

## Italian Revolutionary Syndicalism

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Revolutionary Syndicalism made its first appearance in Italy in 1902-1903, and in the period up to 1914 underwent very considerable evolution. Both the shattering impact of the First World War and the highly agitated political and social climate which preceded the Fascist « revolution » of 1922 had the effect of modifying very considerably what can be taken to have been the original doctrines of the movement. Appearances might suggest the assertion that there was in fact little if any contiguity between the current as it was before the war, and its nature after having emerged from that upheaval. One of the aims of this short account is to demonstrate that it was not in fact the war alone which was responsible for this transformation, the seeds of which had been sown when Revolutionary Syndicalism first arose in Italy, but did not flower until after the war. The movement will here be treated as a continuous political current, although its « unity » in theory and practice would be difficult to demonstrate. The theoretical bases developed and were applied along differing lines, corresponding to various groups and actors in the political arena. It can be stated at the outset, nevertheless, that for the most part the development of a theoretical basis preceded syndicalist action. This will be illustrated with the development of the principal theme of this account, which is of a more investigative nature, consisting of an attempt to crystallize the theoretical bases of Revolutionary Syndicalism, as conceived in the initial period of the movement's development. Such a survey will encompass, roughly speaking, the period from 1903 to 1910, and, once again, a thorough understanding of the doctrinal bases is indispensable if subsequent evolution is to be appreciated. It will be seen that what might be termed the « central concepts » of Revolutionary Syndicalism remain at the forefront until the fateful year 1914, although slight modifications can be detected starting from about 1912. The core of the development, however, can be seen to have taken place not in relation

to the central concepts referred to, either during or after the war. This paper will focus on the nature of the premises upon which the doctrines of Revolutionary Syndicalism were formed, the subsequent development of that doctrine both in theory and in practice, and finally upon critical analysis. As was suggested earlier, the seeds for the radical transformation of the basis concept upon which the movement was founded can be discerned from the outset in these very premises. Revolutionary Syndicalism as conceived and manifested in the period 1902 and 1910 had thus a very short life and received the death sentence in 1910 with Sorel's repudiation of syndicalism.

Revolutionary Syndicalism can clearly be seen to have begun in 1898 with the publication by Georges Sorel of *L'Avenir Socialiste des Syndicats*. An Italian translation first appeared in 1903. Sorel based himself upon the Revisionist Marxism of Bernstein, especially the theories of class polarization and historical and dialectical materialism, as well as upon the philosophy of Henri Bergson, which maintained that history is impelled by spontaneous movements which arise periodically among the masses, giving *élan* — in other words a new moral basis — to the historical process. This essentially *moralistic* basis provided by Bergson meant that the new order could not be achieved solely by the application of the conclusions reached by Bernstein in his reinterpretation of Marx. Sorel accepted that events had demonstrated that Marx's polarization of classes — a necessary precursor of revolution — had not taken place. Indeed, as Capitalism grew ever more powerful, one of the incidental effects had been that the worker's wage had in fact increased substantially, as had his standard of living. The result of this deduction was that doubt was cast also upon the theory of historical materialism (1). Sorel, however, rejected the conclusions reached by Bernstein regarding the consequences of what he had discovered, namely that the task of the Socialist Parties and Trade Unions was now to devote their energies exclusively to day-to-day battles in the political and economic spheres : promoting reforms in parliaments and increments to the material and physical well-being of the working class. According to Sorel, what was needed was, on the contrary, a revival of the revolutionary spirit in order to lead the crusade against firstly, decadence, as typified by the bourgeois capitalist system, and secondly, positivism, the stifler of individualism and humanity, as represented by the reformist socialist parties of the day, which of course as turn-coats received his double anathema. Sorel deduced that this new moralistic

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(1) States that the historical process must at some stage pass through a phase whereby Capitalism will break down due to its internal inconsistencies, giving the signal for the oppressed proletariat to rise and destroy it by crushing the bourgeoisie.

spirit of revolution was only to be found in the trade unions or *syndicats*, because it was here that the worker was able to wage real class war against the corrupters, reformers, and compromisers. The workers in their unions were to preserve, strengthen, and affirm their distinct class — consciousness — a concept of proselytizing purity — in order that their distinct organization and growing strength would allow them to cripple the existing order by industrial action, and ultimately to achieve their end of general strike and revolution, with the overthrow of bourgeois capitalism and its lackeys. The syndicalists would take over and themselves form the nucleus of the new society, developing in an efficient manner (guaranteed by the absence of corruption and « raking-off ») the economic tools and equipment which had been misused by the capitalist system, this time to the benefit of all and not merely the fortunate few. Property formerly owned by capitalists would be vested in the *syndicats*.

Another influence on Sorel and on the Italian syndicalist movement was Francesco S. Merlino, and old follower of Bakunin who had been much concerned with the development of anarcho-socialism before the introduction and general adoption of Marxist dogma during the 1890's. Merlino's bequest to the movement, shared with Enrico Malatesta, was the consuming fire of the revolutionary god unshackled by intermediaries such as political parties, agreed reforms, and so forth (2). The anarchistic accent on individualism in the formation of the new society was another factor whose importance was not lost on Sorel in the development of his thought. Thus Revolutionary Syndicalism may be said to have been a revisionist anarchist successor to Bernstein. The import of Revolutionary Syndicalism and Anarchism as concerted forces acting together will be discussed below.

At this point it would be useful to give an outline of the development of Revolutionary Syndicalism as an economic and socio-political force up to 1914. Within the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), the struggle between revolution and reformism was in full swing by 1902, and in that year at the party congress at Imola the « revolutionists » led by Ferri and Labriola clashed with the gradualist reformers behind Turati and Treves. To have both a minimalist (reform) and a maximalist (revolution) programme was in direct conflict with socialist principles, which accept only the latter. The seemingly insurmountable differences between the two factions were promptly patched up by a makeshift compromise arrived at for the sake of party unity, but which probably fooled no one. The Revolutionary Syndicalists again put up a strong fight at the PSI congress of

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(2) See later references to « mediation ».

1904 at Bologna, but it was at this point that their fortunes began to wane. At the congress of Rome in 1906 they were totally isolated, a number of syndicalists being forced to leave the staff of *Avanti*, the party organ. The general strike of 1904, led by Labriola and Macchi, had been the height of the movement's agitation on an economic level, but though a considerable achievement in itself, the substantial aim — the spreading among the masses of belief in the ideal of the *sindacati di mestiere* as the vehicle of revolution — was in no way achieved. It is worthy of note, as Luigi Lotti remarks in *La Settimana Rossa*, that until 1906 the Revolutionary Syndicalists had placed the main emphasis upon agitation within the Socialist Party itself. The significance of this will be outlined below when the concepts and methods of *sindacati di mestiere* and revolution come under examination. The real breach between the Revolutionary Syndicalists and the PSI occurred in 1907, following the formation in 1906 under the auspice of the Party of the *Confederazione Generale del Lavoro* (CGL), the new national labour-union organization which from the outset had adopted gradualist-reformist policies. The only course which to the Revolutionary Syndicalists seemed compatible with their aims was to form an equivalent organization of their own. This was done at the Congress of Parma in 1907, the new organization representing 202,000 workers, the largest single group being the 60,000 railwaymen. A *Comitato Nazionale della Resistenza* was set up with its own paper *L'Internazionale*. The Congress however failed to set up a national steering or organizing committee, leaving the organization instead at branch level. The immediate result was a diminution of the collective force of the movement, and an easy victory for the (now wholly reformist) official socialists of the PSI rump. The strike of the agrarian workers in 1908 at Parma, a strong centre of Revolutionary Syndicalism, itself in favour of more strikes and an ultimate general strike, greatly discredited the movement and undermined its real political force. By 1910 all the *Camere del Lavoro* which had attended the 1907 Parma Congress had returned to the minimalist CGL with the sole exception of that of Parma itself, which was refused entry.

The development of this new revolutionary movement had in the meanwhile had a great effect of the activity of the anarchists, whose movement had apparently remained more or less defunct since the 1890's. In June 1907 however there took place the first *Congresso Anarchico Italiano*, at which the movement endorsed the aims and principles of syndicalism (though not of co-operativism), affirming « the necessity of trade union organization to the direction of the class struggle by the means of direct revolutionary action on the part of working-class organizations ». The International Anarchist Congress at Amsterdam in the same year accepted Revolutionary Syndicalism as a vehicle for revolution, and gave

its *nihil obstat* to anarchists wishing to enter trade union organizations. Malatesta however at this time stated that the syndicalist programme culminating in the general strike as the prelude to take-over was illusory, and that only the anarchist method of insurrectionary revolution — i.e. direct political and not economic attack — was viable. It should be remembered that the actual strength of active anarchists was exiguous, amounting only to about 10,000 before the Red Week of 1914. Nevertheless in Italy Armando Borghi was elected leader of the *Unione Sindacale Italiano*, and he was an anarcho-socialist.

The revival of revolutionary as opposed to reformist doctrines within the Socialist movement itself led to the formation of the *Unione Sindacale Italiano* (USI) at the Congress of Modena in November 1912, and this constituted a more permanent break with the CGL than had been the abortive attempt of 1907. The leading exponent of the new breakaway faction was Alceste de Ambris, who in 1913 stated : « It will always have to be remembered that syndicalism is faith and action, not merely criticism, theory, philosophy, and dogma ». The revolutionary role of the *sindacati di mestiere* had been reaffirmed. But the USI was divided in 1914-1915 over the question of Italy's entry into war, Borghi supporting neutralism and De Ambris intervention : the USI as a whole had denounced Italy's invasion of Libya in 1911, with the exception of Labriola, Olivetti, and some of the other theorists. However, in the Milan strikes of 1913, Corridoni, one of the leading figures of the USI, had already led his men on the twin principles of proletariat and nation. By 1913 membership of the USI had risen to over 100,000, although the CGL could count three times that number of adherents. The USI found most support in Lombardy, and especially Emilia and Tuscany (the latter have always been traditionally « red » areas, where the political agitator is something of a popular figure). Some support came from the poor South and from other regions of the North. These figures cannot be taken at their face value, as a number of local unions were sympathetic to the USI but remained outside it to preserve socialist unity : this was the case with the powerful railwaymen's union, with 90,000 members, which was especially close to the USI.

The preceding historical analysis should be read in conjunction with the exposition of Revolutionary Syndicalist theory which follows. This falls loosely into a treatment of the premises, method, and outcome. In *Sindacalismo e Riformismo* (1905), Labriola took up Sorel's argument of the need for a pure revolutionary organ to effect economic, social, and consequently moral change, typified by the *sindacato di mestiere*. Thus the premise of Revolutionary Syndicalism is one of self-sufficiency : it alone can provide the organ of revolution. Unlike the reformists' programmes,

says Labriola, « true socialism aims to create a truly autonomous control of production by the workers, thus eliminating all differences between the owner of the means of production and the producers themselves » : the *sindacato di mestiere* was clearly the method. Labriola elsewhere establishes, or rather attempts to prove, the exclusivity of this organ as the vehicle of revolution, quoting Marx's statement at the Geneva International Congress of 1866 : « the trade unions spontaneously became the centres of gravity of the organization of the workers' struggle ».

The labour organization was the front of revolution, Marx had said ; Labriola now superimposed on this the highly questionable deduction that this was none other than the *sindacato di mestiere*. Enrico Leone in *Il Sindacalismo* (1906) established the idea that the revolutionary *syndicat* was the true inheritor of Marx's philosophy : like Labriola, Leone had accepted the results which had activated Bernstein's revisionism, but had then proceeded to reinterpret the conclusions. Indeed Leone went further and stated that the development of socialist agitation had moved away from Marxian premises at the time when the socialist parties were first formed. Political and electoral action had resulted in reformism (*minimum* programme), with the « bourgeoisification » of the parties themselves. What was needed was a truly proletarian organization with an undilutable revolutionary spirit. Angelo Olivetti arrived independently at the same conclusions (3). The arguments were further reinforced by Sergio Panunzio in *La Persistenza del Diritto* (1909). The work which really brought the philosophical basis of the argument in favour to the surface was *Giorgio Sorel*, by Agostino Lanzillo (1910). Sorel had begun from the anti-positivist premise : the socialist parties were both positivist and reformist, which could only spell decadence. Gone was the spontaneity of what had supposedly been the revolutionary days, with the highly romantic individualism, heroism, and sacrifice that all this implied. Democracy and parliamentarism were rejected as compromising agents corrosive to revolutionary agitation. Sorel saw in the workers the only hope for a « cleansing » revolution whereby the old values of heroism and struggle would be applied to a final victory for the dignity of man. The importance of this account is that Lanzillo accepted it absolutely : moreover, the Sorelian method was highly influential in all the writings mentioned, even if in the case of those of Labriola and Leone equal reliance was placed on Marx. This bears out my earlier contention that the seeds for transformation were laid at the outset.

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(3) V. *Problemi del Socialismo Contemporaneo*, 1916, and many articles in *Pagine Libere*.

Before embarking on a discussion of method, a few words ought to be said about the syndicalists' attitude towards the state. Labriola wrote in *Sindacalismo e Riformismo* : « (this is to...) weaken the state, increase the trade unions' power, bringing closer the take-over of the means of production by the workers' collectivities ». This assumption was based upon the general belief among syndicalist theorists that the state was but the arm of bourgeois capitalism. Leone in *Economia Sociale in Rapporto al Socialismo* (1904) said of the prospect of revolution : « salary increases, though tending as with strikes to lessen profits, cannot further our aim, for the monopoly of capitalist appropriation is guaranteed by the state, the laws, and the combination of historical and social forces which govern these, and which have not yet been overcome ». Thus Revolutionary Syndicalism sees in the state and all its tentacles the enemy which it seeks to destroy. Unlike anarchism, however, as Malatesta pointed out, revolutionary syndicalism had a different method by which to achieve the revolutionary objective. Here the influence of Bernstein is most important.

If, as Bernstein's findings seemed to indicate, the working class was in fact better off under capitalism, then, for the Revolutionary Syndicalists, the task of revolution was to maximize the economic processes of capitalism and make them more efficient. Labriola discusses this point in *Economia, Socialismo, Sindacalismo* under the heading « the strength of capital ». The object was to eradicate the old capitalist superstructure without damage to optimum industrial efficiency and output. The task of the new society was to « develop and apply on a vaster scale the economic principles of capitalism ». Indeed, the new order was to preserve the two basic tenets of capitalist economies, productive association and individual responsibility. The quarrel was with the artificial position of the capitalist and the « boss » (often one and the same individual), which wrongly deprived the worker of a faculty which was the product of collective humanity's effort and genius, and which consequently the boss had no right to arrogate exclusively to himself : « the organizing principle of capitalism makes the capitalist and absolute governor, and his capital an instrument for intellectual domination ». On this point Labriola quotes Marx to back him up. Further, « capitalism had brought under its own hegemony classes and sections of society whose obedience it had not earned ». Thus state, parliament, and all ramifications of society were dominated by it. The deduction is that this corrupted capitalism was the root of all society's ills, and here Revolutionary Syndicalism diverged from all hitherto advanced concepts of revolution. Labriola himself once stated « the foundation of this revolution is wholly economic : the rest will come of its own accord ! » If the syndicalists refused to have anything to do with the existing bourgeois state, the puppet of inefficient and



soul-destroying capitalism, nor with the socialist parties, nor with ridden with the virus of reformism (meaning the « provisional » acceptance of the state as a means to social betterment), then the only thing left was the *sindacato di mestiere*. « We think of the action of the *sindacato di mestiere* as bringing about the necessary results not in an indirect manner through pressure applied upon the powers that be, but directly » (4). Organization, growth, and actual experience of direct action would provide the *sindacato di mestiere* in each job sector with the appropriate conditions for the take-over of the means of production in that sector. Recourse to the general strike, followed by a swift and bloodless revolution would complete the process. It can be seen then that precisely the same deterministic inevitability is now attributed to the victory of the *sindacato di mestiere*, given the correct organization, aims, and method, as had characterized the Marxian historical dialectic, shortly before rejected by Bernstein on these very grounds, and subsequently reinterpreted by Sorel and the Revolutionary Syndicalists.

Leone, more clearly than Labriola, described the method whereby Revolutionary Syndicalism was to attain its goal (5). Direct action in the form of organized strikes was sanctioned for this « ...tends to affirm the rights of labour in contradistinction to the arbitrary supremacy of capital ». The task of the *sindacato di mestiere* was not merely to strike but to recruit, organize, discuss, and so on, all with the aim of creating a viable organ which after the revolution will be equal to its great task of moulding the new society. Far more extensive, however, was the method described by Leone in his preface to the Italian translation to Sorel's *La grève générale et la violence*, under the heading *Limiti effective dello sciopero generale* (« effective limits of the general strike »). While the growth of the *syndicats* was proceeding apace, the very elements and bases for their take-over were being laid down all the time : « when the strength of the economic revolt has reached all sections of the working class, then the general strike becomes the rapid way for this force to achieved its ends ». At the time these observations were made, 1904, the workers had not reached by any stretch of the imagination an optimum level of organization and consciousness, and thus a general strike in the short term would be negative and ineffectual. When however the necessary level had been attained in this regard, then events would proceed differently : the general strike would give emphasis to the categorical destruction of the old order, and, the strike being soon over, the new society would rapidly take shape and begin to function efficiently. Leone attacked the concepts of insurrec-

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(4) From *Sindacalismo e Riformismo*.

(5) In *Il Sindacalismo*, v. « La pratica sindacalista ».



tionary revolution and of violence, favoured by Sorel, on the grounds that these methods were too illusory, and smacked of anarchism and Blanquism. The *sindacato di mestiere* was thus the safest and really the only viable method. Panunzio (6) elucidated the essential distinction between anarchism and Revolutionary Syndicalism : anarchy was a substantially negative phenomenon in that its policies were always anti-parliament and really anti-organization, whereas the revolutionary syndicalists were neither for nor against the parliamentary system, *pro tempore* of course. The task of the *syndicat* was to educate and proselytize, the method being « ... the revolutionary general strike, direct action, the struggle against the *patronat* and against the existing state, anti-militarism, etc ».

Thus the culmination of the process would be the destruction of the authoritarian organization of the old capitalism, and its replacement by the new society which had received its gestation in the victorious *sindacati di mestiere* : « the workers' collectivity carries out all the functions of production, from the shop floor to the director's office ». The revolution would not restrict itself, however, to the purely economic domain : « just as the producing collectivity assumes all responsibilities associated with production, in the same way individuals assume responsibility for their own social actions, which (responsibility) had hitherto been absorbed by the state ». The kernel of the inference is that economic revolution would be the prime mover, and that political emancipation of the masses was consequential and dependant upon the triumph of the economic process. Leone, in *Economia Sociale in rapporto al Socialismo*, concluded : « Socialism will either come with liberty or not come at all ! ». Olivetti depicted the socialist future of group ownership and of group participation in management as follows : « ... imagine a free series of productive groups assembled in a federative manner for both productive and social purposes...; let us combat our negative individualism [i.e. that of the old laissez-faire liberal school of economics] by means of that positive individualism which is based on free and rational conviction and the compatibility of rights with the principle of solidarity » (7). Panunzio's conception followed similar lines : « a new society will be formed which will not be « the state », but its very opposite... the self-government of labour ». Much use is made in the various writings quoted of the words « solidarity », « society », « self-government » : these concepts are crucial, for individualism will not run riot in the new system, but on the contrary both rights and obligations will be communal : thus the individual will in fact be at his freest because he will now fully appreciate his role, his contribution,

(6) In *La Persistenza del Diritto* (1909), q.v. supra.

(7) From *Problemi del Socialismo Contemporaneo*.

and his reward, and consequently will contribute to the totality of individual efforts and achievements. Progress and contentment would, with some luck, reign forever.

Revolutionary Syndicalist theory as a whole divorces economic from political emancipation. As with Marxism, economic factors tend to be promoted above political ones in the determination of the historical process. However, not only are the former set above, but they appear to be divorced from the task of political emancipation until *after* the economic revolution undertaken by the *sindacati di mestiere* has been completed. Only then will political emancipation occur : stated baldly, it almost seems an after-thought. The whole reasoning is clearly based on the belief in the inevitability of the role of *sindacato di mestiere* as regards the success of the economic take-over. Will in fact the capitalist bourgeoisie allow any such take-over without putting up a very considerable struggle ? The question is obviously rhetorical. In repudiating in effect the rôle of political agitation and organization (a repudiation which moreover can be seen as a *sine qua non* for the establishment of Revolutionary Syndicalism as a doctrine) they were climbing mountains with their eyes shut : the state and its ever-increasing powers would always be against them and frustrate them, and it was sheer wishful thinking on Labriola's part to maintain that even the army might be transformed into a sort of *sindacato di mestiere*. The entire Revolutionary Syndicalist programme, if such it may be termed, is thus lacking in any concise appraisal of the methods of revolution themselves. So much talk about the central idea of the *sindacato di mestiere* appears very woolly and imprecise when set against the economic and political realities of the time. In fact this criticism was precisely that which was levelled against the movement by the anarchists. The anarchist vision of the society to come was in fact substantially identical with that of the Revolutionary Syndicalists themselves (v. Malatesta in *L'Anarchia*). But the crucial distinction was that the anarchists demanded that any revolution must be political in nature — with all the implications of insurrection by force and recourse to violence that this suggests — and this standpoint appears much more feasible than that of the syndicalists, even though the actual means proposed by the anarchists are questionable. A further, rather less central criticism of Revolutionary Syndicalism concerns the form which the projected future society was intended to assume. The economic (but not of course the social or political) apparatus of capitalism having been retained and made more efficient, and theoretically of equal benefit to all, the *sindacati di mestiere* will emerge as the central organs of the new order : but clearly each trade or profession (*mestiere*) will retain its own rewards, which will result in wage differentials from one trade union to another and other differences. This

follows inescapably from the stipulation — in itself unexceptionable — that efficiency and total productive output in each *mestiere* shall be maximized. This very strict egalitarian concept would have to undergo some modification in being translated from paper to practice. The syndicalist theorists accept as much, but the really unanswerable paradox arises in relation to whether this ideally conceived society based on the *sindacati*, even if set up as expected, could really be maintained? Would not workers in trades inevitably receiving lower remuneration than others immediately have grounds for grievance, which they would promptly voice? Who would be qualified to arbitrate in such a dispute? It is obvious that a solution would have to be reached if individual rights — at least as regards fair and equal consideration if no further — were not to be trampled upon, and the system thus tainted with arbitrariness and authoritarianism, the latter being surely the very ills it was set up to eradicate. Here it appears to me that insuperable difficulties arise. A good solution would apparently be a central non-political authority which would be impartial *arbitrage* establish priorities and formulate policies. But where, in such a scheme, would the *sindacato di mestiere*, supposedly the fountainhead of doctrine and action, fit in, and how could the evangelized, but now possibly alienated worker be expected to react to all this? It must be recalled at this point that, as stated at the outset, the theoretical bases of Revolutionary Syndicalism as conceived at the beginning of the century soon underwent radical changes because of precisely these inconsistencies and inadequacies. Fatally though, that transformation was to establish a new basis which appeared to differ very substantially from the theories from which it had arisen.

It will be useful at this point to examine the ways in which the syndicalist theorists deviated from the syndicalist revolutionary plan. « Deviation » in this instance refers to a development subsequent to the original theories developed during the early 1900 's, or else to one of the inner assumptions referred to at the outset which lay dormant and reasserted itself later. It is of interest that all the syndicalist theorists, except Leone, who rejoined the official socialist party in 1921, praised the Libyan war of 1911 (in contradistinction to most of the membership, which condemned it roundly), which, it is generally accepted, was an indefensible affair borne out of political insecurity and the growth of new nationalist currents. Labriola went almost so far as to embrace the martial tendencies of the then nascent Nationalist movement by exclaiming in an article (8) « War may be an instrument of progress ! » Olivetti went even further

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(8) In *Economia, Socialismo, Sindicalismo*.

than Labriola in accepting the war « because syndicalism also means a philosophical conception of life and of the social conflict. In this sense the events in Lybia are substantially favourable to our movement, and indeed constitute a *syndicalist*, or better still *revolutionary* development » (9). This must be regarded as pure rhetoric. While the theorists were thus advancing lame justifications, the unions belonging to the USI, as stated earlier, took the opposite view, De Ambris himself maintaining that the workers' blood was being spilt to fill the capitalist coffers. Nevertheless, following the outbreak of the First World War, De Ambris came round to agree with the theorists that war could be the vehicle of revolution. The assumption of this rickety doctrine was to have disastrous consequences after 1918.

Of more fundamental importance was the premise by which the individual's freedom of spirit (the Sorelian concept of moralistic, anti-positivist revolution) was tied to the revolutionary process through the *sindacato di mestiere*. Angelo Olivetti was among the leading exponents of this conception, although as stated earlier Lanzillo's ideas ran along very similar lines. Olivetti described Revolutionary Syndicalist Policy in the following manner : « We are socialists, republicans, irreligious, above all anti-capitalists, rebelling against all forms of conventionalism and authoritarian principles, united in the struggle for the supreme liberation of the body and soul from God, the rulers, and the bosses, and from the brutal laws of a crass public opinion » (10). In 1908 Olivetti was unable to restrain his admiration for the Renaissance (11) : « We are witnessing the rebirth of an age of direct action and of assertion of the ego such as Nietzsche admired ». In this and other statements it is plainly evident that a metaphysical order (often of somewhat suspect consistency) was being placed above the rational positivist approach to affairs. Thus, for Olivetti, the deadening and emasculating force of « mediation » was embodied in the Roman Catholic Church, twentieth century society in general, and capitalism as it was under the corrupt bourgeoisie. The state and the reformist socialist parties had to be utterly removed from the scene if the individual was finally to be freed. « The new man, the wilful proletarian, the political and social proletarian, has by now rejected mediation absolutely » : unfortunately it was not much farther than this to « remove » the « new man and wilful proletarian » himself and to replace him with something rather less romantic : for Sorel this

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(9) « La Guerra di Tripoli », in *Pagine Libere*, 15 November 1911.

(10) Article « Rivoluzione Liberale », *idem*, December 1906.

(11) Article « Azione diretta e Mediazione », *idem*, June 1908.

was now to be the monarchy and the Catholic Church, for most of the syndicalists themselves it was firstly the nation, and later Fascism.

The consequences for Italy of World War One had convinced most, if not all syndicalist leaders, that the nation (shortly afterwards thought to be embodied in Mussolini's Fascism, allied as it was in 1923 with the Nationalist movement) was to be the only answer. Little has been said up to now of this movement and especially of its leader and chief theorist, Enrico Corradini. In this period, he became strongly attracted to Revolutionary Syndicalism, which for the Nationalists was clearly evolving in the right direction. In a speech in 1924 (thus after the Fascist « revolution » of October 1922 and the fusion of the Nationalist and Fascist parties in early 1923) : « I have some sympathy for the syndicalists, for they are critical of... some opinions which today are given the force of received dogma ; they reject democracy, parliamentarism, pacifism, humanism, and suchlike ». Corradini also saw in this newly revised doctrine the beginnings of a movement of purification, struggle, and triumph, and moreover took the syndicalist concept of intensification of the class struggle as being applicable equally to the international scene (Corradini naturally having started from the premise that it was through the nation and not through the individual that the new spirit of freedom, struggle, and self-assertion would express itself). He espoused the need for warlike struggle between nations, with wars of imperialist conquest, on the grounds that in this way the « best » and « purest » would eventually win, and hence be in a position to extend their own virility and *raison d'être* : officially, for everyone's benefit. In this way the new Revolutionary Syndicalism was undeniably imperialist, in that it saw the triumph of its ideals by force over the « decadent » forces levelled against it. The gap between Olivetti's proletarian supermen, imbued with a sort of special grace and class purity, and Corradini's vision of the superior nation satisfying its inborn need for expansion, is surely not very great. « Left » and « right » in this context mean very little. Corradini very quickly pointed to the possibility of a tie-up between the two movements, on economic grounds. He did not in fact appreciate that, whatever the evolution they had undergone, the syndicalists' ideal was still the triumph of the hitherto oppressed worker through the *sindacato di mestiere* : this left precious little room for the authoritarian concept of the state which the Nationalists subsumed under their doctrines, nor indeed for the bourgeois capitalism (as represented by certain groups of industrialists fearful of the « red menace » who saw an effective counter in the Nationalist movement) from which they had got their money. It is true that Corradini himself was, strictly speaking, an exponent of neither : nevertheless, in embracing the nation, some form of central directive authority

(i.e. the anathematized « state ») would have to be taken for granted, probably leaving the system of bourgeois capitalism, with all its heresies for the syndicalists, intact. In fact, it emerges from much of his writing that Corradini's Nationalism was based upon the concept of the rebirth of an élite from the bourgeoisie itself.

Despite the apparent improbability of the idea of a union between the two movements, there can be no doubt that Corradini did in fact interpret the spirit and inner meaning of Revolutionary Syndicalism very well, despite his virtual glossing over of the central rôle of the sindacato. In fact, syndicalism was a movement which can be said to have sprung from a moral force (this is very noticeable in the writings of Sorel himself), and was therefore metaphysical rather than positivist. In view of this situation, the radical change in the movement referred to at the beginning of this article will not now seem remarkable, but indeed a mere logical consequence. What is perhaps perplexing is that it should still (after 1918) retain a mass base (cf. the very elitist, intellectual nature of the Nationalist movement), when the revolutionary aspect of the doctrine had been much diluted, if not altogether discarded. This would have to be explained by reference to factors outside the province and compass of this brief survey, essentially developments arising out of World War One and its aftermath, and the intricacies of the socio-political situation in Italy after 1918.

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