

ABSTRACTS

AGAINST THE CHURCH THE PRO-FERRER PROTESTS IN ITALY IN 1909

Edited by MAURIZIO ANTONIOLI
in association with JORGE TORRE SANTOS and ANDREA DILEMMI

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FERRER AND SPANISH POLITICS by *Juan Avilés Farré*

The case of Francisco Ferrer y Guardia is an unusual one. Known as the founder of a primary school with a libertarian orientation and for having been tried for instigating an attempt to assassinate the King of Spain with a bomb in 1906 and acquitted, he was subsequently sentenced to death and executed because he was considered to have masterminded the insurrection in Barcelona in July 1909, the so-called “Tragic Week”. But Ferrer did not organize that rebellion, which was in fact spontaneous and leaderless. The injustice of this sentence provoked a huge wave of protests in numerous European countries, where the Left presented him as a martyr to freedom of thought. In Spain, on the other hand, where Ferrer could now only rely on a reduced number of friends and associates, the size of demonstrations was meagre. His death sentence would have had a minimal influence on Spanish politics had it not been for the impressive international protest campaign. It was only thanks to those mobilizations that the Ferrer case took on some importance in his homeland, to the point of making even the monarchist Liberal Party express its own criticisms of the Conservative government, bringing about its fall and soon contributing to the breaking with the traditional practice of alternating governments the guarantor of which was the moderating power of the Crown. This essay attempts to clarify such paradoxes, looking at Ferrer’s final years of activity and analyzing the repercussions that his actions and his sentence had in the Spain of the early 20th century.

BACKGROUND. 1906-1907: THE FERRER AND NAKENS CASE,
ANTICLERICAL UNREST AND THE ANARCHISTS
by *Maurizio Antonioli*

The figure of Ferrer did not suddenly emerge, in Italy, in 1909, after the “Tragic Week” of Barcelona, due to his arrest and death by firing squad, but had been known for some years in the libertarian *milieu* and in free thinking environments and, above all, it had already had the opportunity of arousing a vast protest movement in 1906, in Italy and to a degree in Europe, on account of his imprisonment and the fear he would be convicted. Arrested as the instigator of Mateo Morral, the anarchist responsible for bombing the wedding procession of Alfonso XIII, after thirteen months of jail, Ferrer was acquitted. Yet for the entire period of his imprisonment his name came to symbolize the struggle of “free thought” against clerical obscurantism. However, Ferrer’s entry into the Pantheon of the icons of Italian laicism was to a large extent due to the powerful wave of anticlericalism that was sweeping through part of Italian society in that period, in parallel with the offensive of the French government against congregations and for the separation of Church and State. After the 1904 elections, thanks to a number of exemptions from the policy of *non expedit*, had led to the presence of the first Catholic members of parliament, in anticlericalism the Left had found a new, albeit ephemeral, unitary platform. The anticlerical offensive was deployed throughout the second half of 1906, culminating in the demonstrations throughout Italy on 17 February 1907 to mark the 307th anniversary of the death of Giordano Bruno at the stake in Campo dei Fiori in Rome. The pro-Ferrer protests and the defence of the lay and rationalist Modern School accompanied the movement, becoming one of its most striking elements. Promoted by the “popular” parties, the campaign saw the energetic – albeit often critical – participation of the anarchists who were part of a common cultural substratum, but who intended to reaffirm their own identity with respect to the so-called forces “of progress”. The pro-Ferrer unrest of 1906-07 was nevertheless a sort of “bridge” conveying the anarchists towards possible associations with other political bodies, as was to be seen later with the formation of the Italian Syndicalist Union and the “Red Week” of 1914.

OCTOBER 1909: ROME AND FRANCISCO FERRER
by *Pasquale Iuso*

The Francisco Ferrer episode is of particular importance in the papal and unitary Rome of 1909 on account of the connection it has with the particular characteristics of the Italian capital itself. The presence of the Vatican, a lay administration (that of Mayor Nathan), a complex and contradictory economic development after 1870, the policies of Giolitti, the persistence of the centuries-old domination of the Church, all affected the behaviour and choices of the Roman working class. These elements were clearly highlighted over the weeks of the Roman people’s response to Ferrer’s arrest and sentencing. A general strike, various demonstrations, clashes with the police, the contradictory and ambiguous attitude of the insti-

tutional forces and the majority in the municipal administration, highlight and focus on the organizational and mobilizing activity of the anarchist movement, which managed (albeit amid internal contradictions and unresolved doubts) to gain exposure for itself and to demonstrate its strength and pervasiveness in a city with the unique characteristics of the capital.

TUSCANY FOR FERRER. UPRISINGS, LAY RITUALS AND LEGENDS

by *Franco Bertolucci*

In Tuscany the “pro-Ferrer” unrest of October 1909 achieved one of the highest, most intense moments of social conflict of the Giolittian age, with anarchists, republicans, socialists, freemasons and progressive liberal democrats coming together to form a common front. This capacity for mobilization has behind it lengthy activity by the Tuscan anticlerical movement with its roots in the Risorgimento period and is expressed through a rich and varied panorama of associations and journalistic work. In the years following Ferrer’s death, a secular sanctification of the libertarian educator took place in Tuscany, with dozens of commemorations, publications and monuments and stones erected, giving rise to the “lay legend” of the rationalist hero and free thinker. A “legend” and memory conservation activity that not even the fascist violence was able to eradicate fully and that, like a karst river, was to revive in the immediate post second world war period in towns large and small in the Tuscan provinces. In spite of the ravages of time, Ferrer’s memory was to remain engraved on generations of Tuscan political and trade union activists, contributing to characterizing the DNA of the political culture of the region, which is rightly considered one of the most “red” and subversive territories in Italy.

THE PRO-FERRER DEMONSTRATIONS IN MILAN

by *Jorge Torre Santos*

After being the «capital of the general strike» in 1904 and having had, between 1904 and 1906, its own Chamber of Labour – the most important in Italy – run by revolutionary syndicalists, Milan had returned to a solid reformist hegemony, reflected in the secretaryship of Carlo Dell’Avalle of the Chamber, in the newspaper «Il Tempo», the editor-in-chief of which was Claudio Treves, and in institutions such as the Società Umanitaria. If also in Milan, as throughout the country, the left, and the reformist socialists in particular, was pervaded by a strongly anticlerical mood, the unrest followed the shooting of Ferrer in October 1909 was marked by an ambiguity poised between the need to accommodate the popular pressure for a general protest strike and that to restrain this and channel it towards objectives that were considered compatible. The figure of Carlo Dell’Avalle, the secretary of the Chamber of Labour, was the personification of this ambiguity, which also amounted to skilful political control; at the same time he was a clever manipulator of choices, intending to stem the combative spontaneity of large swathes of workers and popular sectors more generally, using tried and tested

delaying tactics, bringing into play the statutory bodies of the Chamber of Labour and ultimately even the General Confederation of Labour. The overwhelming protests over Ferrer's death were transformed into a battle against the Law of Guarantees and the privileges of the Vatican on one hand, while on the other the aspects of them that were most disruptive for public order were neutralized. The role of the Milanese anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists in this context was modest, as they were on the defensive after the failure of the general strike in Parma in 1908 and suffering from a crisis of identity, and so were not yet ready to take up the struggle, as was to happen between 1911 and 1914.

“THE TRULY MODERN MAN”. THE POPULAR PARTIES OF THE RAVENNA
AREA FOR FRANCISCO FERRER
by *Alessandro Luparini*

Anticlerical by tradition, also on account of the long, oppressive papal rule over the area, the province of Ravenna responded to the mobilization in support of Ferrer with transversal impetus, in a full-blown competitive frenzy to “glorify” the Catalan pedagogist posthumously; this saw all the parties and popular movements (socialists, republicans, anarchists) equally involved, as also, albeit to a lesser degree, the other lay forces, from the Liberals to the Christian Democrats of Romolo Murri's National Democratic League. With an overview of the provincial capital and its other major towns, this essay reconstructs the structuring of these phenomena, which, even if they did not lead to riots in the town squares as was the case in neighbouring Forlì, did however have a strongly symbolic and political value, all the more significant as it was the final unitary initiative of the Left of the Ravenna area before the imminent violent conflict over the control of threshing machines, which would set socialist and republican workers against each other, led to a painful split that was never to heal.

THE FERRER CASE: REACTIONS IN LE MARCHE
by *Roberto Giulianelli*

In Le Marche of the early 20th century anticlericalism was an ideal that boasted deep roots and held various political components together, both inside and outside the workers' movement. It is within this framework that the episode of Francisco Ferrer fits, prompting two orders of reactions. First there were the “immediate reactions”, arising from the wave of emotion caused by the event (press campaigns, protest demonstrations, strikes). Then there were the “deferred reactions”, which, following his execution, aimed to conserve the memory of the “martyrdom of Montjuich”. The naming of streets, squares and political groups after the Spanish pedagogue, the construction of statues, the fixing of plaques and the opening of new popular universities all belong to this second order of reactions and contribute to the construction of the legend of Ferrer in Le Marche too.

A LAY MARTYR IN CHRISTIAN VENETO
by *Andrea Dilemmi*

The pro-Ferrer protests in Veneto were not a random episode. Even if they never reached the dimensions of the conflicts that took place in other areas of the country, their recurrent, simultaneous and widespread forms focused conflicts and processes on the Ferrer case that had already been taking shape for some time around the issues of culture, public administration and the forms of modernization of regional society, long indicated by now obsolete interpretative models exclusively on the basis of the triad “rural, hard-working and devout”. The electoral victory of radical-socialist coalitions in the capitals of Veneto’s provinces in the early years of the century and the increasing struggle for hegemony between the lay-progressive and Catholic-conservative fronts were at the basis of the demonstrations in the region in support of Ferrer. The success of the figure of Ferrer as a new lay martyr was also contributed to by his multi-faceted nature: the various images of Ferrer could respond in a highly flexible and versatile way to the expectations of different political currents and social classes. Since the “popular blocs” fragmented more or less everywhere in the lead up to the First world war, the legend of Ferrer the martyr rapidly aged, to be replaced by the emergence of new legends and new martyrs, such as – a little later – another multi-faceted figure, that of Cesare Battisti.

CAMPANIA FOR FERRER
by *Giuseppe Aragno*

The figure of Francisco Ferrer was popular among workers in Campania, particularly in Naples. The anarchist tradition and culture – consider exceptional personalities such as Gambuzzi, Merlino and Malatesta – were in fact strong and well-rooted, and, on close inspection we will see that, even if short, the season of struggles for the public school and the training of the “lower” classes had left significant traces in workers’ society. On the other hand, the “Tragic Week”, the anti-colonialist and anticlerical anger of the Spanish proletariat, the harsh repression and elimination of Ferrer all coincided with a period of workers’ and popular struggles for housing and against increased living costs, combined with the unrest over the visit of Nicholas II to Italy. As is demonstrated by the archive documentation and examination of the press output, after the initial enthusiasm over the events in Barcelona, the trial and killing of Ferrer aroused a wave of outrage among workers. The spontaneous protests, which were immediately channelled towards the general strike, temporarily succeeded in bringing together the forces of a proletariat that was disunited, particularly in its leadership. The reaction from the police was extremely harsh and aimed to intimidate the workers, isolate the anarchists and weaken the protests planned for the Czar’s visit. This aim was achieved, but the significance of the protest was as great as the figure of the Spanish revolutionary had been noble. A century later, it still challenges our consciences. The spectre of integralism and the damage caused by ideological demarcations are, unfortunately, more topical than ever.

THE POPULAR DEMONSTRATIONS IN SUPPORT OF FERRER IN ABRUZZO
by *Edoardo Puglielli*

In a predominantly agricultural and pastoral region as was the Abruzzo of 1909, the Ferrer episode offered the opportunity for an exceptional coagulation, both between the bourgeois classes and associationism in a democratic, reformist and republican vein, and between the class-conscious ranks of the socialists and anarchists. Differences and nuances in ideology and doctrine were considerably dampened down in the mobilizations in support of Ferrer, which is what made the unitary anticlerical battle so incisive. The protest movement performed the role of a link between political-cultural and economic associationism; this role was far from marginal, inasmuch as it affected the individual behaviour of the popular classes, who were attempting to oust oppressive Catholic culture from their consciences. It contributed to the spreading among the masses of a powerful pedagogical sensitivity, which in turn developed the need to place the complex relationship between pedagogy, school and society, the promotion of the centrality of education as the true centre of gravity of social life at the centre of reflection. Beginning with the pro-Ferrer mobilizations, anticlericalism was to remain solidly and definitively established in the proletarian organizations and, later diverging into atheism and in anti-theism, was to form a further element of distinction of the local subversive and anti-capitalist movement.

FERRER AND SICILY. THE UNREST OF OCTOBER 1909
by *Santi Fedele* and *Natale Musarra*

The authors review the protests that occurred in Sicily following Ferrer's shooting, connecting them with the climate of crisis experienced by the popular parties that governed the island's main cities. The anticlericalism that developed on that occasion, to which a not insignificant contribution was made by the two main democratic newspapers, acted as the ideological glue holding together the various groups that made up popularism, and at the same time raised a barrier against the Catholic organizations that - prompted by the teachings of Sturzo - were gaining ever more spaces in Sicilian politics and society. The protests ceased as suddenly as they had begun, when the leaders of the socialist party began to fear they might descend into acts of insurrection and hinder the alliance with the middle and entrepreneurial classes, reached in order to modernise production structures and claim greater attention to Sicily's problems from the national government. In any event, the protests in support of Ferrer lay the foundations for the rebirth of Sicilian anarchism that was to take place over the next two years.

“LET’S TEAR DOWN THE VATICAN!” THE ANTICLERICAL PROTEST
ON THE PAGES OF «IL LIBERTARIO» (1906-1911)

by *Antonio Mameli*

This essay examines the editorial line followed by anarchist magazine «Il Libertario» between 1906 and 1911, highlighting the extensive space devoted by the publication to the theme of anticlericalism. The “war on priests” waged by the newssheet fits wholly within the context of the vast anticlerical reawakening that occurred in Italy in the early 20th century. It is almost pleonastic to note that much of the attention reserved by Pasquale Binazzi - founder and editor-in-chief of «Il Libertario» - was devoted to the legal process to which Francisco Ferrer was subjected starting from his first arrest in 1906. The magazine’s aim was to act as an amplifier in the campaign to create awareness of the story of Ferrer among public opinion. In 1909 the battle in support of Ferrer became the leitmotif of the editorial line of «Il Libertario», which implemented a formidable campaign of mobilization in support of the Catalan free thinker. During the two years 1910-1911 the tones of anticlerical polemic gradually diminished to make way for the theme of “war on war” on the subject of the Italian aggression against Libya.

“HAVING HIM SEEN TO”. THE FERRER CASE IN THE CATHOLIC PRESS

by *Massimo Ortalli*

Faced with an increase in protest initiatives occurring throughout Europe, particularly in Italy, during the trial and after the execution of Francisco Ferrer, the Italian Catholic Church as a whole attempted to combat the emergence of strong anticlericalism that seemed to be permeating society. With the publication of leaflets and through the columns of their periodicals, the clergy countered the accusations made against it of complicity in the Spanish events, affirming, on one hand, the absolute independence of the Spanish military court and, on the other, the extraneousness of the Iberian Church to those events. At the same time, the figure of the Spanish pedagogist was heavily attacked both from an ethical standpoint, with accusations of immoral behaviour, and, well aware of the danger that a libertarian education project could represent, from the more strictly political standpoint.