in the fairness of the "justice system," nor in the efficacy of the penalties prescribed under the law. Deep down, I find everything set out above to be very natural; and if I have highlighted it, it was merely the better to register the loving relationship between fascism and the ruling classes; to show that fascism is not a separate phenomenon discreet from all the other injustices in society, but is a direct consequence and emanation of these; that in fact it is the current political and economic system that really bears the responsibility for the civil war launched by fascism.

In point of fact, the latter's responsibility is rather greater than that of the fascists, considered on their own; and this responsibility of the system is all the more grave and criminal in that the fascist guerrilla war, whilst it harms people because of its tool of bloodshed, pain and devastation, sharpening the class struggle and injects added hatred into it, is entirely *useless* for the purposes of social conservation and national recovery that some of the blindest reactionaries hold out as a promise.

Fascism is not so much useless as harmful, just as a cause is harmed by any disproportionate means the costs of which outweigh the benefits. But it would be naivety itself for revolutionaries to ask capitalism and the state to target fascism with repressive measures that might otherwise produce further harmful effects. Moreover, any repression that goes beyond legitimate self-defence, any government backlash based upon jails and handcuffs, always has a criminal impact of its own. And revolutionaries cannot and should not be calling for arrests and convictions, handcuffs and jail terms.

In reality, revolutionaries, socialists, workers will see an end of government and capitalist connivance with fascism only once they summon up their own capacity for resistance, not sporadically and fitfully, not pretty much as individuals or groups or in any unduly localised way, but across the board. When it comes to demanding a right, there is only one thing that the workers could ask for: that they be given equal treatment, and be left free to defend themselves every time that they are attacked; and defend themselves using the same resources as the fascists, to wit, their own organisations, their own meetings, their own flags, their own beliefs, their own lives. They would be entitled to ask that the police and the courts not reduce them to the condition of somebody whose arms are tied whilst others give him a savage beating. Or let the capitalist state cast aside all hypocrisy and stop playing two parts in the farce and take direct responsibility for the repression of workers.

⁷ One of the police ploys for rescuing fascists facing serious charges and public outrage is this; while the incident is still in the news they arrest some fascists but, and this is deliberate, fascists who were not in fact implicated and who can prove their innocence. Then, later, when the protests from public opinion whipped up by the press have died away, the court authorities can blithely set the innocent free. And the guilty are safe.

But these are pointless demands, unless backed by real force, both moral and material; and can only be pressed by way of a token demonstration of one's rights and for propaganda purposes. In point of fact, Italian jails are filled with workers and the heaviest sentences rain down on workers who made the mistake in clashes of using violence to defend themselves from the fascists. Moreover, we have already seen the government's stance as soon as the spontaneous initiative of the people came up with the idea of forming proletarian defence units which were dubbed the "Arditi del Popolo." Outside of Rome where, for contextual reasons, repression is a more difficult undertaking and where, for domestic and foreign policy reasons, the government needs to keep up appearances and therefore prevent fascism's resorting to the violent methods employed in the Emilia, the Veneto and Tuscany, the mere idea of setting up "Arditi del Popolo" chapters has been pre-emptively stamped out in the most vigorous fashion – through bans, threats, raids and arrests.

To tell the truth, only in Rome [at the time of writing] was there a real, proper regular unit of the "Arditi del Popolo," albeit that there have been reports of several attempts (thus far attempts only) to set chapters up elsewhere in Italy. But it looks like it might be a good idea to form them pretty much everywhere. The fascists themselves, somewhat hampered in the activities which they have never abandoned in the wake of the laughable "peace compact" in Rome – they have carried on with the beatings and the destruction – came up with the alibi that they were not doing this to socialists but rather only to communists and to the "Arditi del Popolo" who were not parties to the peace compact.⁸ Of course, everybody, whether they fit the bill or not, becomes such – even the most reformist of socialists most inimical to violence, as well as the least partisan cooperatives and leisure clubs! But we shall let that rest ...

The government's endeavours in this sense deserve a special mention. Every so often, even in the most far flung villages, there are reports of mass arrests of supposed "Arditi del Popolo." In fact, under that pretext, they indulge in the arrest of gatherings, plain get-togethers of the usual social, anarchist or merely labour circles; and charges are preferred of *plotting against the security of the state*. Then, after a few months have passed, the charges melt away; but the months that innocent people have served in jail cannot be so easily wiped away and in the meantime, in a number of towns, the authorities have used this pretext to successfully thwart any opposition to the government, no matter how law-abiding. This procedure is doubly illegal, unfair and iniquitous: 1, because in fact the charge of Arditi activity is in almost every instance a complete concoction and 2, because if there was any truth to it, it would not amount to an offence, in that there is no law forbidding people from banding together to defend themselves against attacks from any quarter. The name by which an association is known is not enough to render it illegal; it must *in fact* take the road of illegality through specific actions and methods.

Some may protest that the arditi association is along military lines; no more so, we reply than the ex-service associations, the young pioneers and lots of gymnastic, target shooting and sports societies. As long as we have done nothing illegal, as long as they do not go armed through the streets, these remain within the boundaries of the law and are entitled to the same freedom of

⁸ The grim farce of the peace compact is now over. The compact, which remained a dead letter as far as fascists everywhere were concerned, was never accepted in those provinces worst hit by the fascists and was finally repealed by decision of the recent fascist congress. Things carry on as before, but only because they cannot get any worse!

association as every other citizen. If they were outside the law, then obviously no such association, no matter how well organised, would have been tolerated in the very capital of the Kingdom. And I shall refrain from making any comparison with the “Fasci di combattimento,” which are out and out military units with their own cadres and officers, tramping through the cities in military order, very often with weapons across their backs, marshalled and drawn up for all to see, in trucks or on foot, prior to setting off on their punitive expeditions to beat, destroy, torch and murder.⁹

According to the police and the courts these fascist organisations are perfectly legal! Remember the incident whereby the Camera Confederale del Lavoro in Bologna was torched in January 1921, out of the blue, without any provocation given by the socialists, at a time when the city was perfectly calm. Twice the fascists, in military array, armed with revolvers, hand grenades or incendiaries and cans of petrol or benzine, attacked the confederal building, broke down the doors, burned and smashed everything they could and ferried everything they wanted away by truck. These fascists had set off from the fascio premises and returned there after their exertions along with the socialist deputy Grossi whom they had discovered at the Camera el Lavoro: and had forcibly carried him away in order to ... Subject him to questioning. There were judicial investigations and complaints made, etc., but the upshot was that no one was ever brought to book for all these trifles.

Yet the deeds I have set out above were plainly reported, indeed with details and excuses aplenty, in the local monarchist and pro-fascist newspapers: and they happened under the very eyes of huge police, carabinieri, Royal Guard and constabulary forces who would, after some initial sham opposition, let things proceed and made way for the fascist procession with its “war trophies” or, so to speak, stolen goods, on the punitive expedition’s return. And the association that orchestrated this feat and other rather worse feats, is perfectly legal! Instead, chapters of the “Arditi del Popolo” are broken up and its members arrested for offences against the security of the state – or is the state fascism, perhaps? – merely for their intention to offer other than passive resistance to fascist violence.¹⁰

Given the situation and the police’s class function, a police crackdown where, as happened in Viterbo and Sarzana, some violence (albeit in self-defence) was mounted by the Arditi del Popolo or alleged Arditi del Popolo might just be understandable – even though it would be unfair and partisan. But no! there was worse to follow: no critical events have occurred, nor are these Arditi for real. Free citizens were quite simply arrested just because, on account of their political beliefs,

⁹ Apropos of fascist military organisation, I am assured that this is complemented by a rather harsh hierarchical discipline and, furthermore, that the military organisation of the action squads is quite independent of the known political leaders of the Fascio and that orders relating to more violent undertakings emanate from the highest military authorities. But I cannot say how reliable these reports may be.

¹⁰ Even as I was proof-reading these pages, minister Bonomi issued his nth circular to prefects against armed bodies and listed the Arditi del Popolo and the (non-existent) Red Guards and only then the action squads. We may be certain that this latest circular will trigger the imprisonment of many more workers as supposed Arditi del Popolo, whereas no action will be taken against the fascist action squads, as has been the case with all past “edicts.”

it is suspected that they may be gathering with the intention of establishing “Arditi del Popolo.”¹¹ And, needless to say, the arrests are endorsed by the bench!

All of which is simply further proof of the complicity, indeed major responsibility of the existing political system for the perpetuation of the civil guerrilla warfare, which is undoubtedly damaging to the targeted proletarian classes but no less harmful to the ruling classes themselves and generally to economic and political conditions in Italy as a whole. A householder setting his own home alight in order to get his own back on or rid himself of bothersome tenants could scarcely be any more unreasonable and hare-brained!

True, the spontaneous formation of the “Arditi del Popolo” outside of the parties and perhaps outside of the subversive parties themselves has been looked at askance – many socialists opposing it for opportunistic reasons and the communists out of sectarian rivalry – is a reassuring sign that the spirit of resistance is taking shape in the labouring masses. But too much of the good moral impact of Arditismo is neutralised by a contrary and more recent phenomenon not detected during the early days of fascism; the switch to the fascists made by more and more workers, albeit few in number compared with the masses as a whole.

The reasons why the fascists are starting to make headway among the workers are several. We are not referring, of course, to those who were taken on as mercenaries at so much per day simply because the pay was good and the work slight. They do not matter: they are the same poor witless and inferior creatures who yesterday served as strike-breakers and from whose ranks the ruling class draws its henchmen and hired goons. Basically, they are superfluous ciphers and nothing more. On the fringes of the proletariat there is always this sector, the most wretched one, which the government and the bourgeoisie are able to wield as the blind instrument of their rule. I do not believe, either, that fascism has much use for these elements; they owe it no loyalty, will desert it at the first opportunity, at the first bend in the road, the first set-back.

But fascism has also drawn other workers who are not merely open to the highest bidder and for sale. To be sure, the growth in unemployment is one factor in this; and there are those who thought to find work, and often did, on the basis of being fascists or members of fascism’s so-called autonomous leagues which, like the red leagues, hold out the promise of job placements, wage protection., etc. Some industrialists and employers have come to an arrangement with the Fascio to give preference to workers recommended by the latter: which goes a long way towards explaining how the new style placement bureaux can still attract some of their clientele from among the ever swelling ranks of the unemployed.

In trade union terms, it does not do to overstate the importance of these so-called autonomous labour unions which are in fact hitched to fascism. Volunteer members are still in the minority, a minority that on its own could never constitute an effective collective force. Most of the membership is recruited forcibly, by means of threats, arson, beatings, bullying by the bosses and a

¹¹ Even as I write I am reading about one of many instances in *Il Resto del Carlino* (Bologna) of 21 September: “Modena, 20 September. – Last night in Nonantola carabinieri and Royal Guards burst into a house where it was said an Arditi del Popolo meeting was in progress, arresting some ten individuals who were taken to prison and charged with conspiracy against the security of the state.” In the Bologna district very many young workers have been behind bars for several months, charged merely with “Arditismo,” without any sort of evidence and without their having been found in possession of weapons. Among other things, all that it takes for such arrests is that a simple list of names, nothing more, should have been found in the pocket of an arrested person.

thousand other coercive measures.¹² Yet the fact that even a few workers have switched to the fascists of their own volition is deserving of some scrutiny.

Painful though it may be to admit, in some workers class consciousness and a sense of dignity are so under-developed that they cannot understand the humiliation in the bosses giving preferential treatment to the members of fascist unions or people recommended by them, or, if they do understand that, lack the strength to turn down work offered on those grounds and in those conditions. But this is not their fault. The fault lies with the mischievous education accorded the labouring masses, especially in certain districts where socialism is synonymous with unionism and socialism consists entirely of organising in order to get better wages, to work in better conditions and to cast one's vote for the parliamentarian that speaks up for the union's rights or for the town council that hands out more work to the trades cooperative. Not that that is not an advance on the lack of consciousness in the slavish, starving disorganised of sixty years back. Accustomed to looking no farther than this, it is only natural that workers should not care unduly about what colour the union or the employment bureau might display just as long as the benefits they promise are the same. And we may be thankful that this is a comparatively tiny phenomenon.

The overwhelmingly materialistic and all too un-idealistic education that socialism has offered the proletariat, especially over the past thirty years, has been yet another factor in the collapse of the Socialist International in 1914 and of the (we can only hope transient) defeat of the Italian proletariat in 1921 (hopefully it will have its revenge). There we find the root causes of the meagre working class resistance to the capitalist onslaught, and of the readiness on the part of some workers to accept work and seek employment through agencies that they know, deep down, are their enemies. Overly used to the notion of securing immediate gains with minimal effort, they lacked that spirit of sacrifice and love of danger without which it is hard to emerge victorious from the toughest battles. In this regard the oldest workers whose training in socialism dates from before 1900, when there was still some lingering vestige of the Mazzinian spirit in socialist preaching, or, failing that, at a time when government harassment and the lack of success had a salutary, character-building and educational impact, such workers, in spite of their years, are still the best troopers, no matter which socialist school or faction they may follow.

The utilitarian practice of trades organisation, bureaucracy and the fact that propaganda and recruitment have also become stocks-in-trade (and trades that are not as easy and undemanding as those who have never plied them may imagine!) – all of this has drawn into socialism and into the trade union movement a number of hacks who have brought discredit upon their function and the ideas they profess in the eyes of the masses. Finding this to their advantage, the masses accepted union leaders but was not always fond of them. And whilst there are some who were a real boon to the well-being and education of the proletariat, there was also no shortage, especially in the countryside, of the other sort who pretty much looked after their own interests, feathered their own nest like real new-style parish priests, throwing the weight of their authority about in such a way as to create a lot of resentment, simmering grudges and a sense of ill-defined intolerance that in normal times went unremarked and mattered little, but which, come the first storm clouds, piled up and tilted the scales.

¹² Here and there it has even been the case (in some small towns in the Ferrara district for instance) that when the fascists realised that those forcibly pressed into service were not actually with the fascist movement but remained hostile to it, they carried on beating them all the same!

Among other things, the system of fines imposed on those derelict of their obligations to the organisation, who abandoned it and were then forced to rejoin, etc., generates a lot of grudges which linger in the mind even after it looks as if everything has moved on. Then, when doubts later appeared regarding where the money ended up, things took a more serious turn. In the Emilia especially, this cropped up in relation to the so-called “levies” whereby lots of league members were arrested, with the odd one retaliating by moving on from jail to Montecitorio and a parliamentary seat. The bourgeois press’s campaign surrounding this has been as nonsensical as it has sensational. Workers’ rights to set an entrance fee for admission to their associations and a fine for those who breach their undertakings, cannot be queried, legally or morally; much less their entitlement to require, in agreements between workers and employers, that the latter pay certain damages for failing to honour their commitments or breaching signed agreements.

But whereas all of this is legally valid and cannot be dismissed as immoral, like any affair in which money is at stake, it can become ticklish and dangerous because it can easily lead to abuses, personal vendettas, explosions of resentment and unscrupulous conduct – and therefore to discord, petty wrangling and squabbling. In most instances fines or “levies” are allocated for public purposes, donated to good works, homes, scholarships, shelters for paupers, etc., and sometimes this is done through the good offices of public officials, inspectors or prefects. But it takes only one or two cases where things are handled differently and where legitimate interests are wrongly infringed, in which there has been some dishonest dealing, where somebody pockets such donations (it cannot be ruled out that this has happened, because there is always some chance of its happening); and lo and behold every other instance is overshadowed by doubt and discredit, and then fresh grounds are created for discontent and discord in the workers’ ranks. And a climate, an atmosphere is created where the proletariat’s enemies reap the benefits.

Another degenerative factor is the anti-libertarian arrangement whereby organisation is made mandatory, and often it is a case of one organisation handling all of the work in a given sector to the exclusion of all other organisations, whereby one has to belong or go without work, suffer a boycott or sometimes worse. In many places this has given rise to the uncompromising slogans that he who is not organised is a blackleg! Anarchists have always strenuously opposed this phoney and dangerous understanding of organisation. Strictly speaking, “blackleg” refers only to someone who reports for work during a strike and dispute and, by extension, to somebody who works at less than the rate and in breach of agreements signed between the workers and the employers. But organisation cannot be other than free; its whole efficacy derives from its being voluntary, its being an exercise in and demonstration of individual wills banding together to form one collective will. The moment organisation ceases to be voluntary and becomes compulsory it loses three quarters of the advantages it offers and acquires a host of shortcomings and seeds of degeneration.

In lots of places fascist violence has been the litmus paper exposing the harm done by compulsory organisation, but for which certain worker elements would never have defected to the fascists. Left to their own devices, they would either have joined the organisation later of their own volition and through conviction, or remained unmoved; no way would they have turned into enemies. Conversely, those who used to be unmoved may today be driven by fascism into organisation and into the arms of subversives, as indeed has thus far been happening with those hitherto unmoved by socialist propaganda. Events have shown just how correct were the declarations made at the July 1920 Anarchist Congress in Bologna which, on the basis that *everyone has the right to work and that organisations should be the arm of the growing consciousness of the*

workers rather than imposed by force, took exception to the system of mandatory organisation, a trespass against freedom which only redounds to the detriment of the organisations themselves, in that it divests them of any idealistic content and spirit of struggle and represents the seed of destruction in their very heart.

“The inevitable has come to pass” – Errico Malatesta reiterated,¹³ noting that for some workers fascism was, at first sight, a liberation, even though they soon found themselves worse off – “because mandatory recruitment into an organisation is not only a trespass against a sacrosanct principle of freedom, but introduced into the organisation the seeds of dissolution and death, because the organisations filled with hostile persons, potential traitors and, on the other hand, when members can be recruited by force, organisers’ incentive to mount propaganda and to attempt to persuade disappeared.”

In short, the prevalence of the authoritarian mind-set turned the leagues, the federations, the central bureaux, etc., into so many mini-governments, large and small, with all of the concomitant defects, and abolished others’ incentive to oppose and rebel against them. Which, in certain labour circles, paved the way for the spread of fascism.

¹³ See *Umanità Nova* (Rome), No 132, 14 September 1921

III.

I want no misunderstandings. The mistakes made by workers and socialists explain why fascism was able to expand even into certain areas which by their very nature ought to have been unwelcoming. They are not, quite, a justification of fascism per se; fascism remains a disease of the social system, because the latter's weakness smoothed its passage, because human error and party miscalculations prevented the most battered sectors from being able to mount serious resistance to it and from stamping it out.

By the same token, TB remains a grievous blight upon human society which needs to treat it and to try to overcome, rescuing as many victims as possible, through the work of the hygienist who, by researching the reasons for its spread, denounces its pernicious practices, unsanitary habits, questionable behaviour and harmful surroundings that predispose organisms to harbour the disease and spread it through their neighbours. No question about it; it takes a change in the surroundings, a change in social conditions, a change in harmful practices, behaviour and habits to prevent and fight the disease at source; but, once the disease has begun to spread, it also needs to be re-examined and combated with every therapeutic and often surgical resource wheresoever it manifests itself.

Fascism is effectively a disease, a fever coursing through the body of society and one that we must try to cure. I have highlighted a few of the factors that have helped it spread, but it should not be forgotten that we are dealing here with a general pathological effect, the origins of which can be traced to the war. Without that, the mistakes and shortcomings of the proletarian and social movement would have had damaging consequences of a different sort, but assuredly not fascism. Given the war, given that the only real preventive remedy against it – revolution – was not forthcoming, fascism or something of the sort was inevitable. The fascists, and those of their leaders who honestly believe that they are in charge of the movement, are in fact merely agents of a phenomenon that is stronger than them and by which they are dragged along.

This was realised this when an attempt was made to adjust the ship's tiller and muster the wherewithal to set a different course. A waste of time!

I said earlier that fascism is a conscious manifestation of the ruling class's interests; but let me amend that. It is partly that, especially for certain personnel who hold the reins of fascism and try to control it, steer it, drive it beyond or keep it within certain boundaries, as the interests, political conveniences and opportunities of the moment, etc. may recommend. But whilst holds true, in part at least, where the leaders are concerned, it no longer applies to the fascist masses.

Ever since fascism emerged triumphant in the autumn of 1920 from its first battles in the Emilia and the wide spectrum of forces and interests whose practice it is to side with the strongest rushed to swell its ranks or stand alongside it, fascism has overcome the masses' weakness for acting on impulse and increasingly acts off its own bat and at the instigation of obscure elements and unspeakable interests who always devise some way of taking cover behind large numbers. Which is to say that fascism has lost the advantage of small groups of being able to operate freely and actually do only what these want and pursue their own aims. Now there are lots of things

prescribed and desired by the fascist leadership which the fascist masses do not care for, do not want and will not do; indeed, on occasion, they do the very opposite.

What will come to pass should fascism continue through sheer inertia and its lapse into ever greater violence accelerate, unless other factors and elements not succeed in shunting it into a siding or halting and defeating it first, is an unknown quantity. Without doubt, it would end up falling apart; but how much destruction will it have left in its wake by then? There is always a chance that it may, after glimpsing the abyss towards which it is rushing, be able to muster the strength to stop in its tracks; but until such time as that likelihood appears, we cannot tell whence it may come.

Very recognition of the hatred by which it senses it is increasingly surrounded, whilst the sympathy of the ruling class that makes use of it of helps it shrinks or becomes more circumspect is making fascism more vicious. It is caught up in a vicious circle; its violence fans the hatred around it but aggressive violence pre-empts and prevents the enemy's hatred from exploding. For how long?

Such blinkered and almost demented exasperation, the result, perhaps, of the uncertainty by which they are beginning to be beset, is discernible in many fascists; some are genuinely beginning to doubt the righteousness of their own cause and others are starting to suspect that they may not always have the upper hand. Especially in areas where fascism has obtained all it can, no longer knows what to do next or how to stop, partly because what it has obtained is fated to be fleeting, which is why fascist violence is looking increasingly targetless; and violence for violence's sake, which achieves nothing, needlessly irritates the enemy and indeed troubles its self-seeking accomplices.

One friend of mine, a university student, identified as an anarchist, was one day surrounded by eight to ten people, given a beating and then dragged through the main city streets to the premises of the Fascio as the unseeing eyes of the police looked on. On arrival there, the victim of the assault asked why he had been given such *courteous* special treatment, but nobody could answer him. He stated that he was an anarchist, and they took him to task for the anarchists being allies of the socialists. He was insulted, threatened and searched; but when, in spite of this, he tried to reason with them calmly and went to speak to say how absurd and pointless this all was, even from the point of view of the fascists, they cut him off with unseemly shouting.

"We want no discussion. We're at the end of our tether!" was the most solid argument they could come up with. And, rather than expose themselves to the dangers of debating with their victim, they opted to set him free!

Maybe it was the knowledge that they were in the wrong that most irritated so many of them. Even though they let themselves be carried away for a moment, they quickly desisted. They either say nothing, rant and rave or resort to beatings!

The fascist upheaval reminds me of the disorderly and murderous gestures of a drowning man, beating the water near him and liable to drown even a would-be rescuer. In such cases, the blind instinct for self-preservation nine times out of ten turns into danger of death. The ruling class refuses to go to its grave and may well not perish – or at any rate the temporary revolutionary incapacity of the proletariat gives it reasons to think so – but fear of death and the blind instinct for survival have thrown it into such a paroxysm, of which fascism is the manifestation, as to render all its actions irrational and tantamount to suicide by proxy.

For instance, fascists often talk about restoring the authority of the state. And in fact the state, the political and military government, is the most stable organisation of bourgeois strength, the citadel that best defends and preserves the established order of things. Which is why all of the exertions of revolutionaries are geared to undermining the state, its weakening, whittling away at its authority and demolishing it. Yet fascism today it itself eroding the authority of the state by divesting it of its most jealously guarded function, the function of armed violence, repression, control and restraint upon the freedom of its citizens. Using phraseology borrowed from syndicalism, the fascists empty the state of meaning but for it they substitute only the unstable and contradictory whims of individuals, unorganised groups, blind interests and impulsive wills bound together not by some unifying idea but by hate, by a single yearning for destruction. Their activities are anarchic in the worst traditional sense of the word, in the sense of disorder – the very opposite, of course, of what the word *anarchy* has been understood to signify, since Proudhon's day, by that current of socialism of which I myself am an adherent, according to which the only genuine order is anarchy.

The deafening brouhaha with which fascism has surrounded itself and the whirlwind that it has unleashed barely disguise its organic weakness, the vacuum of ideas upon which it rests and upon which it builds its house of sand.¹ Its leaders have often been compelled to devise some sort of programme for it, but have not succeeded. They either stacked up empty rhetorical phrases, vague phraseology borrowed from the widest spectrum of parties; yet as soon as they set about doing anything concrete, specifying a given political and social objective, discord promptly erupts in the ranks; and the huge gap between the goals of the many differing factions within come to light. The efforts made by some to turn fascism into a proper party runs up against reluctance and opposition even from several among the leadership, some of whom are agreed that fascism cannot be a party, but only a rallying point for different interests bent upon achieving a given common aim.

What that common aim may be is not articulated very clearly. There is talk of rescuing the nation from Bolshevik catastrophe; but in essence, their differences can only be set aside if they are reconciled in the only feasible aim, of hampering the rise of the proletariat, beheading its political power and smash its growing strength in the economic sphere. On this they are all of one mind; the card-carrying fascists and those who are fascist sympathisers and have fascist leanings; the landowners from the Po valley, the Veneto and Puglia and the estate-owners of Sicily; the parasites from the big banks and stock exchanges and the industrialists in need of state protection; the embittered and unemployed politicians and unprincipled journalists; the landlords itching to hike up rents and the sharks determined not to cough up their war-time super-profits and who are running scared from tax bills; those who are frightened by revolution and those who see even reformism as smoke blown in their eyes. All of them are united by a shared aversion, no matter how different their political programmes may have been in the past – radicals, freemasons, democrats, liberals, conservatives, former syndicalists, ex-anarchists, along with a swathe of the

¹ Such an absolute dearth of ideas in fascism is most striking even in the eyes of the less educated strata of the people. Apropos of five peasants taken and shot in the square in Foiano in Tuscany in the spring of 1921 by a fascist firing squad, the *Voce Repubblicana* correspondent recounted: "Why all these killings? Why this incessant warfare? Most people cannot tell. The socialists speaking in the squares (one elderly peasant remarked to me in wonder) tell us what they want. *But what do these fascists want?* To club and insult and that's that!" See *Voce Repubblicana* (Rome) 9 October 1921.

right stretching as far as the clerical sympathiser Paolo Cappa and a swathe of the left stretching as far as the fascist-leaning former royal minister and republican Ubaldo Comandini.²

Such a consensus among such diverse and opposing factions cannot countenance the impossible, to wit, a shared practical programme of reconstruction, but allows only a negative purpose: an anti-proletarian purpose. The fascists do not want to hear this being said and threaten to beat up anyone who gives the game away. Which does not prevent it from being the real, living reality and for the past year or so the daily press has made it its business to furnish sound and telling proof of this.

Not only that, but the record shows that there is no movement less idealistic and more preoccupied with material success than fascism; it is obsessed by its own material interests and the material interests of the ruling class. Fascism has the entire working class in its sights with its most spectacular acts of violence and vandalism, no matter who may argue the opposite; and the working class is being targeted precisely because it poses a threat to capitalist profits and trespasses against the interests of shopkeepers and employers in that, to date, it has represented an erosion or infringement of proprietary rights. Fascism is rather unmoved by anything else.

When the fascists embarked upon their offensive in the autumn of 1920, the first institutions it most rabidly targeted were not the socialist clubs, the Socialist Party branches, but the *camere del lavoro* and the cooperatives, most of them under socialist leadership, but also including workers of different persuasions and the non-aligned. From the word go, what was under attack was not bolshevism but the proletariat as a whole.

The “Bolshevik spectre” which fascism tried to cite as its justification was, so to speak, exorcised once fascism put in an appearance. Indeed, indirectly, fascism helped rebuild the credibility of the reformist faction within the Socialist Party; but in the labour movement as a whole, Bolshevism or revolutionary communism was already on the wane by that October. Fascism is rather too boastful of having brought the socialists *to their senses*; but the latter had begun to do that themselves somewhat earlier. The socialist congress in Livorno in January 1921 sanctioned and was an obvious signal of something that had at least three months in the making; and the merits or, so to speak, demerits (as I see it, it was culpable) belong, not to fascism, but to the hard core of socialist and confederation reformists.

Activist fascism served, but also exploited the bourgeoisie’s fear of bolshevism, but it was also primarily the instrument and creature of capitalism’s salvation from the proletariat, from the greatest hotheads to the greatest moderates. In fact, in every locality, in every region, the fascists’ greatest violence was not reserved for their assault upon a certain political faction, the very one that were arguing was a menace to the country, to the fatherland, etc. At the time they too were claiming to be keen to champion the freedom of the proletariat and the fortunes of the working class. But then, according to the fascists, Italy and the proletariat faced a different enemy in every

² What I said about Comandini was written on the basis of a talk he gave in Bologna, wherein he offers a lively defence of fascism, barely tempered by a few reservations. It is a known fact that in the Romagna Comandini is the leader of some of the more compromise-minded republicans most sympathetic to fascism, at odds with the majority of their party, with its leadership and with the republican daily newspaper in Rome. But, for the sake of honesty, I have to note that Comandini subsequently moderated his pro-fascist sympathies. In a talk on Cesena on 21 October 1921 he had to declare that he condemned the “degenerations” of fascism and its violence; and he conceded that fascism’s interests were the same as those of the bourgeoisie.

district; the very party or organisation that enjoyed the widest support and largest membership among the proletariat in that particular location.

In places like Reggio and Modena, where the reformist organisations were in the ascendancy, these became the targets; in Bologna and Ferrara, the targets were the united maximalist organisations; in Treviso, it was the republican organisations; in the Bergamo district it was Catholic organisations, in Carrara and the Valdarno, anarchist organisations; in Piacenza, Sestri and Parma, it was the trade union organisations, not excluding those that had earlier been supporters of the war and shown pro-D'Annunzio leanings; in Turin, it was the communist organisations; and in some areas, such as Padua, even the cooperatives belonging to apolitical elements and run by supporters of law and order were targeted. Their destructive frenzy made no distinction between these various bodies; leagues or camere del lavoro, placement bureaux or federations, libraries or newspapers, consumer cooperatives or production cooperatives, workers' mutual societies or leisure circles, cafes, inns or private homes. Just as long as they belonged to the workers.

In all of these conflicts and countless attacks countless proletarians have lost their lives; and those wrapped in funeral shrouds and laid to rest in the mute earth have also been drawn from every persuasion and outlook, Catholics as well as anarchists, republicans as well as socialists, communists as well as reformists, or non-partisan workers. The only reason why they were targeted by murderous revolvers was because they were workers, toilers. What more telling evidence could there be that the fascists' guerrilla war is not waged against this or that specific party but against the working class as a class? The aim is to dismantle its strongholds everywhere, the focus of the proletariat's resistance to capitalism and the intention is to cut down anyone who successfully defends the workers and earns their trust, no matter what colours they may fly.

The pretexts cited by the fascists are of no significance, since they vary from place to place. In Bologna and the Reggiano they talk about routing the cowardly socialists who did not know how or refused to make the revolution. On the other hand, in Carrara and in the Valdarno, they boast that the time has come to put paid to the anarchists who threaten further upheavals and thwart their gradual advance. In Turin and Florence they rail against the Russian communist myth and in Rome and Milan they berate Nittian reformism. And so it goes, ignoring the minority factions in every locality who, precisely because they are the minority – be they socialists, anarchists, republicans or Catholics – have nothing but their ideas to offer and represent no hard and fast, convenient proletarian interest to hit out at.

I must confess that I am not minded to go into a detailed and methodical discussion of fascist violence, arson attacks and destruction, beatings and killings. That would require of us a certain serenity such as only distance in space or time could afford. But every development so exacerbates things that any general scrutiny and relatively level-headed discussion is rendered impossible. Moreover, I have not taken up my pen to write a social history and offer an outline of developments. The latter are familiar to us all, being current; and I shall confine myself to examining them in the light of my ideas, investigating or discussing movements and offering views that naturally might well be wrong but are honestly held in that I hold them (until such time as I am shown differently) to be fair and in accordance with the truth.

Fascism's apologists say that this violence on the part of fascism is a response to worker and subversive violence, a sort of backlash, a consequence. This is untrue. Otherwise, how are we to explain the extraordinary fascist violence in areas around Italy – such as the Reggiano, the Casentino, Perugia and Orvieto – which had always been quiet, and where political and social

frictions had always worked themselves out with scarcely any violence of note. And in the case of regions where proletarian violence has been a factor, three remarks need to be made: 1, That the day to day fascist violence does not wipe out past socialist violence, but merely adds to it, needlessly heaping calamity upon calamity and destroying the best of it, which was certainly not its violence. 2, That the instances of violence credited to the workers were infinitely less numerous, rarer and above all less serious, and in almost every instance triggered by other acts of injustice and bullying. 3, That proletarian violence has almost always been impulsive, improvisational, emotional and occasional and has never displayed the methodical and coolly premeditated character of fascist violence.

For rhetorical purposes, they trot out the old tales of boycotts which never took anybody's life. And remember that the boycott, a decision on the part of specific individuals to withhold their labours, is not an act of violence but a refusal prohibited and proscribed by no law. It can be applied unfairly and amounts to damaging action if applied against one's workmates for the purpose of curtailing their freedom to organise or whatever; but any comparison with the beating or shooting of a union leader or the torching of his home and furniture, is spectacularly ridiculous. Certain bullying ways, lack of education and lack of tact on the part of the workers are certainly to be deplored and self-defeating; but the blame for that lies chiefly with the unhappy social conditions in which those workers have been living. And whilst some of it may be put down to the sort of rabble rousing violent preaching bereft of any idealism which was rife in certain districts prior to the war, the fascists are scarcely in a position to deplore it, because they indulge in the very same rabble rousing, albeit in the opposite direction; but also because a number of those who are fascist leaders today were the very people who were schooling the masses in materialism and bullying in certain areas, such as the Ferrara district, and a few years ago it was they who were peddling the most witless subversion and displaying the very same peccadilloes for which they arraign today's unionists (sometimes without good reason).

True, in the history of popular movements there has been no shortage of eruptions of violence and of savagery indeed on the part of the angry plebs: and some such episodes have been truly horrific.³ But these came in exceptional moments of exasperation, under the spur of hunger or fury, as the result of great provocation; but they were neither premeditated nor ordered by responsible parties and organisations. These have always included instances of unexpected slaughter by mobs driven by desperation or collective insanity, after a lengthy period of despondency or humiliation. When a revolt was headed by the leadership of a party of responsible bodies, the latter nearly always used to manage to avert acts of pointless violence and cruelty. In any case, excesses by proletarians have always been very rare; cumulatively, over the past twenty or thirty years in Italy, they do not add up to as much as one third of those carried out by the fascists in one year. And over those twenty or thirty years how much more commonplace were massacres directed at the workers?

Other, more minor acts of violence may have happened more frequently; the odd skirmish with strike-breakers, scuffles with police, the odd hayloft put to the torch, the occasional stoning incident, the occasional injury inflicted, etc. are the sort of things that happened and which will

³ I am not referring here to individual attentats, some of them fairly and other unfairly credited to the anarchists. Regardless of whether they are deliberate acts of rebellion or acts of blind exasperation or lunacy, they are a quite different kettle of fish and outside of the remit of our study. However, just for the record, it might be as well to recall that among the current fascist leadership there are several ex-anarchists who once upon a time used to sing the praises of the most anti-social violent dynamite outrages and rail against their then comrades.

probably happen again. But, aside from the fact that anyone responsible for such things runs the serious risk of arrest and substantial jail sentences – they could not and cannot at all expect the sort of indulgence demonstrated towards fascists – are the fascist assaults and beatings and shootings, arson attacks, destruction and cold-bloodedly planned and premeditated killings not more serious matters?

And so, today, and this was inevitable, in self-defence, out of fear of attack, in retaliation in the wake of repeated provocation or out of a lust for revenge on the part of the insulted and beaten, some workers have chosen to imitate the fascists and repay them in kind, in spite of advice to the contrary from their leaders. But they go into battle with inadequate resources and those who take it upon themselves so to do always brave great dangers, what with the guns of the fascists, the guns of the carabinieri and the threat of many long years in jail.

The fascist press raises a stink should fascists be killed in their guerrilla warfare and for some time now the numbers of the fascist fallen have been rising considerably. That the fascists should be worried is understandable and only human; but, if they had the capacity for level-headed reasoning, the fascists would realise that the facts that they are lamenting are rather to be expected and are the logical consequence of their mode of operation.

Above all we would do well to stress that, no matter how severe the fascists' losses, their numbers fall far short of the numbers of worker victims, even if we take into account only the period between October 1920 and the present. Drawing up a balance sheet I find rather repugnant, for the amount of blood spilled in one place or another is no guide to which side is in the right or in the wrong. Nor do I want to appear to be exploiting the dead for polemical purposes. But it is my belief that such statistics have already been drawn up by others. That if the public is more aware of the fascist casualties than of the worker casualties, in spite of the latter's far outnumbering the former, this can be put down to the journalistic ploy whereby every dead fascist triggers endless protests with subversives being tried and arrested to as great a fanfare as journalists can manage. On the other hand, when the victims are on the workers' side or in the revolutionary ranks, then (as long as they are not VIPs, deputies, etc.) the papers give them only a few lines, saying as little as possible and sometimes trying to draw a veil over the fascists' responsibility by putting the deaths down to misadventure, accident, bad luck, persons unknown, or ... the victims themselves!

Even so, it has to be acknowledged that the fascist losses have been increasing, especially since April 1921. And the explanation for that is a simple one.

The hatred that the fascists have been planting through the daily beatings and the wrecking of organisational premises, arson attacks and destruction of cooperatives, their infringement of all freedom of assembly, speech and freedom of the press, making life difficult or impossible for parties and associations in certain districts, even preventing the workers' usual evening leisure activities, attacking them in the cafes or inns or forcing them to go home for a time, bursting into private homes, etc., this hatred is on the increase every day and there is no comparatively plain and harmless outlet for it, open and above board. Retaliation in kind is out as far as workers are concerned, because certain forms of reprisal would require a degree of impunity, that freedom of movement, self-defence and freedom of attack that the fascists enjoy thanks to the connivance or tolerance forthcoming from the security forces.

Furthermore, the workers have realised that the fascists run the same risk whether they resort to beatings or revolver. In any event, the fascists prefer the extreme reaction and even the slightest gesture of resistance carries the same danger of death. The fascists also know that any defending themselves with violence will inevitably be arrested. Then again, the workers do not have the communications, the transportation required for rapid assembly; and in most instances attacks on them come out of the blue or when they are walking the streets on their own or when they are peaceably gathered together for the most varied purposes. The workers, who all have their jobs to go to and who need those jobs, cannot leave permanent defence teams in position. And the destruction either comes by day, when all the workers are away at work, or late at night, when they are all in their beds.

It should be added that the workers, even if they could, would never consent to certain forms of retaliation that are odds with their spiritual education, to the cultivation of which they have been schooled by everything connected with their associations, their press, etc. In this regard the uneducated workers are rather more civilised than the daddy's boy university and high school students. Nor should we overlook another factor: that the proletariat's representative political and economic bodies, their so-called "leaders," partly because they regard it as futile, lobby against and disapprove any sort of personal or collective retaliation and if any should be carried out, they disown it. They recommend patience pending an overall response and insist that isolated actions can be damaging, that local vendettas are not worth pursuing, etc. etc.

But none of this damp down hatreds; and even though many were convinced by it, not everybody was and the impatient, the hot-headed and the exasperated were not persuaded. In the end, views were poisoned by the hatred and some thought to themselves "I may be doing harm, but I want my revenge. I want to lash out."

This is only human nature, which carries more weight than any theory or methodology.

Some, driven by their passions and desperation, when the numbers were pretty much equal or when strength of numbers was on their side and where partisan intervention by the security forces seemed least likely did what they could to take on whomever strayed into their sights. Those security forces – and this cannot be said too often – when it did not directly or indirectly play into their hands, stood idly by in the face of fascist violence and only stepped in when the damage was done; and on a number of occasions, acting on orders received, they even tried to thwart the odd act of destruction or fascist bullying, especially in the larger cities when the wider public was looking on and if they stepped in to rescue someone from danger, it was only after the victims had had the good sense passively to endure the onslaught. Anybody making any serious efforts to defend himself and use violence in legitimate self-defence soon found that the security forces would wade in on the side of the fascists and against the victims. That which, in the fascists' case, has been endorsed, abetted, tolerated or benevolently contained, is violently, savagely repressed in the case of subversives.

Given that situation, it is inevitable that, in instances where it erupted, the hate so abundantly generated found extreme expression through childish guile and sought to hide its face and often lashed out in a blindly incoherent manner. Since resistance and open defence are curtailed and well nigh impossible, the people's hatred also vented itself through the eruption of so-called "ambushes" upon which the newspapers dwell with such a wealth of detail, chalking them up to communists or anarchists or to the Arditi del Popolo, whereas they have all been non-partisan in character. It is, moreover, noteworthy that the partisan press very often describes as "ambushes" out and out clashes on open ground, legitimate but unexpected defensive acts by workers coming

under attack and faced with the starkest choice of lashing out lest they be assaulted. The talk of “ambush” has even extended to cover the case of the odd fascist who, having forced his way into a private home, after breaking down the door, met his death within at the hands of residents desperately defending themselves!

Even in the heroic times of the Risorgimento, there was a cudgel policy. In those days it was a policy employed by the Austrians against the patriots and revolutionaries of the times. Which is why Italians used to join with Garibaldi in singing *bastone Tedesco l'Italia non doma* (The German cudgel will not tame Italy). The scenes of beatings doled out in Milan were often lamented: and the common folk of Milan had their revenge, striking back, as best they could and under cover of night, against some of the leading beaters, be they police or pro-Austrians. Whereupon, of course, the Vienna newspapers or the press in Vienna's hire would scream blue murder and ambush, just as the conservative press does in relation to similar instances today.

In weighing up the violence of the two sides involved in this guerrilla warfare, the greatest mistake would be to consider only the bloody encounters which have claimed the odd victim. Although the latter may be many, they represent exceptions to the rule. The worst violence, the type that leaves the worst legacy of resentment behind it, is the day to day sort that kills, not one or two or three people, but rather threatens an entire class, the use of the cudgel offending the human dignity which many cherish more than life itself,⁴ destroying through its destruction of a workers' body or cooperative the economic standing or well-being of an entire group, trampling the most basic elements of everybody's freedom, banishing all security and striking terror, not into a few more or less responsible figures, but into whole populations, into members of the working class or folk who refuse to join the Fascio,⁵ even should these be politically inactive, indifferent or naïve. And this sort of violence, with its less lethal, less bloody aftermath, surfaces daily just about everywhere and is almost exclusively the handiwork of the fascists. In certain districts it has become so run-of-the-mill that it is no longer the subject of complaint or comment and is not even mentioned by the subversive press.

If we add such violence to the other sort, to the more murderous violence upon which the press is more inclined to concentrate, then any comparison between fascist violence and worker violence become impossible; it is like trying to compare the violence of the Austrian invasion of the Veneto with the violence of the almost benign “Red Week” in the Marches and Romagna in 1914!

And finally let it be said, even with regard to the odd, exceptional act of proletarian violence which was an unwarranted response to the petty circumstances that most nearly prompted it, that prior to the beginning of the fascist violence the working class, as a class, conducted its struggle against the capitalist class and government in an impersonal way, generally speaking at any rate.

⁴ It has occasionally happened that a worker, attacked by the fascists with cudgels at the ready, has screamed at them: “Do not beat me; kill me instead!”

⁵ A friend of mine, a professional and recent university graduate, had found a job in a town in the Mantua district where the fascists were running riot. Although progressively-minded, he is not an activist and minded his own business there. Even so, he was beaten, forced to give up his job and move away. “Get this!” – he was told by one fascist leader – “We cannot tolerate outsiders in this area who are not fascists.”

The fascists were certainly not loved, but nor were they hated; no one thought to deny them their rights to organise, assemble or carry out their propaganda; nobody ever disrupted their meetings, if we except the sort of heckling and arguments which are inevitable in the run-up to elections, as indeed had also been the case prior to the war. Other sorts of violence, triggered by other circumstances, there may well have been; but certainly prior to fascism's beginning to set the example, certain sorts of violence of which the fascists are complaining today never took place and were not even contemplated.

In a way, even the turbulent years of the proletariat on the march in 1919–1920, which is often cited by way of a justification for fascism, set the pattern, albeit that the acts of violence were still few and far between, but it displayed the precise features of today's fascism, the same intolerance or connivance on the part of the state authorities. I have stated already that fascism became strong and emerged into adulthood in the Bologna district in the autumn of 1920; but its birth certificate dates from the attack upon and partial destruction of *Avanti!* in Milan in April 1919. That criminal, freedom-killing act, for which there was no precedent, was certainly not a warrant for the today's fascist intentions, invalid though these may be! And the frequently cited unruliness of the proletariat had barely begun when, in November that same year, an attempt was made at gunpoint to force a hostile audience in Lodi to grant a hearing to nationalist speakers!

Neither today nor yesterday nor ever, not even when they attack nor defending themselves, the workers have not used and do not use violence and have not visited and do not visit destruction and arson upon those things, those accoutrements which are the symbols in this world of civilisation, work, progress and thought. Even where its oppressors and exploiters are concerned, the proletariat has always respected the freedom it was demanding for itself. It never occurred to it – and this may have been a mistake – to destroy those dens of thieves the Stock Exchange and the Banks. It has never dreamt of attacking and torching the premises of the Landlord League, the Industrial Societies or the Chambers of Commerce; and where it is in the minority, it has never thought to browbeat city administrations into resigning; nor has it put newspapers, presses and bookshops to the torch.

On occasion the nameless mob has set customs houses and prisons ablaze, but these are hardly symbols of learning and beauty! But those who have spent a century singing paeans to the destruction of the Bastille have cast the first stones. The workers have on every count shown themselves to be more humane, more civilised and infinitely less barbarous than their masters ...

Typical of those who stand for the crumbling civilisation of today – the people who for five years coolly railed against Teutonic barbarism – is the accessory that they have displayed ever since the government was embarrassed into banning them from tramping through street and square with revolvers drawn: the bludgeon, the ancient weapon of Cain, hitherto favoured by the Croat devotees of the Austrian monarchy. The treacherous, short, iron- or sometimes lead-lined cudgel, narrow at the grip and broadening at the tip and fastened by a strap at the wrist!⁶ And the symbols dazzling the eyes of fascists are eagles with their talons, daggers, skull and

⁶ And now a ministerial order has banned bludgeons; yet they can still be seen. Note, however, the complacent and diligent manner in which industry had flooded the market with large amounts of baubles of every shape and variety! Another sign of the absence of any gentleness or humanity in fascism are some of its anthems which are awash with vulgar and savage references. One need only think of the one entitled *Me ne frego* and others which have refrains like this referring to subversives *One by one shall we give them their just deserts and do them to death with dagger blows, or the very well known song Botte e sempre botte.*

crossbones and the lector's fasces, once upon a time a symbol of the republic but today revived as the repulsive symbol of the consular, dictatorial and imperial police.

Oh, no! I am no Bolshevik and, in all likelihood, if I were in Russia, Red Guards would toss me into prison for the crime of loving freedom too much. But in Italy, I would prefer the oriental symbols of life and labour – the sickle and the hammer – to the Roman and medieval symbols of torture and death.

This tide of barbarous savagery, the substance and essence of which is destructive violence, is chipping away at any hope of renovating or rebuilding Italy's wealth.

Small wonder. I have said that there is a guerrilla war being waged by the ruling class against the proletariat; but it might equally be described as a war of the non-worker against the worker. To what end? Alas! to rescue and defend the homeland, they say; and they drain, decimate and exhaust the only source of wealth that the Italian nation possesses, denying her coal, adequate supplies of iron and other essential materials. All that Italy has if she is to recover from being bled and stripped bare by the war, is the labours of her workers, the relentless painstaking exertions at home and abroad which, prior to the senseless Libyan war [1911] had at last managed to repair all the leaks opened up by the regime's earlier criminal ventures and the crazy extravaganzas of those in government.

Way back then Italian paper money was like gold dust; and how old Luttazzi bragged about that! Only the work of the workers and peasants of Italy had restored the country to its full economic efficiency and full credit; if so much of the soil of Italy produces enormously more than back when it was left entirely to the employers to fret about productivity, this is down to proletarian labours and the heightened consciousness of the peasant labouring class and the stimulus and direct efforts of their trades organisations. But the workers added to the value of their native soil precisely as they were growing in political and moral maturity, and only because they had moved on from the state of brutalisation, hunger and slavishness in which they had been wallowing for some time. Anybody trying to bring the working class back under pack-saddle and yoke and herd it back into the past at gunpoint and with cudgel, is committing the most monstrous murder of his homeland.

Anybody who believes that the workers, routed by employers' violence, lawful and otherwise, beaten, bullied, intimidated and starved, can go on producing like before is living in dreamland. The pressures and the threats brought to bear upon them cannot help but unnerve them and productivity is going to be reduced even further. The current crisis will therefore simply be exacerbated. Fascism, if it succeeds in breaking down the proletariat's resistance and organisation, will essentially have killed the goose that laid the golden eggs and exhausted the greatest and most abundant fountain of wealth in Italy.

We can all recall how, a year ago, by way of blaming the crisis on worker unrest, strikes, the threat of revolution, etc., the academic economists and the hired philosophers held the socialists, anarchists and restless workers to blame for Italy's poor credit abroad, disastrous trade balances and the falling value of Italian currency. Yet, for upwards of twelve months, Italy has seen scarcely any strikes, worker unrest or disorder; "order" has regained the upper hand; or rather the disorders of the run-up to revolution have given way to the disorders of counter-revolution. Be that as it may, the upshot is the same: even worse!

I do not wish to be so simplistic as to hold fascism solely responsible for the worsening of the Italian situation which is also attributable to many other, broader and more complex factors but it cannot be argued that fascism is not a factor and that its violence has improved the still declining fortunes of the homeland by one iota.

Nor can it be argued that fascism has in any way revived the worth of the patriotic ideal at home or – as it intended to do – reaped the benefits bought by victory in the recent war. To tell the truth, fascism these days is not overly bothered about these things. A year ago it looked as if these patriotic aims were the main inspiration behind its activities; but now fascism is rather less starry-eyed. And rarely does it waste its time mounting the odd, vaguely patriotic public demonstration; and even then seizes upon this as a pretext for returning to its own special anti-proletarian vocation.

This was seen in September 1921 in the commemorations of Dante and on his centenary; fascism quickly succeeded in chilling any incipient enthusiasm in the people for what could have been a splendidly successful apotheosis of the Italian spirit; which might have signalled new spiritual heights in the masses who are in no way insensible of, blind or deaf to the suggestions of poetry or the splendours of art or the radiance of beauty. Not a bit of it! Fascism took over Dante or rather a phoney representation of him; and even grafted their own punitive expeditions on to demonstrations held in his name! Fascist gangs from the Ferrara district and from Bologna mounted a sort of military march on Ravenna; en route, with fascist deputies leading them on both legs of the journey, acts of violence and destruction were mounted against the proletariat, and in the hallowed “city of silence” that surrounds Dante’s Tomb, the most obscene farce was enacted. Workers who had failed to doff their caps as these bravos of civil war passed by, and scarcely one of the proud men of the people from the Romagna uttered a word about resistance – the fact is that an attempt was made deliberately to provoke such a response – were beaten and reprisals were carried out before the very complacent gaze of the authorities; as usual, it was workers who were being beaten and it was socialist clubs, unions and workers’ cooperatives that were being targeted for destruction.⁷

Thus did the celebrations marking Dante’s centenary get under way at the height of the twentieth century, in the heart of Italy! Had they even the merest grasp of their country’s history the women-folk of the Romagna who barred their doors and windows as the fascists passed by and

⁷ On their military march, fascists wrecked the Godo and San Michele Fornace clubs en route. In Ravenna they promptly set about forcing people to display banners as they passed through; and beating up the unwilling! Among those beaten were a few foreigners who turned out for the occasion. On the morning of 12 September the fascists burst into a hotel and demanded to see the personal papers of those within. One of them, a certain Colombo, was found to have a membership card from the Camera del Lavoro, and was angrily rounded upon: he took to his heels, pursued by raised cudgels. Finally a revolver shot rang out ... Now they had their pretexts and the punitive expeditions began that afternoon. Five socialist clubs were wrecked and ransacked, one of them 4 kilometres and another 12 kilometres outside Ravenna. At one of these, the Aurora club, a bicycle, clothing and the concierge’s laundry went missing. A leisure circle was also invaded and those attending were beaten. It was the same story at the Camera del Lavoro: they forced their way in, wrecking and smashing everything and a few hundred lire, a type-writer and a cyclostyle copier went missing. Then it was the turn of the Federation of Cooperatives. Its door was closed so they used a ladder to gain entry via the windows, allegedly to put up a tricolour. The security forces inspector on the scene with two hundred men at his command granted permission to do this. But from the window the fascists climbed inside, tossing records, books and correspondence into the streets. By way of a trophy of war, somebody carried off a very valuable tapestry on display on the balcony! Ravenna, a working class and subversive city, was soon looking quite shabby. No more music, no more festivals. On the return leg, the fascists passed through Castelbolognese and remembered to drop by to wreck the socialist club there.

who summoned their men-folk indoors in terror must have thought that they were back in the days of the Huns and the Goths. And the most ignorant among them, the ones in sorest need of educating about their homeland, may well have cursed this Dante of whom they knew nothing but in whose name they were being greeted by these hate-filled cries and raised cudgels! So much for the service rendered by fascism to the genuine and most unblemished glories of their homeland: and small wonder that, in the wake of that, the people's hearts were closed fast and that there was no point invoking the great name of Dante, which would be greeted by something between coldness and general indifference on the part of the Italian masses.

Confronted with that sort of an example of what Italian greatness really is and in face of that moral obscurantism whereby that which is most sublime is profaned and degraded, and, out of hatred, dragooned into the service of the most small-minded and vulgar interests, one wonders what "fatherland" and "patriotism" mean to those who, in the name of that homeland, disgrace Italy in the eyes of the outside world and at home turn her into a synonym for bullying, brow-beating and slavishness. But then, have they any right to speak of fatherland when in fact they have shown themselves to be its worst moral and material enemies?

Perhaps, as Errico Malatesta wrote in August 1921, "it was a mistake for proletarians, revolutionaries, socialists and anarchists to have allowed the conservatives and the base instruments of the bourgeoisie to, in a way, claim a monopoly on the cry *Long live Italy!* thereby suggesting to the simple-minded that other people wished ill to the country in which they were living." In other words, maybe it was a mistake to leave a monopoly on patriotic feeling (which is, properly understood, a feeling shared by all) to the tiny minority represented by the ruling classes. Whether or not it was a mistake, time will tell; and I am not concerned here with resolving the matter which is outside of my remit. In any event, when something other than a literary posture, anti-patriotism was never anything more than a backlash against degenerate chauvinist, nationalist and imperialistic forms of patriotism; which has eventually come to represent in a country what blind selfishness does in the individual. No doubt about it. If, indeed the fascists are in the right in doing what they do in order to bring honour to Italy, who could fail to be an anti-patriot?

In reality the fascists have thus far conducted the roughest, most effective and insidious anti-patriotic propaganda among the Italian people, the impact of which will not so readily be wiped out by others nor eradicated very quickly. And I cannot help thinking that that among the current fascist leadership there is more than one, and this may well apply to them all, who in turn of the century Italy made a profession out of anti-patriotism and indeed were the most aggressive pioneers of anti-patriotism proper, as devised and popularised by Gustave Hervé with all his customary exaggerations and unilateralism. It might be said that all that they are doing now, actually, is mounting the same old propaganda under different colours and to greater effect! But the internationalism and cosmopolitanism of the socialists and anarchists, which predated Hervé, carried and retain a quite different ideal; their ideas were and are, deep down, merely the development and continuation of the cosmopolitan and humane spirit that inspires many of the writings of Mazzini and Cattaneo and which prompted one of Goffredo Mameli's beautiful anthems.⁸

⁸ Here are the lyrics to his *Ode to Rome*: "Where once the Caesars / held sway / And the priests held / the human mind in thrall / Where Spartacus is buried / And Dante cursed / The banner of love / Will flutter bright / Peoples

In reality, fascism is rather more alien than socialist internationalism to the Italian mind, and to that broad, humane idealism that reaches back to the splendid literary and philosophical blossoming in late 18th and early 19th century Italy and beyond it to the traditions of the Renaissance and the free cities. Just as in practice and in its brutal deeds fascist activity is rather reminiscent of the “Teuton cudgel” and in fact has nothing in common with the heroism of the Bandieras, Sciesa or Pisacane,⁹ so the ideal wellsprings of the sort of patriotism they display are a far cry from the epic achievements of past generations of followers of Mazzini and Garibaldi and more closely resemble the shabby, shadowy, aggressive nationalism that during the “splendid war” was commonly described as Teutonic. But this is not the place nor the time for a discussion of patriotism and internationalism. My thoughts on the topic are the same, universally known thoughts as the anarchist strand of socialist internationalism. However I want to demonstrate here how the fascists effectively trample upon and contradict any principle of idealism, even one different from and often in conflict with socialist or anarchist ideals. Carrying over the effects on the war in this regard also, fascism has done enough in one year to exacerbate one thousand-fold the proletariat’s alienation from its own country; meaning that it has and increasingly will produce results diametrically opposed to what its flatters claim for it.

To be persuaded that this is the case, one need only have a little contact and share slightly in the life of the people, as it really is, working and living on foot of its labours alone. If one ventures just a little beyond the cafes in the city centres and the village chemist shops, where politics is the stuff of the idlers and all those who do not work, if one wanders out of the centre and into the suburbs, into the countryside, if one steps into homes, little workshops or laboratories and factories, you will discover everywhere that the belief is widely held and deeply ingrained, and outward show suggests that fascists are the “truest and greatest” patriots and that patriotism therefore consists of beating up workers in order to force them to renounce their beliefs or quit their organisations, of torching and destroying the *camere del lavoro*, thwarting socialist propaganda and persecuting the best known and most active socialists and snatching away from workers all of the pay and working improvements that they have won through fifty years of struggle, sacrifice and patient effort.

The use that fascists make of the national flag is deserving of reflection on the part, not of subversives who might, at best, be interested in it as a propaganda weapon against the establishment, but of honest folk from the opposing camp.

Whilst the tricolour is the symbol of the fatherland and flies at the head of military regiments, from the windows of public buildings and is the official emblem of the monarchist government (which requires of socialist townships that they too display it on commemorative occasions), it is also the official emblem of the fascists, one that the proletarians have seen flown by the advance party and on the punitive expedition lorries when the latter descend on certain districts to wreck

forgotten / The wrath of a dying day / Will be the land of men / Like a great city / Free, great, united / A new life ahead / Weary humanity / Joining hands like brothers / Slavs, Germans and Italians / One grief and one hope / The people on one ground / And the king another.”

⁹ [Bandiera brothers, Emilio and Attilio, executed in 1844 for trying to spark a rising in the Kingdom of Naples. Amatore Sciesa (1814–1851), Milanese patriot executed for posting revolutionary bills. Refused to buy his life by becoming a paid informer. Carlo Pisacane (d. 1857), Neapolitan nobleman and revolutionary pioneer of anti-authoritarian, federalist socialism who tried to marry class warfare and national liberation. – ed.]

worker premises, public places and private homes. For the past year, it has been trailed, through the squares, and the city and rural streets, in the wake of gangs brandishing revolvers and cudgels, and which terrorise whole populations and have intimidated even, or indeed *primarily*, the least subversive-minded segment of the population which is most deeply attached to the oldest and best loved traditions of quiet existence. In short, the symbol of the fatherland has turned into the badge of arson attacks on camere del lavoro and cooperatives, the symbol of the strong's bullying of the weak, the armed of the defenceless, the rich of the poor, those in government (or their protégés) of their subjects.

This could be a source of displeasure to honest patriots, who could say that this is all show without substance. However they must agree that appearances can only stretch so far before, as in the present instance, they blend into the most spectacular and most recurrent actions and that such appearances can in effect no longer be separated from them but rather take on all their intrinsic value.

In certain rural socialist townships where fascism has imposed itself and where a sort of state of siege obtains – in certain places in the Ferrara district the impression is of a military occupation, in that the fascist gangs mounted patrols like regular troops – there was a trend for the tricolour to become obligatory. Folk were stopped on the streets and a tricolour cockade forced on them; homes were toured with bundles of tricolour flags, with every family forced to put one on display. And so an entire district was tricolour and won over to patriotism! Known socialist or subversive bandsmen or musicians were even required to tour the town performing patriotic tunes ... Let every sensible person judge for himself if this is doing patriotism a service! Everywhere that it manages to gain the upper hand, fascism conducts itself like a victorious army in a vanquished country. Now it may come to pass that the inhabitants of the occupied territories suffer the rule of the outsider, adapt to it and make an outward show of going over to the victors; but that in their hearts they nurture kind feelings towards them and above all that they embrace their ideas is a plain nonsense!

Now that the national flag has become the fascists' flag, the more they try to foist upon everybody and the more they beat up in the streets those who fail to doff their caps as it passes by, the more hostility there is building up around that symbol, even among non-subversives, and even outside of the ranks of the workers and among all who have any sense of human dignity, scorn any vulgar bullyboy tactics and wish to think for themselves and act in accordance with their own practices and opinions.¹⁰ For one can harbour patriotic feelings without feeling the need to wrap oneself in any tricolour flag, especially if the latter is brandished by a faction and saluting it is turned into an obligation and a pretext for coercion!

It could be remarked that this growing idolatry of patriotic symbols, if heartfelt, is an indicator of greater decadence. In this manner, in hearts and minds, the symbol replaces the thing symbolised, the cold letter replaces the idea and living faith yields to superstition. This has always been the case with religions as their star wanes. Workers, socialists and anarchists all have symbols and flags of their own the very appearance of which provoke them to gaiety and enthusiasm. But *est modus in rebus!* [there is a measure in all things!] A worker, or a socialist or an

¹⁰ Appetite grows with the eating! Now the fascists are no longer content to require a straightforward salute for the tricolour but are trying to impose their salute plus their civil war emblems. The massacre in Modena on 26 September 1921 grew out of just such an ambition. In Rome, during a fascist procession at the time of their recent congress, the fascists also doled out beatings to respectable, law-abiding folk for refusing to doff their caps as the fascist banners passed by.

anarchist who is seen to doff his cap – or, worse still, wants others to doff theirs – in the presence of a red or black flag, would be a laughing stock and would be regarded as a fool! Which may be a further indication of working class superiority; or rather, it is a sign that the socialist idea is still in its ascendant stage when it can be externally represented by some symbol, albeit that the idea prevails within and acts as the direct inspiration; and refuses to give up its place to symbols or be replaced by them in any way.

In short, no matter the angle or viewpoint from which the matter is considered, fascism does the poorest service to the cause of the “fatherland.” One need only see how, in certain ordinary schools, boys, in places where fascism is in charge, get such delight from hunting down tricolour ribbons in order to burn and destroy them as fascist symbols! And this even prior to the fascist take-over. And this is something that happens unprompted and in spite of the teachers’ vigilance. Those schoolboys have become somewhat fascists in reverse, precisely because of an instinctive backlash against fascism; but what sort of “patriotic” education this springs from, every one can decide for himself!

Here I will permit myself a brief aside. A little lad of barely 8 years old, a primary 2 class pupil, the son of workers with no interest in politics and therefore certainly not put up to it by them, was one day standing singing a folk song to the air of the fascist anthem *sarannosocialisti – a rovinarl’Italia* (And the socialists will be the ruination of Italy). Startled by this, I asked him; – You’re a fascist, then? – No, I am a socialist. – And why do you want to see Italy ruined? – Because Italy is a good fascist. (The words were spoken in the rather more expressive Bologna dialect, but I do not know how to convey this). Alas! In his little head the lad had mistaken Italy for some female devotee of the Fascio, which is why he wanted to see her “ruined”!

The real Italy, the Italy that works and studies, can be very grateful to the fascists for the reputation they have created in the eyes of her citizens of the future!

IV.

Even as I was starting this final section of my modest essay, Italy was profoundly upset by the double tragedy in Mola di Bari, where the socialist deputy Di Vagno was murdered by fascists and in Modena where security forces unexpectedly opened fire in the most savage manner on a fascist demonstration, killing seven young people and seriously wounding a further twenty five, including a fascist deputy.

Such incidents which trouble the minds of anybody who is honestly and enthusiastically involved in political struggles, in that they touch the very depths of our soul, complicate the situation even more. There is something in them that is especially worrying for the ruling classes who should understand that one cannot upset the balance of civil society with impunity. Whilst revolutionaries have paid dearly for the intention, the mere intention of upsetting a balance that strikes them as unfair, so too the ruling classes feel and intuitively understand that they are on shaky ground here.

First there is the fact that they, and through them the government, cannot contain fascist violence within the parameters which their own interests will allow; then there is the added fact that when it comes to protecting the fascists, the security forces are uneasy at being required to go the extra mile and defy the orders from prefects and ministers, and, as in Modena – albeit quite exceptionally – employing the most unwarranted violence against them in, again, an undisciplined fashion. This should give the ruling class a little pause for thought. For it is its weapons that are inflicting the injuries and its own supports which are showing signs of cracking.

Where will this lead? Or rather, where must it lead inevitably if things carry on as they have so far and if they should carry on before our very eyes?

Again the idea has been ventilated of turning fascism into a political party. But it has to be one thing or the other: either fascism abides by its specific political and social programme, whereupon it will be abandoned by very many who follow it only out of offensive or defensive needs with relation to the proletariat, but whose own ideas differ widely from one another; or under the new designation of party, it will carry on being what it now is, the orchestration of anti-proletarian violence, in which case the situation is not going to change and will carry on as at present. In the first eventuality, there is nothing for it but wait and see what that programme turns out to be; in the second, everybody knows what the programme is and the fascists delight in singing it at every opportunity: “boots, boots, boots and boots galore.”

Some of the best known fascists would be in favour of dropping the emphasis on violence, beatings, arson, etc. I am not querying the sincerity of their intentions although they make a show of peaceable intent only when fascists are on the receiving end, or when they do something unduly gross; and shelve it the next day. But I believe all the same that more than one of them may honestly wish to see an abrupt about turn, both because violence is proving increasingly incapable of seriously taming the proletariat, and because the use of violence must have worn out and nauseated some of its practitioners, especially the ones that kid themselves that they are driven by idealism.

But that sort of fascist reformist will not find it easy to get the genie back in the bottle. By now there is a number of interests looking to fascist violence to get them back on their feet and they do not want to see it ended. The blind and demented hope of scattering the workers' organisation, especially in the countryside, has not been abandoned by very many of the most obtuse and backward looking landowners. Anyway, the use of violence has created a sort of fascist professionalism that means to continue; and an out and out fascist mob, though negligible in each district, is a considerable presence in Italy as a whole and, like all mobs, once its pent up energies are unleashed, it is not easily brought to heel. And among the fascists we find the same phenomenon as among the socialists; whereas some counsel moderation, others make a big noise out of simple rivalry with the former and in order to supplant them in positions of privilege.

Those fascists who are keen to return to the orbit of normal living complain of the hatred by which they are surrounded, about how they are vilified, the violence visited upon them here and there by those who cannot stand to be provoked, feel the overwhelming urge to be avenged for some offence, or who are simply driven by naked fear, exasperation or an instinct of pre-emptive attack. They are afraid that if they refrain from their violence the violence of their adversaries will be unleashed at them. And this is certainly not an exaggerated fear: there is every likelihood that for a time there will be a flurry of reprisals here and there. But if the fascists were to voluntarily cast away their cudgels, if the fascist backlash could steel itself to stop of its own volition, while it is still in a strong position, then assuredly the violence used against them would be minor, more sporadic and fitful and would cease earlier than if fascism was to wait until it is weaker and on the verge of defeat before desisting in its murderous handiwork.

But in fact what makes most fascists reluctant to set aside their violent destruction of things and of people is not so much fear of opposition violence *per se* as something else that will inevitably come to pass. *Fascism will lose all of its dismal prestige and all its strength as soon as it gives up on violence.* Many fascists know this, their sponsors and protectors know it and all who have founded their personal political fortunes on fascism sense it. It is the reason why some, who by now have carved out a little niche for themselves and hope to salvage it by going over the side, are casting about them in search of another crutch to lean on in the near future. Which is why others who owe their own positions to the exercise of violence and know that they will lose them once that comes to an end, are not willing at any price to give up the weapon that has become indispensable to them.

Automatically, once there is no more violence to prevent it, the red flags and red scarves will re-emerge and again we shall hear the *Internationale* and the *InnodeiLavoratori* and *Bandiera Rossa* being sung, where today the very attempt would draw down punitive expeditions. Scattered organisations will reform, the camere del lavoro will bloom again; and if they have somehow survived the battering, once the current pressure eases off, they will bounce back with renewed strength. Those workers who, in a given district, have bowed to the fascists out of opportunism or fear, will sooner or later desert them and return to their former loyalties. Fascism will empty like an overturned wine-skin and will revert to being the tiny minority movement it was in early 1919, except that there will be the memory of the violence it has perpetrated, which is definitely not likely to open doors for it in the future. I could be wrong; but that is how things stand, as I see them. It strikes me that no close observer of the effects of fascism on the broader masses of the proletariat, the popular mind and public opinion in general could dispute this.

Not that this would be a bad thing! Quite the opposite. Moreover, even if things finish up this way, and this is the brightest hypothesis, fascism will have left behind a legacy of too much hatred

and resentment, and will have set too bad an example for future struggles and those struggles will certainly not proceed in a level-headed way and in a spirit of tolerance. The ruling classes will realise this, especially those employers personally unduly identified with fascism. Very likely, the proletarians will forget fascism *per se* and will forget the names of so many opportunist fascists, leaders or members, etc. But when the class struggle in a particular district is able to bring the proletarians and the employers into confrontation again, identification of the latter as former fascists cannot help but make the struggle against them all the rougher and more hostile. In short, once the pressures brought to bear by fascism through violence has ceased, the workers' movement will re-launch itself with renewed vigour; and the social revolution will be knocking at the door again.

There is no chance of the fascists' and the ruling class's being blind to all this; Which is why I was very sceptical about the calls for peace and the hopes of moderating conflicts and calls to halt to the civil warfare with which the newspapers were awash in the summer of 1921. Its very weight has dragged fascism down a road of its own choosing, a slippery slope. It seems to me that it is doomed to remain violent out of the need to survive; because, on the day it gives up on violence, it will have ceased to exist. This, its spirit of self-preservation, is the reason why the first attempt to arrange a peace between socialists and fascists, a attempt mounted by parliamentarians under the supervision of the Speaker of the House, foundered completely, in spite of the sincerity or otherwise of the contracting parties.

Nowhere was that peace treaty enforced. In some districts where the fascists held sway absolutely, it was blatantly rejected right from the outset. Elsewhere, the fascists denounced it on the first, slimmest pretext. This despite the socialists' having welcomed it warmly and having shown the good will to put it into effect. But this was only natural! That treaty may have been embarrassing to the socialists as far as their dignity was concerned; but it was tilted in their favour, simply because the socialists were not giving anything away that was not already part of their common practice and part of their programme. A return to legality? But it cost the socialists no effort at all to make that return! That may well have been their most heartfelt wish following the lurch to the right at the Livorno congress. As for the (by then) few who had placed themselves outside the law, there was no need for the fascists to put them in their place; the carabinieri and judiciary were enough for that. By contrast, the fascists came away from the peace agreement effectively exonerated and even enhanced as a force in politics. For them a return to abiding by the law bordered on a return to oblivion; a turning away from violence was a turning away from their principle if not their very *raison d'être*. And they did not turn away from it! So, if fascism really does become a political party on a par with all the others, within the compass of the legally constituted institutions – like those who, out of preference or necessity effectively are, even though they might prefer not to be and might be inclined to step outside of them – and if it is to rely for its survival upon its own organisation, journalism, the propagation of its ideas, economic association, elections, parliament, etc., it may well subsist and go by the same name as it does today but it will be a substantially different phenomenon, made up of a variety of elements. What the term fascism signifies today would no longer exist; And I doubt if in the long run the survivors would want to cling to even the name. And how many people would be eager not to have been fascists then! How many of them would deny it! Even now there are a few

who are starting to deny it, to hold their hands up, and in the fascist press there is no shortage of reproaches made of them and reminders of past feats in which they had a hand, etc.

At the end of December 1921, by which time these notes had already gone to press, the National Fascist Party published its programme, having been founded at the stormy Rome congress early the previous month. It would take too long to go into a detailed examination of it and that would be beyond the space available in this essay.

The programme has been written in such a way as to allow fascism to remain what it is, destructive and violent, for as long as this suits it, but allowing it the option to step back inside the law as soon as it finds this to its advantage. The only plainly proclaimed aim is counter-revolution at any price, by any means, not excluding violence, in order to ensure survival of state and capitalist rule.

In its programme fascism sets out its aspiration to govern Italy, to install a *strong sovereign state* to revive and protect the social function of *private ownership*. So it is a programme of struggle not just against revolution but also against socialism and against the proletariat which strives for equality and freedom, liberation from wage slavery and an end of the exploitation of its labour, by any route. In short, it is an explicit affirmation of the aim implicit – I believe that I have demonstrated this sufficiently – in fascism’s entire record from autumn 1920 onwards.

The remainder of the programme, the practicalities with regard to domestic and foreign policy, the army and navy, education, the judiciary, social legislation, etc. is informed by the above mentioned principles and is not dissimilar to the nationalists’ programme. Apropos of the political form of the state, without naming it, fascism implicitly embraces the Monarchy “insofar as national values find expression and curatorship therein”: meaning, effectively, the curatorship of militarism and capitalism. To put this otherwise – the threat is implicit but very clear – it may be replaced by some different political formula by a pronunciamiento or coup d’état.

Whether or not this programme brings success to this party which owes its origins and name to fascism, out and out fascism as we know it today – which consists of systematically destroying and smashing the proletariat’s political and economic organisations by one means or another, especially by violent, bullying means – the fascism which is peculiarly dear to the ruling classes, which feeds upon their aid and protection, the fascism upon which the industrialists and landowners depend to put pressure on the workers and peasants to accept lower wages and additional work, the fascism that is pretty much an umbrella for the parasitical and militaristic classes with their dreams of states of siege and military dictatorships, in short, the fascism of cudgel, revolver and arson, the one that hopes to surmount the crisis generated by the war through a preventive counter-revolution, that fascism is not going to walk away from violence and will carry on being what it is, unless it is defeated by a greater force. It has become an organism and, as such, cannot countenance suicide, no matter the relative logicity of its situation and the pointlessness of its actions in overall political and social terms.

In saying this, I am keeping in mind what I argued earlier and more than once; there is more to fascism than just what is to be found in the regular, card-carrying *fasci di combattimento*. The card-carriers, affiliates and hirelings are surrounded by a whole gamut of sympathisers, honorary fascists and fascist activists out there among the shopkeepers, touts, bailiffs and land agents, property-owners, employees, journalists, etc., making up a mass that supports official fascist initiatives but occasionally act off their own bat; and it is not uncommon for this marginal fascism, which the official fascists cannot disown too much lest they emasculate themselves, to be responsible for the odd act of violence, brutality and destruction rather than the more spectacular

ones. Sometimes, when things take too serious a turn, they are timidly and formally disowned; but people are not taken in, and rightly so, because those disowned are the very people who did “well” on other occasions and, like all the others, they are covered by the *omertà* not just of fascist officialdom, which is only to be expected, but also by the ruling classes en bloc.

Fascism represents one of the liveliest paradoxes of state and bourgeois rule. The latter survives because it serves many private interests, but at the expense of the general interest, and not just of the proletariat; it manages temporarily to fend off disaster for the regime, but is laying the groundwork for a more calamitous and catastrophic disaster to follow.

It is the equivalent of the thousands of delaying tactics to which a formerly booming but now declining commercial company resorts in order to stave off bankruptcy; loans, fresh borrowing at usurious rates, promissory note after promissory note, right up to the criminal forms of embezzlement, misappropriation and malfeasance. The catastrophe thus fended off for a few months or even a few years returns but it comes back in enormously more earth-shattering form. What could have been a straightforward bankruptcy, settled by means of an honourable arrangement a long time ago, turns into a fraudulent and dishonourable bankruptcy, trailing a wake of greater or lesser offences and not uncommonly ending in bloody tragedy.

I have stated why I think that fascism is turning its back on lawlessness and violence. But if it does this successfully and manages not to bounce back under some other name, so much the better! In which case no one would be more pleased than I would to be cast as the false prophet ...

But if things go as I anticipate, where will that lead us?

Some look to vigorous intervention by the state. And in fact if bourgeois liberalism’s theoretical state, loftier than parties and classes, impartial and endowed with the most delicate precision instruments for weighing up rights and wrongs, and armed with a strength blind and deaf to all outside appeals and answerable only to itself were reality, then that ideal state might very well pull the fascist movement up short, reduce it to impotence and usher back inside the parameters of the law and common justice.

But does that ideal state exist? Not by a long shot! Democracy has been chasing its shadow for over a hundred years and devised all sorts of shapes for it; but, no matter what the form, the state has remained the champion of the interests of one class against another, the supporter and ally of the ruling class against the oppressed classes. Fascism in Italy has been an obvious instance of this; laying the democratic view of the state to rest once and for all.

However, it is not the case that the state is, as the Marxists argue, merely the bourgeoisie’s board of directors, subordinate to it in everything and fated to perish with it. The state, however, could outlive the bourgeoisie and conjure up a new ruling class. The state is also, in and of itself, a source of economic as well as political privilege and the various castes that make it up amount to a class good and proper; a class within a class. But the state is inconceivable in the absence of a ruling class; and inconceivable also as a genuine representative of the whole society in the country. Depending on the way the government is made up and organised, it may also come into conflict with one or other segment of the economically privileged class; but it may not take on the entire ruling class, honestly and effectively wedding itself to the cause of a justice that

transcends class, because it is not in its interests so to do, much less come to the defence of the dominated class, no matter how inhumanely tormented the latter may be.

In fact the state has quite different sensibilities and, citing all of the abstract principles of morality and justice, it steps in only when these are or appear to have been breached to the detriment of its own members or satellites and to the detriment of those blessed with wealth and power; it stirs itself when the casualties are directly or indirectly part and parcel of its political and representative machinery, even should they happen to be socialists; it stirs if violence is deployed so maladroitly as to store up greater woes and dangers for it. Outside of these eventualities, it knows nothing and notices nothing. The hundreds of nameless, obscure victims count for nothing; trespasses against the most elementary freedoms – not even the freedom to hold a rally or a meeting, but merely to sing an anthem or wear a ribbon in one's button-hole – may take place throughout Italy on a grand scale, as long as it is the proletariat that suffers; the state knows nothing of these and can do nothing for us!

The fact is that fascism, placing itself through its violence beyond the pale of the common law and taking the state's own duties of repression and reaction upon its own shoulders, is usurping the state itself. Out of esprit de corps and I might even say professional pride, the state might be tempted to impose some limits upon fascist presumption. But how is it to achieve this when fascism enjoys the whole-hearted sympathy of the ruling classes from whose ranks they recruit the tall poppies of the civil service, the police, the judiciary and army, whose task it would be to apply a brake to the excesses and moderate the tantrums of this prodigal, delinquent offspring? Even were it willing to call it to order, how can it manage this and would it be willing to harm it?

When a faction breaches the state's laws, embraces violence as a method and employs it according to its whims, over and above and in defiance of the law, it is in a state of rebellion. The state has the wherewithal to steer it back to normality; the violent, armed and contemptuous violence that it merits, that drowns it in blood, if need be. But in order to do that it needs to have an interest in so doing and such a terrible undertaking must hold out the promise of a reward that outweighs the expenditure. Now, insofar as fascism usurps the state and relegates it to a secondary position, the state might be induced to get rid of it; but other, stronger interests and dark dangers will deter it from taking on a force which, whilst it may well be a competitor and disrespectful, is yet not its enemy, not an opponent of its institutions but rather seeks to reinforce them (albeit by means that run the risk of compromising them) and, above all, champions the same social interests, the same class privileges over which the state itself mounts guard. Fascism is an ally of the state, an irksome, demanding, inconvenient, embarrassing and insubordinate ally – all of these things – but an ally nonetheless. How could the state give serious thought to destroying it?

The state has frequently snuffed out revolts against it in bloodbaths; and the ghastliest butchery has in fact been the handiwork of the most democratic states, from 1789 onwards at any rate. But that happened only when the state's interests coincided with the interests of the economically ruling class; in France in June 1848 and May 1871, in Germany in 1919, etc. When they did not, the state always preferred to accommodate itself to the ruling class, or caved in and agreed to transform itself in accordance with the latter's wishes. Same thing today. The state, feeling quite powerful, would certainly not have hesitated before snuffing out proletarian unrest in bloodshed. But what it would unceremoniously do to the detriment of the working class, it absolutely refuses to do to the detriment of its own class, the capitalist class.

We have already stated that it has no interest in so doing; and even if it was willing, in those conditions it might not have the strength for it because it could not be sure that it would be able to call upon its own instruments which are all more or less fascistic in their leanings, starting with the army General Staff and including many of the officers from all the services and the rank and file of the police. Furthermore, let us reiterate that fascism has all of the greediest and most reactionary factions of capitalism lined up behind it; through fascism, these blackmail the government; either the latter stops putting obstacles in the way of the fascist backlash and indeed starts to back it with an anti-proletarian policy protective of the property monopoly, or the government will find its own foundations attacked, regardless of the dynasty itself. Some hold out the threat of a republic (an anti-democratic, military republic, that is) and others float the idea of a palace coup in the interests of some other branch of the ruling house.

In short, in no way and from no angle does it serve the purposes of the state – either positively or negatively – to confront the fascists with violence. To tell the truth, there is one potential situation in which it might; if capitalism and the majority of the ruling class were to see a reformism redolent of socialism but posing no threat to the rights of property as a likelier rescue package; agreeing to some sort of an accommodation with some of the more intelligent and at the same time more ... petit-bourgeois ... worker sectors; and, above all, by reaching coalition government arrangements with the parliamentary, political socialists who pose a lesser threat to the property-owners' portfolios. There is a bourgeois minority and a socialist minority who cherish this dream, which might have been understandable and indeed feasible prior to the war, but which, given the tremendous current and escalating crisis, would be followed by the ghastliest disappointment. However, such minorities are based exclusively in parliament and in journalistic circles and have no great following in the country, not among the workers nor among the bourgeoisie. Barring freak developments, I believe that they are fated to come to nothing; and if their collaborationist aims were to be put to the test, I think it would merely expose the nonsensicality of them, thereby opening the eyes of the last remaining blind.

There are some who would have expectations of the results of socialist collaborationism (in the sense of bringing the reign of the fascist cudgel to an end), should that collaboration bring the socialists to power in the midst of bourgeois monarchist rule. Which might well help bring clarity to the situation in that we should see somewhat more clearly if the government is powerless against fascism, or is its accomplice (I happen to believe both things simultaneously); and it would, through experience, put paid to that dream. Unless such an eventuality, which undoubtedly frightens the military and most parasitical castes, immediately triggers a coup d'état or military pronunciamiento, an anti-constitutional, reactionary and anti-parliamentary violent closing of the ranks around fascism and militarism – which would drive the situation either in the direction of an absolutist backlash or towards revolution – socialist membership of the government would weaken fascism, and might well force it to lay down the cudgel and restrain itself; but ... it would be the ruination of socialism.

Socialism in power would then have on its side, along with the monarchist regime, the more quietistic and accommodating sectors of the bourgeoisie, the police and the judiciary which could be counted upon to turn their faces towards the new sun for the sake of their interests and out of the habit of standing alongside those in charge; it would therefore have the wherewithal to apply

the brakes to fascism which would automatically be deserted by all who had defected to it out of opportunism. But on the other hand it would no longer be “socialism”; it would have a duty to defend private property and the state and more and more noticeably have to line up against the masses whose interests are at odds with the state and the property-owners; not would it be able, because of the economic and social crisis that is racking the world and which is not about to stop just yet, to introduce the reforms benefiting the proletariat that might have been possible prior to the war. In a word, it would be disowned, discredited and devoid of content. In point of fact it would represent fascism’s truest and greatest victory!

Not to mention that once the illusion had faded and the class struggle become more pointed again, assuming that it would have eased off a little, and once socialism in government, its usefulness spent, has been tossed on the scrap-heap, once the pressures from the toiling masses return to threaten the ruling classes, the latter can always reach to their arsenal again and draw out the fascist weapon stowed away by decision of the government rather than dismantled by the direct action of the proletariat. And we’ll be back where we started!

Leaving fascism to one side, there will be a repeat of what happened on a lesser scale in France in 1848 in the wake of the republican-socialist revolution that February. The socialists, entering government alongside the radical bourgeoisie, took only a few months to discredit themselves and to discredit the revolution. And one fine day, after the bloodbath that June, which the socialists in government proved unable to avert, the proletariat woke up to find itself under the rod of Cavaignac’s military dictatorship, only to wind up a short while later under the imperial-Catholic sceptre of Napoleon the Little.

The fascists newspapers exploited the Modena slaughter in order to scream government persecution and denounce the government as working hand in glove with the socialists, and so on. But this is rabble-rousing talk designed, albeit unsuccessfully, to disguise the truth. The one-off incident in Modena, like the earlier incident in Sarzana and whatever others may yet come to pass, is quite exceptional and the product of the imbalance between the forces working on the government; between its covert dalliance with fascism and its need to save appearances; and is, therefore, the outcome of the inevitable confusion of powers, the differing interpretation of orders, and the impossibility of securing from uneasy police forces right across Italy the sort of measured backing for its sundry purposes that allows the government to back the ruling classes without the lower classes being too sharply reminded of its complicity, so that these may carry on deluding themselves that it is on their side or, at the least, impartial.

The savage massacre in Modena, drawing a misleading veil over the facts of state connivance and helping to blind the populace to the precipice towards which the government, the fascists and the ruling class are herding it, has certainly served fascism’s interests rather more than the most successful of its punitive expeditions.

Fascist violence could certainly have been successfully and definitively repressed by the state, had the latter had interest in so doing or had it desired to do so; but that would have been a touch premature. Initially, a year ago, a few innocuous police measures would have been enough to snuff it out without any need for bloodshed or trespass against the most elementary civil rights: only a tenth of the police measures taken subsequently, which have of course, remained a dead letter. Of course it is understandable that the sort of effort needed to smother or squash a new-born snake is scarcely going to be up to the killing task once it has grown into a fully-grown boa or rattlesnake! But, as we have said, the state could not bring itself to kill off fascism which rather serves its purposes in paralysing and terrorising a proletariat which inspired rather

different worries and posed a graver threat to the interests of the ruling classes and therefore to its own.

So although the state could, if it so wished, dump fascism today, through recourse to proletarian strength, by arming the proletariat for its own defence or simply allowing the latter a free hand to arm and defend themselves against fascism, without having to worry about the government's creeping up behind them, or fret about being arrested, tried and often killed by the latter's gendarmes. But of course the state is not about ever to do any such thing and will give it the same wide berth as it would any enormous danger, because, once built up, armed and set in motion, the strength of the proletariat, we can anticipate, would not stop halfway and would certainly not confine itself to mere circumstantial defensive work but would go on the offensive and wind up overthrowing the regime.

Another means of getting rid of fascism, should the latter become irksome, has commended itself to the government: not by fighting it but rather by exorcising it, outdoing it in terms of violence directed against the proletariat, against socialism and against freedom; that is, by implementing such an anti-worker backlash dressed up in legal garb as to render fascism's unlawful violence quite redundant. Which would of course mean dropping any pretence of parliamentary, liberalism, democracy, etc. The truth of the matter is that this would simply add up to ... fascism in government!

There are many potential means to this end: military dictatorship, state of siege, rule by decree, in short all of the measures that the ruling classes have used down through the ages in order to make the transition from one form of legality to the next. In this way an absolute government might be re-established, or a regime akin to that, like the one they are presently trying to set up in Hungary. If need be, it might tack on, as the Latin expression that I have seen quoted in a fascist newspaper has it, *usque ad effusionem sanguinis* (up to and including the spilling of blood). Its friend, fascism, should not be drowned in blood; but its socialist enemy which so pig-headedly persists in refusing to give up and wither away spontaneously, can always be drowned in blood!

Let it not be said that I am exaggerating here or looking too much on the bleak side. Such things are not stated openly and the "heavyweight" newspapers are reluctant to declare them. But the provincial press, some of it at any rate, has no such inhibitions and plainly and with complete honesty (or, if one prefers, cynicism) speculates about them. Certain newspapers in the Emilia, known platforms for the Agrarian League, argue this very point without overly veiled language; that the only way to banish the evils of fascism is to legalise and make government policy of what the fascists have achieved in many districts using unlawful means; namely, the dissolution of workers' organisations and subversive parties, or their complete paralysis, a ban on subversive rallies and marches, demonstrations and songs, a ban on strikes, dismissal of all socialist district councils, the closure of all cooperatives and all of the unbroken non-aligned consumer agencies, elimination of the anti-monarchist and labour press and, finally, enforced residence orders on all whose presence might give encouragement to proletarian resistance.

In Rome, with my very own ears, I heard one deputy, whose status I knew from hearing him referred to as "onorevole" but whose name I did not quite catch, saying to the person sitting next to him on the tram, just after the incidents in Sarzana, that as far as he was concerned they could

disband the fascists too as long as they disbanded the parties and the camere del lavoro; and this would mean a “bloodbath” for the people!

And there is no shortage of people with the courage to formulate such bluntly reactionary aspirations or afford them a pseudo-scientific or pseudo-philosophical foundation. For instance, there is the one-time socialist republican turned conservative monarchist, Giuseppe Rensi, who has written a book (or rather gathered several of his essays into book form) which could easily have been entitled “*Philosophy of Fascism*.”¹ I am not familiar with the author nor can I pronounce upon his sincerity; but certainly his book has the ring of sincerity about it; and he also recounts very many things mortifying to proletarians and subversives, but above all he has the merit of plain-speaking, avoiding circumlocution and of seeing his premises through to what he would regard as their necessary logical conclusions, which might be summed up by Birro’s formula, as immortalised by Giusti: “This is the maxim – short and true: prison and gallows, prison and gallows.”

That book, written prior to March 1920, opens with the premise that the worker, insofar as he works, must always be answerable to others, and must be somebody’s slave and that Aristotle indeed was perfectly correct in arguing that slavery was a timeless necessity. Rensi accepts that the choice is between reaction or revolution and candidly plumps for reaction with all of its implicit trespasses against democracy, freedom of speech and freedom of the press and freedom generally. He talks with irritation of primitive Christianity and the French revolution and all but laments the fact that the Roman emperors and French kings lacked the vigour to nip those two movements in the bud; he also rejects the notions of a constituent assembly or republic and sees the monarchy as the bulwark of society’s salvation. And he would like to see government become more absolute, more oligarchic, pretty much along the lines of the Venetian Republic, with its Doge, its Council of Ten and its state Inquisitors.

Rensi cites “*the authority principle capable of implementing what the Catholic Church was able to implement in the Middle Ages, the subjugation of freedom, the taming of minds, the silencing of debate and the restoration of order*.” Deploing the pointless bourgeois hypocrisy (now aped by a number of fascists as well) of making distinctions between various parts of the proletariat or between the latter and its leaders, etc., he calls openly for the bourgeois, conservative world, from non-Bolshevistic Catholics through to non-republican reformists, to band together against the proletariat, as a mass and as a class, countering all the principles of freedom with the principles of aristocratic authority. Further, he recommends that religion should not be under-estimated because, as Polybius had it, “*it would be rash and unreasonable to banish certain views of the Gods and the punishments of hell since the multitude is fickle and brimming with illicit ambitions and the only thing left to keep the lid on is lurking terrors and tragic dreams*.”

Again according to Rensi, there is one way of standing up to rising tide of ideas; but, lest resistance be rendered pointless, it must be, not intermittent and weak, but mounted with determination and consistency. And, in order to explain himself he cites this quotation from Stendhal: “*One must send ten thousand to the gallows, or none; St Bartholomew’s eve destroyed Protestantism in France*.” What else is there to say? For an insight into the fascist programme one need only look at the Machiavellian quotation placed on the fly-leaf of his book to indicate its subject matter: *the only way to unite a divided city is to slaughter the leading trouble-makers*.²

¹ Instead, it was entitled, rather more modestly, *Principii di politicaimpopolare* (Edit. Zanichelli, Bologna).

² Rensi’s little book has a lot of interesting things to say, especially against infatuation with the Bolshevik dictatorship, the opportunistic politicking of the socialists, the masses’ lack of education, etc., and on all these counts

This sort of “governmental fascism” could in fact do away with the current lawless fascism which conservatives find offensive on the basis that it is none too reliable, carries worrying implications and is rather too reminiscent of the approach of the notorious Bonnot Gang. The fascist ranks contains not just a few of the former apologists for those tragic bandits and that well-known Parisian individualist terrorist; there was even a fascist deputy who recently commented that fascism is the Bonnot method adapted for the purposes of nation-rebuilding or something of the sort. The state’s openly anti-proletarian backlash would make fascism redundant as far as the propertied class is concerned; and fascism would then wither away from lack of purpose and lack of sustenance. Thereby ridding the ruling class from a troublesome slave which irks precisely because increasingly it poses as the master.

Of course, this would not spell the definitive extinction of socialism, revolution, anarchy or the workers’ movement. A St Bartholomew’s Eve targeting the socialists (and the odd fascist has used those very words) would take at least thirty years to mount and it would not be feasible to enforce it sufficiently; which means that it would be a pointless blood-letting. Furthermore, the French Huguenots were always a minority, a minority of seigneurs and aristocrats, in whose absence the world could proceed on its way. But the workers are the life blood of society; even though the current crisis, unemployment, etc., may reduce the value of the working class, it remains vital to the overall life of the country all the same. The white terror’s utopia may well trigger lots of disasters and grief, and may drench a page of history in blood and make the path of civilisation more arduous and cost the proletariat lots of lives and many tears, but, for all that, it remains ultimately an impossible utopia.

The revolutionary utopia, by contrast, always works through one achievement towards a broader and more enduring achievement; true, this is a relative achievement differing from that dreamt up by the founders of ideologies, but increasingly it broadens its foothold in time and space. Renzi, in the book mentioned above, seeks solace in sorting through the historical record, in an attempt to show that every revolution inspired by the idea of freedom and equality has spawned fresh tyrannies and further inequalities and from this he deduces that the idea is bankrupt. But the fact that humanity relentlessly turns back to it, in spite of setbacks, in spite of partial reversals and pauses; and that thought and action leap from revolution to revolution, not merely extracting some additional freedom and equality every time, but extending these rights to an ever-swelling number of individuals in every land and in an ever-growing number of countries, from lonely little Greece all those centuries ago to the vast continents as a whole – all of this shows that the path of civilisation leads towards socialism and anarchism; towards increasing equality and increasing freedom for all.

The lawless reaction of the fascists and the lawful reaction of the state may, though, stand in for one another on occasion, or, as is happening now, may amalgamate; but neither one has nor can ever produce anything other than the bitter and sterile outcome of rendering the revolution

is quite successful. Except that instead of using these arguments in order to press on in the direction of more libertarian truths, he uses them as grounds for moving backwards, in the direction of the lies of the past. At certain times his argument becomes so paradoxical that it is hard to believe that he is being serious. Renzi is a patriot, so it would seem to have been the spirit of patriotism that had made him turn on his erstwhile comrades. Yet, as a patriot, he should believe that but for the spirit of revolt and freedom there would be no Italy. The authority principles, had they survived, would still be the principles embraced by Louis XIV, Metternich, Wilhem and Franz Joseph!

and the transition from one society to another, from one civilisation to another all the rougher, more painful, more damaging to the victors and the vanquished and more fraught with hatred.

The torrent of hatred being hatched by white terrorism is certainly worrisome, with its exasperating slow drip of provocations, violence against the person and against property and its lack of any sense of kindness or fairness. It will bear the primary responsibility for the red terrorism that it will probably trigger – and this will come, even should lawless terrorism be replaced by the lawful variety – unless the brakes can be applied in time, unless, between the cessation of its own violence and the resurfacing of rival forces, enough time intervenes for the healing of so many wounds, the fading of so many memories and the evaporation of so many hatreds.

I have said it before and let me say it again – fascism could only lighten the hatred it has created on such a wide scale and with such profusion, if it were, unsolicited, to call a halt to its work of destruction and violence and then only on condition that it were not to wait before so doing until the day when it is compelled to do so by force, namely, until the day when it is routed once and for all. By then it would be too late.

I do not know if fascism, and with it the ruling classes, are going to have the strength to succeed in this and halt their slide down the by now well nigh sheer slope; nor do I know if they may yet be in time to do so. I yearn for both, not just out of a loftier feeling of humanity but because it is my heartfelt conviction that the hatred sown by fascism and by any reaction at all does no favours to the classes which provoke it nor to the classes in which it is instilled. The revolution, in which hatred may play too great a part, would emerge poisoned by authoritarianism and injustice and would prove to be the most flawed of revolutions; hatred would trigger evils harmful to all, those who were defeated by it as much as the others who might emerge from it as the victors.

Some thirty years ago, apropos of revolution and hatred in the revolution, Errico Malatesta stated: “Material rebellion will assuredly come along and it may serve to deliver the stab in the back, the final push that will bring down the present system; but unless countered by revolutionaries acting on behalf of an ideal and who are inspired and guided by love for their fellow-men, for all men, such a revolution will eat itself. Hatred does not bring forth love and hatred makes the world over. The revolution of hatred would be a complete failure and would lead on to fresh tyranny which might well describe itself as anarchist, just as those in government today style themselves liberals, but that will not make it any less of a tyranny or stop it from having the same effects as any other tyranny.”³

What those effects are is obvious today from the Russian revolution. The unprecedented savage tsarist repression, taken to unlikely extremes during the war, and its bloody repression of all subversives, the individual hangings as well as the massive massacres, the *pogroms*, the extermination of whole villages, the police from the Third Section and the “Black Hundreds” (much the same as our own fascists) – let Rensi note this well if he is a believer in the efficacy of savage repression – availed nothing in terms of saving the ruling castes and classes which have been deposed, dispossessed and destroyed. But absolutism’s brutal and reactionary violence generated such a sea of hatred that the poison has invaded the revolution; and as yet we cannot tell if its robust constitution will ultimately get the better of the poisonous impact Malatesta anticipated would beset any revolution unduly intoxicated with hatred; especially the unhappy rule of a dictatorship that threatens to strip the Russian revolution of any element of freedom and equality.

³ *En Dehors*, Paris, 28 August 1892.

Bolshevism, in the sense of absolute civil and military authority, the power of the mailed fist awarded to a single class, or to a single party or to the handful who lead a party – the dictatorship of the proletariat being a meaningless expression that may as well signify dictatorship over the proletariat – would certainly be an evil, the direst expression of the working class revolution; but much more likely, the established ruling classes are spiritually and materially paving its path to success. The Royal Guards and the fascists of today may well give way to future Red Guards and future red fascists.⁴

In today's Russia, many of the agents of the revolutionary police are the very same people who served in the old tsarist police force!

Fascism, the unwholesome fruit of the war and the partly instinctive, partly deliberate expression of the spirit of self-preservation of the existing political and economic regime, will certainly not go on forever. Sooner or later it will come to an end.

It may well be that fascism will meet its end through some process of internal dissolution, which it has avoided for the present but the symptoms of which come to the surface from time to time. It may be that certain of its leaders, having "made it" may come to realise that by straining on the leash too much it might come to grief and that they might lose everything that they have gained; and thus apply the brakes themselves and bring the movement to heel. Just as it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the more aware and thoughtful sector of fascism may decide to change tack and shunt its remaining supporters away from the tracks of violence. Finally there could be a sort of process whereby they are swallowed up by established political and social institutions whereby the latter may start successfully to claw back those of their functions which have been usurped by fascism.

I have already looked at a number of these possibilities; and I cannot rule it out that, for one of many reasons, which may well be different from those I have floated, the fascist phenomenon with its present features may unexpectedly and shortly grind to a halt or disappear. It may well happen ... although it is hard to credit!

Events may well make a nonsense of my scepticism on this count; at which I would be only too happy. But the opposite might also come to pass; that fascism, now that it has sprung to life, will not perish so easily and will not die a natural death. It may be the case that the spectrum of interests created around it may stabilise and coalesce; that the organ may cling to its function and thereby find some new *raison d'être* and fresh sustenance.

It may be that fascism, albeit moderating certain of its most irksome features which are offensive to humane feelings, may survive and consolidate as an instrument for violent compulsion, some sword of Damocles to dangle constantly over the heads of the working classes, so that the latter can never be fully at ease anywhere, even within the parameters of the law and forever fearful of its rights being violated by some unforeseen and arbitrary violence.

In which case, for the working class and for all those who have embraced its cause, for all who see the proletariat's liberation from wage slavery as a pre-requisite to greater justice, greater well-being and greater freedom for all, the only option is to kill off fascism, to make its eradication a target, without retreating into some Moslem-like patience, without trusting fatalistically to fate,

⁴ "Red fascists" is the name that has recently been given to those Bolshevik communists who are most inclined to espouse fascism's methods for use against their adversaries.

to natural evolution, the process of decomposition, the laws of economics and other kindred expressions through which men disguise their laziness and their reluctance to make the requisite effort of will.

Killing off fascism, of course, is not an excuse for slaughtering fascist personnel. Often the violence deployed against the latter merely feeds it rather than killing it off. That those attacked by the fascists at specific times and in specific places should defend themselves however they can and may is only natural and unavoidable. This is not a bad thing, but even if it were a bad thing, it would make no difference. However, embarking upon a material struggle against fascism as an organism in itself, seeing no other enemy but this, would be a dismal affair; it would be like stripping the branches from a poisonous tree whilst leaving the trunk intact, like striking off some tentacles instead of striking at the octopus's head. It may be possible to inflict a few partial defeats on fascism this way and to claim fascist lives; but it will only serve to make the fight all the more bitter and might well bolster fascism and help to make it an even sturdier organism.

The fight against fascism can only be waged effectively if it is stricken through the political and economic institutions of which it is an outgrowth and from which it draws sustenance. Moreover, revolutionaries aiming to bring down Capitalism and the State, if they were to allow themselves to be drawn out by fascism like a lightning bolt diverted by the lightning rod, and to devote all of their efforts and exhaust themselves on the fight against fascism alone, would be playing into the hands of the very institutions that they would like to see demolished. Using the fascists as a bogeyman, the capitalistic state would not only succeed in protecting itself and living a easier life, but would also succeed in persuading a segment of the proletariat to work in cooperation with it and to take its part. Even today, whilst on the one hand capitalism uses fascism to blackmail the state, the state itself uses fascism to blackmail the proletariat, giving out the message: "Give up on your dreams of political and economic expropriation and order your leaders to cooperate with me in strengthening the institutions of state, or I will stand by as you are beaten and killed by the fascists and, if they are not up to the task, I will lend them a helping hand myself!"

As long as the proletariat is accustomed to viewing fascism as its special enemy, against whom it has a special fight, the government's blackmail ploy can always succeed; and for as long as that blackmail does its job, the government has an interest in the continued survival of fascism (which is more or less disposed to follow its instructions).

As I have said before, especially in the countryside, fascism is identified with the employers; in the countryside of the Po valley the fascists are landowners, bailiffs, farm stewards, the remnants of the old nobility, etc. But elsewhere, as in southern Italy and in Sicily, where lawless and organised employer violence was already a feature, especially in connection with elections – in newspaper articles and books, orthodox or quasi-orthodox writers such as Oietti, Prezzolini, Salvemini, etc., have told the tale of what was done in 1915 – a rag-bag of thugs, cudgel-wielders from Puglia, Mafiosi from Sicily, etc., simply donned the fascist emblem and thereby attracted fresh recruits who had initially been content to make use of them but disdained to formally join their ranks. In the South, such groups, having gone over to the fascists out of convenience are the most important stalwarts of government policy and, with the crack of their whips and revolvers, the real, electoral architects of the parliamentary majority in the government's service.

All of which bears out what I have already stated, that fascism is one branch sprouting from the great state-capitalistic trunk, or an offshoot thereof. To fight fascism while leaving its perennial sire unmolested and indeed deluding oneself that the latter will defend us against it, is to ensure that both are on our backs, and more burdensome and oppressive with every day that passes.

Fascism can be killed off, as long as the defensive action taken against it as the circumstances require is not divorced from the attack on its twin sources – the privilege of power and the privilege of wealth. But it needs to be killed off and the proletariat must succeed in bringing this off directly with its own resources, because if fascism were merely to quieten down or swallowed up by existing institutions, it could always or at least more readily resurface. The bourgeoisie has learnt how to put this weapon to use; and if the proletariat fails to destroy its will to do so, by means of a practical demonstration that it knows how to dash it from bourgeois hands, the latter may – even if they set it aside for the moment – pick it up again at the first opportunity.

There are several means that the proletariat could use to dash the fascist weapon from the grasp of capitalism and conservative cabals; and it is no part of my task to spell them out and recommend them here. If ever, such a matter should be dealt with separately. But, as I see it, all methods, even the most law-abiding and peaceable, may be effective, as long as they meet this single requirement: that proletarian energies are not squandered on partial, local or factional undertakings; and that, instead, actions are mounted as simultaneously as possible, not just across the nation, but also with the involvement of all and any organised and even un-organised forces, or at any rate of all of the forces organised in trades and party associations, from all the proletarian factions, ranging from the far right to the far left.

This does not require any blocs, united fronts or other artificial and contrived formations. What is required is moral unity and shared intent. We already have fascism to thank for part of that unity, thanks to its violence; the rest should be supplied by the strength of *determination* and spirit of *sacrifice* of all men of faith.

Fascism is undoubtedly a scourge as far as the working class is concerned: and as far as revolutionaries are concerned it is an adversary, an enemy. But even the enemy deserves his due and there is something that we can learn from him. I have already said in the course of this modest essay how fascism draws its strength from motley elements; it embraces a little of everything. But there is something that should not be overlooked: that neither the material, moral and financial assistance from industrial and landowner capitalism, nor the connivance of the security forces, nor the backing from all the slavish worshippers of success would have been enough to make fascism strong; indeed, all of these would have been missing had there not been, at the outset, a core of individuals equipped with strength of determination and spirit of sacrifice who, at risk to themselves, led the way by breaking the icy indifference of their friends and the hostile recklessness of the enemy; had there not been some inner moral force – whether it was hate or love – to plunge them into the fray, careless even of their own lives. And it did cost some of them their lives. Those few, who stirred the many, set in motion the whole enterprise that now seems so strong; and they were as obscure as could be. We may deplore and regret their ill-made sacrifice as much as we please and the effort that others have exploited in order to get ahead or line their own pockets or pursue their own selfish ambition; but we cannot but be plunged into thought and disturbed by the tragic way in which they met their ends. Whilst a few perished simply by accident, without having had the slightest intention of giving their all, and indeed confident that of their impunity, quite a few fell as volunteer soldiers, conscious of the risk they ran and were willing to run. We have said plenty already about their aims; we have no more interest in those

here; we are merely registering that from their daring sprang fascism's success and that that that successes would have been meaningless without their willing sacrifice of self.

Thereafter, everything helped feed fascism and to turn it into an organism more or less pernicious of and parasitical upon society; but it would never have reached adulthood but for that initial creative coming together of wills, just as no living organism could exist but for that first unseen egg's having been fertilised in the mother's womb. The human will, pretty much determined by other natural and social factors, in turn become sire to further developments; and there is an instant, a fleeting moment perhaps, when the voluntary intervention of individuals steers the course of events in one direction or another. Fascism's original core group managed to seize the fleeting moment, to bring its own daring and spirit of enterprise to bear upon events and thereby opened the way to success.

Which success, and I can never emphasise this enough, would not have happened but for the favourable climate prepared by circumstances, the whole moral and material crisis through which we are passing which afflicts the situation of the ruling and governing classes, of mistakes by the personalities, parties and organisations of the proletariat, etc. But on their own, all of these factors would not have been enough, or might have produced different and perhaps opposite results, but for that initial effort of will, made at some risk and danger by the original fascist minority, an effort that cost it considerable sacrifices, albeit less than those it inflicted upon the proletarian enemy. Let that fact be a caution, a lesson to us all, even those of us who man the other side of the barricades. Revolutionary theory has been experimentally borne out by fascism, albeit in a negative sense. Out of hatred, the fascists have done for counter-revolution what revolutionaries ought to have done by different, more humane and social means and methods.

The revolution, it has often been said, is made, not by majorities, but by minorities. There is truth in that, insofar as the majority, being by nature inimical to novelty, will never take the initiative with revolution and will only come over to the revolution once it is under way. Revolutionary minorities have the task of breaking down the doors barring the path to the future; and, afterwards, the majority will pass through the doors thrown open by insurrection. True, the minorities would be squandering their efforts to no purpose, in relation to their time at least, and would be sacrificing themselves if the environment were not in their favour, if the time was not ripe and had a certain degree of preliminary development not been achieved. But nobody has any gauge or measuring stick to tell if the time is right or not and whether the climate has reached the correct temperature. One can be mistaken in one's reckoning; whereupon what one has is premature sacrifice, heroics and martyrs. But if these do not lead on to success, they nevertheless have a usefulness all the same, insofar as they contribute to the formation of consciousness and to the ripening of time. That the enterprising minority, risking defeat and sacrifice, can then batter down the doors is the finest and only possible proof that the times are indeed ripe.

Fascism has shown all this to be true. The counter-revolution by the end of 1920 had had things all its own way, as we have seen. But it would never have succeeded but for the determined counter-revolutionary initiative of the fascist minority. The doors to the past seemed to have slammed shut behind the ruling classes and reactionaries, who were already preparing themselves for their evil fate. But then along comes fascism, that rough interpreter of their every aspiration to seize upon a momentary weakness in the enemy and dares to break through all the doors of law and custom to reach the past. Only then did the ruling classes realise that they could dare and through the smashed doors they are trying to shove the whole of Italy back into the

past; and everybody bows before the hero of the moment; the power of wealth, the judiciary and the servants of the law.

The fascist example may not have been set in vain; and, if it wishes, the proletariat can draw useful lessons from it, as may all the revolutionary minorities. Fascism, that is, may have taught them *how to go about winning*, how to go about returning to the attack and turning incipient defeat into victory. Solidarity and organisation on the one hand, and, on the other, audacity, initiative, strength of will and spirit of sacrifice! In spite of all of these, there may be defeats ahead too when there is a preponderance of enemy forces and when one is too much in the minority; but, without them, no victory is possible, no matter the size of one's majority.

Without doubt, one of the causes of the lack of success of revolutionaries is the lack of perseverance, discipline and organisation. I am speaking of moral discipline of the will, not of the quasi-military discipline of authoritarian parties, which boils down to obeying the leaders; I am taking about voluntarily embraced discipline, primarily consisting of honouring one's freely given commitments. It being better and more productive, I prefer that discipline through freedom over the military discipline of blind obedience. But some discipline is required, and where the former is not forthcoming, the latter triumphs, whatever colours it may fly. Which is why, due to the absence of voluntary revolutionary discipline, reactionary forces organised along quasi-military lines have unexpectedly (and, we hope, temporarily) gained the upper hand.

We should not delude ourselves. The requisite effort to be made by the revolutionary minorities is going to have to be greater than that made by fascism, since, they, unlike fascism, cannot look for support to established bodies possessed of all the means of attack and defence. Furthermore, revolutionary action is harder, in that its task is not merely to destroy, but simultaneously to build. Not only that, but in that very destruction, since the revolution's goal is the good of the greater number, it should be more discriminating; it should be guided more by the broad humane objective rather than by any spirit of retaliation and vengeance and be careful not to destroy along with harmful parasitical institutions the fruits of civilisation and progress as well which should remain as the common inheritance and provide the building blocks for the future freedom- and social justice-based society.

That being the case, it is unquestionably harder to fight and win and the initial effort has to be all the greater than blind destructive violence striking at a particular target when one's rear is secure. That increased effort will be fuelled by other inner drives, all of the feelings that fuel the enthusiasm and heroism which, added to righteousness, drive all who are fighting, not just for the present or the past but also for the future; belief in one's own ideal, the confidence that one is on the right road or more nearly so than the opposition, the heartfelt conviction that one is fighting for a higher good, for the moral and material benefit of all – as well as for the good of one's foes who are not going to end up as the oppressed and exploited of the future but will be turned into brothers, equals among equals, once rescued from the yoke of their own injustice, the source of their savagery today.

That said, the fascist example sounds a warning note. Once the proletariat's revolutionary libertarian minority manages, thanks to the slightest coordination of efforts, to muster the requisite strength of determination, contempt for danger, spirit of enterprise and spirit of sacrifice, its victory will be assured – a victory that will bring well-being and freedom not merely to the proletariat but to humanity as a whole.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Luigi Fabbri
The Preventive Counter-Revolution
Essay by an Anarchist on Fascism
1922

Retrieved on June 3, 2020 from www.katesharpleylibrary.net
Original title: *La contro-rivoluzione preventiva: Saggio di un anarchico sul fascismo*. The original
Italian version can be checked here: www.docdroid.net

usa.anarchistlibraries.net