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Autobiographical Notes

Raffaele Schiavina (Max Sartin)

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I was born in San Carlo in the province of Ferrara on 8 April 1894 into a peasant family. When I finished school in 1912 I had the chance to satisfy my desire to go to America the following year and settled in Brockton, Massachusetts.

In those days I regarded myself as a socialist, not really out of reasoned conviction but simply lest I give the impression that I was a conservative. During summer 1914, at an Italian-American picnic, I made the acquaintance of a man considerably older than me who told me that he was an anarchist and offered me, to read, a book that he said that he had enjoyed reading. In fact it was Kropotkin's *Memoirs* which held my attention, for I discovered in it feelings and ideas that it seemed had always been a part of me. I went on reading what he lent me and took out a subscription to *Cronaca Sovversiva* which, in a very short space of time, had become essential reading for me. The war in Europe was just beginning at the time and there was widespread revulsion at the horrors being perpetrated. I had occasion to hear a few talks given by Galleani and to make the acquaintances of persons of my own age living in the Boston area. In April 1916, with all of the zeal of the convert, I accepted the post of administrator with *Cronaca Sovversiva*. Towards the

end of 1915 I had even made so bold as to send an article to that weekly paper and it had been published, albeit completely revamped by the editors.

The following year the United States entered the war and I, like many another, refused to register as a potential soldier, so I was arrested for breaching the law making registration a requirement and then was sentenced to a year in prison. Having served my time, I was then sent back to Italy, arriving along with eight other comrades, including the Sanchinis with their two young babies, on 9 July 1919.

In Naples I was detained by the military police as a deserter in time of war and committed to the military prison of Sant'Elmo where I stayed until the 2 September amnesty meant that I was taken to the district military headquarters and drafted into the King's army. Leave for my draft started on 12 September and I was allowed furlough along with them, which is how I came to turn up at my parents' home, not having seen them in six years.

At the start of 1920 *Cronaca Sovversiva* resumed publication in Turin and I returned to the post of administrator. But after twenty issues Galleani was indicted over some anti militarist articles and, being threatened with arrest, he went on the run, except that later he showed up at the trial which took place towards the end of October 1922. Publication of *Cronaca Sovversiva* ceased after twenty issues.

In August 1922 I set off on a speaking tour in the Marches. But on arriving in Fabriano, I was arrested by a carabinieri patrol; after holding me overnight they bundled me on board a train with two carabinieri who escorted me to Turin where the courts had initiated proceedings against me. After a brief stay at police headquarters, I was taken to the remand cells to await trial. I was charged with having taken part along with about ten communists upon whom I had never set eyes, in the organising of the *Arditi del Popolo*, with which I had had nothing to do. After fifteen months of inquiries we were taken to the

Turin Assizes (one of the communists having died in prison in the interim) where we were all acquitted and freed because the frame-up fell apart.

In March 1923, whilst I was looking around for some way out of the situation created by fascism's arrival in power, comrade Emilio Coda, having arrived from America, suggested to me that I go to France in an effort to inject some vigour into the campaign to save Sacco and Vanzetti. I of course accepted and I crossed the frontier with comrade Giuseppe Mioli, striking up a friendship that has survived to this day. In Paris we published a four page newspaper called *La Difesa* (Defence), managing to bring out four or five issues thanks to the solidarity of French comrades. But during that summer Coda had to return to the United States and publication was suspended. After a short stay in London I went back to France where I found work in the textile industry and I might even have become a half-decent weaver, had not encouragement from several comrades and my own enduring desire to be of service to the movement inspired me to return to Paris where, in 1925, we started publishing *Il Monito*, a newspaper that appeared fairly irregularly up until 1928. In the years that followed, the Sacco-Vanzetti campaign was stepped up to such an extent that when Luigia Vanzetti passed through Paris, the French comrades successfully organised a popular demonstration in which 250,000 people were said to have taken part. The tragic denouement of the campaign was a profound upset to *avant garde* groups and to the Paris proletariat generally. After that — I was to be expelled from France after a couple of years — I went to Marseilles where I lodged with the family of a comrade who had spent some time in the United States and where I was treated like one of the family. I stayed there up until the end of that year, once more contributing regularly to *L'Adunata (dei Refrattari)*. It was at this point that the idea came to me to go back to America. The first person to mention it to me was comrade Luigi Pitton, a veteran of our Italian-American movement, and

with the help of some comrades on both sides of the Atlantic I was able to make the trip the following March. The rest of my life is recorded in the fifty bound annual editions of *Adunata*.

Partly out of modesty and partly out of necessity, I have used lots of pen names. Even so, I used my own name when I had to face up to my personal responsibility. In 65 years of life as a militant I contributed to the following publications, *Cronaca Sovversiva* of Lynn, Massachusetts and Turin, *La Difesa* and *Il Monito* in Paris, and the odd single edition publication from Paolo Schicchi in Marseilles, the English-language California newspaper *Man!* in the 1930s, *La Frusta* of Pesaro and finally *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* (as a contributor up until 1928 and from May 1928 to April 1970 as editor).

These have been my noms de plume:

Cesare; Nando; Michetta; Calibano (used only once in *Il Monito* in Paris); Max Sartin; Labor; Manhattanite; Bob; Juan Taro; X.Y.; R.S.; and M.S., in more recent contributions to *L'Internazionale* of Ancona.

I should also say that ever since I took over as editor of *L'Adunata* I have always published general articles as spokesman for the editorial team and therefore without signature. Into this category fall the *Cronache Sovversive* which I would send in to the paper on a weekly basis even when, for whatever reason, I happened to be far away from the editorial offices or because I was otherwise unable to be there. I ought to add that those of my writings published in *Man!* were signed Melchior Seele. I cannot guarantee that I may not have left out one or two things in this list but this is what comes to mind right now and were in any event the pen-names I used most frequently. In one of the few issues of the review *Veglia* that Virgilia D'Andrea published in Paris there is a piece by me on Sacco and Vanzetti, signed with my own name.