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*Anarchist Resistance  
to Facism in Italy*

*From Rivista Anarchica*

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# Red Years, Black Years

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## Introduction

Resistance to fascism, and especially the resistance during the Second World War has always been a popular theme. Countless articles, books, films and even the odd television soap has been devoted to the subject. Most of these are set in a never never land, and depending which side of the political wall one happens to be on at the time, are either filled with 'clean upright democrats' or 'heroic self sacrificing' party members. If one was to believe the British propaganda machine (still active today), one would be left with the impression that the only real resistance during the war was that which was organised, supplied and led by the SOE.

In Eastern Europe the picture is not much different, 'only the Party resisted'; all other so-called resistance groups were in fact fascist plots, set up to ensnare young patriots. There are solid reasons for this distortion of history. Since the end of the war many political figures came to power on the strength of their war record, or should we say, imaged record. Even such miserable dogs as Ferdinand Marcos in the Phillipines, claimed to have led guerilla groups against the Japanese. The whereabouts of political leaders during the war can become a form of entertainment, the French Communist Party claimed for many years that their current leader was very active in the underground; we now know that Georges Marchais spent most of the war in Germany, working in a munitions factory! Most of the East European communist leaders spent their war years in Moscow, their western counterparts from the 'democratic' parties did most of their fighting in the Lyons Corner Houses around London. Only after the Allied armies, assisted in many places by the local resistance, had swept the Axis powers off the battlefields of Europe did many of these 'valiant leaders' return to their countries to lay claim to political powers. There were of course a few exceptions, but nothing like the history books would have us believe.

It is a sad fact that so little historical material is available today dealing with the role of the various resistance groups throughout



Europe. There are many reasons for this, ranging from the obvious; secrecy equals survival, to the more surprising and depressing fact, fascism was not defeated in 1945. Those who really fought the fascists, as opposed to those who only claim they did, still have to be careful even now. It was only in 1983 that the notorious butcher of Lyon, Klaus Barbie, was brought to trial. Between 1945 and his capture he was at various times working for the CIA, the Catholic Church, Latin American drug barons and Bolivian death squads. Likewise Paul Touvier, head of the Milice (fascist para-military) in Lyon was only captured in 1989. He was protected for almost 50 years by a huge network of extreme right-wing followers, many in the highest positions in the land. If the fascists have such connections then it is quite understandable why those who have fought them do not wish to discuss these matters too openly.

The record of anarchist opposition to fascism goes back to day one in the annals of fascist history. Of all political groups the anarchists never made any deal or concession to fascism. For in pure logic, they are the complete opposite ends of the political spectrum; total devotion to the idea of the state on the one hand, total opposition to the state on the other. The armed struggle against fascism did not start in 1939 with the outbreak of the Second World War or even in 1936 with the revolution in Spain. It started in the years after the First World War in both Italy and Germany. By 1939 many, if not all of those who joined the anarchist partisans had seen years of active armed resistance to fascism. This small work is a tribute to those men and women of the Italian anarchist movement who fought both the native fascists and the German Nazi invaders, and who after 1945 did not set out to crown themselves with glory or betray the slaughtered millions.

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## Anarchists against Fascism

In the following pages we have recorded some episodes in the Italian anarchist resistance to fascism, particularly in the struggle against black-shirt gangs in the 1920s, and the armed resistance to the Nazis between 1943 and 1945. A few episodes only: We have many more accounts from comrades all over Italy than are given here. To present them all would make a much larger and more fragmented work than this.

We have not attempted to write the definitive history of the Italian anarchists in these struggles. That history, which has yet to be produced, would involve a more systematic search for documents and publications, and the collection of more eye-witness accounts from those involved in the fight. What we have tried to do is to break down the wall of silence which has surrounded the anarchists' part in the fight against fascism, a fight which the Italian parliamentary parties now claim to have organised and led.

In the 1920s the anarchists were a force to be reckoned with. They were a thorn in the sides of the bosses, the government, and the fascists. They had a daily paper, the *Umanita Nova*, with a circulation of 50,000 and numerous magazines. The USI, an anarchist-influenced revolutionary trade union, whose secretary was the anarchist Armando Borghi, had hundreds of thousands of members. After the failure of the factory occupations of 1920 the anarchists came to see fascism as the "preventive counter-revolution" (as Luigi Fabbri succinctly defined it) which the bosses would use to prevent the repetition of a pre-revolutionary situation, and they threw all their energy into fighting this young but already strong bastard son of capitalism.

The anarchists' will and courage were not enough to counter the fascist gangs, powerfully aided with material and arms, and backed by the repressive organs of the state. Anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists were decisive in some areas and in some industries, but only a similar



choice of direct struggle on the parts of the Socialist Party and the General Confederation of Labour could have halted fascism.

The defeatist policies of the "socialist" party and trade union had already proved an obstacle in the development of the revolution, and had contributed to the failure of the factory occupations. Now they spread confusion and uncertainty in the workers' movement at a time when, in many ways, the struggle was already declining. This was in the face of the spreading and intensification of the fascist attacks, especially after 1921.

Throughout Italy Mussolini's gangs attacked political meeting places, newspaper offices, active militants — everything that "stank" of "subversion". The liberal state was the direct accomplice of both the criminal activities and of the political strategy of the fascists. State and fascism were united in trying to destroy the fighting spirit of the workers.

Although they were victims of the gangs' attacks, the socialists merely denounced the fascists' "illegalities" without putting their energies into the popular revolutionary struggles against the bosses' terrorism. The PSI (Socialist Party) even agreed a "Pact of Pacification" with the fascists in August 1921. The pact helped disarm the workers' movement both materially and psychologically while the gang violence continued to grow unchecked.

While the leaders of the parties and the trade unions were recommending "calm" and non-violence the workers themselves, independently organised, gave some historic lessons to the fascists. Insurrections at Sarzanna, in July 1921, and at Parma, in August 1922, are examples of the correctness of the policies which the anarchists urged in action and propaganda. Against the defeatism and reformism of the socialists and communists the anarchists urged the vital necessity of fighting violently against the fascist movement, stimulating the fighting spirit of the workers. The anarchists fought to the end, without the socialists' hesitations and searches for compromises. In this respect, it is useful to look at the different positions taken by the socialists and communists on the one hand and the anarchists on the other towards the *Arditi del Popolo* movement.

This movement emerged in 1920 on the initiative of various different elements. It developed along anti-bourgeois and anti-fascist lines, and was marked by the independence of its local sections. The *Arditi del Popolo* assumed different political forms in different places, but always had in common the belief that it was necessary to organise the people to fight

violently against the violence of the blackshirts. The anarchists participated enthusiastically and were often, individually and collectively, its organisers. To take just the two episodes already mentioned: The defence of Sarzana was mostly the work of the anarchists; and at Parma the anarchists manned one of the famous barricades set up to fight off the attacks of the gangs of Balbo and Farinacci.

The attitude of the socialists and the communists (who became an organised party in January 1921) was quite different. Despite the fact that many of their militants spontaneously joined the Arditi, both the party bureaucracies kept their distance and tried to sabotage the movement's development. The central organs of the newly-formed PCI (Italian Communist Party) went so far as to tell their militants to avoid all contact with the Arditi, against whom was begun a press campaign based on lies and slander.

In a recent television interview the communist Umberto Terracini defended this political line. Now, as then, the communists in Italy want to subordinate the anti-fascist struggle to their goal of domination over the workers' movement. Thankfully, many of the ordinary militants of the left parties, while operating from positions very different from our own, made their contributions of struggle and blood against fascism.

This social reformist defeatism and communist sectarianism made impossible an armed opposition that was widespread and therefore effective; and the isolated instances of popular resistance were unable to unite in a successful strategy.

The anarchists, in the first rank of the resistance to fascism, fought without thought for themselves or for parties. In proportion to their numbers they suffered more than the other anti-fascists, first from the gang violence and later from the legal violence of the state. After the burning of anarchist meeting places and sections of the USI, after the destruction of printing equipment and editorial offices, after the murders, came kidnappings, arrests and prison. The survivors - persecuted, unemployed, provoked, watched - had no alternative but exile.

In twenty years of fascism very few anarchist militants (except those in camps and prisons) remained in Italy. And these few were under constant observation and prevented, for the most part, from carrying out clandestine activities. In the midst of state terror individual instances of rebellion continue to testify, in spite of everything, to the impossibility of conquering the libertarian spirit. A few examples are enough:

o On 21 October 1928 the anarchist Pasquale Bulzamini was attacked and ferociously beaten by a group of fascists. In a cafe, a little earlier, he had deplored the shooting of the anti-fascist Della Maggiora. He died in



hospital three days later.

- o The Comrade Giovanni Colvolcoli shot at the Podesta (a functionary in the fascist administration) and secretary of his village. This man had been persecuting him for a long time, finally getting him put into a mental hospital. He was declared sane and released, and wanted to revenge himself.
- o In April 1931 in La Spezia the young anarchist Doro Raspolini fired several shots with a revolver at the fascist industrialist De Biasi as revenge against the man he held largely responsible for the death of his father, Dante - an anarchist militant killed in Sarzana in 1921. Dante had been several times beaten with clubs then tied, still alive, to a car and dragged along for several kilometres. Doro Raspolini died in Sarzana prison from the pain and tortures inflicted on him by the fascists. On 16 April 1931 the comrades Schichi, Renda and Gramignano were condemned by the *Tribunale Speciale* in Rome to 10, 8 and 6 years prison respectively. They were accused of having returned from abroad to perform anti-fascist activity.

By 1943 the anarchists were mostly scattered: in exile, camps and prisons. But first the few militants who had remained free and later the ex-detainees took up their fighting positions with unchanged energy. Some joined the organisations of the workers' resistance, some the armed struggle. Others did propaganda work; clandestine in the North, semi-clandestine in the so-called liberated zones of the South. There, the Allies denied freedom of the press to the anarchists because they were worried, correctly, that the anti-German and anti-fascist struggles could turn into a social revolution.

Within the partisan armed struggle, the anarchists largely worked within politically mixed groups. Only in a few areas where there was a significant anarchist presence were there anarchist-organised groups. These were still, often from consideration of the local situation, within the framework of the various resistance divisions: Garibaldi, controlled by the communists; Matteoti, directed by the socialists, and *Giustizia e Libertà*, a group formed by the 'liberal-socialists' of the *Partito d'Azione*.

This lack of autonomy from and dependence on the party partisan groups was due not only to the numerical weakness of the remnants of the anarchist movement, but to the fact that the Allies (again, correctly from their point of view) refused to supply arms and ammunition to the anarchist groups.

In these circumstances the bravery and sacrifices of the anarchists were exploited by the other political forces. In the end the anarchist influence was small in the Resistance, which was channelled by the official partisans - from liberals to communists - towards the squalid restoration of the 'bourgeois democracy' which is with us to this day.

## The knights errant

Dispersal in exile could not stop the anti-fascist struggle. The very first thought of the anarchists in exile was for a press that would continue from abroad the attack on the fascist regime.

On 1 May 1923 *La Voce del Profugo* (The Voice of the Refugee) appeared in Paris, and from 3 June onwards it appeared every two weeks. The fascists responded: on 3 September, in Paris, the young anarchist Mario Castagna was attacked by a gang of fascists and killed one of them in the fracas.

A few months later, on 20 February in a Paris restaurant, the young anarchist Ernesto Bonomini shot and killed the high-ranking fascist Nicola Bonservizi, secretary of the fascists abroad, correspondent for the *Popolo d'Italia* and editor of the fascist newspaper in Paris, *L'Italie Nouvelle*. Our comrade said that he wanted to make a protest about the unpunished crimes of the fascists and their accomplices. He was given eight years in prison.

Another paper came to life on 1 May, also in Paris and produced by Italian comrades: *L'Iconoclasta*; in the same year some anarchists produced a clandestine paper called *Compagno, ascolta* (Comrade, listen), which called for energetic and merciless struggle in the event of an uprising in Italy.

A few days after the Matteoti crime the anarchists formed a committee in Paris which was subsequently responsible for another paper, *Campane a stormo*, edited by Alberto Meschi. In July 1924 the Italian anarchists in France began a national campaign and distributed thousands of leaflets denouncing fascist crimes. Other magazines and papers were produced by the Italian comrades in France, including *La Tempora* and *Il Monito*. On 11 October 1927 the newspaper *Lotta Umana* appeared, produced by an Italian Teacher-Luigi Fabbri-who had refused to swear loyalty to fascism





*Gogliardo Fiaschi, carries the flag as the 3rd Costrignano Brigade, Modena Division, enter a liberated Modena. Fiaschi went on to join the anti-Franco resistance and in 1957 was captured and imprisoned. He was released in 1975.*

and had escaped to France where he produced the paper with Berneri and Gobbi.

Direct action, usually by individual militants, continued. On 22 August 1928 at Saint-Raphael the Spanish consul, a well-known fascist by the name of marquis Di Mauro, was attacked. A few months later the young anarchist Angelo Bartolomei shot the fascist priest and vice-consul don Cesare Cavaradossi after the cleric had tried to persuade Bartolomei to inform on his comrades in return for freedom from deportation. Bartolomei escaped from France to Belgium but was arrested there in January 1929.

Arrests and deportations were, like the fascist attacks, a constant threat hanging over the exiles. In March 1928 Pietro Bruzzi was arrested in Paris. Two other comrades, Carlotti and Centrone (who were to die bravely in Spain), were arrested and deported.

In Belgium, in July 1928, the anarchist Gasperini successfully resorted to a hunger strike against an extradition order demanded by the Italian government over Gasperini's involvement in wounding some fascists seven years earlier. But the Belgian government did order the extradition of Carlo Locati. A few months later, at Liege, Gigi Damiani was arrested and subsequently deported to Tunisia.

Deportations of all those who had energetically opposed fascism made simple survival very difficult for the exiles. In January 1929 strong pressure from the Italian government resulted in the arrest in Paris of Gobbi, Berneri, Fabbri and Fedeli, who were all escorted to the Belgian border. For them and many others there was no alternative but to change name and profession, through France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland; always pursued, never secure.

In September 1929 at Saarbruecken in Germany the young anarchist Enrico Manzoli was attacked by a group of fascists belonging to the 'Steel Helmets'. In defending himself he killed one of them. Others were not so successful. In January 1930 in Nice Vittorio Diana was killed by an ex-policeman because of his intransigence at the time of fascist demonstrations for the inauguration of a new *gagliardetto*, a type of flag worn in the buttonhole. A few months before, near Paris, the young anarchist Malaspina died after suffering and deprivation, after being chased without respite by the police of various countries. He was accused of throwing a bomb at the fascist house at Juan-les-Pins. Released for lack of proof, he was re-imprisoned and tortured several times.

By 1929 the anarchists had almost no materials, and no safe refuge, but they carried on the struggle with little more than willpower and bare courage. In June 1929 the circle responsible for editing *Lotta Anarchica* managed to smuggle a small newspaper on very this paper into Italy. And there were more direct actions.



In August of the same year the 65-year-old anarchist Paolo Schicchi tried to provoke insurrection by his own example. He set off from France, via Tunisia, for Sicily, but was arrested on arrival at Palermo, together with his friend Gramignano. They were condemned to ten and six years' imprisonment respectively. Their fellow-conspirator Renda was sent down for eight years.

In Paris in January 1931 the anarchists held a meeting to coordinate and intensify the illegal struggle in Italy. In the following years, many comrades were sent to the camps, but resistance continued, in taking material into the country, in a series of individual actions, and in co-operation with other anti-fascist groups, notably *Giustizia e Libertà*.

The fight was not confined to Europe, and anti-fascist activity continued in America during the twenties and thirties. In June 1923 the Italian government pressured the US authorities into closing down the anarchist news sheet *l'Adunata dei Refrattari*. The reply came on 24 November: a bomb wrecked the Italian consulate. In the next year the anarchists organised a general strike in Cuba on the arrival of an Italian ship on 27 September.

There were numerous fascist provocations in those years, usually ignored but often supported by the US government to whom the anarchists, though few in number and isolated from outside support, were a constant nuisance: during these years the Italian anarchist community was active in the campaign against the persecution of Sacco and Vanzetti as well as anti-fascist work.

It is impossible to give a full account of all the demonstrations, attentats and clashes with the police and with the fascists during these years. The anarchists continued with their work until 1936, and in these years were often shot in the streets by the police or by fascist agents. More were arrested and deported to Italy: some, like Armando Borghi, lived underground for years. Others survived the years of American repression, only to die in Spain.

## Rebels in the camps

On November 8, 1926 the *Gazetta Ufficiale* published the decree which created the "Special Tribunal for the defence of the State" and the "Provincial Commissions for consignment to Police Detention". But even before this decree many anarchists had been sent to the islands spread in the Mediterranean, which already at the end of the previous century were used to group together subversives and isolate them from the outside world.

In detention the anarchists always formed a compact and combative group, and even in those hard conditions knew how to fight against the fascist dictatorship. It is enough to consider the prison sentences suffered by the 152 political detainees who, in Ponza in 1933, organised the protest against the continuous abuses of the command of the colony. There are numerous anarchists among those sentenced, Grossuti, Failla, Bidoli, Dettori etc. The following year the anarchist Messinese, a detainee at Ustica, hit the commander of the colony who tried to force him to give the fascist salute. Rebellion against similar abuses spread progressively to other islands, in particular to Ventotene and Tremiti, bringing new sentences against our comrades.

United by close links of solidarity, the anarchists succeeded in obtaining and circulating clandestinely among the comrades a few anarchist texts, and in the meantime held lively discussions with the other detainees. The relations between the communist and anarchist detainees were always particularly tense because the former, bound by the political directives issuing from the party and from Moscow, always did what they could to hinder the libertarians' political activity. This dispute became more bitter in 1936 with the arrival of news from the Spanish front which, though imprecise, referred to armed clashes between anarchists and Stalinists.

Rebellious against all authority, the anarchists constantly maintained a





Partisans in the mountains.

proud and dedicated behaviour, and were always considered by the camp authorities to be the most dangerous and seditious. This very bad (and very well deserved) reputation with the higher ranks of the fascists was the cause of new persecutions and sentences, and often of the prolonging of the period of detention without even the pretence of a trial. Thus several comrades, although initially condemned to only a few years, had to stay on the islands until 1943, when, with the fall of fascism in July, they were "demobbed".

The winding up of the camp at Ventotene, where a large number of anarchists had been concentrated, is significant in this respect. On the arrival of the news of the fall of fascism the first to be freed were the activists of *Giustizia e Libertà*, catholics, republicans and Jehovah's Witnesses. The result was that there remained only communists, socialists and anarchists in Ventotene. Then, when Marshal Badoglio called on Roveda, for the communists, and on Buozzi, for the socialists, to participate in the government they requested and obtained the release of the imprisoned communists and socialists, without mentioning the anarchists and the Slovene nationalists. Thus was broken the bond of solidarity which, despite the polemical disputes, had always linked the various groups of detainees in face of the common enemy of fascism. Although a few militants of the left parties at first refused to leave, so as not to abandon the anarchists, the majority of the detainees made for freedom with no thought for those who were forced to stay on the island.

About ten days after the others had left the anarchists were transported by ship and then by train to the concentration camp of Renicci d'Anghiari (Arezzo). During the long transfer journey many tried to escape, but only one succeeded. As soon as they reached the camp the anarchists clashed with the authorities, and two of them were immediately isolated in cells. This gave rise to such protests and continuous agitation among the anarchists (among whom we may note Alfonso Failla) that they reached the point of a violent clash with the camp guards. Afterwards however some succeeded in escaping and went on to start the first partisan groups in the district. Only in September did the guards make a run for it, and the anarchists left the camp just before the arrival of the Germans.

As we have seen the struggle against fascism often devolved on individual actions, paid for by life. We briefly mention here three heroic comrades, Gino Lucetti, Angelo Sbardello and Michele Schirru. They tried individually to execute the pig Mussolini, but unfortunately they did not succeed. The first attempt failed by sheer bad luck: Lucetti's bomb went past the butcher's car. Lucetti was tried with his accomplices, who were



also anarchists, Stefano Vatteroni and Leonardo Sorio. Lucetti was condemned to 30 years, the others to 7 and 16. The other two attempts did not even take place because of the preventive arrests of Schirru in 1931 and Sbardellotto in 1932. These two were both shot after a summary trial. Lucetti's fate was also tragic. Released in 1943 after the fall of fascism, he died in a bombardment as soon as he was out of prison! The *Testament* of Michele Schirru is especially significant. In it the Sardinian anarchist explains his political growth and the moral and political reasons which convinced him of the necessity to eliminate the *Duce*.



Newspaper headlines announcing an assassination attempt on Mussolini by anarchists.

## Fighting in Spain

The news that a popular revolt had broken out against Franco's putsch in Spain was like a bomb exploding among the anti-fascist Italian emigre circles in Paris. The exiles, who for years had been forced to fight on the defensive, suddenly saw that in Spain a people at last dared to say "No" clearly to fascism and to take to arms to prevent its victory.

While some left immediately to go and fight in Barcelona many others got ready to go, and held frequent meetings to discuss what should be done. There was one meeting specifically convened by all the Italian anti-fascist political forces in Paris. Longo for the communists and Bouzzi for the socialists declared that their parties were ready to send medical aid and give moral support to the Spanish people, but were not in agreement with armed intervention. The representative of the republicans made only general statements, avoiding any definite commitment, so that the anarchists and the 'giellisti' (militants of the movement *Giustizia e Libertà*) were alone in arguing that they must leave at once for Spain. And this was just what they did.

On August 18th, less than a month after the popular insurrection, the first group of Italian anti-fascists left for the Aragon front. They enrolled as volunteers in the Italian section of the Ascaso column, organised by and made up of anarchist militants of the FAI and the anarcho-sindicalists of the CNT. Most, about 100, of these first Italian volunteers were anarchists.

Other Italian anarchists who reached Spain later were attached to the CNT-FAI organised columns "Durrutti", "Tierra y Libertad", "Ortiz", and to other groups. According to estimates based on enrollment registers of the Italian section which were left in the care of the CNT-FAI, there were 653 Italian anarchists fighting in Spain.

In the very first months of the revolution hundreds of Italians were carried away by their enthusiasm, which always put them in the first rank. It was at this time that most of them died or were wounded. Many of the



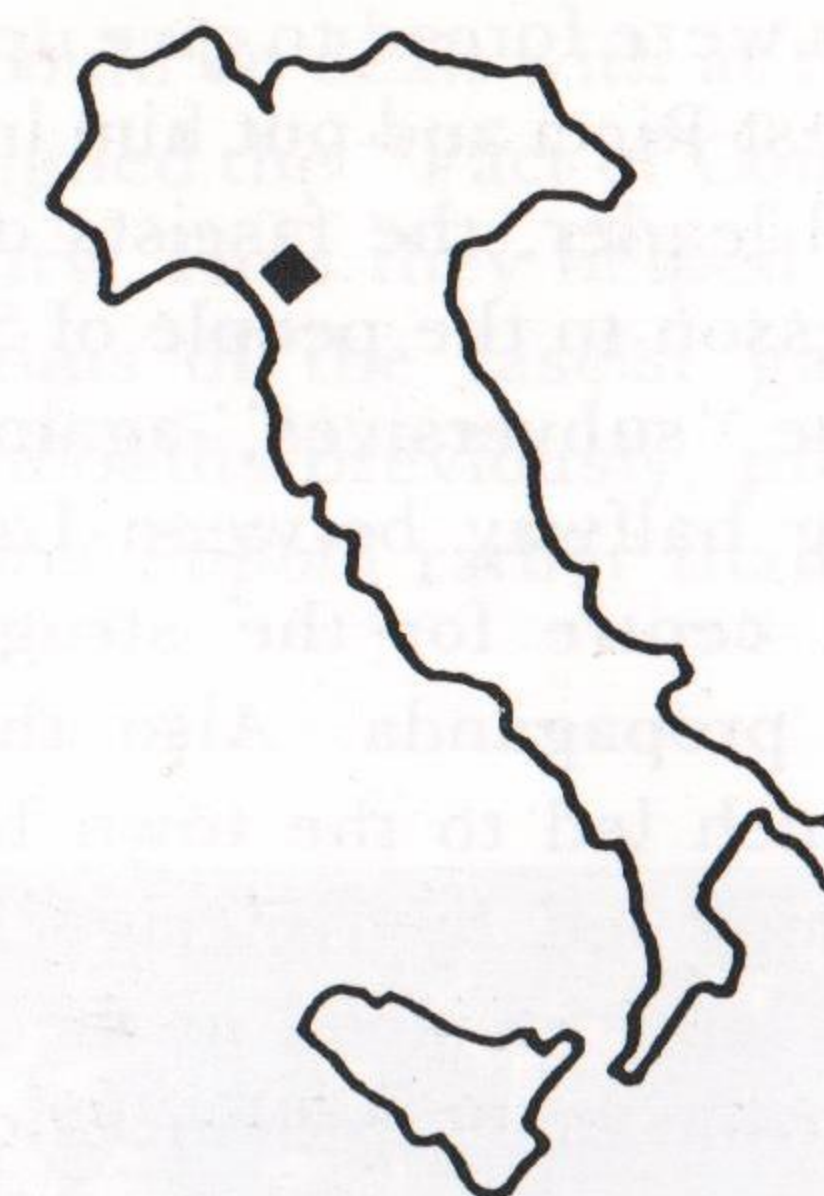
wounded returned to the front to fight again. One such was Pio Turroni; wounded for the first time in October, he returned to the front after a few months, where he was again wounded; then he returned to Barcelona, where he was political commissar for the Italians in the "Spartacus" barracks.

It is impossible to mention here even the names of all those who died or of those who survived. As well as Turroni, among the survivors we particularly remember, in that they are still active militants in the Anarchist movement, are Umberto Marzocchi and Umberto Tommasini.

The Italian anarchists always maintained a consistent position, above all with regard to the communist counter-revolution, as in the May days in Barcelona in 1937. At this time the Stalinists murdered the Italian anarchists Camillo Berneri (who was the Barcelona editor of the Italian periodical *Guerra di classe*) and Francesco Barbieri.

In the face of militarisation their determined revolutionary position was expressed almost unanimously. First on 10 October and then on 13 November they published documents in which they warned of the danger of counter-revolution if the process of militarisation continued, which it did. These documents were signed, for the Italian section of the Ascaso column, by Rabitti, Mioli, Buleghin, Petacchi, Puntoni, Serra and Segata.

During the tragic days of the communist counter-revolution they came to disagree with the "leadership" of the FAI and CNT, and by now they understood that the revolution had taken a turn for the worse. In spite of this they continued to fight and to die. About sixty Italian anarchists died in Spain and a hundred and fifty were wounded, many of whom died later because of shortages in the concentration camps in France.



## Sarzana

The presence of a strong and combative workers movement, and particularly of many anarchist and anarcho-sindicalist groups, meant that the policy of the fascist gangs took on a violently provocative and murderous character in the whole of the province of La Spezia, just as in the Carrarino.

In the occupations of the factories the workers had shown their revolutionary character decisively. The bosses and the fascists could not permit the continuation of their tradition of rebellion. For this reason, from the early days of 1921 (i.e. only a few weeks after the treachery of the reformists and the defeat of the factory occupations) the fascists tried to take over, threatening and attacking the revolutionary militants.

To give some examples; on 27 February, 1921 the fascists made an attack on the "*Camera del Lavoro di La Spezia*", a meeting place and office for workers and trade union groups. On 28 February, 1921 they murdered Olivieri, and on 11 March they provoked incidents at his funeral. On 11 April they carried out a provocative inauguration of the *gagliardetto*, a fascist symbol for use on parades. And on May 12th the fascists destroyed two *Camera del Lavoro* belonging to the CGL and to the USI.

But above all it was the "punitive expeditions" which characterised, here as elsewhere, the violence of the blackshirts, and which provoked the determined angry reply of the people. It became commonplace for the fascists to concentrate in some centre and then to attack the anti-fascist organisations in it, to kill the most resolute opponents and then to leave, certain that they would go unpunished by the "liberal" state. The recognised chief of the gangs around La Spezia was Renato Ticci, an ex-legionary from Fiuma who was to have a distinguished career. Amongst other ventures, he led a punitive expedition against Pontemoli and Sarzana on June 12th.

The reaction of the people against the fascists was so determined that



the gangs were forced to give up, and the authorities had no alternative but to arrest Ricci and put him in Sarzana jail. Deprived for the moment of their local leader, the fascists decided to try to free him, and to give a historic lesson to the people of Sarzana, who they saw as a symbol of the fight of the "subversives" against the bosses and the fascists. Sarzana, in fact, lying halfway between La Spezia and Carrara, was an especially important centre for the struggles of the anarcho-syndicalists and for anarchist propaganda. Also the local administration was traditionally "red" which led to the town being hated by the class enemy.

The gangs led by Amerigo Dumini (one of the most famous fascist criminals, later involved in the murder of the socialist deputy Matteotti), gathered from many provinces of Tuscany in the district around Sarzana, preparing to attack it by force. When they learned that in the village of Arcola (La Spezia) their comrade Procuranti had been killed, they immediately began the punitive expedition, performing acts of violence even before entering Sarzana. Among others they killed a peasant in Santo Stefano Magra (La Spezia). On arrival in Sarzana the fascists gathered at the railway station to get in order for the attack. Here they were welcomed with shots by seven carabinieri and four soldiers who, under the command of Captain Jurgens, wanted them to abandon their plans, "in their own interest".

After this brief clash with the forces of law and order the fascists found that they had to confront an armed attack by the *Arditi del Popolo* who, organised by the anarchist Ugo Coccardi (known as Ramaella), were the first to greet the fascists. But they were not alone and were soon joined by the workers who travelled every morning by train from Sarzana to La Spezia to work in the arsenal there. As the attack of the gangs had been anticipated the train had not left that morning.

The whole population took part in the attacks on the blackshirts, who soon sustained some deaths and were forced to try to escape into the surrounding countryside. But they were out of luck. The peasants, most of whom were anarchists, or at least strongly anti-fascists, helped the *Arditi del Popolo* in capturing the attackers, many of whom were killed. It was said at the time that about twenty fascists were killed, a figure confirmed by the official historians. But according to information we have received from comrades who took an active part in the events, it was many more.

In any case the great popular victory of Sarzana was a reality, together with the collaboration of the *Arditi del Popolo* who arrived quickly from neighbouring centres, and this was a real blow to the fascists' violent progress. This defeat made the fascists take revenge of "Subversives" in distant areas in the vain hope of obliterating the memory of Sarzana. On the 21st July the people of Sarzana showed the way later taken up in further examples of violent popular resistance in Parma, Civitavecchia etc.

By these means the reaction of the bosses could be dealt with at the outset.

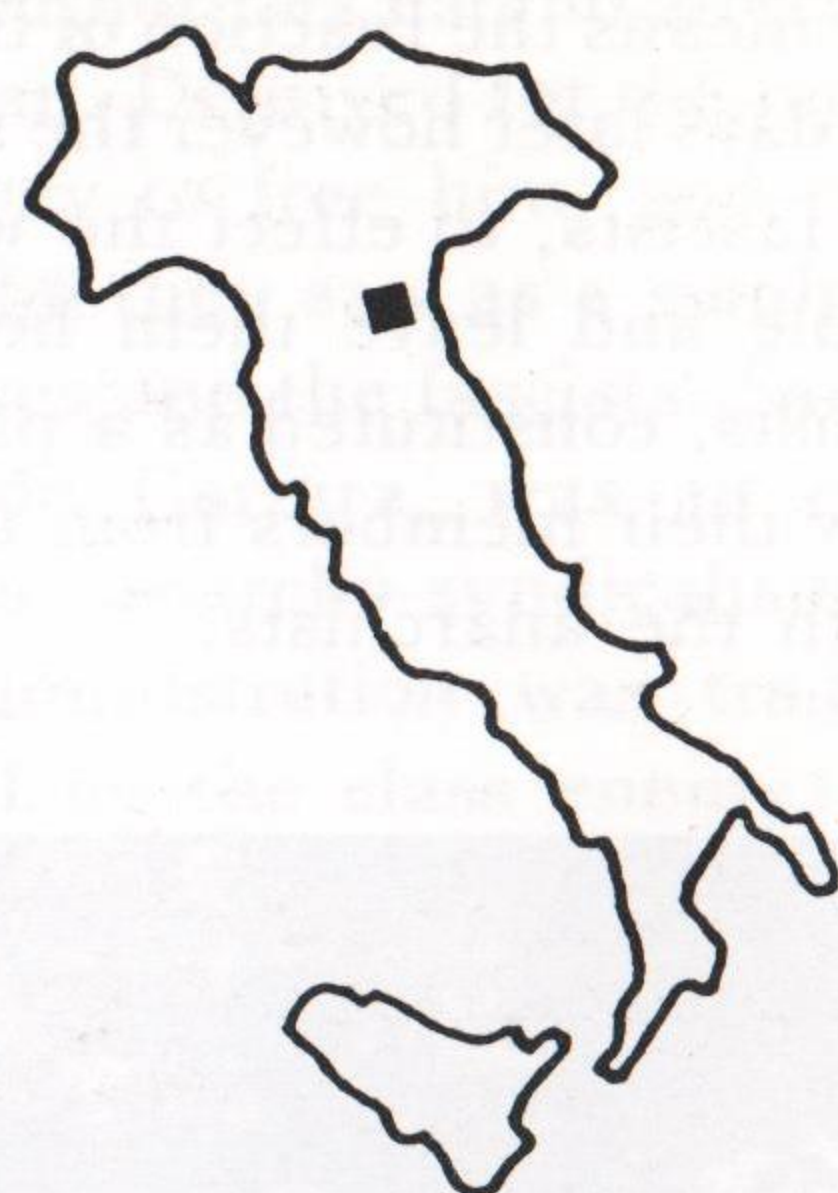
A few days later however the socialists signed the "Pact of Conciliation" with the fascists, to effect the whole country. Thus they helped to disarm the people and leave them helpless victims of the fascist gangs. The communists, constituted as a party a few months previously, preferred to withdraw their members from the *Arditi del Popolo* rather than let them work with the anarchists.



Anarchist detainees in a photo taken by the Communist leader Amadeo Bordiga, also a detainee. The anarchists, who were second in number only to the communists in detention, were the organisers of all the protests against the abuses of the authorities.



## Imola



1920 marked the final reorganisation of the anarchists of Imola and this gave birth to two large groups, the anarchist youth group (*gruppo giovanile anarchico*) and the USI. There were altogether about eighty young people who were actively committed. They organised debates, conferences, meetings and tried to work in complete harmony with the young socialists.

Trade union activity was mainly concentrated on those professions like builders, nurses, decorators, barbers, metal workers and waiters which were considered of little interest by the *Camera del Lavoro*, an adherent of the CGL which was heavily engaged in propaganda work in the countryside, and thus in the organisation of the farm workers.

The revolutionary preparation of the anarchists increased day by day, so fascism did not catch them unawares.

On October 1920 an attempt was made on the life of Dino Grandi, at that time a young lawyer in Nordano, a district next to Imola, and later one of the most important fascist bosses. Four revolver shots were aimed at him. Unfortunately they all missed. Accusations were made against the anarchists, and the socialists disclaimed all responsibility. It transpired that those who had made the attempt really were anarchists who had seen the future enemy in Grandi, at a time when the new phenomenon of fascism was finding support among young students inflamed with patriotism, reactionary ideas and a hatred of socialism.

At the end of 1920 the fascists tried to prepare for a breakthrough in Imola, but up to June 1921 they met with no success at all. The anarchists worked with the young socialists (who later passed *en masse* into the PCd'I) in the formation of the "red guards" whose task was to defend Imola from the fascist gangs coming from Bologna. The fascists had already taken control of Castel S Pietro and used this district as a base for their expeditions against the neighbouring villages. They wanted to destroy the myth of "red" Imola and the fighting spirit of the inhabitants,

the result of fifty years of anarchist and socialist propaganda, and of the great prestige of Andrea Costa.

Until November the fascists tried various methods, but were repeatedly dissuaded by the local authorities and even by the socialist leaders, because an exceptionally high level of popular mobilisation would have provoked a blood bath. But on 14 December a column of fascists tried to reach Imola in lorries. The news quickly spread and the people, summoned by the great bell of the district, took to arms and went onto the streets. Five squads of red guards occupied the strategic points of the city and anarchists set up two machine gun posts at the entrance to Imola on Via Emilia, to catch the fascists in cross fire. But the fascists did not arrive this time either. A socialist, Romeo Galli, had telephoned the mayor of Ozzano to beg him to dissuade them. But the fascists had realised that it would be more effective to let a long wait unnerve the inhabitants and weaken their defences.

Thus, with the support of the *popolari*, they began to make short appearances to prepare the way for a major attack. On 10 April the fascists from Castel S. Pietro arrived during a procession organised by the *Partito Popolare*. The army and the carabinieri occupied the town centre to protect the gangs from the people. On 28 May, they attacked the socialist meeting place in the evening. One group, hidden in the shade of the public gardens, prepared to attack with knives, hand-bombs and revolvers. While some of them went into the meeting place others stayed outside and fired like madmen to stop people coming to help. As a result of the attack there were seven wounded and the furniture and papers in the office were destroyed. The building also housed the editing rooms of the socialist weekly *La Lotta* and the socialist group.

So the reaction began to find a footing in Imola. The socialist leaders fled to San Marino and only came back in September when the storm had passed. The armed fascist reaction struck at the vanguard while the masses were disoriented and frightened.

On 26 June the fascists, with Dino Grandi and Gino Baroncini, under the satisfied eyes of the ignorant local bourgeoisie, inaugurated their *gagliardetto* of battle. The local fascists were squalid figures and in some cases outright lunatics. They found support among the farmers, who praised them and made them drunk with wine and bribes. And their close liaison with the fascists in Bologna, who were already in a strong position, made them feel, unexpectedly, masters of the streets as, a hundred against one and protected by their police, they clashed with the revolutionary vanguards. The anarchists were the first to be struck, then the socialists. Finally the reaction fell on the entire working class.

On 10 July at the Passetti pub, the fascists failed in an attempt to murder



the anarchist Primo Bassi (1892-1972) and then tried to frame him for the murder of Gardi, a bystander who had been killed in the shooting.

According to Primo Bassi: "On July 10th 1921 a gang of Imola fascists began the first acts of indiscriminate violence. At ten o'clock in the evening they came across a bricklayer, Campomori. They beat him about the head until, covered in blood, he managed to escape into the Passetti pub, which was crowded at the time. Then I noticed a young man who gave me a clap on the shoulder and invited me to go outside. I agreed, but after I had taken a few steps into the big courtyard I was surrounded by the gang who wanted to search me. When they had frisked my pockets and were sure I was unarmed they began to beat me up. I pushed my way through them towards the exit, and just as I was getting away through the blows I was hit with a club on the left cheek bone, which almost knocked me to the ground. I turned round quickly and only then did my instinct for survival take over. The fascist Casella, gun in hand, was almost on top of me, and I drew my pistol from the belt of my trousers and shot at him, hitting him in the leg. I fired another shot in the air, and while everyone was shooting I ran down the Via Aldovrandi to give myself up to the carabinieri who were just arriving. I had been wounded by a ricochet shot. I was taken first to the police station and then to the hospital. The carabinieri kept on hitting me until a nurse, who was a socialist, managed to stop them. It turned out that a man in the pub, supposedly a fascist, had been seriously wounded by a revolver shot and later died. The fascists claimed the dead man as one of their own, and began a violent campaign against men and property".

That same evening several gangs of fascists ran through the streets of the city, firing like madmen to create an atmosphere of fear. Then they attacked the offices of the *Unione Sindicale*, destroying everything they found there. They devastated the offices of the various groups, the editing rooms of the anarchist paper *Sorgiamo*, the meeting place and the rich library. Everything that could not be burned was wrecked. The following day the hunt for subversives continued through the streets of Imola.

The anarchist teacher Ciro Beltrami was arrested for shooting Mansueto Cantoni, an ex-republican who had become secretary of the local fascists. He was savagely beaten on the back, and he died in Brussels in 1941 from tuberculosis, which he contracted as a result of the beating the fascists gave him.

Romeo Romei was also attacked, and wounded seriously in the chest by a revolver shot and left dying on the ground. He was director of the newspaper *Il Momento*, published by the Bolognese communists and the organ of the *Camera del Lavoro* of Imola. Ugo Marati was also assassinated by the fascists while he was working peacefully in the allotments as a thresher. They prevented the printer Galeati from producing the anarchist

periodical *Sorgiamo* by threatening to burn down his premises. The kiosks were forbidden to sell "subversive" papers such as *Umanita Nova* and *Ordine Nuovo*. But the anarchist movement was not yet completely destroyed, so it was necessary for the fascists to strike again, to murder some more.

On the evening of 21st July 1921 five fascists came to an inn at the "Case Galletino" with the sole purpose of getting another anarchist, Vincenzo Zanelli, known as Banega, a bricklayer and one who had always been known for his courage. He had been arrested during the struggles against inflation in July 1919, and arrested again in 1921 without any charges, and then released after 20 days. Since then the fascists had never left him in peace. They found him with another two anarchists, Farina and Tarozzi, and they shot him. While the other two anarchists who were not armed, ran away he shot back from on the ground and killed his attacker, the fascist Nanni, a professional thief. By this time almost all of the more prominent anarchists of Imola had been eliminated.

The killing of the young fascist Andrea Tabanelli was used as an excuse for further moves against the anarchists. The first accusation was made against the anarchist Diego Guadagnini. His cousin Enrico Guadagnini was also accused, and the fascists made other reprisals. They attacked the offices of USI and killed the anarchist war invalid Raffaele Virgulti with blows to the head.

Thus the movement was decimated. The best comrades, such as Diego Guadagnini and Primo Bassi (sentenced to 20 years although the ballistic investigation proved that the bullet that killed Gardi could not have come from Bassi's gun) were put out of harm's way. And many of the best were killed; Leo Branconcini, Vincenzo Zanelli, Raffaele Virgulti. And so many others were imprisoned or detained; Tarozzi, Baroncini, Farina, Errani, the Tinti brothers, Tonini etc. But still the Imolan anarchist movement would make its contribution to the struggle for liberation in Italy in 1944-45, and before that in Spain in 1936.

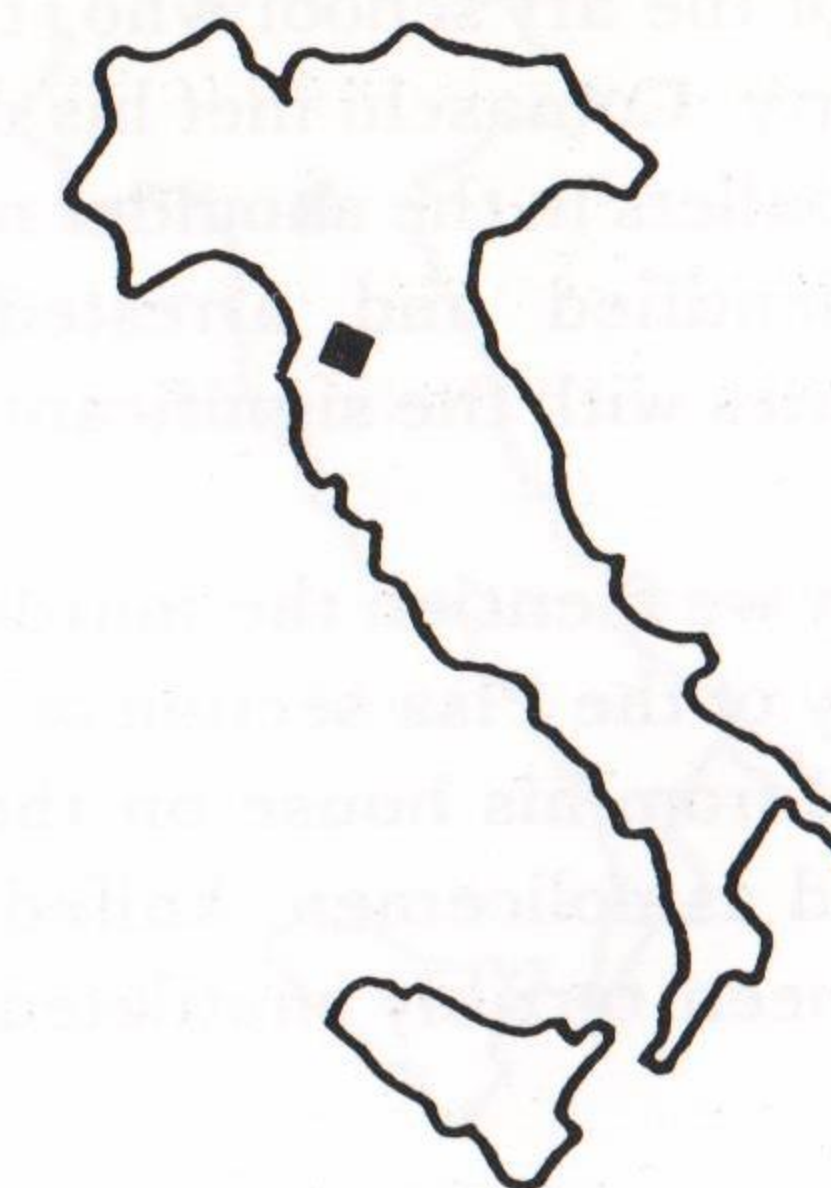
The fates of the Imolan anarchists from 1920 to 1945 follow a pattern: the struggle against fascism in Italy, exile, the Spanish revolution, France, deportation to Italy, detention and, after September, partisan resistance. Even from a small centre like Imola the number of anarchists who made this journey is so great that we cannot write biographies of all of them. We offer one to illustrate them all.

Vindice Rabitti, a clerk and supporter of *Arditi del Popolo* took part in various clashes against the gangs. He was tried and sentenced to a year and three months in 1922, and to a further 11 months in July 1923. He was wounded by the fascists following an attentat. He went to France in 1923, returned to Italy in the spring of 1924. He took part in renewed clashes with



the fascists and returned to France. He was arrested for an alleged attempt against the League of Nations. In 1923 he reached Algiers where he continued anti-fascist activities. In July 1936 he volunteered for Spain and was among the organisers of the Italian *Ascaso* column and became its political delegate. He fought on the front at Monte Pelato, Huesca, Almudevar, and later in Carrascal di Huesca in April 1937. To France in April 1938 where he continued the anti-fascist struggle. He was arrested in Bardonecchia in March 1940, in detention in the camp of Ventotene for two years. He took part in the liberation struggle around Imola and Romagna.

As was mentioned the fate of many other Imolan comrades was similar. Carlo Alvisi, bricklayer; Guiseppe Tinti, bricklayer; Gino Balestri, bricklayer; Gaetano Trigari, smith (arrested for partisan activity in September 1943, he was deported first to Dachau and then to Mathausen); Eutilio Vignoli, shop assistant; Nataslino Matteucci, bricklayer; Umberto Panzacchi, road worker (died in Paris in 1941 after an illness contracted in the Spanish war); Armando Malaguti, barber; Ugo Guadignini, bricklayer; Bruno Gualandi, builder (fell on the Huesca front in October 1936); Luigi Grimaldi, farmworker; Lorenzo Giusti, railway worker; Attilio Balzamini, railway worker (wounded at monte Pelato, died in hospital in Barcelona in June 1938); Cesare Forni, craftsman; Ferrucio Tantini, bricklayer, and Tosca Tantini (sister of Ferrucio who took part in the battles of Huesca and Almudevar).



## Pisa

The fascists had their eyes very closely on Pisa, knowing the traditions of struggle there among the workers and peasants. The anarchists were numerous both in the city and in the centres around it. It was in Pisa that *Avvenire Anarchico* was published, a paper which was known and distributed in many areas of Italy, and also the *Camera del Lavoro* was active and syndicalist, adhering to the *Unione Sindicale*.

The local fascists were troubled with serious internal divisions, but they still carried out the same provocations and physical harassment of "subversives" as elsewhere, financed and directed by some well-known local capitalists. Among the criminal acts of the Pisa gangs it is enough to mention the raid on the district of Cascina on July 22 1921, the day after the defeat inflicted on their fellow fascists in Sarzana. In solidarity with Amerigo Dumini and the other gangsters put to flight by the people of Lunigiana they wanted every family to be put into mourning.

On the way back from their raid the fascists stopped at the restaurant of the anarchist Luigi Benvenuti, where they insulted those present and finally attacked them. In the furious fight that followed the two leading gangsters were killed, as well as comrade Benvenuti. The fascists, disturbed by the reaction of those present, went away and returned later that night on a lorry, provided as usual by the carabinieri. After having, among other things, murdered the son of an anti-fascist by stabbing him four times and then throwing him into a river, they turned to Benvenuti's house which they wrecked and set on fire, forcing the two very young orphans of comrade Benvenuti to jump from the window.

Very effective also was the murder of the anarchist Comasco Comaschi, an art teacher and head of the woodwork department of the School of Art of Cascina, whose political ideas were based partly on the humanitarian teachings of Tolstoy and partly on the anarchist propaganda of Pietro Gori. The fascists could not forgive him for his defence of the students in a



faculty of the art school who, they insisted, should be forcibly enrolled in their party. Comaschi met his death at the decree of the local blackshirts, by four bullets in the shoulder near to the Emissarion canal. The murderers were identified and arrested, but were naturally acquitted by the magistrates with the significant formula "no grounds for proceeding in the case"

Finally we mention the murder of the anarchist Ugo Rindi, a printer and secretary of the Pisa section of the *Federazione Italiana del Libro*. He was snatched from his house on the night of 8th April 1924 by some fascists disguised as policemen, knifed to death just outside his house, his body having been terribly mutilated.



A fascist gang leaves on a punitive expedition. The lesson given to the fascists in Sarzana in July 1921 by the local people would, if it has spread, have been able to stop fascism. But to spread the example it would have been necessary for the PSI, PCI and the CGL to have thrown all their weight behind the popular armed struggle.



## Reggio Emilia

The anarchist presence in the anti-fascist struggle in Reggio Emilia was essentially composed of actions by single comrades: understandable in view of the complete dominance of reformist socialism which had, in Camillo Prampolini, a national as well as a local leader.

From the time before the first world war the anarchists, though few in number, made known their anti-militarism, although the first specifically libertarian group was founded only in the "red two years" of 1919-1920. This was the Spartacus group, which included intellectuals of various kinds (among whom was Camillo Berneri and the lawyer Nobili) and many militant workers (such as Torquato Gobbi, Fortunato Sartori and some workers from the Officine Reggiane). Their presence, both in propaganda activities and in the anarcho-syndicalist field, was very effective and brought down upon them the gangs of young fascists, who found support mainly through the financial backing of the Reggian district's big farmers.

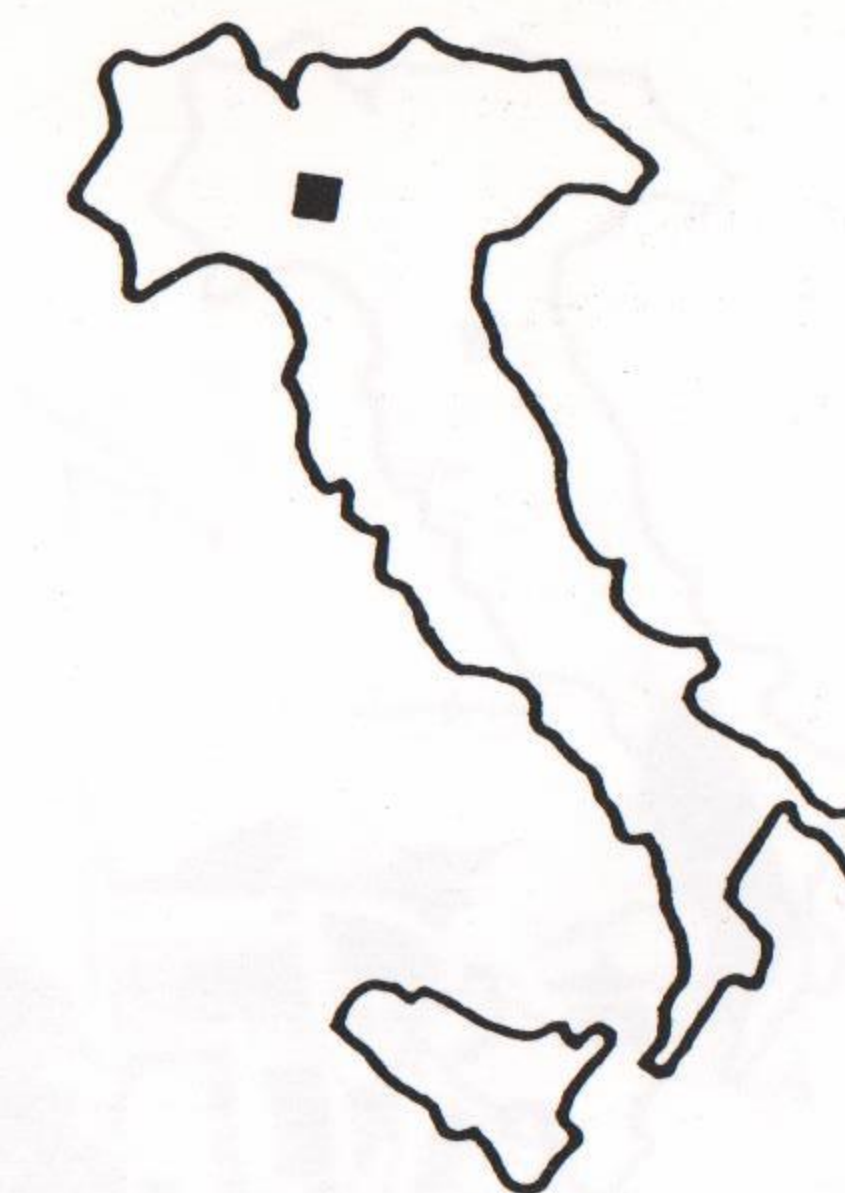
To describe the atmosphere which the blackshirts created in the city we present the following report from the liberal-fascist paper *Il giornale di Reggio*, 25/3/21. "Yesterday's (i.e. March 24, the day after the Diana attentat in Milan) most serious incident was provoked by a well-known local anarchist, a certain Torquato Gobbi... Yesterday, while everyone was filled with disgust for the infamous and horrible butchery at the Theatre Diana in Milan, this Gobbi walked around ostentatiously near the groups of fascists who met in the centre and were discussing what had happened. At one point a fascist asked him why he was walking around and he gave an evasive reply. Then they told him to go away and he replied, almost laughing at them, that he couldn't go away quickly because his feet hurt. The fascists became more and more angry at this behaviour and said, "Well, if you want to stand here shout *Viva Italia*". The anarchist, who was evidently bent on making trouble, or wanted to become a martyr, simply



cried out "*Viva l'Anarchia*". As one would imagine he was soundly beaten and should be quiet for a few days."

In Cavriago (Reggio E.) on the first of May 1921 there were violent clashes between anarchists and socialists on the one hand, and fascists on the other. In the end two anarchists died (Primo Francescotti and Andre Barilli) and several were wounded. On this occasion too the fascists had come in from the neighboring districts. It seems that the excuse was that one comrade had a red and black scarf in his buttonhole. Another important example of persecution against the anarchists took place in February 1923, when there was invented a "subversive plot" which led to numerous arrests both of communists and anarchists, among whom were Gobbi and Nobili. This blow also contributed to pushing many comrades along the road to exile.

Several Reggian anarchists took part in the Spanish revolution, fighting on the anti-fascist front. Of them we remember especially Camillo Berneri, Mario Corghi, Lebo Piagnolli and Emilio Zambonini. The latter returned to Reggia after 8 September 1943, where he was among the organisers of the partisan groups in the appennine district of Villa Minozzo. Captured together with don Pasquino Borghi's group, he was shot in Reggio's shooting range on 29 January 1944. Before dying he shouted out '*Viva l'Anarchia!*'".



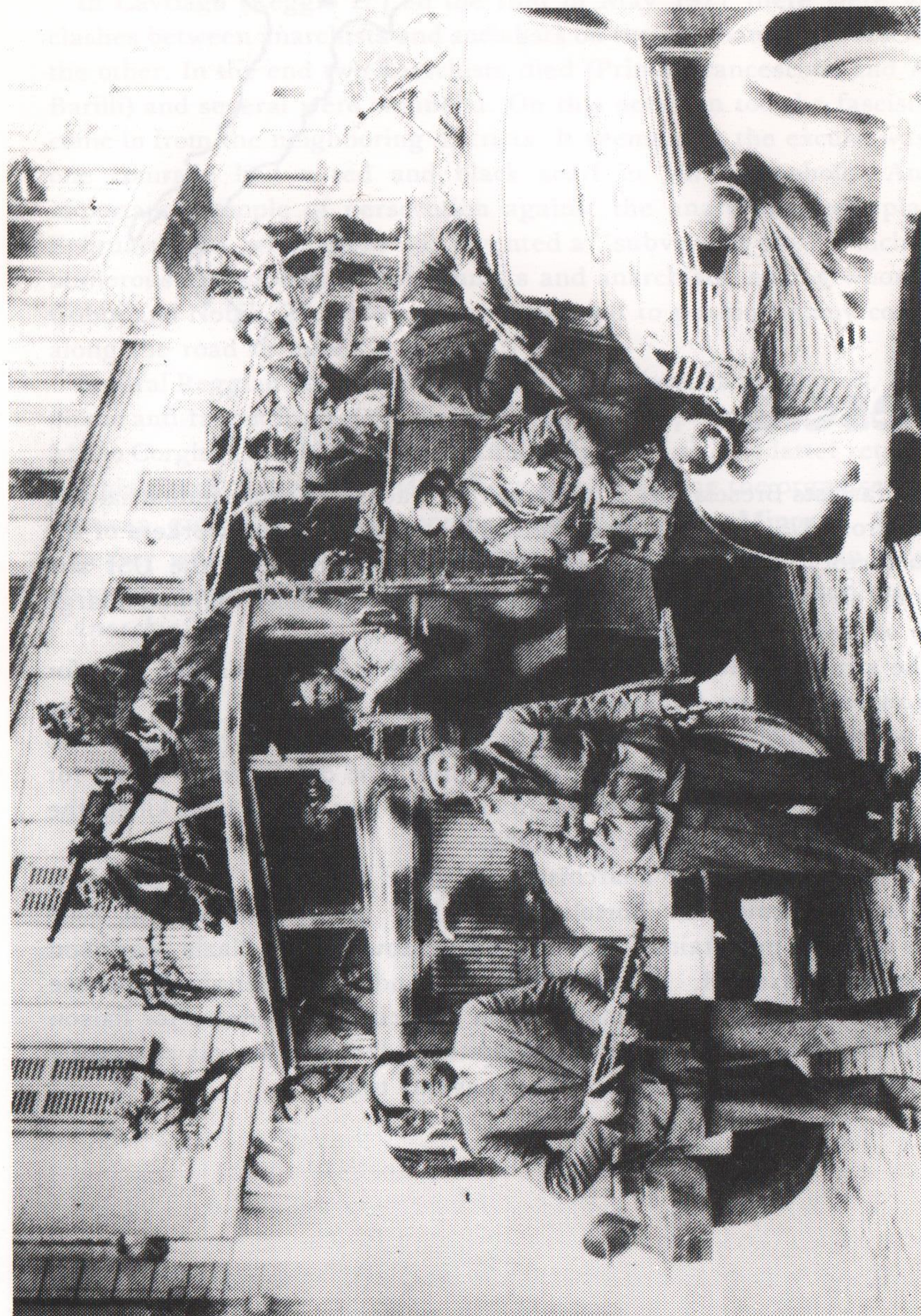
## Brescia

For the fascists Brescia was a tough nut to crack. It was an industrial city with a strong USI section (remembering that almost all the workers of the match factory, which exists no longer, were members of the USI and generally showed the way to the workers of the other factories) and a large group of *Arditi del Popolo*.

If the struggle was hard the fascist revenge was even harder, and for many anarchists there followed persecutions, jail, detention, exile. Among them we remember Ettore Benometti, Angelo Alberti, Mario Conti, who was murdered by the fascists, Leandro Sorio, who did 16 years in jail for Lucetti's failed attentat on Mussolini, Ernesto Bonomini, who killed the fascist boss Boservizi in Paris in 1924.

In the resistance some anarchists took part in the GL and Garibaldi brigades. We remember Bortolo Ballarini of Bienno, whose hut 2000 metres up in the mountains and twice burned down by the Nazis, was used as a base by a mixed GL - Garibaldi brigade. And Ettore Benometti, whose shop was a clandestine meeting place in Brescia and a centre for liaison and organisation with the partisans, despite the fact that he was constantly watched and had his house searched several times.





Partisan patrol in Turin April 1945.



## Castel Bolognese

In Castel Bolognese it was above all the young anarchists of the local group who responded to the fascist provocations which came from the garrisons from other cities, especially Bologna, and from the few local fascist groups. For example the anarchists set up two large red and black banners with the text "*Viva la Commune*" on Via Emilia. The local fascists immediately informed the fascists in Bologna, who came that afternoon wearing the usual black shirts with skulls on the chest and carrying knives. But they couldn't take down the flags. The bravery of the young comrades put them to a hurried flight. That day however, 18 March 1921 was the last occasion on which the anniversary of the Commune could be celebrated.

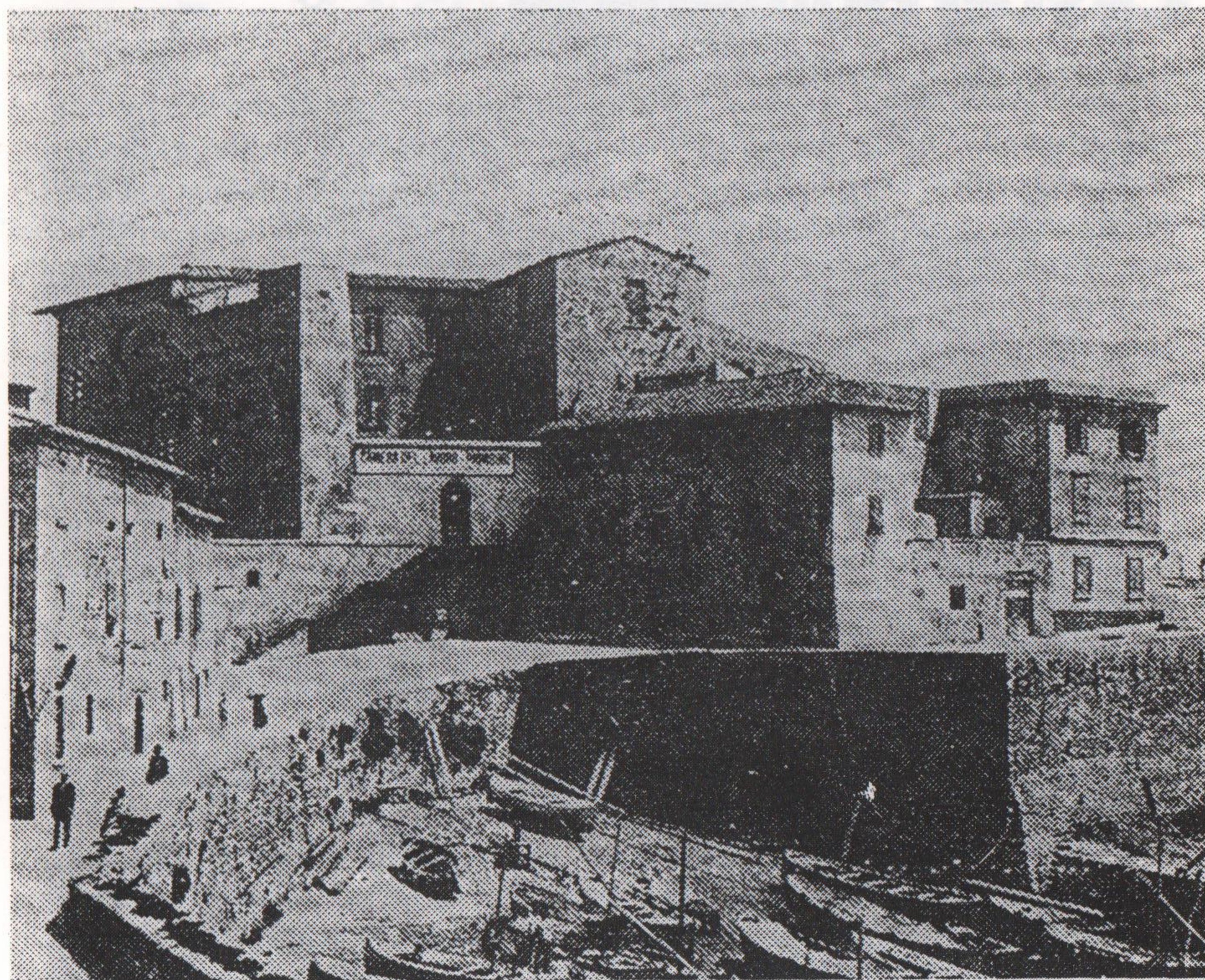
It was certainly not the last episode in the struggle against fascism. But the blackshirts, in order to conquer Castel Bolognese, had to wait until the most active anarchists were prevented from carrying out any form of political activity.

In the following months there was an intensification of the fascist provocations, which for preference took place at night. Many well-known anti-fascists were beaten up, and in their fury the blackshirts did not even spare a fascist farmer, who greeted his gangster friends. He had left his membership card at home, and he ended up with a broken arm.

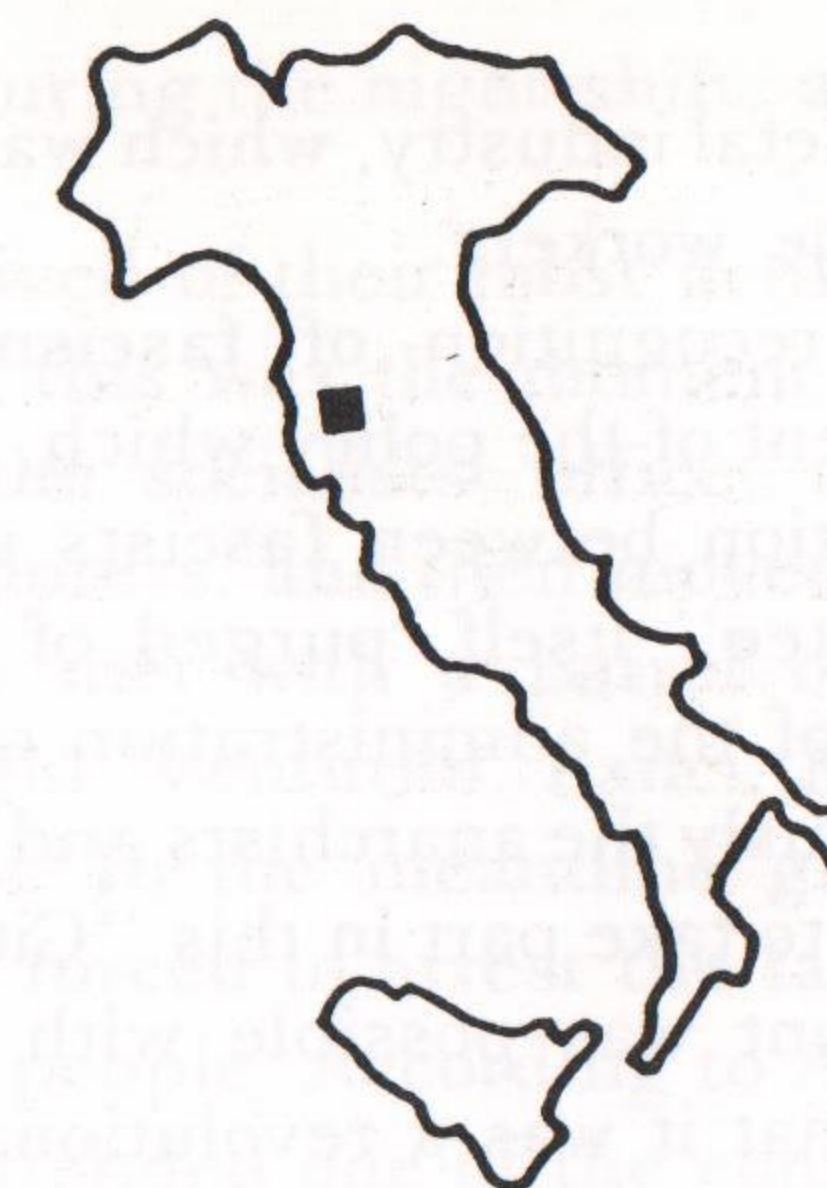
If the active fighting against the fascists was done mainly by the young anarchists (Nello Garavini, Antonio Patuelli and many others), we should not forget the contribution made by the older comrades, some of whom remembered well their experiences from the time of the first International. At that time the oldest anarchist of Castel Bolognese was Raffaele Cavallazzi; he had been arrested more than a hundred times! Always in the front line of the fighting against the police he used to be searched and arrested under any excuse, so that the magistrate's cry "*Arrest Cavallazzi*" had become a proverb. But he would be released again after a few days, and then take up again his battle post distributing anarchist



newspapers. On 18 March or 1 May or other anniversaries of revolutionary events he would hang out of his window two red and black flags with rips in them. He maintained that they were the more glorious as the tears were war wounds. After the fascists had pulled off a piece of his beard to insult him he was careful to leave the beard always "dissected" so that he could show it and say "Everyone should come and see how those fascist butchers treat the old people". For this rebellious attitude of his he was hated by the reactionaries and bigots of his town, but not even the persecutions of the police could deter him, and he is still remembered today as a symbol of the resistance made by the anarchists of Castel Bolognese against the fascist attacks.



The Camera del Lavoro in Piombino in 1911. In Piombino, an industrial city with a strong anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist presence the fascists did not venture until autumn 1921, and only in June 1922 could they 'take over' the Camera del Lavoro (of the USI) after a day and a half of fighting.



## Piombino

In the first months of 1921 fascist attacks had broken out all over Tuscany. But Piombino was still untouched by the gang violence, and was to hold out for another year against the black circle that was closing around it.

Unlike other places, fascism at Piombino was born in the shadow of factory chimneys, with the money of the bosses of ILVA and of Magoa, the two most important metal works in the city, which had been occupied by armed workers in 1920. These two industrial giants supplied not only the money but also the men for the vandalism, turning the guards of the two factories, men who had always been used to the hatred of the workers, into black gangs. But these first appearances of the fascist wave found no opportunity to put down roots and grow strong in the midst of an extremely combative and revolutionary working class, which was strongly influenced both by the anarchists and by the anarcho-syndicalists of the local *Camera del Lavoro*, affiliated to the USI. To get some idea of this influence we can look at the results of the political elections of 1919, with 3483 blank votes against 1487 for the socialists out of a total of 6098 voters, and at the composition of the "Internal Commissions" of ILVA and Magona, with 15 anarcho-syndicalist delegates from the USI against the five socialist and communist delegates from the FIOM.

Until the fateful "March on Rome" in October 1922 there were not even a hundred fascist gangsters in Piombino. Before 1922 the local fascists did not dare to hold their meetings in the city. Rather, every time the fascists in Pisa, Siena or Florence did some "business" the local fascists in Piombino had to withstand the anger of the anarchists and the *Arditi del Popolo*.

The slow success of fascism in Piombino is also due, to some extent, to the short-sighted action of the CGL and of the socialists who together with the leaders of various parties, the industrialists and the fascist gangs, formed a Citizen's Committee" to pacify the city and to resolve the crisis



in the metal industry, which was threatened with closure and the laying off of all the workers.

This recognition of fascism by the socialist forces was the local equivalent of the policy which, at national level, was to lead to the Pact of Pacification between fascists and socialists. It was to be the "Citizen's Committee" itself, purged of its socialist members, which was to take control of the administration of Piombino after the conquest of the city.

Obviously the anarchists and the *Camera del Lavoro* affiliated to the USI refused to take part in this "Citizens' Committee" on the grounds that no agreement was possible with the industrialists or with the gangs, but rather that it was a revolutionary duty to go on the streets and fight to overcome the fascist violence.

The anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists were the most important supporters and activists of the *Arditi del Popolo*. On the initiative of the socialist deputy Giuseppe Mingrino there was formed in Piombino the 144th battalion of the *Arditi del Popolo*, to which the anarchists and the communist wing of the socialist party adhered. Soon however the communists were to abandon these workers' defence organisations, and a circular from the executive of the CP forbade its members to become members of the *Arditi*, or even to have contact with them. After this defection, the *Arditi* in Piombino consisted almost exclusively of anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists, and it was they who fought the hard and often bloody fights which kept the fascists out of Piombino until the middle of 1922.

The attempt on the life of the socialist Mingrino on July 19th 1921 brought the *Arditi* into action for the first time. They attacked the "den" of the fascists in Piombino, but found it empty. Then they captured the fascists in their homes and at their work places and forced one of their bosses, the director of the shipyard, to sign a certificate of surrender. The Royal Guards came to the aid of the fascists, but they too were overcome and disarmed.

The reaction of the *Arditi* lasted for several days, and only then could the forces of law and order regain control of the city.

On August 2nd the fascists and the socialists signed the Pact of Pacification in Rome. The *Arditi* put up a poster in Piombino saying, "There can be no possibility of peace at this moment between the proletariat of Piombino and its exploiters. The *Arditi del Popolo* will remain vigilant and armed against the black thugs."

On 3 September the anarchist Giuseppe Morelli was taken by surprise putting up posters against the Pact of Pacification. He defended himself with his pistol against the Royal Guards and the fascists but was killed in the fighting. During this night, anticipating the anarchist reaction, the

police broke into houses and work places, during the night shift, arresting more than 200 comrades.

The *Arditi* and the anarchists were deprived of their most active union militants, and the fascists understood that this was the moment to push home their attack. First they set fire to the socialists' office, then the *Camera Confederale* and the *La Fiamma* printers, and then moved toward the union's *Camera del Lavoro*. But they met with a patrol of young anarchists, among whom were Landi, Lunghi, Venturini, Fanci, Marchionneschi, Panzavolta, Messina and Lucarelli. In the meantime groups of workers were arriving, and the police were forced to arrest the fascists in order to protect them from the anger of the people. According to Armando Borghi: "The communist deputy Misiano attended one of the conferences in Piombino. The fascists had chased him out of parliament, threatening him with death, and he placed himself under the protection of the anarchists. We kept him in Piombino until the end of 1921."

The fascists attempted the conquest of Piombino on 25 April 1922, but when they reached the outskirts of the city they met with the anarchists and the *Arditi* who quickly put them to flight. In the meantime the metal works had re-opened. The management, assured of the full collaboration of the Citizens' Committee, prepared their final blow, skillfully manipulating a differential pay scheme to weaken the workers' unity, Piombino being an industrial centre even at that time.

On 12 June (after they had deliberately created an incident in which a fascist student was killed, for whose funeral fascists came into the city from the whole surrounding district) the fascists and the Royal Guards, who were sent from Pisa to "bring back law and order", took control of the city. First they occupied the Commune and the Pretura. Then the fascists attacked and destroyed the offices of the Socialist Party and the CGL. All that night and all the next day, with hundreds of attacks, the fascists tried to take the union offices of the USI and the printers of the anarchist newspaper *Il Martello*. But they were repeatedly driven off. Only after a day and a half of fighting were they able to beat the anarchists. So fascism came to Piombino and the best known comrades escaped to exile. Others had to face persecution and harassment under the fascist regime.

Let us take as examples the fortunes of two comrades, Egidio Fossi and Adriano Vanni.

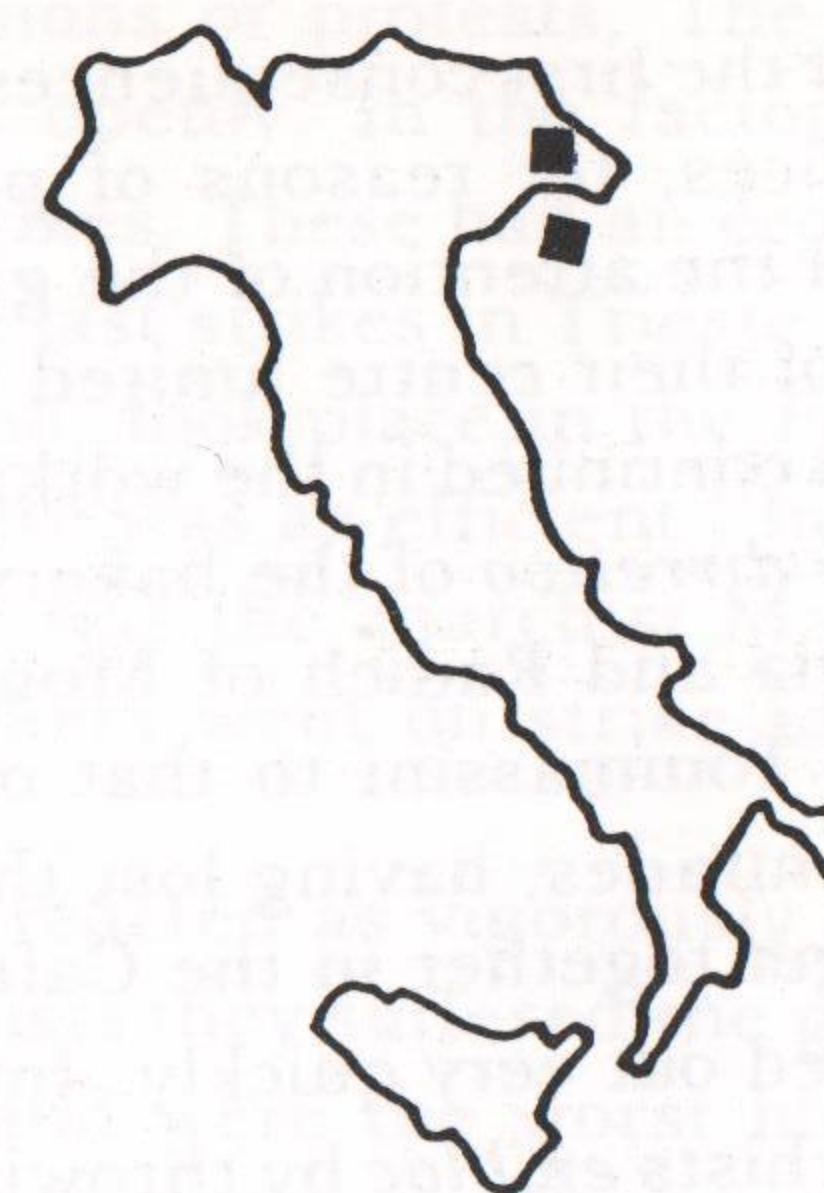
Egidio Fossi was sentenced at Pisa assizes in 1920 to twelve years and six months. He spent two years in isolation at Portolongo, and others in various other prisons. In October 1925 he was set free under the amnesty. He was repeatedly persecuted, put under supervision and threatened by the fascists, until he left secretly for exile in France. Even here he could not escape from persecution and thus began the wandering life of the emigre,



hunted also by the French police. At the news that the people of Spain had rebelled against the fascists' attempted coup he lost no time, and in August 1936 joined the Italian column Francisco Ascaso, taking part in all the actions of the Aragon Front, at Juesca, and staying to fight in Spain until March 1939. He was then interned in Gurs concentration camp and sent to the labour brigades. In 1940 he was taken prisoner by the Germans, then sent to Italy and put in the detention camp of Ventotene for five years. He was set free in September 1943 and returned to Piombino in 1945 where he took up his place in the anarchist ranks and as a worker in Italsider.

Adriano Vanni was sentenced together with Egidio Fossi. He was released at about the same time and immediately beaten bloody by the fascists. He was forced to go into exile, but life was difficult there too. After a few years he returned to Italy, and the regime's persecutions and the beatings by the blackshirt thugs began again. He took an active part in the popular uprising against the Nazis on September 10th 1943. In the partisan struggle he was one of the most responsible organisers of the resistance, and together with other libertarians he worked in groups that operated around Moremma. He was also a member of an external nucleus of the CLN. When liberation came he found himself face to face with those who had tormented him for twenty years, but he found the moral strength not to exact revenge.

Other comrades were forced to leave Piombino. Franci Dario, Bacconi, the leader of the USI, Agnarelli Smeraldo and many more. Comrades like Guerrieri Settimo, Baroni Ilio, Bellini and Cafiero moved to Turin. The comrades who stayed in Piombino were under supervision and threats. And when visits were made by government officials they were taken from their homes and held three or four days in prison.



## Trieste & Istria

The following is an incomplete, though documented picture of the Friulian anarchists contribution to the struggle against fascism. In 1919 the fascists of Trieste used to meet at the *Cafe degli Specchi*. There were about 30 of them, and there they recruited more active members for the "punitive expeditions" from among the "lumpen proletariat" rewarding them with money and cocaine. The leading light of this gang of black shirts was Giunta, who, having proved a failure as a lawyer in Florence, moved to Trieste where he took on responsibilities as secretary for the local fascists. From this first foothold he then continued his brilliant career as a fascist boss, dying a few years ago of natural causes.

At his instigation in 1920 the Balkan Hotel (Narodni Dom), an office for the Slovene organisations, was burned down. There followed fires at *Il Lavoratore*, the organ of the local communists, and at the *Camera del Lavoro*.

On this last occasion the proletariat of Trieste responded by starting a fire at the San Marco shipyard, the city's biggest industrial plant. The anarchist Maria Simonetti also participated. She was taken to court with fifteen other workers, but all of them were acquitted and the trial was an excellent contribution to anarchist propaganda.

Shortly after the end of the First World War the activity of the Germinal Anarchist Group recommenced in Trieste. it was active mainly in two sectors. One was propaganda, by means of conferences, debates and the newspaper *Germinal*, and the other was anarcho-syndicalist. The comrades, all workers, took part in union meetings where the most important trade union problems were discussed. Often on such occasions they had a decisive role, enjoying the support of many sympathisers and forcing a radicalisation of the struggles by the use of the general strike. Very soon however a third activity grew up beside these two: direct action against the gangs and against the rise of fascism.



One of the first consequences was an order from the police to move out of their offices, for reasons of public security, for they had several times attracted the attention of the gangs, to the terror of the tenants. But if the closure of their centre limited the cultural activity, their propaganda and agitation continued in the workplaces. The comrade Volpin belonged to the *consiglio dirretivo* of the bakers, Cartafina to that of the printers, Frausin of Muggia and Radich of Monfalcone to that of the metal workers, and Umberto Tommassini to that of the construction workers.

The comrades, having lost their office, had to limit their meetings, and used to get together in the Cafe Union, a socialist cooperative. The place was picked out very quickly. In August 1922 the fascists tried to liquidate the anarchists *en bloc* by throwing two bombs into the cafe. But the bombs failed to explode. The police, in reprisal, closed the cafe for a month. By this time life was impossible for fascism's opponents. The anarchists in particular were hunted everywhere.

The situation was no better in Monfalcone, where the anarchists were very active, especially in the shipyards. In March 1919 the comrade Frausin was attacked by the fascists. They left him on the ground, thinking him dead. He recovered in hospital in Monfalcone. The fascists, learning of their mistake and wanting to carry out their murderous plans, tried to kidnap him. They failed, and for the sake of his safety he moved to Trieste.

In Muggia, in the district of Trieste, a gang of fascists tried to occupy the house of a comrade, Koenig, in 1920, but were driven off by shots from a hunting rifle.

Also in 1920 a large number of fascists tried to take over the *Casa del Popolo* of Trieste. Pietro Cociancig, together with others, took part in the defence, and the attackers had to flee on this occasion as well. Cociancig, of Monfalcone, managed among other things to scrape together weapons for self defence which had been dispersed in various hiding places in the city. They kept a small stock of arms close at hand for emergencies, which enabled them to make a speedy reaction. In July 1921, for example, a group comprising three anarchists, a communist and a republican threw some bombs on a fascist gang that was returning from a punitive expedition in the poor area of San Giacomo. This wounded 28 fascists. Nobody was recognised or stopped. But these were individual initiatives, and as a group the comrades were concerned with intensifying the mass opposition during the general strikes. They made trouble for the scabs and for those shopkeepers who, despite the propaganda, remained open.

Despite the armed opposition, and that of the masses, the fascists very soon succeeded in gaining control of Trieste. The last organised action was the strike in August which was, however, not a success. The shops stayed open, there were sporadic outbreaks of fighting, but nothing decisive.

From that time there were no more processions or protests. The people were by now afraid to confront the fascists openly. In the factories the opposition lasted longer with more internal strikes. These had an economic character, but were basically anti-fascist. The last strikes in Trieste, before the promulgation of the emergency legislation, took place in the *Fabbrica Macchine Sant' Andrea* factory in March. There was an efficient "Internal Commission" in the factory and its secretary was the anarchist Mario Del Bel. For this activity he was fired. The workers went on strike for three days in protest, and he was re-instated.

It can be said that the anarchists of Giulia reacted as vigorously as they were able against fascism. After the communists they suffered the greatest number of prisoners, detainees and exiles, and were the worst hit if one considers the respective basic strength of the two groups. They took every opportunity to assert their basic principles, and they put-up posters for the 1st of May and flags for the anniversary of the Russian revolution.

In 1926, on the anniversary of the march on Rome, the police made more arrests for reasons of public security. They arrested twelve communists, socialists and republicans, and three anarchists, Umberto Tommassini, Cartafina and Negri. In the meantime, following Zamboni's attentat on Mussolini, the emergency laws came into force, and Gunsher and Umberto Tommasini were among the first anarchists to be arrested. The *ammonizione* (a form of punishment which meant reporting regularly to the police, staying at home in the evenings, and denial of cultural or political activities) was imposed on Rodolfo Defillipi, Giovanni Riboli, Nina Montanari, Mery Pahor and Lucia Minor. In order to survive, these and other anarchists had no alternative but exile.

Exile did not mean abandoning the struggle. In fact one of the reasons why the comrades left was the impossibility for the better known anarchists of continuing the struggle against fascism in Italy. For example the Giulian anarchist Cociancig threw a bomb in Anbagne (Marseilles) against the so-called Italian House, a notorious den of fascists and spies. He was arrested and sentenced to five years. On leaving prison he went to Spain to fight fascism. He returned to Brussels, was arrested and extradited to Italy. He died in 1944 in the prison of Castelfranco Emilia during an aerial bombardment.

Most of the exiled anarchists from Trieste and Giulia took part in the Spanish revolution, in the Italian section of the Ascaso column (CNT-FAI) these included Luigi Erijaz of Pola, died in Almudevar in December 1936; Giuseppe Pesel of Rovigno, died in Carasca, Huesca in April 1937; Rodolfo Gunsher of Trieste, died in May 1938 in hospital in Barcelona of disease contracted at the front; Edigio Bernadini of Trieste, wounded in Carascal in April 1937; besides Nicola Turcinovich of Rovigno, and Umberto



Tommasini, Antonio Mesghez, Guglielmo Scheffer, Lina Simonetti, Alpinolo Bucciarelli and Lucia Minor of Trieste.

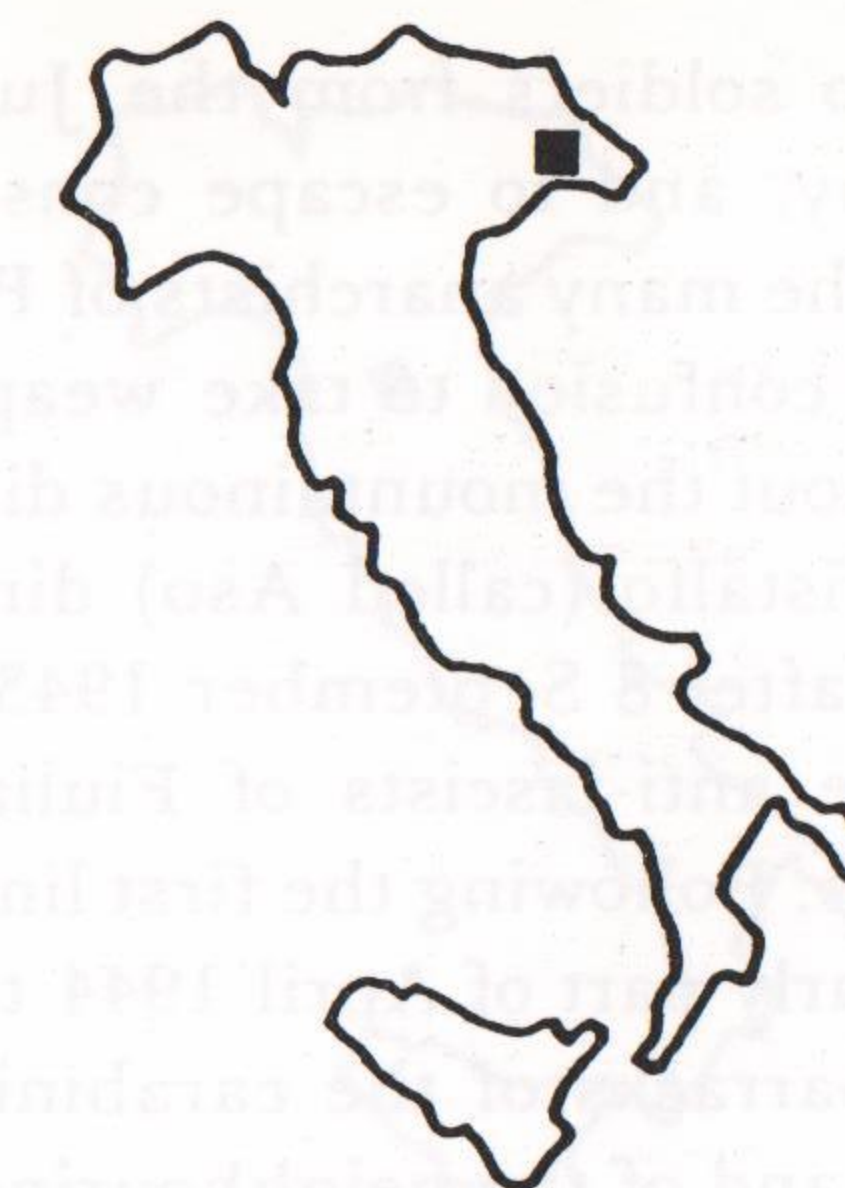
Many comrades, scattered throughout Europe after the Spanish war, were extradicted to Italy and put in detention camps. In 1943 in Ventotenne were Tommasini, Bucciarelli, Minor, Turcinovich and Giovanni Bidoli; in Tremiti were Gabriella Zetko and Ludovico Blokar.

Meanwhile, in Trieste, fascism found another victim, the comrade Vittorio Puffich. In 1938 there were disturbances created by the workers of the water works at Acegat. Puffich was singled out as the instigator and sacked. Finding it impossible to get another job to maintain his wife and their two sick children, he committed suicide.

There were however, in the district of Venice, the first signs of a revival. There were no independent anarchist groups, but some comrades liberated from detention in 1943, others who returned from exile, and others who had stayed in Trieste, collaborating with the communist groups. Comrade Bidoli maintained the connections with these. In 1944 he was arrested and deported to the German concentration camps. He never returned. Carlo Bnussi was another comrade who never returned from the German lager. Comrade Defilippi, who was a printer, obtained stamps to make documents. Many comrades allowed their houses to be used as collecting points for food, clothing and weapons, and hiding places for partisans who found themselves in danger.

Comrade Turcinovich, who came out of detention on the fall of fascism, returned to his native town of Rovigno and took part in chasing out the Germans with the Slovene groups. Following a fierce series of searches he had to flee to Genova, where he collaborated with the local fighting groups. At the end of the war he returned to Rovigno and won the recognition of the Yugoslavs for his militant anti-fascism; but he soon came into conflict with the communists. A childhood friend who was a member of the "Peoples Guards" warned him that he was in danger and advised him to go away. But in spite of this Turcinovich returned to the Ligurian city.

In May 1945 the last detainees began to return to Trieste while it was still occupied by the Slavs Tommasini returned; Bruch returned from detention in Calabria and the *Gruppo Germinal* was reconstituted. The first work was clarification, and they discussed Spain most of all. many comrades, who until that time had been collaborating with the communists, now severed that connection and were active only in their own group. With the American occupation they revived the agitation and brought out *Germinal* as a bi-monthly paper. There were conferences in various places and, above all, activity in the work places. In the trade unions Volpin resumed his work among the bakers, Cartafina in the shipyards, and Umberto Tommasini, as a metal worker, received 1100 votes to go as a delegate to the European Congress of Trade Unions, which was held in Trieste in 1947.



## La Carnia

In Carnia, right from the first appearance of fascism in the period 1920 to 1922, there was resistance to the gangs by all the left wing political movements.

Prato Carnico was the most combative district, and for a long time the fascists did not dare to penetrate there. For example, when they tried to burn down the office of the *Casa del Popolo* they clashed with the armed opposition of all the anti-fascists, and they had to stop their expeditions because they found they were "costing" too much. Because of the fierce anti-fascist struggle the district of Prato Carnico was called *Commune Rosso* by the magistrates of Udine.

In July 1933 when an anarchist died in Paris his girl friend had his body brought to his native village, Pesari, in prato Carnico. When it arrived the anarchist and anti-fascist comrades organised a funeral procession, headed by a band. The public ceremony attracted a great number of people and assumed the character of an anti-fascist demonstration. The following day came the arrest of three anarchists and two communists. They were taken to the prison of Udine and tried there. The anarchists and one of the communists were sentenced to five years dentention and the other communist to one year, to be served on the island of Ponza. One of the anarchists, Guido Cimador, was an American citizen and was released after two months following pressure from the American authorities. Italo Cristofali and Luigi D'Agaro served the full term. D'Agaro was joined in detention by his wife and two children, one of whom died in Ponza.

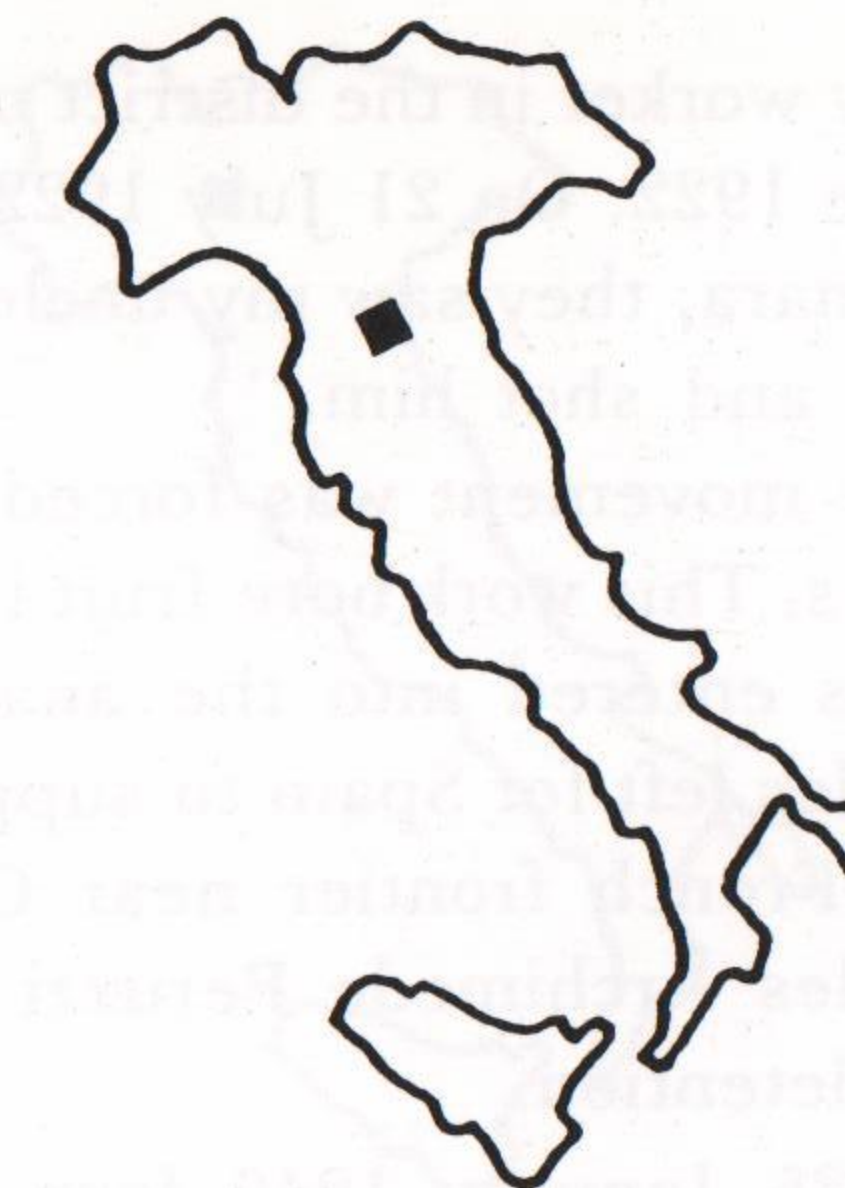
By the time of the outbreak of the second World War there were very few comrades left in Carnia, as a result of the heavy emigration, especially to North and South America, and as a consequence of twenty years of fascist dictatorship. Nevertheless, at the fall of fascism on July 25th 1943, the few who remained organised for the armed struggle against the Nazis.

From 8 September small local detachments were formed and help was



given to soldiers from the Julia division, who, to avoid deportation to Germany, and to escape conscription, took to the mountains with their arms. The many anarchists of Pradumbli took advantage of this moment of general confusion to take weapons from the barracks which were spread throughout the mountainous district, and hide them. The anarchist worker Italo Cristallo (called Aso) directed operations.

Soon after 8 September 1943 the partisans of Alta Carnia made contact with the anti-fascists of Fiulia for the first replacements of automatic weapons. Following the first links in the winter of 1943-44, they were able, in the early part of April 1944 to attack first one and then all the outposts of the barracks of the carabinieri and of the *Guardia di Finanza* of Alta Carnia, and of the neighbouring districts of Alto Cadore. The purpose was to supply arms, uniforms and radio-telegraphic materials to all the comrades who were gradually joining the armed Liberation Front, which slowly grew throughout the district.



## Pistoia

The anarchists and militants of the *Partito Comunista Libertario* (founded in 1939-40) formed the first partisan groups in Pistoia and took up the armed struggle against the Nazis. Among them was the group which took the name of *Silvano Fedi* on the death of their commander on 29 July 1944.

In Pistoia the anarchist had an historical background of experience and of struggle. During the red two years of 1919-1920 the movement went forward from its oldbase among the craftsmen to include new social classes. The USI was active everywhere, and was especially strong among the carpenters and printers. Its influence extended beyond its own real strength; it formed a point of reference for all the revolutionary forces, and had a stimulating and catalysing function inside the workers' movement, which caused a crisis for the CGL hegemony. The *Sindacato Ferrovieri* (Railway Workers' Union) followed the principle of direct action, and its secretary was the anarchist Egisto Gori, who was also the secretary of the local USI.

On 7 July 1920 the railways workers of Pistoia, in solidarity with Soviet Russia, refused to move a wagon destined for Poland. Wherever there was a strong anarcho-syndicalist element the struggle became more radical. During the first phase of the struggle, when workers all over were blocking production, the prefect of Florence, Crivellara, sent a telegram to inform the Minister of the Interior that in Pistoia "the workers who belong to the USI have cut down production to such an extent that industrialists have declared that where this state of affairs continues they will be forced to reduce minimum salaries."

In Pistoia the fascist violence dealt hard blows to the working class and its organisations. With the coming of fascism many militants were sent to prison and detention. The son of the anarchist Egisto Gori is a telling witness to the climate. "Unexpectedly they came to take away my father and my uncles, then we had to wait for months....Father was the first



railway worker in the district of Florence to be sacked for political reasons, in June 1922. On 21 July 1922 a lorry drove along Via Curtatone and Via Montanara; they saw my uncle, who was a carpenter, mistook him for my father, and shot him."

The movement was forced to work underground, by propaganda and contacts. This work bore fruit in 1936, when a group of young students and workers entered into the anarchist movement. In June that year three comrades left for Spain to support the revolution, but were stopped at the Italian-French frontier near Chavier (Turin). On 27 February 1937 the comrades Archimede Peruzzi and AEnzl Gazzoli were sentenced to five years detention.

On 25 January 1940 four young anarchists, including Silvano Fedi, appeared before the Special Tribunal, charged with participation in "an anti-national group and propaganda". The accused were acquitted through lack of proof, but the movement took a new lease on life. Agitation and propaganda now gave way to preparation for the armed struggle.

The first groups in Pistoia to take up armed struggle were militants from the anarchists and from the PCL. The Resistance in Pistoia covered the eleventh zone, commanded by Silvano Fedi.

In both zones the anarchist and libertarian presence was predominant. In July and August 1943 in Piuveca, in the plain of Pistoia, the anarchists who worked with Silvano Fedi did not limit themselves to the armed struggle, but were busy organising the population to overcome their difficulties. They persuaded the peasants to mill the grain that had been left to rot because there was no market for it. They got two men to work full time at an oven, and the bread they made was distributed freely to the local population, to whom were added refugees from Montaguana and Momigno.

After organising things efficiently the anarchist and libertarian groups helped groups of various political tendencies with supplies of cheese, rice, sugar, flour, shoes and cigarettes. They also gave 30,000 lire to the local CLN for the purchase of a duplicator.

Besides this the group *Silvano Fedi* (whose commander was delegate of the Pistoian anarchist group in the meeting held with comrades from Florence) contributed 5,000 lire a week to the newspaper *Umanita Nova*, which was printed clandestinely in Florence. Headed by the anarchist Artese Benesperi, it was the first partisan group to enter Pistoia as a military formation. At five in the morning the anarchists' red and black flag flew from the bell tower in Piazza del Duomo. At ten o'clock it was replaced by the tricolour, symbol of the republican order that is with us to this day, and which still operates Mussolini's code of Justice, the *Codice Rocco*, his agreement with the Vatican, the Concordat, as well as the system of exploitation.



## Milan

Before the coming of fascism Milano had been one of the most active centres of the Italian anarchist movement. During the Resistance it again became a centre for propaganda and struggle.

In 1944 there appeared various clandestine anarchist papers, *L'Adunata dei Libertai*, *L'Azione Libertaria* and *Il Comunista Libertario* (organ of the *Federazione Comunista Libertaria Lombarda*) among others.

Pietro Bruzzi was a figure of particular note. he had been a militant since the beginning of the century. Studious and capable in discussion, effective as a revolutionary propagandist, he had been in Russia in 1921 and then in exile in Paris where he ran the Committee for Political Victims. During the Spanish revolution of 1936 he was active in the anarchist brigades where he showed great courage. On his return to France he was deported to Italy and put into detention for five years on the island of Ponza. At the fall of fascism he was held in the concentration camp of Renicci d'Anghiari (Arezzo) by Badoglio's military dictatorship. He escaped together with other anarchists and again took part in clandestine work, leading an anarchist partisan group which operated around Milano, and also editing and distributing *L'Adunata dei Libertari*. He was captured through the treachery of a fascist spy, and although he was tortured with such ferocity that his face was completely smashed, he gave no information to the Nazis and was subsequently shot. Before dying he still had the strength to shout '*Viva l'anarchia*'.

After his death the anarchists of Milano formed the groups *Errico Malatesta* and *Pietro Bruzzi* which had their base in Carlo Erba. On 25th April 1945 the anarchist brigades disarmed a German column that was in retreat and put all the industrial area into the hands of the people's rebellion, without risk of sabotage or more violence. In the poor district of Porta Ticinese it was the anarchists who got the struggle moving. This was the first part of the city to fall into the hands of the rebels.



By a series of efficient and brave manoeuvres the anarchist brigades succeeded in controlling the arteries leading to Porta Sempione and Porta Garibaldi. They occupied the Mussolini barracks and protected the central electrical depot. Also they cleared out many fascist strongpoints and even the radio station was taken over by brigades of the Malatesta group in collaboration with other brigades.



*Prato Carnico: the Casa del Popolo. Built by anarchists and socialists at the beginning of the century, it was defended from the repeated attacks of the fascists. In the end the gangs had to abandon plans to conquer the small but militant district.*



## Lucca

As no anarchist group operated around Lucca we can only mention the militant revolutionary engagement of some comrades at the time of the partisan struggle in Lucca.

Luigi Velani, an anarchist and a lawyer by profession, died in 1973. He was responsible in the Spring of 1944 for important intelligence services for the resistance forces in Lucca. When discovered he evaded arrest and joined his comrades on the mountains in the district of Val di Serchio. He was adjutant major for XI zone, where there were many anarchist partisans active. This partisan group, with a thousand comrades, was headed by the famous "Pippo" and Luigi Velani. It lost 300 men but took over 8000 Nazi prisoners.

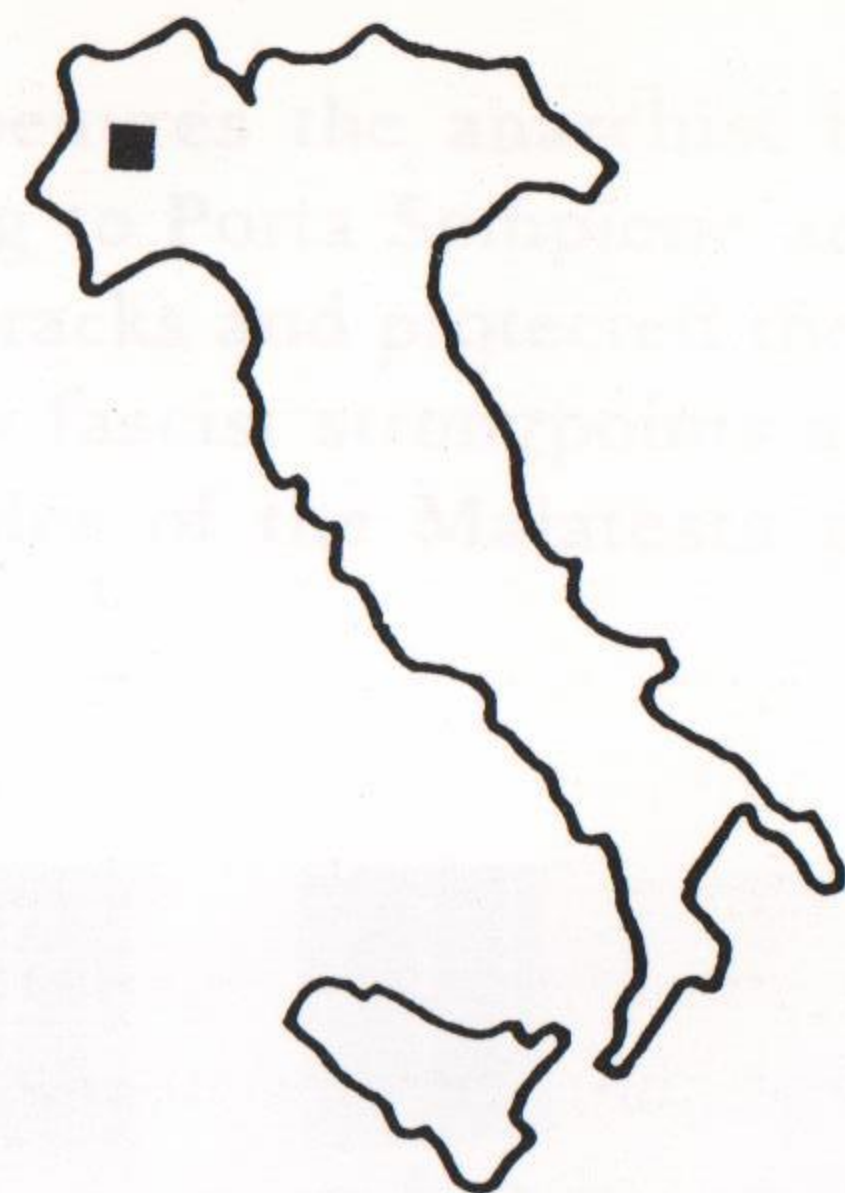
Emanuele Diena, who had been an electrician on the railways, and then a clerk, was arrested in Taranto in 1943 while at work on the railways, and sent into detention in Pisticci in the province of Matera. In Milan, during the Liberation he was part of the red guard in charge of the Municipal Tramway at Porto Vittoria.

The anarchists Ferruccio Arrighi, a travelling salesman, and Vittorio Giovannetti, a wood sculptor, had important coordinating functions in the city, putting anti-fascists in touch with the partisan groups working in Garfagnana, the mountain range near Lucca.

During the Liberation all these comrades were members of the anti-fascist citizens' committees.



## Turin



On 18th December 1922 Turin was the scene of tremendous fascist attacks, which are still remembered today as the massacre of Turin. Many workers were attacked in their houses and beaten up in front of their families. Others were loaded into lorries and thrashed by the river Po, on the hillside roads and in the fields of Barriera di Nizza.

Among the eleven "subversives" barbarously murdered by the black-shirts we remember the anarchist Pietro Ferrero, who two years previously had been one of the inspirers and organisers of the factory occupations in Turin, in his capacity of secretary of the FIOM of Turin. Savagely beaten by the fascist gangs, Ferrero was tied by his feet to a lorry and dragged through the streets of Turin. His body, by now unrecognisable was left in a road not far from the *Camera del Lavoro*.

The anarchist Probo Mari, an activist of the USI of Turin, had better luck. The fascists carried him to the banks of the river Po, tied his hands behind his back and threw him in the river. But Mari succeeded in reaching the bank again and later recovered in hospital.

On 24 April 1945, comrade Ruju, a partisan in the independent 23rd division "Sergio de Vitis" was sent to Avignana to organise the resistance and the defence of some industrial plant. On his arrival, as he was trying to contact some young anti-fascists, he was met by a German patrol. However he managed to profit by some moments of confusion and took three of them prisoner. When he returned to Avignana he was met by the village priest who begged him to release the prisoners, since otherwise the town would be destroyed by two o'clock on that same afternoon.

He immediately went with two public officials to the German positions, where he was able to speak with the commander, who asked him to release the three captured soldiers, otherwise he would be forced to order the

destruction of the town, in accordance with the orders he had received from the 5th Alpine division. Our comrade let him know that 10,000 partisans surrounded the place, and that within 30 minutes they would begin the attack. Moreover, any Germans who by chance survived would be considered as war criminals and shot.

All this was bluff, and the 10,000 partisans existed only in Ruju's imagination. But the commander believed him, and gave himself up with the 500 men in the garrison, surrendering their weapons to the partisans.

For this episode the "democratic" state wanted to decorate Ruju with a cross of military valour, but our comrade refused the useless decoration as did other anarchist partisans, in accordance with their anarchist beliefs.



*Partisans resting at a mountain lodge.*





## Carrara

From the moment of its first appearance the local workers' movement had been strongly influenced by libertarian socialism to such an extent that from the first years of the century Carrara was an important centre for anarchist propaganda.

It had been above all the anarcho-syndicalist struggles of the workers in the mines who (organised by the anarchist Alberto Meschi) had been the first in Italy to obtain the 6-hour working day, that showed the workers the validity of the anarchists' political activity. And so Carrara was always in the front line of the people's struggles against militarism, against the insolence of the bosses, against the State's repression, and thus from the start put up a determined resistance against fascism.

The whole province of Carrara, together with the neighbouring provinces of La Spezia, Pisa and Livorno, was one of the centres of gang terrorism. It is sufficient to remember the shooting against a group of anarchists by a fascist gang, supported by the carabinieri in Carrara in June 1921. And then the general strike in the same city in reply to the fascist attack against the comrade Alberto Meschi, at that time secretary of the *Camera del Lavoro* (18 October 1921); and the wounding, again by the blackshirts, of the anarchist Bonelli in Berizzana (Carrara). The anti-fascist opposition of the workers of the district is marked by numerous other incidents of the same kind. They also always brought help to neighbouring centres which suffered fascist attacks, as during the events in Sarzana, the outcome of which was the trial of about fifty anarchists under the charge of "criminal association" on January 19th 1922.

During the twenty years of fascist dictatorship, the people's opposition stayed alive, although there were no famous incidents to mark this (with the exception of the unsuccessful attentat on Mussolini by the anarchists from Carrara, Lucetti and Vatteroni, which is discussed elsewhere).

Immediately after 8 September 1944 the anarchists learned that the Germans were disarming the Italian soldiers in the Dogali barracks in Carrara, and many of them (including Del Papa, Galeotti, Pelliccia etc) hurried to the spot and succeeded in getting hold of many weapons and then forming partisan groups.

The anarchists' participation in the Resistance assumed decisive proportions in Carrara, more so than in any other part of Italy. It was not a question of the participation of single individuals, nor of anarchists working in non-anarchist groups in an uncohesive way. It was really a mass phenomenon which involved a large proportion of the population, and which put the anarchist groups always in the front positions.

From September 1943 the comrades made a stable network of contacts, which also included Sarzana and other centres. The first search operation carried out by the carabinieri and the militia was directed against the first attempts of the anarchists to organise. But the repression did not have the intended effect, because the resistance movement had healthy roots. A few arrests were made among the anarchists. In less than two months however, the son of the governor of the Massa prison was kidnapped, and the arrested comrades were set free in exchange for his liberty.

Now that it was completely re-constituted the anarchist movement developed further, both in the city and in the villages, making contacts with other anti-fascist groups. The anarchist group *Gino Lucetti* was operational in the same area as other groups. It was decided to form a unified command for the Apuan Brigade, while leaving the political components independent (the anarchists, communists, etc.). This decision was taken because of the need, which was strongly felt, to coordinate military operations against the Nazis, who, with the establishment of the Linea Gotica, had increased in number and become even harsher in repressing the partisan movement. In general relations between Lucetti and other groups were good, although the recent traumatic experience of the Spanish civil war had led to a deep distrust of the communists, and in particular of their group *Giacomo Ulivi*.

The incident in Casette showed how well-founded this mistrust was. Until now it has never been made public, and it has been unknown outside the circles of those who were actually there.

The winter of 1944 was drawing near and the situation was really difficult, both because of the growing Nazi repression, and because help from the allies failed to arrive. Radio London suggested to the partisans that they should go home to last out the winter. But those who returned home from the valleys and mountains were subject to the vengeance of the Nazis. Other partisans preferred to stay in the wilds preparing for the next



spring. They decided to try and pass through the *Linea Gotica* by the mountains, and to try to reach Lucca, a town held by the allies.

Partisans from the *Lucetti* group marched in a single column with the communists from the *Giacomo Ulivi* group. Their commanders were, respectively, Ugo Mazzucchelli (who has recounted to us this incident in Casette) and Guglielmo Brucellaria. When they came to a bridge which joined two valleys near the village of Casette the communist leaders insisted that the anarchists march at the head of the column, and were the first come to the bridge. It was in the dark of the night, and when Ugo Mazzucchelli, at the head of the line, came to cross the bridge the silent cover of the darkness was broken by the infernal noise of a machine gun. This was positioned in a fortified building near the bridge, but fortunately could only hit part of it.

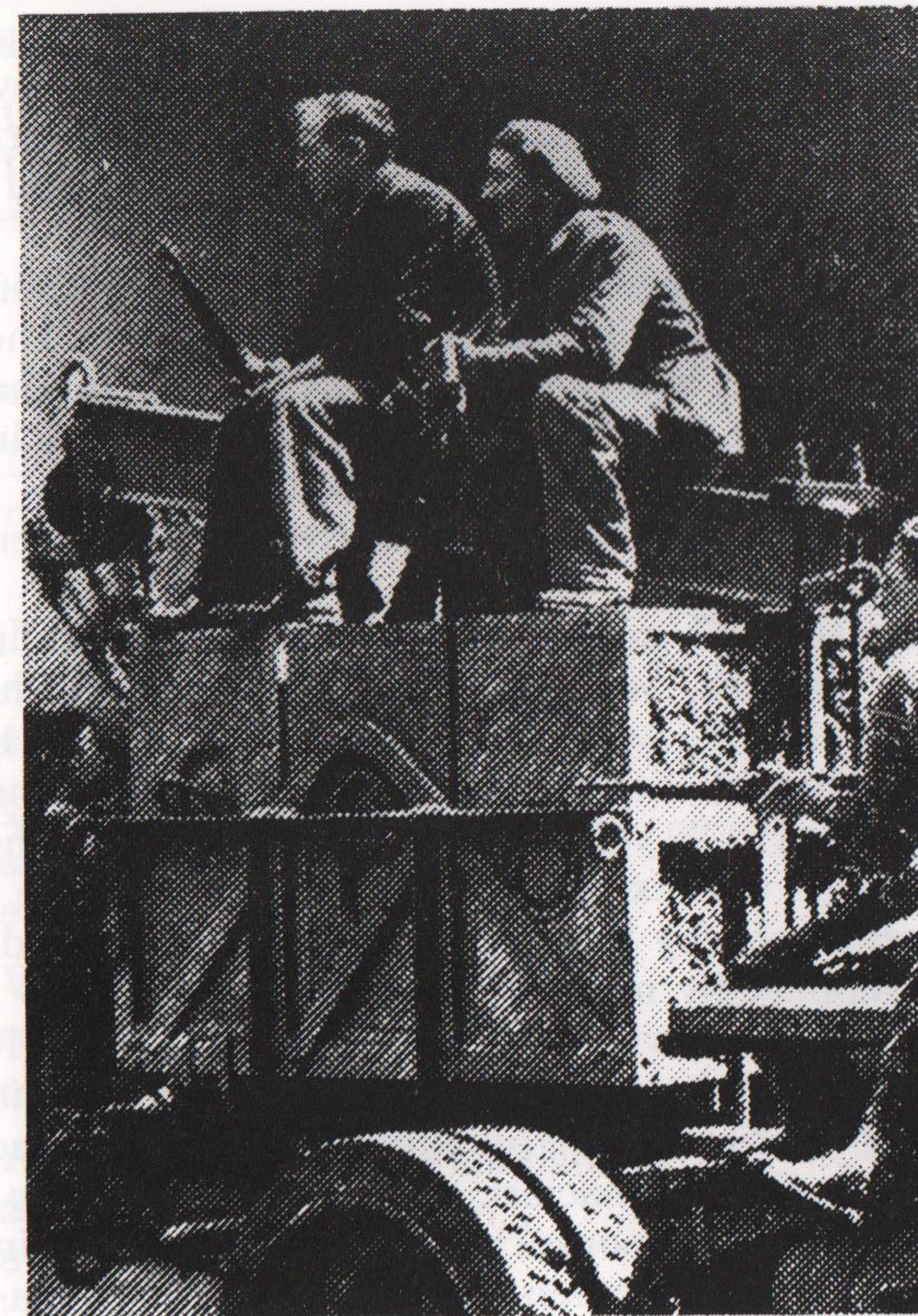
So our comrade, and the other anarchists were able to save themselves, certainly contrary to the hopes of the communists. Their previous insistence on the anarchists being at the front gave rise to serious suspicions amongst the anarchists, who sent a highly critical report to the unified command of the Apuan Brigade. These suspicions proved to be fully justified when it became known for certain that the communist leaders knew in advance of the machine gun in the building, but the whole business was hushed up completely with the usual justification of the necessity for anti-fascist "unity".

Besides the *Lucetti* group, the anarchist group *Michele Schirru* was active around Carrara, parallel to *Lucetti*, as was the *Garibaldi Lunense* division made up mainly of anarchists, and the group *Elio Wockievic*, whose leader, the anarchist Giovanni Mariga, was offered the golden medal for bravery in battle, and naturally refused it in accordance with his anarchist principles.

Both in the Apuan mountains and on the coastal plain numerous anarchist groups were constantly in action, everywhere confronting the criminal Nazi repression.

The province of Carrara was in fact the scene of some of the most horrible massacres carried out by the Germans and their republican slaves. It is enough to remember the annihilation of the populations of the little village of Sant'Anna di Stazzana (560 dead, 12th August 1944), of Vinca (173 dead, 24th August 1944) and of San Terenzo Monti (163 dead, 19th August 1944). And this is certainly not the complete list. In this tragic reality of war, destruction and reprisals, the anarchists of Carrara had the great merit of organising and defending the life of the population in the city of Carrara. Above all the comrades took upon themselves the responsibility of assuring a regular flow of supplies, and of keeping the hospital working and continuing the armed struggle against the enemy at the same time.

Money was needed, and the method of raising it was one of the most attractive aspects of the work of the Carraran anarchists. They used to call together the rich and oblige them to make over large sums of money to the partisans, using their arms to persuade them, and making out a regular receipt for payment! In fact this was made out in three copies, one for the contributor, one for the *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* (CLN) and one for the comrade Ugo Mazzucchelli, commander of the *Lucetti* group, who organised these summonses. Thus it was possible to help the most needy families, to finance the partisan groups and the hospital, and thus to reinforce the strong unity between the population and the anarchist partisans, which is still the most important lesson of the anarchist resistance in Carrara.



Partisans on a captured German truck, Milan, 25th April 1945.



## After 1945

The Italian anarchists' struggle against fascism did not stop in 1945. It continued, above all in the question of international revolutionary solidarity with the Spanish comrades. However we will terminate our brief and incomplete historical panorama at the so-called liberation. We mention only three post-war episodes.

In November 1949 three young armed anarchists, Busico, De Lucchi and Mancuso, occupied the Spanish consulate in Genova. They grouped together in the hallway, hands in the air, then raised an anarchist flag on the balcony and set fire to the archives. In their trials in June and November 1950 they turned from accused to accusers of Iberian fascism and managed to get off with relatively light sentences (from two to three years).

On 30th August 1957 in Barcelona, Gogliardo Fiaschi, a young anarchist from Carrara, was arrested together with the Spanish comrade Luis Vicente. They, with Jose Facerias, who had been killed that same day, were part of an Italo-Spanish commando group of urban guerrillas. Sentenced to 20 years, he served only a part of the sentence in Spain. In 1965 he was extradited to Italy, where, in the meantime, he had been sentenced by Italian 'justice' to 13 years and 6 months for a hold-up supposedly made by the commando group in 1957 to finance anti-Francoist activity. Gogliardo was released in 1975.

In September 1962 four young anarchists of the International Federation of Libertarian Youth, Amadeo Bertolo, Gianfranco Pedron, Luigi Gerli and Aimone Fornaciari, with the help of three socialists, kidnapped the Spanish vice-consul in Milan, and demanded in exchange for his liberation the cancellation of the death sentence passed a few days previously on the young anarchist Jorge Conil Valls. The death sentence was revoked, and after three days the vice-consul was released. The whole affair, and the subsequent trial of Bertolo and his comrades (which ended with light sentences) was a great success for anti-Francoist and libertarian propaganda.

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