

## THE THIRD GENERATION: THE YOUNG SOCIALISTS IN ITALY, 1907-1915

Despite a rich, monographic literature on the pre-1914 European socialist movement, we still know relatively little about the socialist youth groups that flourished in Europe before the war. Yet, we know that most leaders of the post-war communist movement had participated in their youth federation. This article will look at the history of the Federazione Giovanile Socialista Italiana (FGSI) between 1907 and 1915. A moderate organization in 1907, it had become by 1912 one of the most militant in the socialist constellation of organizations as evidenced by the strong support it gave Benito Mussolini during his two year tenure in 1913-14 as editor of the socialist daily, *Avanti!* Even before war and revolution exercised a powerful influence on the shape of their thinking, Italy's third socialist generation (many of them born within a year of the party's establishment in 1892 as a Marxist political party) had begun to form a collective opinion of what separated them from that second generation of leaders responsible for bringing the Italian movement into the Second International<sup>1</sup>. This is not to say that the views of such communist leaders as Antonio Gramsci, Amadeo Bordiga, Angelo Tasca, and Alfonso Leonetti were identical, or that they did not evolve over time. But their view of the world, especially in the negative sense of who and what they were against, had been formed largely before the war and by its outbreak, and it was shared, in broad outline, by ordinary members of the youth federation. Where the founders of the Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI) had explicitly rejected insurrectionalism when they organized the party<sup>2</sup>, and would remain ever vigilant against its reappearance as anarchism, syndicalism, or Bolshevism, young socialists found unity in their rejection of "reformism" whose theory and practice they depicted in bold strokes with little attention to its subtle shadings. The causes of their growing disillusionment with the "old" socialist politics which had dominated during the years of Giolittian parliamentary hegemony can best be traced through a history of the youth federation.

The FGSI was born out of the syndicalist schism that rent the socialist movement in 1907. During the years of struggle for the soul of the working class movement between 1905 and 1907, a majority of youths had sided with the revolutionary syndicalism of their young leaders, Michele Bianchi, Alceste De Ambris, and Paolo Orano. Over the strenuous objections of some socialist leaders, the federation, reorganized under the leadership of Arturo Vella, was given formal recognition at the 1908 party congress. By 1910, its membership had surpassed the syndicalist group<sup>3</sup>.

The 1908 congress was a milestone in the history of the Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI). Delegates formally declared revolutionary syndicalist doctrine incompatible with Marxism and voted to return

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1 Filippo Turati and Costantino Lazzari, who represented the main wings of the socialist party at Genoa in 1892, were both born in 1857; Amadeo Bordiga was born in 1889, Antonio Gramsci in 1891, Angelo Tasca in 1892.

2 Faced with the new threat of "Bolshevism," Costantino Lazzari, party secretary and maximalist leader, recognized what had united him with his pre-war rival, Filippo Turati. In arguing against changes in the constituent document of the PSI he told delegates to the 1919 party congress: "When we organized the Party, we rejected the insurrectionalist tactics of the past seeing before us the possibilities of organizing new forces into a powerful organization." Resoconto stenografico del XVI congresso nel Bologna, 5-8 Oct. 1919.

3 Founding document in *Avanguardia*, 20 Oct. 1907; Gaetano Arfe, "L'origini del movimento giovanile socialista," *Mondo Operaio*, 10, no. 4 (Apr. 1957), pp. 177-81; no. (May 1957), pp.232-24; 10, no. 6 (June 1957), pp. 30-34.

the moderate, reformist faction to power. In handing the reformists this victor the 1908 congress set the PSI on a course in which legislative action became the party's major objective. In the view of Filippo Turati, the leading reformist and socialist of his generation, the syndicalists had been mere “mystics” of revolution who “thought that they could lead an army of underfed, hungry, uncouth and coarse people, an army of slaves, to realize the complete liberty of the world.”<sup>4</sup> Reformists who stayed within the boundaries of orthodoxy contained in the party programme shared with their long-time factional rivals, the maximalists, the belief that revolution would arrive at the end of an evolutionary historical process. They differed in believing the passage to socialism could be a peaceful one achieved through the gradual accumulation of social reforms. The primary focus of the reformist-led party after 1908, therefore, was on parliament and on securing electoral victories that would insure adoption of pieces of the party's “minimum” list of legislative reforms – a tactic fraught with difficulties for a party carrying the banner of socialism given Italy's severely limited suffrage<sup>5</sup>.

Under the new order, the FGSI was given the modest function of “making elementary propaganda.” Members, who were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, were expected to dress neatly, avoiding such sartorial outrages as long hair and high pointed collars, behave seriously, and devote their spare time to study and evangelization of the socialist Word<sup>6</sup>. To the great relief of party leaders, members of the federation seemed content to do just that. They proselytized in the piazze, lectured in the popular quarters on the evils of alcoholism and dangers of venereal disease, organized lectures on Marxism for young students and potential working class recruits, and, most importantly in party leaders' eyes, provided socialist candidates at election times with a willing corps of campaign workers. Of course, there were social occasions, too: Saturday night dances at local headquarters; Sunday tours of the Red cycling clubs<sup>7</sup>. But these activities were often turned to more serious purpose, as Angelo Tasca remembered in his account of student days in Turin<sup>8</sup>.

“Nearly every Sunday we left in a group of red cyclists to spread the Word to an often resistant peasantry .... Frequently, we were met by a hostile mob who, summoned by the priest's ringing of the bells of the campanile, stubbornly refused to accept our newspapers and pamphlets even when we offered them without charge.”

Gradually, the peasants' hostility to these young socialist messengers diminished, Tasca recalled. But, at the same time many youths had begun to question the value of this form of evangelization.

While reformism in one of its several guises continued to command majorities at PSI congresses until 1912, maximalism had conquered the FGSI by 1910. FGSI leaders first showed signs of restiveness in 1909 when the socialist parliamentary group proved ineffectual in halting a steep increase in military expenditures<sup>9</sup>. As the PSI approached the 1910 party congress a number of questions swirled about in socialist circles. Should the socialist parliamentary group resume

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4 Resoconto stenografico del IX congresso nazionale nel Roma, 7-8-910 Oct. 1906.

5 In 1909, there were just forty-two socialist deputies out of 508 in the Chamber of Deputies. See James Edward Miller, *From Elite to Mass Politics: Italian Socialism in the Giolittian Era, 1900-1914* (Kent, Ohio, 1990).

6 G. Zibordi, “L'opera dei giovani socialisti: critiche e auguri.” *Critica Sociale*, 1-16 Mar. 1909.

7 In *La Giovane Piemonte Socialista* one finds reports of such activities through 1910. The 3 December 1910 issue, for instance, reports on Professor Pio Foa's lecture on “Physical Hygiene and Morality” to which those under age sixteen were forbidden to attend. According to the paper the professor used visual aids to explain the process of reproduction, warned of “the need for temperance in the use of sexual organs,” and admonished those present that it was their “duty to preserve their ability to reproduce by avoiding abuse and infection.” He was given an ovation.

8 Angelo Tasca, “I primi dieci anni del Partito comunista italiano,” *Il Mondo*, 18 Aug. 1953.

9 *Avanguardia*, 23 May 1909.

intransigency as a matter of principle, as the maximalists or “revolutionary intransigents” believed, or, should they resort to intransigency as a matter of tactical expedience, as some reformists thought? Or, in view of their weak numerical strength in parliament should socialists continue to throw their support to the lesser of evils, that is, to those bourgeois parliamentary leaders who promised to deliver up cherished portions of the PSI's minimum programme of legislative demands?

Throughout 1910, Vella, as secretary of the federation, laboured to bring the youth movement into support of the intransigent line. Except in Reggio Emilia, a traditional stronghold of reformism, his efforts met little opposition. Indeed, delegates to the 1910 youth congress passed resolutions showing the organization's independence. They first “condemned” the socialist parliamentary deputies for using “impotent words” in fighting recent increases in military expenditures and authorized the FGSI leadership to inaugurate its own antimilitarist campaign. The second, passed unanimously, expelled freemasons from the FGSI and urged the PSI to follow suit<sup>10</sup>.

The real target of the anti-masonic resolution was the “bloc.” Since the organization of socialist political parties the propriety of Masonic membership had been a troublesome question in socialist circles. While opposition to socialist membership in Masonic lodges could be found across the Italian spectrum, maximalists were the most consistent opponents. Until 1914, however, all efforts to sever the relationship between masonry and socialism in the PSI would fail. This was not so in the youth movement where the issue was picked up in 1910 as a means of ridding the socialist movement of a “democratic, unreliably socialist, and possibly subversive element.”<sup>11</sup> As Angelo Tasca insists in his memoir “our overwhelming hostility to freemasonry was not motivated by a sectarian spirit but by our association of freemasonry with the politics of the bloc.”<sup>12</sup>

The 1908 PSI congress had sanctioned blocs leaving the final decision on their formation at the local level. Consequently, during the 1909 elections, alliances between socialists and “democratic” parties (for example, Radicals and Republicans) had been formed in a number of districts, and were widely used in the south where electoral demographics made socialist candidates despair. The reformist right wing was the strongest advocate of this tactic since more than any other faction it was committed to the passage of anticlerical legislation and, therefore, saw in the Radical party and in freemasonry a natural ally. Thus, in those electoral campaigns where the bloc figured prominently, anticlericalism, sometimes of the crude variety promoted by Guido Podrecca in L' Asino, became the lowest common denominator between the parties. In the words of one young critic, anticlericalism was the “cement sealing the bloc.”<sup>13</sup>

The socialist youths objected to this bond. Socialist objections to religion were derived from a different set of principles than Masonic anticlericalism, explained an FGSI pamphlet distributed to the membership. The socialists' primary goal was not to attack religious institutions *per se* but to “promote class struggle.” Since the principal beneficiaries of recent blocs formed in Naples, Rome, and elsewhere had been freemasons, not socialists, was there not some truth to the rumour that masons were “infiltrating” socialist circles before the elections in order to “subvert” them to “secret” ends? The aim of the anti-masonic resolution, therefore, was to “cleanse” the socialist movement of those “tainted” with “democratic” rather than purely Marxist Ideals<sup>14</sup>. The earliest

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10 *Avanguardia*, 2 Oct. 1910; *Avanti!*, 19, 20, 21, and 22 Sept. 1910.

11 Guido Feroci, *Socialismo e massoneria* (FGSI, 1910).

12 Tasca, “I primi dieci anni.”

13 Vittorio Baldoni, “La massoneria svelata,” *Avanguardia*, 1 Jan 1911.

14 Feroci, *Socialismo e massoneria*.

writings of one young Neapolitan whose name would figure prominently in the formation of the Communist party, Amadeo Bordiga, were precisely on this theme<sup>15</sup>.

The FGSI's growing independence alarmed some party leaders. Filippo Turati, the dominant socialist figure of his generation, took time to address the problem in *Critica Sociale*. The youths' recent attacks on party policy were "childish," he wrote in the influential review. In terms reminiscent of those he had used in the past against syndicalism, maximalism and other ephemeral left-wing variants, Turati condemned the youths, "maximalist inspired thought" as impractical, unrealistic, "socialism of the Dream."<sup>16</sup>

"In its initial formulation a social movement's ideological doctrine ... necessarily creates an illusion of a rapid and straight-forward passage from one stage to the next, which if this were to come to pass truly would be a miracle. Like all miracles such a doctrine inspires [in its followers] an easy faith and noisy enthusiasm. The paths of history, instead, are winding and tortuous."

The article was a classic restatement of reformist doctrine by its foremost Italian spokesman. Socialism would only arrive at the end of a long and patient process, Turati warned. In the meantime socialists must learn to master the game of politics as a minority party.

Such criticism did little to dampen the fires of discontent. The FGSI paper, *Avanguardia*, unleashed a scathing barrage of criticism at the outcome of the PSI's 1910 Milan congress where Leonida Bissolati had raised the unwelcome spectre of labourist revisionism in the Bernsteinian mould. What comfort could the youths find in the party's rejection of Bissolati's and Ivanoe Bonomi's views when the entire debate had turned on the question of how far socialists might go in backing bourgeois governments? Another writer warned that if the PSI continued its present course it risked winding up as little other than a "useless duplicate of the Radical [Party]"<sup>17</sup>

While contributors to *Critica Sociale* and *Avanti!* heatedly debated the Great Reforms in 1910-11 (especially the tactical wisdom of universal suffrage), *Avanguardia* exhibited a remarkable indifference to these issues focusing instead on burgeoning military budgets. Shortly after the 1910 congresses, *Avanguardia* published a series of articles by Gioacchino Martini, a disaffected former army officer who wrote under the name of Sylva Viviani. This decision was, in fact, a slap at Bissolati who had refused to give Viviani a forum in *Avanti!* claiming he was an *hervéiste*<sup>i</sup>. While Viviani did not subscribe to the direct action tactics promoted by the French antimilitarist, he highlighted problems many PSI leaders had placed on the backburner. He documented conditions in

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15 Amadeo Bordiga, "Ferrer e la massoneria," *Avanti!*, 22 Oct. 1912; "Socialismo e religione," *Avanguardia*, 14 Dec. 1913. See also Enrico DeCleva, "Anticlericalismo e lotta politica nell'Italia giolittiana," *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 42 (1969), pp. 541-618; Helmut Ullrich "L'elezioni del 1913 a Roma", *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 55 (1971) pp. 265-78; Michele Fatica, *Origini del fascismo e del comunismo a Napoli, 1911-1915* (Florence 1971), pp. 20-33. For an overview see Adrian Lyttelton, "An Old Church and a New State: Italian Anticlericalism 1876-1915", *European Studies Review*, 13 (1983), pp. 225-48.

16 Filippo Turati, "Ai giovani ed ... ai maturi," *Critica Sociale*, 1 Sept. 1910.

17 Vittorio Baldoni, "Sconfitti," *Avanguardia*, 30 Oct. 1910 Mario Pittalunga, "Il ramo secco," *ibid.*, 6 Nov. 1910.

i Note for the libcom edition: Gustave Hervé (1871-1944) was a French antimilitarist insurrectionist. In 1901, while still a little-known history professor, he became notorious by writing an article in the socialist press which included an image of the tricolour planted in a dungheap. When France's socialist parties united in 1905, Hervé led the most extreme faction. He founded a weekly newspaper, *La Guerre sociale*, and signed his articles "Sans Patrie". It lasted for six years. Sadly, with the approach of WWI he became a rabid patriot and ended up on the extreme right of French politics.

the army's infamous “compagnie di disciplina” (companies for criminal offenders to which epileptics and those alleged to be subversives were routinely assigned); he quoted facts and figures on the great powers' arms race; and, he attacked PSI leaders for paying scarce attention to these problems<sup>18</sup>. *Avanguardia* also published extracts from the writings of Jean Jaures and Karl Liebknecht. To the dismay of party leaders, some local sections appeared eager for confrontation. For example, young militants in Rome were arrested for distributing manifestos urging “insubordination” on active duty soldiers<sup>19</sup>.

Alarmed by the formation of the Nationalist party and growing irredentism, the FGSI, backed by the Bureau Internationale de la Jeunesse Socialiste, planned to meet in Trieste in early 1911 with representatives from the youth movement in Austria-Hungary to co-ordinate action should war threaten the region<sup>20</sup>. With their eyes focused on potential hot spots in Europe, the Italian youths, like socialists generally, missed the significance of diplomatic developments in North Africa until preparations for the Libyan invasion were virtually complete<sup>21</sup>.

Much has been written about the Libyan war and how it opened up the developing fractures in the Italian socialist movement: between Bissolati and Turati in parliament; between the PSI leaders and rank-and-file; between the PSI and the youth movement<sup>22</sup>. Certainly, the FGSI dropped all pretence of “neutrality” toward competing party factions, and, in some quarters of the youth movement there was interest in co-ordinated action with the antiwar parties of the extreme left. Shortly before the 29 September declaration of war on the Ottoman Empire, representatives of the FGSI met with leaders of the syndicalist youth organization headquartered in Parma to discuss, at the latter's initiative, the possible reunification of the two organizations separated in 1907. While merger was rejected, the two organizations formally agreed to co-operate in the antiwar effort. In some regions, similar pacts of informal co-operation were extended to young anarchists creating, in effect, “red blocs.”<sup>23</sup>

During the war, young socialist militants regularly turned up at army recruitment stations and embarkment depots with antiwar leaflets and, according to secret reports to the minister of the interior, sometimes managed to smuggle these tracts into army barracks<sup>24</sup>. The FGSI adopted the program of “Il Soldo al Soldato” (“the soldier's penny”) as a means of making contact with young recruits and bringing antimilitarist propaganda into the barracks. Members of the local circles were encouraged to correspond with recruits, sending newspapers, and even money in order to remind them that “under the uniform which you have not chosen but which has been inflicted on you, you

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18 Sylva Viviani, “Mentre nostri coscritti partono,” *Avanguardia*, 16 Oct. 1910; Antimilitarismo e antirredentismo al Congresso di Milano,” 23 Oct. 1910 “L'esilio militare,” 27 Nov. 1910; “Vecchie e nuove imprese militaristi,” 25 June 1911.

19 *Avanguardia*, 23 Oct. 1910. For publishing the leaflet on October 16, FGSI leaders were arrested, *ibid.*, 30 Oct. 1910.

20 *Avanguardia*, 13, 27 Aug. and 10 Sept. 1911; on view of International, see Georges Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War* (Oxford, 1972), p. 64; F.L. Carsten, *War Against War* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 11-63.

21 As late as August the PSI leadership dismissed the possibility that Giolitti might commit himself to war. See Francesco Malgeri, *La guerra libica, 1911-1921* (Rome, 1970), pp. 216-25.

22 Dino Cofrancesco “Democrazia, socialismo, nazionalizzazione delle masse. La vicenda di Leonida Bissolati,” *Storia contemporanea*, XVII (1986), p. 683; Spencer Di Scala, *Dilemmas of Italian Socialism: The Politics of Filippo Turati* (Amherst, 1980), pp. 128-29 on differences between Turati and Bissolati. For impact of war on general political landscape see Malgeri and Ronald Cunsolo, “Libya, Italian Nationalism and the Revolt against Giolitti,” *Journal of modern History*, 37 (1965), pp. 186-207.

23 *Avanguardia*, 24 Sept, 19 and 26 Nov. 1911 and 11 Feb. 1912.

24 Malgeri, *op.cit.*, pp. 225-30 with the caution that *La gioventu socialista*, the syndicalist youth publication, is incorrectly identified as socialist.

are still a worker.”<sup>25</sup> Although we know from personal reminiscences many youths followed the antiwar activities of the anarchist movement and their leader, Errico Malatesta, with interest<sup>26</sup>, the tactics of the youth socialist militants were usually less extreme. Even so, documents held by the Ministry of the Interior show that many youths were arrested for subverting the war effort as the movement fell under increased police surveillance<sup>27</sup>. FGSI leaders gloried in the persecution, however, and the movement flourished as FGSI membership nearly doubled at a time when PSI membership was continuing to fall<sup>28</sup>. As Vella would boast before delegates assembled at the PSI's 1912 congress: “We got ourselves arrested and prosecuted but we carried on, showing our commitment and our faithfulness to the kind of action the Party had forgotten for many years.”<sup>29</sup>

To be sure, opponents to the Libyan venture were to be found all across the socialist political spectrum – from Turati to Lazzari. Even Bissolati, who would vote for annexation, “regretted” the war because it jeopardized the realization of cherished social programs. The FGSI's position, however, was more akin to the thinking of the Second International's left-wing in that they based their argument on principles of socialist internationalism. As the pamphlet put out by the FGSI in 1913 summarized: “In each of its manifestations [that is, whether justified as a war of defence or of patriotic conquest] militarism is an arm in defence of the bourgeoisie.”<sup>30</sup>

The Libyan war altered the course of the PSI, nonetheless. The small revolutionary intransigent group formed at the close of the 1910 PSI congress rapidly gained supporters in late 1911 and 1912 as it used the issue of the war to focus on the inadequacies of the reformist programme. The youths became the intransigents' most faithful ally. In 1910, Vella had been one of the few socialist leaders calling for the right-wing reformists' expulsion<sup>31</sup>. By 1912, the FGSI was fully committed to this path. The “outrages” committed by the right-wing reformist deputies, Bissolati, Bonomi, and Angiolo Cabrini (entertaining a ministerial offer, voting for the treaty of Libyan annexation, and paying respects to the king after a failed assassination attempt) led a few young extremists even to suggest breaking their ties with the national party as Mussolini had done in Forlì<sup>32</sup>. Disturbed by these developments a resolution was offered at the leadership's April meeting that if adopted by the party congress would have ended the FGSI's organizational autonomy and incorporated all persons over age eighteen into PSI sections<sup>33</sup>. While Angiolo Bidolli's resolution inflamed passions – a headline in *Avanguardia* threatened the imminent revolt of “The Sons Against Their Father”<sup>34</sup> – the

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25 Text of FGSI 1913 antimilitarist pamphlet, “Il Soldo al Soldato” in Fatica, op. cit., pp.474-82.

26 Alfonso Leonetti, *Da Andria contadina a Torino operata* (Urbino, 1974), p. 74 says that in addition to *Avanguardia* his socialist circle read the anarchist, *La Volontà*. We know that Gramsci also read the antimilitarist journal, *Rompete le righe*.

27 *Archivio Centrale dello Stato*, Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, Ufficio Riservato, 1911-1915, busta 23.

28 Cardholding members of the FGSI rose from 1449 in 1907 to 3362 in 1909 reaching 5642 in 1912, *Avanguardia*, 15 Sept, 1912. In comparison, the PSI dropped from a high of 45,800 members in 1904 to just 28,835 in 1909 after which it stabilized. Between 1912 and 1914, membership rose to earlier levels; see James E. Miller, “Reformism and Party Organization: The Italian Socialist Party, 1900-1914,” *Il politico* (March 1975), p. 103.

29 Resoconto stenografico del XIII Congresso Nazionale del PSI, Reggio Emilia, 7-8-9-10 luglio 1912, p. 284. In October Edouard Vaillant complained to the Secretary of the International, Camille Huysmans that the PSI had not done “its international duty” in resisting the war, Georges Haupt et Jolyon Howarth eds., “Edouard Vaillant, delegue au Bureau socialiste international: correspondance avec le Secretariat international (1900-1915),” *Annali* (Feltrinelli 1976), p. 283, discussion in Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War*, pp. 64-66.

30 Feroci, “Il Soldo al Soldato.”

31 *Avanguardia*, 19 June 1910.

32 Vittorio Baldoni *Avanguardia*, 9 Apr. 1911 Ugo Barni, *ibid.*, 21 Apr. 1912.

33 *Avanti!*, 29 Apr. 1912.

34 Ereole Bucco, “I figli contro i padri,” *Avanguardia*, 9 June 1912.

general hysteria proved unwarranted. At the 1912 PSI congress in Reggio Emilia the maximalists triumphed all along the line: the right reformists were cast out of the party, the intransigent tactic affirmed, a maximalist leadership installed, and, as a last item of business, the resolution on the FGSI tabled. Turati's long-time maximalist rival, Costantino Lazzari, was named PSI secretary, Vella became a member of the Leadership, and a few months later, a young journalist from Romagna who had made a name for himself during the Libyan war, Benito Mussolini, was asked to edit *Avanti!*. It was "The Youths, Great Victory at Reggio Emilia," *Avanguardia* boasted<sup>35</sup>. As Vella and other former FGSI leaders assumed leadership roles in the PSI their place was taken by others, most notably the FGSI's new secretary, Lido Caiani, a young Roman who would follow Mussolini to *Il Popolo d'Italia* in 1914, and two men whose names would be intertwined in the formation of the Italian Communist party, Angelo Tasca and Amadeo Bordiga. At the 1912 FGSI congress held in Bologna that fall, the transformation of the organization at the leadership level became apparent. Tasca, a student in the Faculty of Letters at the University of Turin, and Bordiga, a young engineer from Naples, debated the causes of the socialist "crisis", taking positions that foreshadowed those they would take as leaders of, respectively, the Ordine Nuovo and communist abstentionist factions at the end of the war. The debate, long remembered both by delegates to the congress and by those who later followed its continuation in *Avanguardia*, revealed striking differences between the two men, differences sharpened by the tactics of debate. Later commentary has elaborated on the differences between the "culturism" of Tasca, and what Gramsci called the "economic determinism" of Bordiga to the point of obscuring what united them<sup>36</sup>. For all their differences both men shared concerns common to their socialist generation. They utterly rejected reformism for both its theory and practice, were dismayed by the labour unions, drift toward bread-and-butter trade unionism, and sought to bring to the centre of socialist attention the long-neglected southern question.

The southern sections came to exercise an influence over the politics of the youth movement disproportionate to their actual numbers, especially after 1912. Historically, the federation's membership, like the PSI's, had been concentrated in the centre and north. In 1910, out of 4330 card-holding members just 327 came from the south and islands. While my calculations of paid memberships show that Apulia experienced dramatic gains between 1910 and 1914, going from a small base of 78 members to 358, the organization as a whole also grew during this period. For example, Lombardy and Piedmont, already beginning from a larger base, would more than double to join Emilia and Tuscany as the numerically most dominant provinces<sup>37</sup>. The fact the FGSI began to focus on issues of particular concern to the south owed itself to more than the growth in representation of the southern region.

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35 "La grande vittoria giovanile socialista a Reggio Emilia," *Avanguardia*, 21 July 1912.

36 Report on Congress of Bologna in *Avanguardia*, 20-24 Sept. 1912; *Unita*, 12 and 26 Oct. 1912. Nearly all the published memoirs of militants who were involved in the socialist youth movement during this period refer to it as well. Gramsci, who was close to Tasca's viewpoint in his student years, would later deem both the "culturism" of Tasca and "economic determinism" of Bordiga "immature" in his prison notebooks, Antonio Gramsci, *Passato e Presente* (5th ed. Torino, 1951) pp. 73-74. This judgement colored by the battles for control of the Italian Communist party, was echoed in much of the secondary literature, see Aldo Romano, "Antonio Gramsci tra la guerra e la rivoluzione," *Rivista storica del socialismo* (1958), pp. 405-42; Paolo Spriano, *Torino operaia nella grande guerra* (Torino, 1960), pp.35-39; Enzo Santarelli, *La revisione del marxismo in Italia* (Milan, 1964), pp.23-29.

37 In 1914, about 1500 of PSI's 47,000 members were from the South according to Miller, *From Elite to mass politics*, p. 165. Statistics on FGSI compiled from summary in *Avanguardia*, 15 Sept. 1912 and reports of provincial federations 1910-1914. Also see table in Giovanni Gozzini, *Alle origini del comunismo italiano: Storia della federazione giovanile socialista (1907-192)* (Bari, 1979), p. 158.

We know from the reminiscences of Antonio Gramsci, Angelo Tasca, Ottavio Pastore, Mario Montagnana and others that the PSI's benign neglect of the South had come to weigh on the conscience of many young socialists in the north. More importantly, within the FGSI itself the case, for the south was compellingly put forward by a group of remarkable political leaders who were themselves southerners and knew conditions in the south firsthand.

Some of these youths, like Alfonso Leonetti and Nicola Modugno, were from modest backgrounds, the first in their families to get beyond functional literacy. In his memoirs, Leonetti has described vividly the squalid conditions in his Apulian hometown of Andria, bursting from the influx of landless day-labourers from the countryside. Leonetti himself came from the small class of simple artisans and tradesmen whose precarious social position and economic circumstances were only marginally better than those of others. His father, a tailor, was known in the popular quarter by the local nickname "Mastro" or teacher by virtue of his second grade education and ability to read; his mother was illiterate as were 40,690 out of residents of the city, according to a 1902 survey. The dismal state in which the vast majority lived was reflected not only in the numbers afflicted by cholera, tuberculosis, and malaria but also in the frightful degree of overcrowding in rural Southern cities, such as Andria, compared to cities in the centre and north. Apulia had the dubious national distinction of being the province in which thousands of day-labourers, unable to afford any kind of normal housing, subsisted with their animals and children in subterranean grottos and caves<sup>38</sup>.

Reformist socialism, with its emphasis upon elections and education, had never taken root in this region of the south where the vast majority were illiterate and disenfranchised. The organized struggle against the bestial working conditions of the braccianti and giornatari had been dominated, instead, by the revolutionary syndicalists. Out of the ferment surrounding the Libyan war, however, there had emerged a set of socialist labour leaders, such as the head of the Bari Chamber of Labour, Giuseppe De Falco, who were completely antagonistic to reformism as the title of the local socialist paper they founded in 1912, *La ragione dei ribelli*, suggests, and whose primary interest lay in creating an effective and militant labour organization<sup>39</sup>. Among the more remarkable of these labour organizers was Nicola Modugno. In a region where there was little apparent distinction between syndicalism and revolutionary socialism, Leonetti says he was influenced in choosing socialism by Modugno, a young, "educated" peasant his own age. A "born leader and advocate," Modugno had organized child day-labourers in the region about Andria when he was himself a fieldworker of just fifteen<sup>40</sup>. He was active in the local Peasant League (*Lega dei contadini di Andria*) as well as in the local branch of the FGSI whose ranks were largely drawn from day-labourers. Modugno's impassioned letters and articles in *Avanguardia*, *La Soffitta* and sympathetic regional socialist papers such as *La Ragione* and *Il Socialista* (Naples), in which he explained the plight of the braccianti and the obstacles posed to their effective organization by the large landholders, conscious introduction of the Tuscan sharecropping contract (the "mezzadria"), gave these workers an authentic voice<sup>41</sup>.

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38 See personal story of Leonetti, *Da Andria contadina*, pp.12-36, statistics in Frank Snowden *Violence and Great Estates in The South of Italy: Apulia, 1900-1922* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 43-61.

39 Snowden, op. cit., pp. 92-149 gives a good summary of the labour movement and relative strength of syndicalism.

40 Leonetti, *Da Andria contadina*, pp. 49-50.

41 In September 1912 local labour and socialist movements joined to publish *La Ragione (dei ribelli)* with express purpose of being a paper of those who had "liberated themselves" from the "dry branch" (right-wing reformists) of the socialist party. *Il Socialista* in Naples had a similar mission Modugno wrote for both papers on organizational efforts among the braccianti and labour problems surrounding introduction of mezzadria into the region, *La Ragione*, 31 Aug, 1913, and 6 June 1914.



Bordiga was the lead singer in this southern chorus. The future communist leader had grown up near Naples in Portici where his father was professor of agricultural economics. Like other youths in his socialist cohort he was outraged by the Libyan war and aligned with the revolutionary intransigent group contributing several articles to *La Soffitta* in 1912<sup>42</sup>. In April 1912, a few months before the crucial PSI Congress of Reggio Emilia he led a group of fifteen young radicals out of the official Neapolitan socialist party to form the “Circolo Carlo Marx.” While breakaway factions had developed elsewhere in 1912, Bordiga remained dissatisfied with implementation of the maximalist agenda in Naples. A talented debater and political organizer, Bordiga tried to convince the leadership over the next two years that Neapolitan socialist leaders had blithely “accepted” the new party directives while continuing to operate just as before. The Federazione Socialista Napoletana, an amorphous electoral bloc encompassing freemasons, reformist socialists and pro-Libyan syndicalists, had done little other than change its name to the Unione Socialista Napoletana (USN), he said<sup>43</sup>. Angered by these developments, Bordiga organized a national campaign against the “morbid degeneration” of Neapolitan socialism. By 1914, he had managed to get his faction recognized as the official local representative of the PSI<sup>44</sup> (and won a place for himself in the files of the ministry of the interior in the process)<sup>45</sup>.

During this long campaign, Bordiga frequently drew upon Neapolitan socialist experience to condemn not just the tactic of the bloc per se but socialist preoccupation with election outcomes in general. He tirelessly argued in *Avanguardia*, at the national congresses of the FGSI, and before any socialist body that would give him a hearing that the presumed link between socialism and democracy was false and that socialists, therefore, must keep their attention focused on their ultimate revolutionary objective rather than on the next election. Despite the recent passage of a law granting near universal manhood suffrage, Bordiga warned in an article published in *Avanti!* in November 1912 that the elevation and education of the proletariat “would never be achieved by cooperating with “pseudo-democratic parties.” The party must follow a unitary strategy of intransigency, abandoning its argument that the south was a “special case.” It was more important to create a small party composed of dedicated militants than to recruit a large one composed of dubious revolutionaries, he said. Those who said the masses were “not ready” were those who had lost their own commitment to revolutionary change. The one way of salvation” for the south lay in adopting the “ultra-intransigent” tactic. Only then would socialists “awaken the sleeping lion thrusting it against the ... bourgeoisie which has fed so often on the servility of this unfortunate population.”<sup>46</sup>

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42 *La Soffitta*, 4 Mar. and 14 Apr. 1912.

43 See pamphlet distributed before the 1914 congress, *Il socialismo napoletano e le sue morbose degenerazioni* (reprint, Libreria Editrice del Partito Comunista d'Italia, 1921); Amadeo Bordiga, “Il socialismo napoletano e le 'questioni' morali,” *Avanti!*, 11 Nov. 1912; “Il socialismo a Napoli e nel Mezzogiorno,” *Utopia*, 15-28 Feb. 1914.

44 Day-to-day accounts in *Avanguardia*, *Il Propaganda* (Naples), and especially *Avanti!*, and *Il Socialista* taken together with the reports of the local prefect, give a rather complete picture of how the twenty-two year old Bordiga and his small faction that included his future wife, Ortensia De Meo, Ruggero Grieco, Oreste Lizzadri, and Antonio Cecchi managed to discredit nearly everyone formerly connected with the FSN (USN). Even after the Congress of Ancona's decision on freemasonry, Bordiga remained dissatisfied with the composition of the executive committee of the local socialist movement that included some reformists of the left. By August 1914, he had taken complete control of the local movement by using various incidents to show their deviance from the national party's intransigent line. Fatica op. cit., p. 92 concludes that Lazzari's initial reluctance to intervene left Bordiga suspicious of Lazzari's commitment to intransigency.

45 Archivio Centrale dello Stato. Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, Affari Generali e Riservati, busta 33. See especially reports of prefect of Naples to minister of the interior, July 1913.

46 Amadeo Bordiga, “Il socialismo napoletano e le 'questioni' morali,” *Avanti!*, 11 Nov. 1912.

Southern delegates, and Bordiga in particular, played an important part in proceedings of the FGSI Congress of Bologna in September 1912. Despite enthusiasm for the recent maximalist victory, there was a general feeling that the recent PSI congress had not gone far enough. As the nation prepared for its first elections under the new law extending suffrage to all males over thirty or with a record of military service, discussions on the upcoming elections at the FGSI congress centred instead on maintaining the ideological integrity of the party. Representatives of the southern sections were especially outspoken in their condemnation of the practice of fielding socialist candidates with masonic affiliations. The head of the Apulian delegation, Luigi Rainoni, proposed that young socialists act on their own account and refuse to assist masonic-socialist candidates. Southern delegates also were most adamant in asking that the programme of “Soldo al Soldato” focus on war resistance<sup>47</sup>. But it was in the debate on the future orientation of *Avanguardia* that a more general dissatisfaction with the traditional parameters of socialist politics was made plain.

The attacks on the party developed along two divergent lines. Tasca, who came from the northern industrial triangle, tackled the troubling question of the “economism” of organized labour, the tendency of the Confederazione Generale del Lavoro to go its own way responding to the economic needs of its constituency rather than to the long-term goals of socialism. Tasca realized that the economic gains made by skilled factory labour in recent years meant that the party could not rely on the “whip of misery” to goad the proletariat to revolution. The son of a metallurgical worker, he was representative of a new “class” of university students. Influenced by the neo-idealism then fashionable at the University of Turin, he showed more intellectual sophistication in his remarks than was customary at such assemblies as he traced the current socialist “crisis” to the fatalism and economic determinism that underlay prevailing socialist doctrine<sup>48</sup>: “Our party has been formed of men who continue to judge with the criteria of ten or twenty years ago. Theories have progressed but their culture has remained the same.” The time had arrived to “reconstruct” the socialists’ “ideological baggage” ridding it of the burden of positivism, he said<sup>49</sup>.

Bordiga, who had seen “la miseria” from near, was certain the answer to the problems that beset socialists lay elsewhere. Despite his own disgust with the kind of economic determinism used to justify socialist praxis in the south he warned his comrade “not to lose time with revisionist fantasies” or other “amusements of bourgeois philosophy”<sup>50</sup>: “We do not wish to evangelize, but to ignite, and when the moment arrives the flame will burst forth.”

For the next year and a half they continued their debate in *Avanguardia* and the issue surfaced again at the 1914 FGSI congress where Tasca’s proposal to change the nature of the paper was again turned down by a narrow margin. For those who, like Antonio Gramsci, first reached political awareness before the war the debate endured in their memory as an intellectual marker along their political journey<sup>51</sup>.

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47 *Avanguardia*, 29 Sept. 1912.

48 As quoted by Pietro Silva, “I giovani socialist,” *Unita*, 12 Oct. 1912.

49 Angelo Tasca, “Note d’un culturista,” *Avanguardia*, 20 Oct. 1912; also “Note d’un culturista,” 15, 22, 29 dicembre 1912. For a somewhat different evaluation of debate, see Alexander De Grand, *In Stalin’s Shadow: Angelo Tasca and the Crisis of the Left in Italy and France, 1910-1945* (Dekalb, Illinois, 1986), pp. 10-48.

50 Amadeo Bordiga, “Il punto di vista,” *Avanguardia*, 15 Dec. 1912; also “Per la concezione teorica del socialismo,” *Avanguardia*, 23 Mar. 1913 and biographies of Andreina de Clementi, Amadeo Bordiga (Torino, 1971), pp. 11-35 and Franco Livorsi, *Amadeo Bordiga, 1912-1970* (Roma: 1976), pp. 26-36.

51 Alfa Gamma (Gramsci), “Socialismo e cultura,” *Il Grido del Popolo*, 20 Jan 1916; previously cited passage in *Passato e presente*, pp. 74-75.

The interest this debate stirred in the youth movement – one can hardly browse through a copy of *Avanguardia* between 1912 and 1914 without finding reference to the debate – helps explain why the movement was readily drawn into Mussolini's circle of support. As Tasca explained forty years later, Mussolini was the only party leader willing to step outside the well-marked boundaries of transigency-intransigency; he was the only leader “liberated from the triumvirate of Darwin-Spencer-Marx.”<sup>52</sup>

A skilled journalist in the modern mould, Mussolini had gained national exposure during the Libyan war with his impassioned articles against Giolitti, Bissolati, the bloc, and, the war. Arrested for his antiwar activities, Mussolini had been released in time to make a triumphant appearance at the 1912 PSI congress. Mussolini, said Vella, had been the party's “cutting edge” against the Giolitti's greedy colonial adventure<sup>53</sup>. In his new editorial position at *Avanti!*, Mussolini wrote attention-getting articles that highlighted the differences between himself and older party leaders in matters of substance as well as style. However, his reputation as a “revolutionary leader” primarily grew out of the public stances he took during three successive incidents – the “massacre” at Roccagorga, the Milan strike, and Red Week<sup>54</sup>.

On 6 January 1913 in a poor community in the Lazio called Roccagorga government troops fired on a crowd demonstrating for improvements in basic sanitation killing eight and wounding fifty. The “massacre” at Roccagorga was immediately followed by news of similar incidents in villages near Parma and Palermo bringing the death toll to twelve within the week. The riots and their tragic conclusion were not unusual occurrences in rural Italy. But it had been usual for party leaders to deplore such violence even while admitting that these tragedies would continue to occur under conditions of economic and social backwardness. The party's response to the 1908 San Severo massacre had been typical.<sup>55</sup>

The deputies from the North called upon their comrades in Apulia to show “sentiments of moderation”, to reject the tactic of repeated general strikes, and to rid themselves of “the impulsiveness that is harmful to all.” *Avanti!* loftily appealed against the “coarseness” (*rozzezza*) of the day labourers in the region.

Roccagorga instead became a rallying cry to socialists just coming of age. More than fifteen years later, Antonio Gramsci referred to Roccagorga in his notebooks while serving a life sentence in the fascist Mussolini's prison<sup>56</sup>. Ironically, the socialist Mussolini had been principally responsible for imprinting its name on the conscience of Gramsci's generation.

Mussolini's interest in the south and its prospects under the newly extended franchise had led him to make a whirlwind visit to Apulia in late September 1912. There he met with local socialist and labour leaders and spoke at dinners in Andria and Gioia del Colle. Those who attended the dinners hastily organized in his honour were excited by the three articles he subsequently wrote on “Puglia

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52 Tasca, “I primi dieci anni.”

53 *Avanguardia*, 29 Sept. 1912.

54 The standard work on Mussolini as seen in the political context of his times is, of course, Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini: il rivoluzionario* (Torino, 1965), I, pp 112-323.

55 Snowden op. cit., pp. 94-95.

56 In the prison notebooks, Gramsci *Passato e presente*, pp. 39-40 referred to peasant testimony at the trials of Mussolini and Giuseppe Scalarini in Milan showing with what attention he had followed the events in Roccagorga.

rossa” and up to a year later, Leonetti says, youths in Andria remembered he had called their city the “red lioness of the South.”<sup>57</sup>

Impressions of Apulia were still fresh in Mussolini's mind when news came of the massacres. The next day, 7 January, he accused the Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti of state-sponsored murder and in the ensuing days kept the story on the front pages, choosing Roccagorga as the most typical example of the kind of rural “massacres” that had occurred for over a decade under the political regime of “liberal” Italy. Peasants had been “murdered” in Roccagorga, he said, because they had dared to demonstrate for decent local government and better social conditions in a “commune without water, sewers, or doctors.”<sup>58</sup> The demands of the poor peasants in Roccagorga had been “legitimate”<sup>59</sup>:

“We cry loud and clear and solemnly promise that if there is one who thinks he can suffocate every protest of the oppressed with blood, we will not counsel the masses to show either a long-suffering or generous spirit. No violence is more legitimate than that which comes from below as a human reaction to the criminal politics of slaughter.”

For these inflammatory words, Mussolini and *Avanti!* were formally denounced to the police for incitement. The defeated reformists encamped about *Critica Sociale* were alarmed as they saw in Mussolini's words the unwelcome spectre of anarchism banished by them some twenty years before. To speak of the “legitimacy” of peasant demands, though “juridically correct”, is “politically senseless”, said the editors of the journal. One could not hope to find the initial cause of these tragedies in the “less evolved” areas where “barbarity arises both from above and below ... locked together in a fatalistic chain of provocation ... whose first link cannot be found.”<sup>60</sup>

Such rebukes merely enhanced Mussolini's standing with the young. Where *Avanti!* formerly had been “filled with long interminable articles expressing theories of class collaboration,” under Mussolini it became a “clarion call to battle”, Giovanni Germanetto recalled in his memoirs<sup>61</sup>. Mussolini devoted full page articles the evils of militarism and the *compagnie di disciplina*; he prodded the leadership and the CGL toward acceptance of a general strike in the event of new massacres; played up popular manifestations of discontent.

As the general elections loomed near, members of the maximalist directorate were distressed by Mussolini's seeming disinterest in their outcome. Lazzari warned against those who influenced by Sorelianism would rely on the “holy spirit” to bring about a powerful response by the working class movement. Serrati was more explicit: *Avanti!* should lay out concrete proposals for the upcoming election rather than talk in vaguely revolutionary generalities<sup>62</sup>.

As a breach began to develop on these issues between the 30-year old Mussolini and older party leaders (even Serrati, though fifteen years younger than Lazzari and Turati, was forty-one in 1913), the youth movement remained on Mussolini's side of the divide. Italo Toscani, the editor of *Avanguardia*, Amadeo Bordiga, now a leading member of the FGSI central committee, and others

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57 Leonetti, *Da Andria contadina*, p. 50; Benito Mussolini, Nella Puglia rossa, 1 Oct 1912, *Avanti!* in Edoardo e Duilio Susmel, eds., *opera omnia* (Firenze, 1952), IV, pp. 218-21.

58 “Assassinio di Stato,” 7 Jan. 1913, *Opera omnia*, V, p. 52.

59 “La politica della strage,” 8 Jan. 1913, *ibid.*, p. 55.

60 “Ricominciamo, seguitando ...,” *Critica Sociale*, 6-18 Jan. 1913.

61 Giovanni Germanetto, *Memorie di un barbiere* (Rome, 1949), p 46.

62 C. Lazzari, “Il prossimo eccidio,” *Avanti!*, 27 Jan. 1913; G.M. Serrati, “Valorizzare o concretare,”

criticized Serrati for resorting to the language of reformism<sup>63</sup>. The FGSI central committee, reflecting opinion at the local level, voted to refuse to assist candidates with masonic ties whether or not they were socialists or had received the PSI's endorsement<sup>64</sup>.

“The value of the electoral campaign lies not in the number of seats we win at Montecitorio [parliament], where little is gained and much is lost, but rather in the magnificent occasion it offers us for calling attention to the social problem and its socialist solution.”

Just as Roccagorga pointed up the failure of the party's passive “Southern strategy”, so the great Milan strike of May-June 1913 revealed the weak link between the party and organized labour. The reformist vision had been underpinned by the spurt in economic growth during the early Giolittian years. By 1913, economic growth had sputtered to a halt bringing lower real wages and widespread unemployment especially in the metallurgical, textile, and building industries. Revolutionary syndicalism, which had languished during the years of growth, once again seemed a viable alternative to many workers<sup>65</sup>. In this ferment the Milan strike took place. Unlike its Turinese predecessor that spring, the strike in Milan rapidly expanded to include categories of workers among whose ranks the newly formed revolutionary syndicalist union, the *Unione Sindacale Italiana* (USI), had made significant inroads. The history of the day-to-day conduct of the strike is a complicated one. But it placed before party members three fundamental questions: first, to what extent should the CGL accept the authority of the PSI?<sup>66</sup> second, under what set of circumstances was the general strike appropriate and, most particularly, was it ever an appropriate instrument of “political” action? third, to what degree should socialists and the CGL collaborate with the syndicalist USI?

In the aftermath of Roccagorga, Mussolini, had pressed for greater party control over the CGL. As the CGL revealed its caution in extending the strike, Mussolini caustically ridiculed its hesitation. When he joined a rally protesting the arrest of the syndicalist leader, Filippo Corridoni, the reformists had had enough. In an article in *Critica Sociale* oft-cited in the literature, Turati accused him of Stirnianism, Nietzscheanism, Bergsonianism, of anything else but socialism<sup>67</sup>. The youths instead lauded him. It mattered little that the general strike had collapsed in three days, as the reformists predicted, or that Mussolini descended into recriminations with his erstwhile syndicalist allies. In one of many approving letters sent to *Avanguardia* at the close of the strike, Gerardo Turi, a young member of Bordiga's Neapolitan faction, wrote that “the brave editor of *Avanti!* has understood how to restore the Party's revolutionary soul.”<sup>68</sup> Bordiga wrote that “only *Avanti!* had saved the good name of the Socialist Party” during the recent strike in Milan. We have “observed the sad spectacle of a party too preoccupied by electoral preparations” to bother with “proletarian trade-union life ... which is exhausted, amorphous and pale.” The reformists who have condemned Mussolini envision the party as a “gathering of good fellows who ponder and discuss with calmness and reflection, and, when necessary, damn ... proletarian impatience.” But, in thinking of “educating and civilizing” the proletariat for its mission, they have instead quieted its most rebellious members by promising them a mere scrap of the Revolution some thousand centuries away in the Beyond.” It is this fact more than anything else that has placed the “syndicalist demagogues on the pedestal.”

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63 Italo Toscani, “Per il nostro programma. Il pericolo del concretismo socialista,” *Avanguardia*, 8 June 1913.

64 *Avanguardia*, 29 June 1913.

65 Giampiero Carocci, *Giolitti e l'eta giolittiana* (Torino, 1961), pp. 66-82; Alceo Riosa, “Il sindacalismo rivoluzionario in Italia dal 1907 alla 'settimana rossa,’” *Movimento operaio e socialista*, 2 (1979), pp. 51-87.

66 Miller, *From Elite to Mass Politics*, pp. 169-70 on maximalists' attempt to assert greater control over the CGL, also, Adolfo Pepe, *Storia del CGL dalla guerra di Libia all'intervento, 1911-1915* (Bari, 1971).

67 Filippo Turati, “Per ritornare al socialismo,” *Critica Sociale*, 1-6 June 1913.

68 Gerardo Turi, *Avanguardia*, 3 Aug. 1913.

The socialist party should be the “accelerator of the working-class movement in a revolutionary direction.”<sup>69</sup>

Mussolini tried to tap into this longing for a revitalized party by launching his own journal, *Utopia*. A revolutionary revision of socialism was needed, he wrote, first, because reformist political methods had failed and, second, because socialist political practice had been deformed by the positivist theory upon which it had rested<sup>70</sup>.

“The most frequently used phrases in positivist jargon were and are these: in nature, as in life, all evolves by degrees, slowly, fatally. There are no sudden creation of forms, unexpected catastrophes of systems and institutions, but instead a passage without leaps from one phase to the next. This conception bans violence and will from the world. It denies the Revolution.”

Among critics given a forum in *Utopia* were Giuseppe De Falco, Sergio Panunzio, and, the FGSI's Tasca and Bordiga<sup>71</sup>.

“Proletarian unity” or a *blocco rosso*, topics raised by Panunzio and by Mussolini himself in *Utopia*<sup>72</sup> had their advocates within the youth movement. Not only had such temporary accords existed during the Libyan resistance but “proletarian unity” had, in effect, been practiced in organizing the land-labourers in Apulia. Certainly, Bordiga sensed enough danger in the syndicalist attraction to warn his youthful compatriots against syndicalist-inspired abstentionism before the 1913 general elections<sup>73</sup>. Yet, the FGSI central committee to which Bordiga belonged unanimously voted to stick to the formula of allowing temporary red blocs over specific issues<sup>74</sup>. As the reformist Zibordi ruefully commented, there were those for whom intransigency applied only to a bloc of the right<sup>75</sup>.

While the PSI party congress in April 1914 confirmed that electoral intransigency had become the platform of the party's centre – freemasons were expelled; candidates were forbidden from resorting to the old configuration of the bloc even in run-offs, as had happened in some southern districts in 1913 – this shift lagged behind the march of events. The administrative elections of 1914 were soon engulfed by Red Week, the greatest wave of unrest to sweep across Italy since 1898.

Red Week began with a “massacre” on June 7 in the Adriatic port city of Ancona. News quickly spread that another massacre had occurred at a rally organized by the anarchists demanding “justice” for two young soldiers “victimized” for their antimilitarist views. In 1916, the young Gramsci recalled those “tragic, unforgettable days” in June<sup>76</sup>:

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69 Amadeo Bordiga, “Lo sciopero di Milano,” *Avanguardia*, 15 June 1913.

70 “Al Largo!,” *Utopia*, 22 Nov. 1913.

71 Angelo Tasca, “I socialisti e la scuola,” *Utopia*, 15-28 Feb. 1914; Amadeo Bordiga “I socialisti a Napoli e nel Mezzogiorno,” *ibid.*, 15-28 Feb. 1914 and “Il socialismo autonoma napoletano,” *ibid.*, 15-20 July 1914.

72 Sergio Panunzio, “Il lato teorico e il pratico del socialismo,” *Utopia*, 15-31 May 1914; Benito Mussolini, “Un blocco rosso,” *ibid.*, 15-28 Feb. 1914.

73 Amadeo Bordiga, “Contro l'astensionismo,” *Avanti!*, 13 July 1913. As leader of communist faction after the war Bordiga supported abstention on tactical grounds.

74 *Avanguardia*, 10 Aug. 1913.

75 G. Zibordi, “Quel che dovremo dire ad Ancona,” *Critica Sociale*, 1-15 Apr. and 16-30 Apr. 1914.

76 “La commemorazione di Miss Cavell,” *Avanti!*, edizione Piemontese, 17 Jan. 1916 in Antonio Gramsci, *Scritti Giovanili* (Torino, 1958), p. 18. On early Gramsci see also Salvatore Francesco Romano, *Antonio Gramsci* (Torino, 1965); John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (Stanford, 1967).

“In a faroff city in the Marches, three nameless people had fallen in a day mockingly dedicated to constitutional liberty, and a wind of rebellion swept over Italy ...”

Barricades were placed in the narrow streets of Florence, Rome, and Parma, and at the portals of Andria. Crowds gathered in the piazze of the great southern cities of Naples, Bari, and Palermo. Red blocs sprang up in industrial centres of the north. As the CGL joined the call for a general strike, about fifty thousand workers in Turin marched from the Camera del Lavoro to the city centre in “iron ranks of class solidarity.”<sup>77</sup> In Milan, even before it had become clear what action the CGL would propose, the USI and Chamber of Labour called for a general strike and Corridoni and Mussolini were linked once again in a red bloc as they took personal charge of the protest movement. As the death toll mounted and the protest reached its peak, local government officials in Romagna were forced to flee, and rail and dockworkers asserted their power in a crippling wave of protest.

Small wonder that to those just coming of age in the socialist movement, revolution seemed “very near and imminent.”<sup>78</sup> Two years later, Gramsci would admit to the accusation that “as socialist youths we had been mystics of revolution.”<sup>79</sup>

“Where everyone else saw only single Issues, single positions, to be conquered patiently in order to arrive finally at the top, we saw a solid wall upon which to turn the full weight of our forces with an energetic act of will. All or nothing, isn't that what we said?”

In the aftermath of Roccagorga and Milan, CGL leaders had agreed to a strike of short duration should similar events occur. When CGL leaders refused to go beyond the “sacred forty-eight hours” accusations of betrayal came readily to the lips of those most caught up in the revolutionary fervour. In an article long remembered by those then active in the youth movement, Mussolini captured their widespread feeling when he wrote that “in these days of fire and blood the only grey page had been written by the [CGL] . . . “Still, he found reason for hope. Compared to prior episodes of popular unrest, the recent unrest was distinguished by its extent (from north to south, in city and country) and its intensity (a strike of offence rather than defence). The end of the strike was merely a “ceasefire.”<sup>80</sup> Despite all that would separate them in later years, Mussolini's analysis in its fundamentals would remain the accepted view of that generation of socialist youths, as later comments of Gramsci and Bordiga reveal<sup>81</sup>.

As usual, the reformists were outraged by Mussolini's lack of discipline. The socialist parliamentary group restated their view that socialism would not be achieved by the acts of a “disorganized crowd” but by “patient and assiduous work” that relied on the “organization, education,

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77 Ibid.

78 A.G. “Pietro Gavosto,” *Il Grido del Popolo*, 22 Jan. 1916; Scritti Giovanili, p. 22.

79 “Vecchiezze,” *Avanti!*, 13 July 1916 as quoted in Spriano, *Torino operaia*, p. 8.

80 “Tregua d'armi,” *Avanti!*, 12 June 1914.

81 When Bordiga included this article in his anonymously authored book on the communist left in 1964, he called its fundamental analysis sound, though marred by Mussolini's typical rhetorical excesses, *Storia della sinistra comunista* (Milano: *Il programma comunista*, 1964), pp. 81-83 In his prison notebooks Gramsci commented that it was strange that Salvemini hadn't noticed that the real value of events during June 1914 (which in Gramsci's view had their true origin in the massacre at Roccagorga) had been that they renewed ties between north and south, urban northern classes and rural southern classes. Gramsci, *Passato e presente*, pp. 39-40.

intellectualization of the proletarian movement.”<sup>82</sup> Claudio Treves ridiculed the “Bergsonian intuitionism” inherent in this new conception of the general strike<sup>83</sup>.

“The new socialist idealists believe that, in spite of the near total illiteracy of the masses and their rustic, ages-old patriarchal traditions, the socialist revolution can be made with the Idea and Will of revolution.”

Just weeks earlier, in presenting his argument on the south to the Congress of Ancona, Bordiga had resorted to Marxist texts on the revolutions of 1848 to challenge the “automaticity” of the “Marxism of the Honourable Treves.”<sup>84</sup> Now, the youths rallied to Mussolini's defence. Nicola Modugno, who would become a member of Bordiga's communist abstentionist faction at the end of the war, accused the socialist parliamentary deputies of having “sown internal discord” by asking for the “head of the editor of *Avanti!*.” “In these last two years, Mussolini has ... renovated and reinvigorated the party ... and now he falls under the vile attacks of the deputies enraged by their own impotency ...” Apulia's “starving labourers” send their “salute of solidarity to Benito Mussolini, the fiery Archangel of the Revolution.”<sup>85</sup>

Five days after writing “Tregua d'armi,” Mussolini came to Turin to speak on behalf of the socialist candidate in a special election. In the aftermath of Red Week, emotions were running high and there is little doubt that members of the Turinese socialist youth group were present on that occasion when Mussolini reverted to language more explicitly antidemocratic than in his recent editorial<sup>86</sup>. When Tasca, a few months later, wrote in reference to Mussolini of “your eyes illuminated with such a rare, such a holy light in the days of June”<sup>87</sup> he was, no doubt, summoning up his vivid memories of that day.

During Red Week, this socialist generation had dared to hope for a leap into revolution. Red Week instead proved to be the high point of pre-war unrest. “Tregua d'armi” was, in fact, “the gladiator's final gesture,” Bordiga wrote sadly a few months later when Mussolini had made his famed turn-about on the issue of Italian intervention in the war<sup>88</sup>. Still, it had a powerful impact on this generation's thinking. A few months later when Tasca proposed moving *Avanguardia* to Turin he criticized not only the fatalism of the past generation (“The socialist revolution will not strike as an inevitable product of the present state of things: economic determinism and discontent are only the forces to which socialism must show the way”) but the emphasis upon building a mass, electoral party. The “creation of revolutionary consciousness” must not be confused with an “idolatriy of numbers”: “The socialist crisis will not end unless we create a band of militants who will become the propelling nucleus of the masses that will gather around it at the decisive moment.”<sup>89</sup>

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82 Quoted in De Felice, *Mussolini*, I, pp. 211-12.

83 Il Vice, “Involuzione Rivoluzionario,” *Critica Sociale*, 16-31 July 1914. On Treves, see Antonio Casali, *Socialismo e internazionalismo nella storia d'Italia*. Claudio Treves, 1869-1933 (Napoli 1985).

84 Resoconto stenografico del XIV Congresso del Partito Socialista Italiano nel Ancona, 26-27-28-29 Apr. 1914; comment of De Clementi, op. cit., pp. 31-33.

85 Nicolo Modugno, “Per la direttiva rivoluzionaria d'Avanti!,” *La Ragione*, 20 June 1914.

86 See Spriano, *Torino operaia*, p. 68. Tasca had approached Salvemini, then Mussolini, to stand for the vacant seat.

87 A.T., “Il mito della guerra,” *Il Grido del popolo*, 24 Oct. 1914.

88 “Serriamo le file,” *Il Socialista*, 12 Nov. 1914.

89 Tasca, “Il nostro giornale,” *Avanguardia*, 9 Aug. 1914; reports of speech at fifth regional congress of Piedmont youth movement, *Avanguardia*, 30 Sept. 1914. Gramsci sounded a similar note in *La Citta Futura* (Federazione Giovanile Socialista Piemontese, 11 Feb. 1917). “Waiting to become one more than half is the program of timid souls awaiting socialism in the form of a decree countersigned by two ministers.” See comment of Giuseppe Fiori, *Antonio Gramsci* (New York, 1973), pp. 106-9.



The outbreak of World War I changed the terms of international socialist debate. Although the PSI was virtually alone in maintaining an official stance of “neutrality” for the duration of the war, the PSI’s statement masked the degree of sympathy for the French cause in the first days of war. Characteristically, Mussolini displayed his sympathies openly. “The Teutonic Horde Unleashed on Europe,” ran *Avanti!*’s banner headline. In *Avanguardia*, Lido Caiani said that “civilization” had been “menaced” by “Attila’s barbaric horde” and went so far as to subscribe to Ricciotti Garibaldi’s call for a “new army of red shirts.”<sup>90</sup> The more temperate Toscani accepted the special case of the “war of defence.”

Such views, it soon became clear, were at variance with rank and file opinion. The FGSI’s antimilitarist tradition, its history of confrontation with young nationalists during the Libyan war, its ties to the left-wing of the international movement, created a barrier against the penetration of blatantly patriotic sentiments. FGSI sections in virtually all parts of Italy, except Reggio Emilia, passed resolutions in August and early September condemning Caiani; many explicitly criticized Mussolini’s wavering<sup>91</sup>. Although letters to *Avanguardia* and later reminiscences of some members of the Turinese youth movement reveal lingering sympathies for the French side in some quarters<sup>92</sup>, the strong antimilitarist tradition of the youth movement prevailed. Few were ready to endorse even the notion of a “war of defence.”

Amadeo Bordiga, who had been one of the principal authors of the FGSI’s 1913 antimilitarist pamphlet, did much to firm up the FGSI’s stand against “social-patriotism.” In the opening days of the war, Bordiga shared the futile hope that the International would be able to prevent the conflict<sup>93</sup>. In 1912, he had interpreted the International’s Basel resolution as meaning that socialists would respond with a “general strike without limits” to a general mobilization and with “a general insurrection” to a war declaration<sup>94</sup>. As this hope vanished, he immediately affirmed in *Avanti!* that the working class “has no interest and no ideals to defend at the national frontier.”<sup>95</sup> On 8 August, the Neapolitan socialist section passed Bordiga’s resolution “against any support by *Avanti!* or the party leadership for a ‘war of defence’” and a few days later he censured an older member of the section for his francophile views<sup>96</sup>.

In an article written just ten days after the outbreak of war and published in *Avanti!* on 16 August, Bordiga denied that the war had been prepared and willed by Austro-German militarism alone for “in reality the bourgeoisie of all nations are equally responsible for the outbreak of the conflict, or rather the capitalistic system is responsible ...” He ridiculed the notions that the French represented the cause of “civilization” and that a German victory would mean a “return to barbarism.” To propagate such ideas was merely to adopt the “scholastic baggage of bourgeois democracy.”

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90 Lido Caiani, “Grido d’Allarme,” *Avanguardia*, 9 Aug. 1914 and “Rispondendo ... Viva la Francia!,” 20 Aug. 1914. For political debate on the war during Italy’s neutrality, Brunello Vigezzi, *L’Italia di fronte alla prima guerra mondiale* (Milano, 1967), I, pp. 143-205, 493-515, 557-58.

91 Giovanni Gozzini, “La Federazione one Giovanile Socialista tra Bordiga e Mussolini (1912-1914),” *Storia contemporanea* M, XI (1980), pp. 119-21.

92 The differences between Gramsci and Togliatti, on the one side, and Tasca and Terracini, on the other, have been commented on by Tasca himself. References also in Montagnana, *Ricordi*, p.37, Giorgio Bocca, *Palmiro Togliatti* (Bari, 1973), pp. 18-25, and Gramsci biographies.

93 Speech at the Borsa del Lavoro in Naples *Il Socialista*, 6 Aug. 1914.

94 *La Voce*, December 18, 1912. Commented on by De Clementi, op. cit pp. 36-37 and Livorsi, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

95 Reported in *Avanti!*, 11 Aug. 1914.

96 *Il Socialista*, 13 Aug. 1914.

“Whether civilization or barbarity” arises out of the “militaristic saturnalia” does not “depend upon the victory of one side or the other” but rather on the consequences the war will have upon the “relationships between social classes and the world economy.”<sup>97</sup>

As the debate over possible Italian intervention on the Allied side continued among the parties of the old left, some syndicalist leaders (De Ambris and Corridoni) moved away from the majority position within the syndicalist camp to advance the cause of intervention on “revolutionary grounds.” It was the sort of argument bound to appeal to Mussolini especially in the aftermath of Red Week and his deep disappointment with its outcome<sup>98</sup>. In late August and early September, *Utopia* and *Avanti!* hosted articles by Panunzio that set forth the revolutionary grounds for intervention. Panunzio believed the war would be long, deep, and change European society fundamentally and said that if the proletariat remained an “inert” bystander, it would not be prepared to exercise its “will” against the capitalist order at the war’s end<sup>99</sup>.

Only a few weeks before, young socialists had looked to Mussolini as chief spokesman of the revolutionary left. As Mussolini vacillated, failing to define a clear line against Italian intervention, Bordiga took upon himself that mantle. Just as he had once tenaciously battled against “degenerate” Neapolitan socialism, he now guarded against any deviation from socialist internationalism. Local agents from the ministry of the interior, who had placed him under surveillance following his participation in the demonstrations of Red Week, reported to their superiors in Rome that in a “very private meeting” on September 1 in Naples, Bordiga and Francesco Misiano, a radical leader in the railroad workers’ union who would end up in Soviet Russia, had expressed great concern over the growth of francophile sentiment among party rank-and-file<sup>100</sup>. On 17 September in an unsigned editorial in *Il Socialista* he reproved Mussolini for a speech in Milan on the 9th that “truly surprised us by its tone.” Rumours had been heard both from within and without the party that Mussolini does not share “our opinion” on the meaning of absolute neutrality. The rumours now appear to be justified. During Red Week the “Party had been accustomed to having its path charted by *Avanti!*.” In the present situation the “Party has been a little lost, like a ship without a pilot.” If *Avanti!* had spoken out against the war without hesitation, without reservations of any kind, in a manner consistent with its anti-bourgeois, anti-statist, and revolutionary stands, the party surely would have responded with a powerful antiwar demonstration, he said<sup>101</sup>.

“Sincere friends, if you will, “admirers” of Mussolini, we do not hesitate to point out the grave danger that lies in creating idols in the Party even when we are speaking of highly-gifted comrades who have shown a secure conscience and a true spirit of sacrifice. The Party must become ever more autonomous of the single individual as Mussolini himself has so often maintained!”

Mussolini replied that he had been gravely misjudged.

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97 Bordiga, “Al nostro posto,” *Avanti!*, 16 Aug. 1914.

98 De Felice, op. cit., pp. 217-19. For a more detailed discussion on De Ambris and revolutionary interventionism in the USI, see Umberto Sereni, “Luglio-agosto 1914: Alle origini dell’ interventismo rivoluzionario,” *Ricerche Storiche*, XI (1981), pp. 525-74.

99 Sergio Panunzio, “Guerra e socialismo,” *Avanti!*, 12 Sept. 1914; “Il socialismo e la guerra,” *Utopia*, 15 Aug.-1 Sept. 1914.

100 Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell’Interno, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, “Conflagrazione Europea,” Busta 5, Napoli P, dated 8 Sept. 1914.

101 “L’*Avanti!* e la guerra,” *Il Socialista*, 17 Sept. 1914; Mussolini’s letter dated September 25 published in *Il Socialista*, 1 Oct. 1914.

A month later, as PSI leaders gathered in Bologna to hammer out a clear statement of the party's position, Mussolini came into the open with the article, "From Absolute Neutrality to Active and Operating Neutrality." Returning to an old line of attack, he said the PSI was "settling down into the soft cushions of an easy-chair formula of "absolute neutrality," but the party must not succumb to norms derived from "unquestionable dogma." Behind this now familiar philosophical argument, he mustered more mundane ones: that the PSI must not play into the hands of those who wished Italy to intervene on the side of the central powers, that the socialists who had sympathized with insurgent Armenians and Cypriots could hardly forget the unredeemed, "morally insurgent" Trentini. Making Panunzio's argument his own he asked: "Must we – as men and socialists – be inanimate spectators to this great drama? Or must we not be, in some way and in some sense, protagonists?"<sup>102</sup>

Antonio Gramsci's first excursion into political journalism came in defence of Mussolini's article. He began on a note of despair over the "extraordinary confusion" the war had created both "in our consciences and in the parties." We must resolve those problems which plagued us in the past in order that "humanity may resume its path," he said. He began by asking "What should be the function of the Italian Socialist Party (mind you, not of the proletariat or of socialism in general) in the present moment of Italian life?" Certainly, the national party is "autonomous" in determining "the way" in which the class struggle will take place "in various situations" and "the moment in which the revolution will be fulfilled." Moving on from this early statement of what later would be known as the "Italian way to socialism," Gramsci said he agreed with Mussolini that whereas absolute neutrality had been helpful as a provisional formulation in the first days of the war, it now threatened to turn the proletariat into impartial spectators of the march of history. "But the revolutionaries who conceive of history as the creation of spirit ... must not content themselves with the provisional formula..." Perhaps, by adopting an "active and operating neutrality" the party would be able to "touch the country with its hand," gaining the support of "great masses of common people" who, hitherto, had been alienated from political life<sup>103</sup>.

Bordiga did not find Mussolini's reasoning seductive. In an editorial appearing in *Il Socialista* on 22 October, he argued "For Active and Operating Antimilitarism"<sup>104</sup>:

"The concept of neutrality has as its subject, not the socialists but the State. We want the State to remain neutral in the war ... In order to get that we must act upon It and against It. We do not intend to disarm. Our war is permanent. It strikes, at times, as in June, in open revolt, but it does not concede armistices ... We are readily accused of pacifism ... But we remain open enemies, active and operating of the State."

In fact, the opinion expressed by Gramsci, who until recently had been more a spectator than a leader in Turinese socialist circles, was not reflective of general opinion in the youth movement. Despite agonizing discussions between Gramsci and his university friends, the leadership of the Turinese youth movement (Tasca, Montagnana, Nino Benso) stuck with the formula of absolute neutrality. In the south and in many sections in Romagna and Tuscany, the picture was far different than in Turin and Milan where sympathy for the French side swayed some members into toying

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102 *Avanti!* 18 Oct 1914.

103 Antonio Gramsci, "Neutralita attiva ed operante," *Il Grido del Popolo*, 31 Oct. 1914. This fact has been troublesome to admirers of Gramsci and many have been at pains to explain how his thought subtly differed from that expressed by Mussolini. On this point, see Bocca, op. cit., p. 24.

104 "Per l'antimilitarismo attivo ed operante", *Il Socialista*, 22 Oct 1914.

with the “defensive war” exception. The FGSI's National Committee meeting on 25 October gives us a glimpse.

As the PSI leadership gathered to discuss the “crisis” caused by Mussolini's article, the FGSI's national committee gathered to discuss the pro-French positions of Caiani and Toscani. The national committee, composed of representatives of the twelve regional federations, had been formed in 1912 to keep the small central committee in touch with rank-and-file opinion between congresses. Cainani, Toscani, and Vella, who came as representative of the Direzione, were also there. At the meeting, presided over by Bordiga, most delegates “disapproved” of *Avanguardia's* editorial line. Caiani, backing away from “interventionism,” directed his remarks to justification of a “war of defence.” None of the representatives directly backed either Mussolini or Caiani although Emilia's representative said the antimilitarism of the Libyan war was not valid under present circumstances and spoke of a “watchful and operating neutrality.” While representatives from Liguria and Lombardy dithered, reflecting, no doubt, some waverings within their regions, they stuck with the official position of the party. Representatives from Tuscany, from the south, and from those regions such as Romagna where opposition to the state had a long tradition (and from which Bordiga would draw support for his communist abstentionist faction at the war's end) never wavered from the FGSI's old line of antimilitarist resistance. The toughest talk came from Modugno, who representing Apulia spoke of taking their antimilitarism to the point of insurrection “especially if war became imminent.” Bordiga's position of “active and operating antimilitarism” without any distinction between wars of defence or offence was completely endorsed by Campania and other southern regions and by the regional federations of Apulia, Tuscany, and Romagna. Although the final resolution that was hammered out contained a strong statement on absolute neutrality, Caiani and Toscani, though disciplined, were not forced to resign<sup>105</sup>.

Shortly after the meeting Bordiga lent his steadying hand to the editorial direction of *Avanguardia* and embarked upon a lecture tour in Mussolini's home region of Romagna where he spoke “eloquently” to “large crowds” on the “proletariat and militarism” outlining the arguments he had made in articles and at the recent meeting of the national committee<sup>106</sup>.

Mussolini, meanwhile, finding himself virtually isolated at the meeting of the PSI leadership, tendered his resignation from *Avanti!*. On 15 November he came out with the first issue of *Il Popolo d'Italia*. On the 24th, he was expelled from the party. Few socialists followed him out of the PSI and even fewer youths. The case of Lido Caiani, forced out of the central committee of the FGSI after sending his warm congratulations to Mussolini on publication of *Il Popolo*, proved exceptional. With the benefit of hindsight, Leonetti writes that “once the mask was removed from the face of the revolutionary Mussolini in which so many youths had hoped and believed, he ceased to have any kind of standing.”<sup>107</sup> Indeed, despite Panunzio's southern origins and De Falco's participation in the Apulian labour movement, *Il Popolo* never found a following in that region or in the south<sup>108</sup>. Yet, Leonetti's comment, written sixty years later, does not capture their anguish.

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105 Report of meeting in *Avanguardia*, 8 Nov. 1914; also Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell'Interno, Ufficio Riservato (1911-1915), Busta 92, report dated 26 Oct. 1914 “Convegno del Comitato Nazionale della Federazione Giovanile Socialista.”

106 *Avanguardia*, 25 Oct. 1914; *Il Socialista*, 29 Oct. 1914 and *La Lotta di Classe*, 31 Oct. carried reports of his speeches between the 25th and 28th in Forli, Cesena, Rimini.

107 Leonetti, *Da Andria contadina*, p. 81.

108 De Felice, *op. cit.*, p. 290 notes *Il Popolo's* failure to penetrate the south but does not explain it. The explanation also may lie in what A. Campanozzi called the “natural hervéism” of the peasants, see fn. 117 below.

In the greatest moment of crisis the international socialist movement had faced, he had let down the side. Abandoning his usual formality to address Mussolini with the familiar “thou,” Angelo Tasca expressed his emotion in *Il Grido del Popolo* on 24 October<sup>109</sup>:

“... we say it with pride, today the Party is more proletarian than ever. And the proof of this is in the fact that even though there had been in all of us a great confidence that in this very sad moment you, oh Mussolini, would remain at our side as our leader, just as you were in the days of such boldness and anticipation (oh, how your eyes were lit up with such an unusual, such a holy light in the days of June, revealing a strength “that it was folly to hope”), then now – with all the great love with which we have surrounded you – today, we believe that the Party Leadership has done its duty in placing you in a situation of having to leave our daily newspaper.”

Even Bordiga who had done much to bring Mussolini out into the open simultaneously commended the party for avoiding the “terrible revision” envisioned by the “heretical and restless genius” and expressed “real grief” over his loss<sup>110</sup>. Yet, unlike the demands for expulsion with which the youths had greeted Freemasons and right-reformists, there was toleration shown to those individuals who had expressed reservations about the formula of absolute neutrality, and even defended Mussolini in the first hour<sup>111</sup>.

It was in breaking the bond of socialist unity that Mussolini committed the unforgivable sin. Montagnana relates how he stared at the first issue of *Il Popolo* in disbelief<sup>112</sup>. There is no stronger feeling than love betrayed and no time when betrayal is felt more deeply than in adolescence. As Mussolini turned to attack his former comrades, a member of the young socialist federation wrote: “I idolized Mussolini” when he served the socialist Ideal but now he has become a “murderer” who “venomously” attacks the party<sup>113</sup>. No one asked Mussolini to leave the party nor even tried to silence him for his disagreement with the majority, Bordiga wrote. “We must now ask, did Mussolini serve the Party or did it rather serve him?”<sup>114</sup>

There were boundaries beyond which even the “charismatic” Mussolini could not go. Yet, as an interpreter of Marx, he had shared, and helped shape, the views of this “third generation of socialists.” (In his first speech as a fascist deputy, Mussolini ridiculed his communist opponents saying that some of them were his spiritual heirs since it was he who had brought into the pre-war socialist movement “a little Bergson mixed with a lot of Blanqui.”)<sup>115</sup> What he had shared with the younger generation was a set of common beliefs about the failures of that socialism practiced by the older generation. Where the collective memories of the older socialist generation, of both Turati and Lazzari, had been shaped by their experiences during the heroic years of the Estrema when they had struggled and overcome the suspension of the right to free speech and assembly, and the prohibition against the right to strike, these were but acquired memories, old history, to Mussolini and the socialist youths who had admired him. What they saw instead were, first, a socialist theory-practice

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109 A.T., “Il mito della guerra,” *Il Grido del Popolo*, 24 Oct. 1914.

110 Editorial note, *Il Socialista*, 19 Nov. 1914.

111 At the FGSI National Committee meeting, the delegate from Lombardy was anxious to avoid schism in Milan where some members appeared to share Mussolini's opinion.

112 Montagnana, *Ricordi*, p. 38.

113 Letter of Antonio Cecchi, *Avanguardia*, 13 Dec. 1914.

114 “Boicottiamolo,” *Il Socialista*, 19 Nov. 1914.

115 21 June 1921, *Opera omnia*, XVI, 440. One should not forget that Gramsci's first article on the Bolshevik Revolution was entitled “The Revolution against ‘Das Kapital’” by which he meant that the Revolution violated the fatalistic schema of the older socialist generation.

that had taken on a passive view of the world and an over-reliance on parliamentary methods and electioneering; second, a trade union movement that had stagnated, and a party that had provided neither revolutionary guidance nor effective political control over the trade-union movement; and, third, a PSI that had failed to see the revolutionary potential of the rural areas, particularly, in the south. These were precisely the problems to which this generation of socialists would return at the end of the war, and which would form the fault-lines of the communist schism.

The Great War had exposed another fault-line that ruptured zigzag through the parties of the Second International. Although the maximalist leadership had held the line against Mussolinian interventionism on the one hand and reformist waverings on the acceptability of “defensive wars” on the other, socialists were faced in 1915 with the still unresolved problem: How could they make their opposition to participation in a war operational? As the nation became aware of imminent intervention in late April, the question begged an answer. The reformists who dominated the parliamentary group looked to the formation of a new “neutral” government by the old master of parliament, Giolitti; the left pondered the feasibility of a general strike.

For months, discussions within the youth movement had focused more on how the “socialism of yesterday,” (Bordiga) and the ideological “constructions of two generations of socialists” (Tasca) had failed than on how socialists might act to prevent intervention<sup>116</sup>. Now, with interventionist agitation in the northern cities mounting and intervention by the State imminent, the problem had to be faced squarely. On 9 and 10 May 1915, 107 delegates to the FGSI congress debated tactics in closed door session. Delegates from the south held the strongest convictions. As one socialist visitor to the Terra di Bari would report in *Avanti!* in February, opposition to participation in any kind of war boiled up from the grassroots level. In Andria, where young peasants formed the majority, a “hervéist” resolution was passed with a vote just one short of unanimity<sup>117</sup>. Similarly, Gerardo Turi, Bordiga's young protégé in Naples of Calabrian origin who had come to assist him at *Avanguardia*, preached an extreme form of “defeatism” that would bring war resistance directly into the barracks<sup>118</sup>. At the May congress, Turi offered a resolution calling for a “general strike” that should be allowed to assume an “openly insurrectional character” in the event of a war declaration. Young socialists were to ask their members “not to respond to the call to arms”; the FGSI was to coordinate and organize a “general and simultaneous armed insurrection of all its adherents.”<sup>119</sup> Although *Avanti!* and *Avanguardia* would publish only the final resolution approved by delegates, Turi angrily explained what had happened to readers of *Il Socialista*.

According to Turi, representatives from Campania, Apulia, Sicily, and other southern regions were joined by Tuscany, Bologna, Liguria, and Romagna in favouring his resolution. Angelo Tasca and the Turin delegation and those from Lombardy doubted the efficacy of a strike. Then, Vella,

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116 Amadeo Bordiga, “Il socialismo di ieri dinanzi alla guerra di oggi,” [“the socialism of yesterday confronted by the war of today”] 25 Oct., 1 Nov., 16 Nov. 1914; Angelo Tasca, unpublished speech to be delivered at FGSI congress in Reggio Emilia, *Avanguardia*, 1 May 1915.

117 A. Campanozzi (see “Le Puglie contro la guerra: L'herveismo naturale dei contadini,” *Avanti!*, 25 Feb. 1915) had come to Andria from Milan to present his arguments on the distinction between a war of offence and defence. He was struck by their antimilitarist fervour. Although he felt a “general strike” would be “suffocated by blood” and result in the imposition of martial law, he was doubtful that southern peasants whose major struggles were against landlord and authority, could be relied upon as a fighting force for the state. This contemporary account should be contrasted with Brunello Vigizzi's speculation on grassroots peasant opinion, “Italian Socialism and the First World War: Mussolini, Lazzari and Turati,” *Journal of Italian History*, 2 (1979), pp. 253-54.

118 Gerardo Turi, “Denunziamo il militarismo,” *Avanguardia*, 18 Apr. 1915. See his critique of Turati, Treves and other PSI leaders in *Avanguardia*, 7 and 21 Feb. 1915.

119 Gerardo Turi in unpublished speech to be delivered at congress, *Avanguardia*, 8 May 1915.

representing the leadership, weighed in and asked the FGSI to forego an independent course of action. The resolution finally adopted merely “recommended” that the party agree to a “general strike” as the “most effective sign” of a “disassociation between the bourgeoisie and proletariat” and promised that the FGSI would co-ordinate its actions with the PSI<sup>120</sup>.

A few days later, on 16 May, representatives of the CGL, the party leadership, the parliamentary group, local PSI sections and provincial federations gathered in Bologna at an extraordinary meeting called by the party secretary. Bordiga, attending as representative of Naples, has left the only complete record of proceedings. A few days after Italy's entry into the war, he bitterly informed readers of *Il Socialista* that the socialist deputies had totally dominated discussions. Rather than sending three delegates as requested, they arrived *en masse*. Saying there was now no hope in averting intervention, they strongly advised again the general strike. According to Bordiga, the CGL attempted even to withdraw its promise of a 24-hour strike. Convinced that the party's rank-and-file would have backed the strike, Bordiga felt that representatives of the local sections either were “so overwhelmed by the deputies” or were themselves “so unreflective of the general will” that they capitulated, ending all hope of a crippling action. The resolution simply restated the PSI's opposition to intervention, said socialists would oppose war credits, and would sponsor antiwar rallies on 19 May that would be marked by their “discipline, dignity and power.” The CGL “recommended” a symbolic twenty-four hour strike to their locals. Bordiga told his readers the meeting proved the need for detaching the influence of parliamentarism and labourism from the Party.”<sup>121</sup> Those party leaders who stated that socialists should “do their duty” on the home front once the government had committed to the war merely justified the accusations of “inertia” and “cowardice” Mussolini had levelled at the socialist party, Bordiga wrote bitterly in *Avanti!* on the 23rd. There were just two choices for party members: either social-patriotism or a new International<sup>122</sup>.

Although in some cities such as Turin there were clashes with pro-interventionists, these actions were mostly symbolic. Even Bordiga, whose analysis paralleled Lenin's in many ways, had earlier argued that “a revolutionary attempt will always have greater possibility of success in time of peace than on the eve of war.”<sup>123</sup> Talk of insurrection proved to be mostly brave talk covering up a more deeply felt pessimism. Most young socialists would submit to the draft. Some would be marked in the files of the ministry of the interior as “defeatists”; some would serve time in military prisons; a few would defect to Switzerland; many would die. Neither Amedeo Catanesi nor Gerardo Turi, local leaders at the 1915 conference, survived the war, for example<sup>124</sup>. But those who did came back prepared to wrest control from the older, failed leadership.

The Great War became a great divide separating socialist generations. While it would be Bordiga, with his penchant for organization and network of ties extending already in 1915 outside the south, who would be best prepared to take on the old PSI leadership at the war's end, it would be the little group of intellectuals from Turin who would rework the intellectual foundations of socialism. Even as the first troops prepared to depart for the front, the Piedmontese young socialists issued a

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120 *Il Socialista*, 15 May 1915.

121 [A. Bordiga] editorial, *Il Socialista*, 22 May 1915.

122 A.B., “Il Fatto compiuto,” *Avanti!*, 23 May 1915. The reference was to Turati who had promised in the Chamber of Deputies that socialists would be in the front lines of the humanitarian effort.

123 “Il socialismo di ieri . . .,” *Avanguardia*, 1 Nov. 1914.

124 *Avanguardia* carried names of leaders who had “fallen” during the war. The search for “defeatists” by the Ministry of Interior after Caporetto reveals names of some local young socialist leaders from the pre-war. The poignant story of Turi's death is told by his former comrades in an early issue of *Il Soviet*, 22 Dec. 1918.

manifesto on 24 May 1915 that looked forward to the creation of a New Order: “Before the crumbling of the world of old, we want to create a reign of youth.”<sup>125</sup> Finding a positive programme would prove an arduous and tortured journey.

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125 “Appello ai Giovani,” *Il Grido del Popolo*, 23 May 1915.