

the italian anarchist press in australia between the wars

by david faber

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One of the practices brought to Australia by antifascist émigrés in the first decade of the regime was that of publishing political newspapers. These publications had long precedents in Italy, since the days of the bifurcation of the original internationalism of Marx and Bakunin into socialist and populist anarchist streams.¹ In Australia and elsewhere, this tradition was largely carried on by anarchists in exile, in ways that reflected the proletarian character of a migration which included tradesmen rather than professionals, and activists with remarkable initiative rather than career intellectuals. Nevertheless, journalistic standards and the quality of production were respectable. The chronology of these publications in Australia has been recorded by Bettini and Cresciani, the latter having moreover sketched their general character and sustaining infrastructure.² It seems appropriate to recapitulate this information adding a few remarks on the merits and limitations of this antipodean literature. These publications were among the first fruits of the efforts of the *fuorusciti* [émigrés] to propagate resistance to fascism in the Italian diaspora in Australia and to contribute to the labour movement here. They also have a place in the history of the Italian language in this country.

The brief flourishing and decline of the Italian antifascist press in Australia was essentially a function of the degree of organisation the anarchists and their fellow travellers were able to sustain in none too favourable political and economic conditions. Between 1923 and 1929, when Italian immigration to Australia began to pick up pace, Stanley Melbourne Bruce was Nationalist Prime Minister and the temper of the country was conservative in the wake of the Great War, as it was fascist in Italy. Bruce sought to manage 'men, money and markets'

within the framework of the British Empire in an export driven, low wage economy. He stigmatised opposition as animated by alien doctrines disseminated by foreign agitators.³ Bruce, characterised by the Italian antifascists as a man who aped Mussolini and was 'the faithful servant of the British shipping magnates and industrialists', ultimately fell and lost his seat meddling in the labour market (like Prime Minister Howard after him).⁴ Thereafter, the Depression ushered in a decade of external alarms culminating in another World War. The Italian antifascists in Australia struggled with these conditions as did the national and international labour movement; their analysis took specific notice of Australian circumstances, both historical and contemporary. Almost from its inception in June 1930 *L'Avanguardia Libertaria* published an earnest, detailed and long running feature series by H. Payne on Australian history.⁵ Again, in September 1930, *L'Avanguardia Libertaria* noted that the Scullin government was called upon to answer for the errors of past administrations, adding that:

"[i]f there is a criticism that can be made of the current government ... it is that of a downright political subservience to England, an aspect which finds its

¹ See Bettini, L. (ed.) 1972, *Bibliografia dell'anarchismo*, Crescita Politica Editrice, Firenze, Vol. I, Tomo I for metropolitan Italian periodicals and single issue newspapers, 1872-1971.

² See Bettini, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Tomo II, pp. 29-32 and Cresciani, G., 'Refractory Migrants. Fascist Surveillance on Italians in Australia 1922-43', *Italian Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 15, 2007, p. 15; and 'The Proletarian Migrants: Fascism and Italian Migrants in Australia', *The Australian Quarterly*, Vol. 51, no. 1, March 1979.

³ See Radi, H., particularly pp. 397-400 and Chapter 9 generally in Crowley, F. (ed.) 1974, *A New History of Australia*, Heinemann, Melbourne.

⁴ For Isidoro Bertazzon's fascinating, extended analysis of the industrial and political issues raised by the November 1928 Commonwealth elections, see the translation entitled *VICTORY?*, now in National Archives of Australia, A367 C18220, of the article originally published in Italian in *Il Risveglio*, October 1929. Bertazzon called for Bruce to be turned out of his seat 'by means ... more effectual than a ballot' and predicted a solution to the political situation in the disappearance of government.

⁵ These 'profiles' looked at the history of Australian settlement with specific reference to land and labour policy (noting the strictures of Marx on the Wakefield scheme), democracy in the age of gold and the Eureka incident, Federation, the Harvester judgement and Trade Unionism, and defended the White Australia policy on economic grounds. Aborigines were dismissed as a dying race. The series ran from 1 August 1930 to 5 June 1931 and for all its flaws represented a serious brief introduction for Italians to a contemporary historical understanding of the Australian experience.

consecration in the almost daily repetition of the promise to scrupulously pay down war debt, a sad heritage which weighs on the population like a permanent menace. This is the darkest cloud obscuring the Australian horizon.”⁶

Cresciani credits the agitation in defence of Sacco and Vanzetti (1921-27) with being the crucible out of which anarchist elements coalesced to give organisation and a voice to Italian antifascist sentiment in Australia. There is undoubtedly much truth in this. Certainly both the first and second anniversaries of the execution of the two Italian American anarchists were observed in August 1928 and 1929 by the publication of the single issue broadsheets *Il Calvario* and *In Memoria*. Moreover, the issue of their judicial murder continued to be revisited throughout the short life of the Italian antifascist press in Australia.⁷ But equally, along with the escalation of tensions as the fascist regime in Italy was consolidated into a police state, the incitement of political and industrial strife in the antipodes by the Nationalist Party played its part in exciting the internationalism of Italian antifascists in Australia.

At any rate, the spark which caught the imagination of a generation of over two hundred and fifty Italoophone labour activists in Australia was struck, as Cresciani has also emphasised, by a handful of activists from the Veneto, bound by ties of class and regional culture.

Even affinity based on the *comune* of origin was important. Five names recur as the most important, all from the Veneto alpine fringe, for long centuries a homeland of mass migration both temporary and permanent, leavened by the political exodus of heretics both religious and secular⁸. One is Isidoro Bertazzon from the province of Treviso, who was to find his vocation as a self taught journalist. Another was Valentino Ciotti from the province of Belluno, a long standing activist and editor. Three hailed from the Schio district of the province of Vicenza, one of the many rural crucibles of Veneto capitalism, the particular domain of the Rossi wool industrialists’ dynasty. They were the

⁶ *L’Avanguardia Libertaria*, 1 September 1930

⁷ See for example the denunciation of Judge Thayer from the dock, republished in *Il Risveglio*, no. 2, 1 August 1927 in the original Italian and in translation, now in NAA A432 1929/578 Part 4.

⁸ For the survey of these themes in the contemporary era see Franzina, E. (ed.) 1983, *Un altro Veneto: saggi e studi di storia dell’emigrazione nei secoli XIX e XX*, Francisci editore, Abano Terme (Padova). More broadly for the modern era see also per index at ‘emigrazione’ Lanaro, S. (ed.) 1984, *Il Veneto*, Einaudi, Torino. For an analysis of the regional and other characteristics of the émigrés to Australia monitored by the DGPS [Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza], see the appendices to Cresciani, ‘Refractory Migrants...’, as above.. From my analysis of the 1932 ‘List of Co-nationals Most Known for their Communist Views’, found in the files of leading antifascists such as Fantin and Baratto (cited by Cresciani on page 16), it is clear that some of the persons mentioned in the files did not have dossiers of their own. Thus the estimate of activists must somewhat exceed the number of dossiers cited by Cresciani, and the circle of sympathisers must have numbered a few hundred more.

anarchists Francesco Giuseppe Carmagnola and Francesco Giovanni Fantin, both from the village of San Vito di Leguzzano, and the communist Giovanni Terribile Antico from Piovene.



Fig. 1 Canecutters working on a sugar cane plantation in Northern Queensland. The group includes Francesco Fantin, c.1925

These men and their peers not only spoke one another’s language; they spoke one another’s dialects. From time to time they looked over their shoulders at Veneto affairs.⁹ Theirs was a fellowship of youth, of class, of culture, of philosophy, of like-mindedness and mutual support conceived in adversity to outbrave the world of penury and exile they were born into. Their saga remains one to conjure with for those who admire the fight of the underdog everywhere.

From all accounts Francesco Carmagnola was a leading light among the Italian anarchists in Australia. But he was only ever eminent among equals given his extrovert personality and ability to turn his hand by turns to organising, editing and writing something more than mere diatribe. In Sydney in late 1926, Carmagnola in conjunction with Antico established an active *Lega Antifascista* counting some three hundred members. The given name Terribile suggests that Antico was the son of leftist parents. Be that as it may, by 1927 he was secretary of the Italian section of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). His working relationship with Carmagnola must have been very interesting, given that the latter was a good follower of Bakunin in regarding the admirers of Marx as inherently authoritarian, and was accordingly known from time to time to refer to them acerbically as ‘red fascists’.¹⁰

⁹ For one example see *L’Avanguardia Libertaria*, 15 August 1930 ‘**From the Veneto**’ Padova. This year the Annual Fair was even more miserable than last year. At Vicenza almost all the shops in the Corso are closed. The grand caffè Garibaldi in Piazza dei Signori has also closed. The city bears the aspect of the worst months of the War.’ In the very first issue of the paper on 14 June 1930 Bertazzon published news of fascist relocation of Vicentine peasants to Sardinia.

¹⁰ Cresciani, ‘The Proletarian Migrants...’, as above p. 8. Nevertheless, Carmagnola’s discrete pragmatic links with the CPA were long term and extensive in Sydney, Melbourne and North Queensland (as were Bertazzon’s in the Victorian capital, as the CIB [Criminal Investigation Branch] was well aware: see CIB – Secretary, PM’s Dept., 17 February

Nevertheless, they worked in tandem, and their association gave birth to the first Italian antifascist publication in Australia, *// Risveglio* [The Awakening], which was published, despite its decidedly anarchist character, by the CPA as an antifascist initiative. The Rome Directorate General of Public Security [*Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza*] (DGPS) maintained political surveillance on the Italian community in Australia, especially after its reorganisation in 1927 under the Unified Text of Public Security Law [Testo Unico delle Leggi di Pubblica Sicurezza] (TULPS).¹¹ It noted that over the years Antico contributed copy to the antifascist press under the signature GA, which created headaches for his politically antagonistic brother Giuseppe and sister in law.¹²



Fig. 2 Studio photograph of three friends, possibly members of the Matteotti Club, an anti-Fascist organisation. Included are Isidoro Bertazzon and Mr Tarandin. Bertazzon, with Francesco Carmagnola, were co-founders of the Matteotti Club, c1927.

The foundation under anarchist leadership of the Matteotti Club in Melbourne in 1927 was likewise an expression of this astute political vision of antifascist unity. This was embodied in the very name of the club. Among other reminders of his sacrifice published at various times, portraits of Matteotti were

1931, NAA A367 C1822R). Even-handedly, Carmagnola dismissed laborites as ‘caffelatte socialists’. Bertazzon endorsed the view of Gaetano Panizzon that laborism and bolshevism were heresies of state power in *L’Avanguardia Libertaria*, 15 August 1930, describing Stalin as ‘the dictator of dictators of all the Russias’ on 1 December 1930.

¹¹ For a discussion of the ‘politics of assassination’ of late 1926, when multiple attempts were made on the life of Mussolini, see the article by Lussu in *L’Avanguardia Libertaria*, 1 November 1930 and the articles on the fascist Special Court [Tribunale Speciale per la Difesa dello Stato] in the issues of 15 November and 1 December. The implicit criticism of anarchism by Lussu was so discrete as to go unnoticed.

¹² Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Roma, MI DGPS CPC J-5 1939, Antico Giovanni Terribile. [The J-5 sub-series was reserved primarily for émigrés who had naturalised in their host countries.]

recurrently advertised for sale in the Club press. On 20 June 1930, the fifth anniversary of his assassination was observed by Carmagnola with the publication of a special commemorative edition of *La Riscossa* [The Counterattack]. References to him were as ubiquitous in the Italian antifascist press in Australia as to Sacco and Vanzetti. In life, Giacomo Matteotti was a reformist socialist faction leader, the political secretary of the ironically named Partito Socialista Unitario, one of many expressions of socialist disunity. In death, after his assassination by Mussolini’s henchmen acting at Il Duce’s suggestion in 1924, his figure, implicitly antithetical to anarchism, became that of the quintessential antifascist martyr above any factional quibble. As such, Matteotti was the very emblem of resistance to the bloody fascist subversion of constitutional and parliamentary order. In naming the club after him, the Italian anarchists in Australia were not only denouncing fascist atrocities. They were also declaring a commitment to antifascist solidarity and a degree of political sophistication such as would move the communist Gramsci, himself the most illustrious political prisoner of fascism, to aim at the resurgence of democracy as opposed to a proletarian dictatorship.¹³ This theme was specifically taken up in the club’s single issue publication *Germinal* of July 1929 in the leading article ‘Per un’azione antifascista’, signed ‘Lux’.

It is worth emphasising the role of F.G. Fantin in all this, not only because he has been unjustly regarded by Nursey-Bray as a lesser figure than Carmagnola, but also because he may be taken as emblematic of the dozens of rank and file supporters of the Italian anarchist press in Australia.¹⁴ Fantin’s name does not appear explicitly in the columns of the anarchist press as a contributor of copy. We do not know if he used a pseudonym. He does appear once as an industrial orator.¹⁵ He figures primarily as a donor, fundraiser and distributor. Fantin arrived in Melbourne from Italy in late 1924, bringing up the rear of a group of industrial militants victimised after the failure of the 1921 textile strike in the Schio district of the province of Vicenza. Prominent among them was Fantin’s mentor, the anarchist Gaetano Panizzon. The Panizzon connection involved the youthful Fantin in paramilitary activities including the supply, witting or unwitting, of the explosives used in the largest anarchist terrorist outrage in Italian history, the Diana Theatre massacre of March 1921.¹⁶ Fantin had been detained by military service and a romantic affair, which ended in a brief, failed marriage, from initially joining family and comrades in Australia.¹⁷

¹³ Davidson, A. 1977, *Antonio Gramsci*, Merlin Press, London, p. 250.

¹⁴ See his ‘Anti-Fascism and Internment: the Case of Francesco Fantin’, *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, no. 17, 1989, p. 88.

¹⁵ *L’Avanguardia Libertaria*, 1 April 1931.

¹⁶ The connection of Panizzon with this atrocity emerges clearly from Mariani, G. 1953, *Memorie di un ex-terrorista*, Self published, Torino, pp. 35-36. Panizzon’s involvement in the supply is certain; what is uncertain is whether he was aware of the terrorist purposes of the ringleaders, Mariani and Boldrini.

¹⁷ This profile, based on my own primary research conducted in 1985-1988, is broadly confirmed by Venturini, V.G. 2007, *Never Give In*, SEARCH Foundation, Sydney, pp. 97-103.

The second number of *Il Risveglio* of August 1927 records in its subscription list the donation of a pound each by Fantin and Panizzon. Along with Carmagnola, Bertazzon and others, Fantin figures upholding the club banner in the famous group photo of the Matteotti Club taken in Melbourne on May Day 1928. By 1930, Fantin was known to the Townsville Consulate as an inveterate antifascist propagandist and ‘a distributor of subversive flyers and newspapers of diverse origins.’¹⁸ Australian intelligence sources described him at the end of the decade on the basis of local police and community knowledge as an avid reader of anarchist literature.¹⁹ Among the few possessions confiscated upon his internment in 1942 was, for example, *Dio non esiste* [God Does Not Exist], a pamphlet by the French anarchist Sébastien Faure offering a dozen well argued proofs of the non existence of God.²⁰ (Anticlerical pieces were regularly published by the antifascist press.²¹ This did not prevent the citation, with legitimate opportunism, of a christian populist like Tolstoy on ‘the rationality of anarchism’.²² In a rhetorical trope common to the Italian left, the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti was compared to ‘the crucifixion on Golgotha.’²³) Also seized were copies of *L’Adunata dei Refrattari* [The Gathering of Dissenters] to which Fantin was a subscriber. This American publication was the successor to *La Cronaca Sovversiva* [Subversive Chronicle], edited by the violent Italian American anarchist Luigi Galleani, a proponent of ‘direct action’, and was, so Australian intelligence believed, the most diffused anarchist publication in Australia prior to World War II.²⁴

During the war, in an effort to have Fantin released from internment, Carmagnola made representations to the Australian authorities vouching that Fantin was a ‘correspondent’ and ‘distributor’ of *La Riscossa*.²⁵ Perhaps Carmagnola was gilding the lily a little on Fantin’s behalf. Nonetheless, he certainly stated that Fantin ‘assisted him in the publication’ of *La Riscossa* in the course of a deposition to the NSW Branch of the Security Service in which he identified Fantin and Valentino Ciotti as co-founders, with himself, of the

Matteotti Club.²⁶ At any rate, *La Riscossa* does not feature a single by-line by Fantin. By contrast, Fantin’s recurrent donations from the cane fields and Geelong to *L’Avanguardia Libertaria*, regularly reported in its subscription column, emphasise his enduring relationship with Bertazzon after the split between Bertazzon and Carmagnola destroyed the Matteotti Club in 1930, well before it was formally wound up in 1933.²⁷ Fantin maintained good relations with both sides in the dispute, leading Chiara Bertazzon in 1941 to marvel at his ‘inseparability’ from Carmagnola.²⁸ Indeed Fantin may have been a key individual in linking the diverse and even antagonistic anarchist networks in some form of tenuous communication after 1930. The DGPS files of Fantin and Carmagnola, who are known to have been friends and comrades since their youth, are linked through the elder brother of the former, Luigi Francesco Fantin, who had accompanied Carmagnola to Australia in 1922.²⁹

Fantin’s own file linked him with Cesare De Luca and Giovanni Epifanio, two more *schedati* [people monitored by the police] known to the DGPS. More importantly, it linked him, as does photographic evidence, with Costante Danesi of Innisfail, who, with his astute brother Luigi, was the force behind the Mourilyan Italian Progressive Club and the resistance to British Preference in the cane fields, which led on to the Weil’s Disease strikes lead by Carmagnola with communist assistance.³⁰ Oral tradition has it that Fantin was an associate of Carmagnola in these endeavours also.³¹ Another associate of Carmagnola, and thus of Fantin, was Ernesto Baratto, the hero of North Queensland’s passionate involvement with the Spanish Civil

¹⁸ See Consolato Townsville – Prefetto Vicenza, 14 May 1930, ACS Roma, MI DGPS CPC b1948 Fantin Francesco Giovanni.

¹⁹ Edmonton Station Cairns District – CIB Brisbane, 15 December 1939, in NAA BP242/1 Q30084.

²⁰ CIB receipt, 23 April 1946, in NAA BP242/1 Q30084.

²¹ See for example ‘The Church: Its False Morality and Iniquitous Actions’ in *Germinal*, July 1929. In *La Riscossa*, 1 October 1930, R. Pastega from Broken Hill lamented the pragmatic accommodation of comrades with the Church when it came to marriage. Many other articles could be cited.

²² *Germinal*, July 1929.

²³ *L’Avanguardia Libertaria*, 1 September 1930.

²⁴ Security Service Brisbane, FANTIN BROS, 14 July 1942, in NAA BP242/1 Q30084. For Galleani and *La Cronaca Sovversiva* see Avrich, P. 1991, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, passim.

²⁵ F. Carmagnola – Commandant Camp14A, Loveday, 10 September 1942, in NAA BP242/1 Q30084.

²⁶ Security Service Canberra – Brisbane, 18 November 1942, in NAA BP242/1 Q30084.

²⁷ Cresciani, ‘The Proletarian Migrants...’ as above, p. 12.

²⁸ C. Bertazzon – F. Fantin, 12 November 1941, in NAA BP242/1 Q30084.

²⁹ ACS Roma, MI DGPS J-5 1939 b69: Carmagnola, Francesco Giuseppe. Note that Carmagnola began spelling his name with an ‘a’ rather than an ‘i’ after his arrival in Australia, either because of a mistake which had occurred in official documents or because of the prestigious historical and literary associations with the name Carmagnola. The original Carmagnola, a tragic figure, was a condottiere in the service of Venice, celebrated among others by the 19th century poet and novelist Alessandro Manzoni. For the dossier of Luigi Francesco Fantin, originally one with that of Francesco Giovanni Fantin due to the police confusing the brothers’ identity, see ACS Roma, MI DGPS J-5 b119.

³⁰ These connections are confirmed by various documents in ACS Roma, MI DGPS CPC b1948, Fantin Francesco Giovanni. For references to the Danesi brothers see Douglass, W.A. 1985, *From Italy to Ingham*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia (Queensland), passim. For photographic evidence of their connection with Fantin see *Australia’s Italians 1788-1988: A Bicentennial Exhibition*, Italian Historical Society, Carlton (Victoria), 1988, p. 80, where Fantin can be seen on the balcony of the Mourilyan Italian Progressive Club wearing a bow tie. For industrial action in the cane fields, see Menghetti D. ‘The Weil’s Disease Strike 1935’ in Murphy, D. (ed.) 1983, *The Big Strikes*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia (Queensland).

³¹ As reported to me by F. Cavadini on 19 February 1985.

War.³² After Fantin's martyrdom, his comrades remembered him as, among other things, a fundraiser for the Republican cause.³³ Altogether Fantin does seem to have had a substantial, if modest, role in the production and dissemination of Italian anarchist literature in Australia, such that Australian intelligence rated him a leading promoter of anarchism in the Italian community in Australia.³⁴ All this refutes the Nursey-Bray thesis that he was an altogether negligible figure in comparison to Carmagnola. Fantin died as an anarchist martyr in November 1942, after having been interned due to confusion of identity with his 'anti-British' elder brother Luigi, who had transferred his allegiance to the regime. Francesco Fantin was assassinated in Loveday Internment Group Compound 14A with a blunt instrument wielded by a fellow internee acting for fascist conspirators who objected to his determined role in the struggle for the hearts and minds of internees, which was being waged as the war approached its climax for Italians.³⁵

Fantin's role as a distributor of the anarchist press reminds us that apart from publishing and distributing its own productions, the Matteotti Club also acted as a clearing house for the import and dissemination of the anarchist press from the Italian antifascist diaspora overseas.³⁶ It is clear that the Italian anarchists in Australia drew much inspiration and material from the fraternal press abroad. As early as August 1927, *Il Risveglio* was recycling such standbys as a Max Nordau piece on 'Free Love', damning the 'good matches' of bourgeois matrimony as prostitution. This, like their antidericalism, will have antagonised conservative opinion in the Italian community. There were limits to anarchist willingness to cultivate the middle ground. In March 1928, the Melbourne Customs and Excise Office forwarded to the Melbourne Investigation Branch of the Attorney General's Department a copy of *Il Monito* [The

Admonition], an Italian anarchist weekly published in Paris, for advice as to whether it 'should be regarded as [a] prohibited import...'. The publication had been intercepted addressed to 'Bertazzon Isidoro, 131 Station Street, Carlton.' The Melbourne CIB replied late that month detailing the contents of the publication. Amongst miscellaneous news and administrative items were featured articles on the Matteotti affair, the Sacco and Vanzetti case, pacifism and feminism. The CIB appended a translation of the editorial 'Anarchist Problems', a long sermon against factional tensions amongst 'revolutionary anarchists, be they communists or individualists, organisers or anti-organisers...' in the name of 'the revolt of the oppressed against the authority of the State, of Capitalism, of Morality, of Religion...'. At first the Investigation Branch offered the surprisingly favourable opinion that 'none of the articles contain any direct reference to subversive propaganda and no reference to the Commonwealth appears.'³⁷ This benign view did not long remain the CIB line. By February 1932, with the return of the conservatives to power in Canberra under Lyons at the December 1931 elections, the Italian Consul General at Sydney applied to Attorney General Latham for the suppression of Carmagnola's *La Riscossa* and Bertazzon's *L'Avanguardia Libertaria*. They were denounced for stirring up the Italian community in Australia and being inimical to both governments 'and, in fact, all forms of recognised government.'³⁸ Even in February 1931, before the change of government, CIB Director Jones had advised the Prime Minister's Department that 'it is highly undesirable to permit foreigners to spread subversive propaganda amongst their own people, who aren't in a position to judge for themselves.'³⁹

³² On the figure of Baratto and the participation of immigrant communities in North Queensland in the controversy over the war, see Menghetti D., 1981, *The Red North*, James Cook University of North Queensland, Townsville (Queensland), especially Chapter 4. For the Italian secret police dossier on Baratto see ACS Roma, MI DGPS CPC b313.

³³ See obverse of memorial card reproduced in Faber, D. *F.G. Fantin*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Adelaide 2007, p. 340, originally displayed in the exhibition *Francesco Fantin: Myth & Reality*, FILEF, Adelaide, May 1989. Note that this memento also compared the martyrdom of Fantin with that of Christ, a leftist motif noted above regarding Sacco and Vanzetti. The commemorative publication *Il Calvario* obviously started from the same motif.

³⁴ Security Service Brisbane FANTIN BROS₂, 14 July 1942, in NAA BP242/1 Q30084.

³⁵ For the Adelaide CIB report to this effect see State Records SA GRG. 5/46/1942/14757, now in *Nuovo Paese*, July 2000, p. 6.

³⁶ See Cresciani, 'Proletarian Migrants...', as above, pp. 9-10 on the range of publications imported by the Matteotti Club, and on the practice of republishing articles from the international anarchist press. Italian editions of classic works such as Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* featured in recurrent offerings of books often at very discounted prices, for example in *L'Avanguardia Libertaria*. In the issue of 15 August 1930, Gaetano Panizzon commended 'good Luigi', a reformist socialist in Italy who became an anarchist in Australia through reading great libertarian writers.



Fig. 3 A meeting of the Italian Anarchist Movement in Venice, Italy. Included in the photograph is Isidoro Bertazzon, c.1920.

As we have seen, from the beginning the Italian antifascists concerned themselves not only with the situation in Italy,⁴⁰ but also with the situation of the Italian community in Australia.

³⁷ CIB Melbourne – Collector Customs Melbourne 29 March 1928, in NAA MP707/1 V4764.

³⁸ Consul General Italy – Post Master General, 8 February 1932, in NAA A367 C1822R.

³⁹ CIB – Secretary Prime Minister's Dept., 17 February 1931, in NAA A367 C1822R.

⁴⁰ For example in the issue of *La Riscossa* of 1 October 1930.

Every effort was made to link the two realities. For example, on 15 August 1931, Bertazzon noted the success in Melbourne of the film *All Quiet on the Western Front* in connection with the banning of the book in Italy because its 'disenchanted pacifism ... disturbed the warlike dreams of a fascism breathless to maintain in the Italian people an artificially bellicose spirit.' The ban was out of line with even backward nations and their dictatorships, and was a doleful effect of the 'Jesuitical' tutelage consecrated by the Lateran Pact.⁴¹

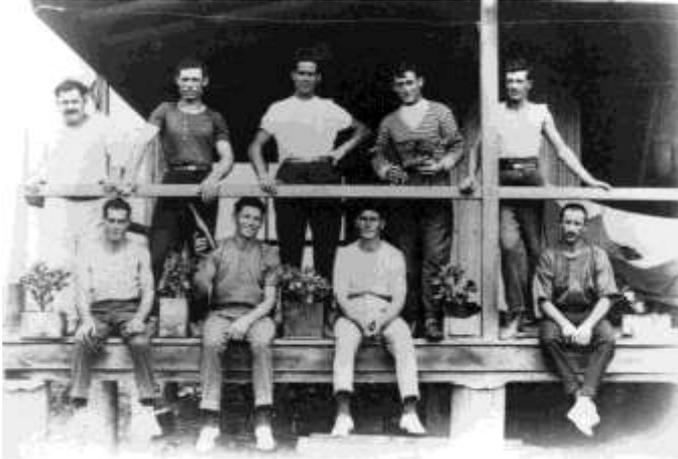


Fig. 4 Cane cutters relaxing on the verandah of their barracks after a day's work on a sugar cane plantation in Northern Queensland, c.1927.

Carmagnola was early engaged in the industrial and social situation of the most numerous Italian colony in the continent between the wars, that of North Queensland, cutting cane there soon after his arrival in Australia in May 1922⁴² and discussing its circumstances in typically trenchant style. In the leading article of issue number 2 of August 1927 of *Il Risveglio*, Carmagnola addressed himself to the 'Workers of Queensland' in the name of an Italian antifascism striking antipodean roots, mindful that 'only those united in struggle with the exploited of the fatherland will be able to suppress the master class.' Carmagnola frankly discussed the ill feeling subsisting between Italian and Australian workers in the cane fields, attributing responsibility equally to both sides due to the 'stupid racial hatred ... inculcated ... through faulty education, purposely so as to divide [those who] ... should be united against the common capitalist enemy...'. He lamented what he saw as the lack of class consciousness amongst many Italian immigrants, which made them hard to organise and loathe 'to unite with Australian workers in the struggle against capitalism.'⁴³ Driving home his point Carmagnola asked:

"Why are we Italians looked upon so favourably by employers all over the world? Because we are ignorant

and because we allow ourselves to be exploited more than others. To work then. Oh! Comrade workers of North Queensland! Let us destroy in ourselves that brutal egoism which renders us slaves to ourselves. Let us free ourselves of prejudices and superstitions and let us unite ourselves with the Australian workers in the struggle against the masters who oppress and exploit us. Let us remember the words of that great one [Marx] who said that the emancipation of the proletariat cannot but be the work of the workers themselves."

Carmagnola clearly set out to criticise not only the regime in Italy, but also what he saw as the social and political shortcomings of the Italian diaspora in Australia. He sought, moreover, to intervene in North Queensland personally. When in February 1932 Carmagnola was defended with characteristic perspicacity and energy by the communist lawyer Fred Paterson on a charge of having assaulted the Townsville Vice Consul, the CIB noted that Carmagnola had in his campaigning made able use of flyers to advertise his efforts against the regime in the north. A circular dated 5 December 1931 had announced boldly:

"We have amongst us these several weeks comrade F. Carmagnola. Our comrade came to North Queensland to organise and to incite the anti-fascists to persevere in the struggle against the bloody regime which starves and enslaves the Italian workers."⁴⁴

It is clear that the efforts of Carmagnola and comrades in North Queensland were not without effect. On 10 February of that year, A. Noselli reported that *La Riscossa* was ever more widely read by workers in North Queensland. Nonetheless, the paper's finances remained parlous in September.⁴⁵

The single issue publications, each proudly bearing the legend 'published by I. Bertazzon for the Matteotti Committee, Victoria Street, Melbourne, Victoria', demonstrated the intention of the Club to publish commemorative series monthly under different mastheads, so as to circumvent the ban which had quashed *Il Risveglio* after its third issue. Between the two commemorative issues devoted primarily to the commemoration of the sacrifice of Sacco and Vanzetti, *L'Azione* [Action] was published in September 1928, commemorating the second anniversary of the attempted assassination of Mussolini by the Carraran anarchist Gino Lucetti. *L'Azione* outlined Lucetti's life and exalted 'the propaganda of the deed' of this avenger from the antifascist diaspora in France, implicitly encouraging emulation even from the antipodes.⁴⁶ The marble quarries of Carrara in Tuscany were one of the ancestral homelands of Italian

⁴¹ *L'Avanguardia Libertaria*, 15 August 1930.

⁴² Cresciani, 'Proletarian Migrants...' as above, p. 5.

⁴³ Bertazzon also criticised fascist efforts to entice Italian workers to conspire with local capitalists, to undercut union rates and to strike-break (in *L'Avanguardia Libertaria* of 1 October 1930). In *L'Avanguardia* of 1 April 1931 Francesco Fantin denounced consular interference in North Queensland labour disputes.

⁴⁴ See *La Riscossa*, 15 March 1932, in NAA A367 C1822R. The costs for Carmagnola's defence were £ 143 10s 6d, of which £ 80 19s 6d had been raised at publication, with £ 19 9s 11d being raised at an Ingham dinner dance.

⁴⁵ *La Riscossa*, 20 September 1931.

⁴⁶ Santarelli, E. 1967, *Storia del fascismo*, Editori Riuniti, Roma, Vol. II, p. 23.

anarchism. The profound radicalisation of anarchism in such relatively insular mining and industrial communities as Carrara and Schio was mirrored in Australia in such working class citadels as Broken Hill, Wonthaggi, Queenstown and Geelong.⁴⁷ Partly because of this and 'the idea's' own unhistorical logic, it never occurred to the anarchists that there was an inherent limit to the appeal of a politics of duty which exalted the personal sacrifice of life and happiness in dramatic gestures sometimes encompassing violence and the perpetrators' own deaths. Perhaps however, the most significant item in *L'Azione* was the advertisement published at the foot of the internal pages 2 and 3, which referred to the fundraising intentions of the Club:

"The evening of 6 October next, 8pm to midnight, the Club Matteotti will give a grand ball at the Oddfellows Hall, in Latrobe Street between Exhibition and Russell Street. There will be a choice orchestra directed by the well known musician P. Piccinini."

This demonstrated fiscal ambition and social adroitness well beyond that of the convivial improvised evenings when the Club had danced against fascism to the tune of a single accordion.⁴⁸ It was as well that the antifascists were inventive, as their press 'lived on voluntary contributions', hand to mouth as it were, as the masthead of *Germinal* declared in July 1929. This was usual with the anarchist press internationally.

Nonetheless, the vitality of Italian anarchist activism in Australia, far outstripping the native strain, was from first to last hamstrung by the static nature of anarchist ideology. Questions of right were confounded with issues of means and opportunity. On 15 December 1930, Bertazzon published in *L'Avanguardia Libertaria* 'The Problem of Action', an exhortation to armed struggle in general terms. 'The enchained people', it was alleged, 'demand nothing better than to follow the example of the promoters of revolt and the ponderous march towards liberty.' The article reiterated:

"Action command our dead, massacred by fascism.
Action request the trembling victims in the infamous penitentiaries of the peninsula.
Action hope the masses without hesitation **at once**."

In the following issue of 10 January 1931, Bertazzon offered the sanguine materialist opinion that 'the opposition is convinced of the imminent end of the fascist regime given its present financial difficulties.' In fact, fascist chauvinism would have to embroil Italy in another world war before any such weaknesses of the regime could be brought to book, and then it would be the communists, not the anarchists, who would be to the fore leading the Resistance.

As the sermonizing of *Il Monito* underlined, anarchism is structurally given to factionalism. The prime expression of this

⁴⁷ See for example the subscription lists of *L'Avanguardia Libertaria*.

⁴⁸ Cresciani, G. 'Proletarian Migrants...' as above, p. 7.

in the Italian Australian antifascist panorama was the implosion of the initially successful Matteotti Club and the subsequent publication of *La Riscossa* by Carmagnola and *L'Avanguardia Libertaria* by Bertazzon in competition with one another in 1930. The terms of the disputation in their columns, above and beyond the reciprocal accusations of financial impropriety, are obscure, but in any case their general themes were so complementary that the CIB thought they were 'one in reality and the second name used to alternate its appearance'.⁴⁹ In any event, it was Bertazzon who published the most eloquent program for the Italian anarchist émigrés in Australia.

"We are in Australia many thousands of Italians more or less violently torn from our affections and habitual work and thrown into the vortex of a new life to seek our bread. Many hundreds of us have carried here the fire of passion, vowing to recross the ocean at the first sign of resurgence, not because of the call of the fatherland, but because there ... we know we may most profitably resume our struggle... But exile for us cannot only be a matter of hoping and waiting... We cannot be absent from the post our faith assigns..."⁵⁰

As dissension and the Depression crippled the anarchist press in Australia, antifascism began its evolution from a form of expatriate resistance, drawing on transplanted traditions and marginal internationalist sentiment in the host community to a more broadly based denunciation of a looming international menace. With a return internationally to the policy of the united front on the left, there was less scope for a specifically anarchist press and greater pressure to address world events in a more widely accessible idiom and in a more organised way. The communist movement was better equipped to do, as exemplified in the Australian chapter of the International Movement Against War And Fascism. Anarchist identity, as seen therein and in the careers of Carmagnola and Fantin, became subsumed in the antifascist front. For all its antifascist merit and felicitous heterodoxy, for all the vibrant individual initiative and independent thought it incarnated, the limits of the Italian anarchist press in Australia faithfully represented the limits of anarchism itself, ineffectual and factious, sectarian and minoritarian in its extremism. Even a century ago, anarchism was a transitional phenomenon bespeaking its pre-industrial populist origins, whose historic past was greater than its 'eternal future' within the radical democratic tradition.⁵¹ Students of that tradition and of Italian culture in Australia will nonetheless continue to find this modest literature worthy of study. ★

⁴⁹ CIB – Secretary Attorney General's Dept., 13 June 1932, in NAA A367 C1822R

⁵⁰ *L'Avanguardia Libertaria*, 14 June 1930 'To our comrades'.

⁵¹ See Gramsci, A., 1977, *Quaderni del Carcere*, Einaudi, Torino, Notebook 14, Note 3 for the classic statement of this analysis of the derivation of Italian anarchism from Russian *narodniki* such as Bakunin.