

David Faber

FG Fantin

The Life & Times of an Italo - Australian Anarchist 1901 – 42

Thesis submitted towards
the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Faculty of Professions
School of Economics
The University of Adelaide
February 2008

History is Us – Francesco de Gregori – 1985

History is us, let no one be offended,
we are this field of needles under heaven...
History is us, pay attention, no one is to feel excluded,
history is us, we are the waves of this ocean,
these sounds which break the silence, this silence so hard to digest.
And then they say
'Everyone is the same, they all thieve in the same way'.
But its only a line to convince you
to stay at home in the evening.
History doesn't stop at your front door
history enters your rooms, burns them, judges right and wrong.
History is us, we write the letters
it is us who have everything to win and to lose.
And then it is people
[because it is people who make history]
when it's a matter of choosing and moving, who find themselves with eyes open
knowing very well what to do.
Those who have read a million books and those who don't even know how to talk,
and this is why history makes us shiver, because no one can stop it.
History is us, we are father and son,

it is us, bella ciao, who march.

History has no bolt holes, it does not pass the buck.

History is us.

We are this plate of grain.

Translation David Faber

Dedicated to
my late adoptive father,
Cyril William [Bill] Clements,
who knew what it was
to long for a better world

Table of Contents

Housekeeping

Preface & acknowledgements.

Introduction: Francesco Giovanni Fantin 1901-42

Abbreviations

Note on Notes

Part I:	Origins
Part II:	Francesco Giovanni Fantin 1901-24
Part III:	The Bros Fantin in Australia 1924-41
Part IV:	Death in Custody
Part V:	`A Man Has Been Killed`
Part VI:	Iconographic Appendix
Part VII	Bibliography

Abstract

This thesis is inspired by the historical principles of RG Collingwood, an historiographer whose precepts are recurrently cited herein.

It is the life and times style biography of Francesco Giovanni Fantin, born San Vito de Leguzzano in the Schio district of the Province of Vicenza in the Veneto region of Italy 20 January 1901, died Loveday Internment Camp Compound 14A, South Australia 16 November 1942.

SA police at the time found that Fantin was assassinated by fascist conspirators who contrived to intimidate witnesses and interfere with material evidence, (findings here confirmed) frustrating the laying of a charge of murder and leading in March 1943 to the sentencing of Giovanni Casotti to two years hard labour for manslaughter in the Supreme Court of South Australia. (Casotti was subsequently deported.)

This thesis begins with the reconstruction of Fantin's origins in one of the rural crucibles of Italian capitalism and industrialism. The presence of anarchist traditions in the Province and in Fantin's immediate circle in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is documented. The history of the Great War, the Red Biennium and the Rise of Fascism in the Schio district is then reconstructed in connection with Fantin's formative years, with particular reference to the role of the textile strike of 1921 as the precursor to the political and mass emigration from the district to Australia of which Fantin was a humble protagonist.

Fantin's years as an antifascist activist in exile in Australia are then rehearsed as an essential prerequisite for understanding why he was selected for assassination. The thesis closes with a detailed reconstruction of how his death was encompassed and its political implications managed by Dr HV Evatt. An Iconographic Appendix and Bibliography follow.

Statement

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Signed David Faber

Preface & acknowledgements.

Praise is the reflection of virtue.

Bacon¹

Theses are supposed to satisfy a test of originality, to add something substantial to the body of critical knowledge. That requires a quantity of labour that cannot be completed without incurring debts of gratitude that it is very properly customary to discharge in the preface to such studies as this. Moreover the apprentice historian encounters so much carping criticism that positive encouragement shines by comparison.

First of all must be thanked my former wife Anna Fabrizio Faber. For fifteen years she supported me and my work in disregard of my detractors through my difficult illness, until the accumulated negligence of quacks finally made it all too much to bear. Without her patience the realisation of this research, especially in Italy, howsoever incompletely, would simply have been impossible. My gratitude to her is undying.

In her absence the fellowship of friends has been doubly important. In the main they are too many and too modest to be named, but I would like to thank them anonymously here for those small gestures of companionship and practical assistance which have sustained me. Specific recognition for their support must go to my mother, Mrs Vivienne Beck, my Aunt Ms Rosemarie Allen and my friends Mr Gerald Graves and Mr Paul Harris. I would also like to recognise here all those at the Mood Disorder's Association SA with whom I worked as a volunteer and office holder from 1996 - 2003, particularly the President Bob Burke, and Dr Renata Maruszczuk. All these people have played a vital role in my recovery from the bouts of serious illness which disrupted my studies especially in the summer of 1994/5 and during 2006. Diana Burrato of the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service assisted with the recovery of sources which were lost at that time, enabling me to pick up the threads of my research. The deterioration of the international situation after September 11 2001 drew me into the Nowar activist network, which deepened my reflection on the participatory democracy of which Fantin was an exponent. Mr Kyle van der Borch and Mr Bruce Hannaford provided invaluable computing assistance.

My investigations began in 1984 as a community history collaboration between myself and the Adelaide office of the Federazione Italiana Lavoratori Emigrati e Famiglie, known as FILEF. Through a long gestation marked by many setbacks FILEF and I have kept faith with one another, and I am indebted to the organisation for much material and moral support. Like the PCI comrades of the *Casa del Popolo* of *Via Balconi, Cernusco sul Naviglio, Milano* in the mid 80s, so the FILEF comrades of Lowe St Adelaide lent me books from their collection. I owe both these outposts of the political culture of the revolutionary Italian proletariat an intellectual debt I here seek in part to repay.

Next I would like to thank the great niece of Francesco Giovanni Fantin, Shaneen Fantin, whom I was fortunate to meet in the final stages of my research. She has taken a constructive interest in my work, and I would like to thank her and her family for their support.

In Italy I consulted for local knowledge Professor Emilio Franzina regarding the social history of the Veneto and Vicenza Province and the labour movement thereof. He referred me to Ezio Maria Simini concerning the labour history of the Schio district. This was some of the best advice I was ever given. Simini is an accountant and communist activist, one of those part time historians who put some academic historians to shame. I wish Signor Simini and Professor Franzina well in their ongoing struggle for historical enlightenment.

Likewise I must thank the late Professor Marcello Montagna, historian of the wartime Italo-Australian antifascist association Italia Libera / Free Italy of which his father Massimo was a protagonist in keeping with the traditions of one of Italian communism's most illustrious families. Signor Montagnana spoke English with a proper strine accent, having grown up in inner Melbourne playing street cricket with child peers who never bothered about his foreign origins, his family having got out of Italy on the last boat after the passage of the fascist regime's anti-Semitic racial laws. He was very generous with his time in keeping me posted regarding his research, contiguous with mine given the association's contemporary interest in the Fantin affair, and even facilitated my efforts on more than one occasion, for which I am grateful.

The staff of the libraries and research institutes named herein have been courteous collaborators. I would like to acknowledge in particular the encouragement of Professor Gaetano Grassi and the staff of the Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia of Milano; also Professor Giulio Sapelli, onetime Director of the Istituto Feltrinelli of Milano.

Both these institutes house specialist collections of interest to the political, social and cultural historian of the Italian labour movement. Also of interest, even concerning Australia and its Italian community, was the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, the literary wing of a cultural institute endowed by Empress Maria Theresa of Austria as suzerain of Milan. Gianfausto Rosoli of the Centro Studi Emigrazione Roma will have forgotten the afternoon he devoted to assisting me, but I have not. Such is also the case of Dottor G Navoni Cancelliere Dirigente of the Prettura of Schio, who kindly admitted me to the treasures of his court's archives.

Transferring our attention to the antipodes, I would like to thank Ms Margaret Hoskings of the University of Adelaide's Barr Smith Library, and Mr Graham Thomas & Ms Mara Seton of the Adelaide Office of the National Archives of Australia. Also to be thanked are the staff of the State Library of SA. Any Adelaide historian who overlooked it in the mistaken belief that the city's academic libraries had a monopoly of scholarly resources would be sadly mistaken. I would also like to thank Mr Norman Smith of the Human Resources Management Branch of the SA Police and Mr Peter Alexander for their kind assistance regarding the figure of Detective Sergeant Bill Gill. Not to be forgotten neither are the staff of the SA History Trust Migration Museum and their director Viv Szekeres. Mr Bruce Greenhalgh, Historical Collection Librarian with the Supreme Court Library, Adelaide, was also helpful. State Coroner Wayne Chivell also found time to address an inquiry regarding the wartime operation of the Coroner's Act. Mr Bob James kindly bestowed on me some documents concerning Francesco Carmagnola.

I am indebted also to certain scholars for specific advice – to Professor Stuart MacIntyre, for the emphasis he advised me to place on the figure of Detective Sergeant Gill, and for the encouragement given me by Professor Geoffrey Bolton in my exploration of methodological issues during the 'history wars'.

Last but not least it is my agreeable duty to thank my academic supervisor Associate Professor Tom Sheridan. The candidate approaches the doctoral thesis as a form never before attempted, which he or she will never be permitted to undertake again. In such situations the constructive advice of an old hand is bound to be appreciated. Recognition is due also to the Department of Economics of the University of Adelaide for the hospitality it has accorded me as a post graduate student. The University itself is also to be thanked for making allowance for my health in the requirements for completion of this thesis.

Regarding the persons who responded to my requests for information about Fantin and his world, the reader will find their names listed alphabetically in the bibliography. Suffice it here to say that they deeply touched me with their confidence, generosity, trust and veracity. It is from them that I have derived my belief in the fundamental reliability of oral sources. I hope they will find respectful the interpretations advanced here regarding their testimony.

After the completion of this thesis, VG Venturini published Never Give In, a study of Italian antifascism in Australia 1924 -56 which sketches amongst other things Fantin's Italian background and publishes the bulk of Australian archival holdings concerning his assassination. Except for a period in 2003 when he sought my advice, our researches were conducted wholly independently. Our work is substantially mutually corroborative, and his ample backgrounding of the origins and history of Italian fascism and antifascism may profitably be read as a preamble to this study, substituting the chapters on the same themes I wrote and discarded for motives of space. Without attempting to exhaust the richness of his valuable contribution to Italo-Australian historiography, I have noted relevant data and themes where appropriate, not excluding notice of minor errors of fact, situating his work in the literature. I give however a more nuanced and considered account of the handling of the Fantin affair by the Australian authorities, which together with my investigation of Fantin's circumstances prior to his emigration in 1924 and my reliance on Italian as well as Australian sources regarding his life in Australia, represent the historical correction to the literature which is the burden of this thesis. Moreover, whereas like Cresciani and Nursey Bray before him, Venturini describes the killing of Fantin as a probable murder, I offer a demonstration that Fantin was assassinated by fascist conspirators.

David Faber February 2008

Introduction: Francesco Giovanni Fantin 1901-42.

Every trace of autonomous initiative on the part of subaltern groups is...of inestimable value for the integral historian. Thus it is manifest that such a history cannot be treated but by monographs, and every monograph demands a great mass of material often difficult to collect.

Gramsci²

At sundown on 16 November 1942 an Italian internee was struck down by another at Loveday Internment Camp 14A near Barmera in the South Australian Riverland. He died of horrendous head injuries later that same evening. The victim was a fortyone year old anarchist political activist, the assailant a fascist. Military intelligence quickly established that the motive for the assault was political. But just who was this man, that he had been selected for violent death?

Francesco Giovanni Fantin was the son of a textile working family resident in the Schio district of Vicenza Province in the Veneto region of north-eastern Italy, one of the homelands of Italian capitalism on the terra firma of the old Venetian land empire. In his youth he had followed his father's profession before emigrating in 1924 after a brief career of grass roots political activism. In Australia he remained politically active in the antifascist diaspora, dividing his working life between the textile mills of Geelong and the cane fields of North Queensland. But what lay behind this resume? What experiences had formed him in Italy? What emotional baggage did he bring to his Australian experience? What did anarchism mean to him? And what was the historical significance of his death in custody?

These are the questions this study proposes to address, and in doing so, we must measure ourselves with other queries. It has been said that the individual is an ensemble of social relations, and this is certainly true of the psychosocial dimension of our material being. Certainly our subject was not a social isolate, but a being immersed in multiple communities of family and friendship, provincial locality and region, class and nation, to say nothing of the political tradition he elected to follow, which laid great stress on internationalism. Into these worlds within worlds he was born, as we all are, each in our own multidimensional individual context. For as it has likewise been said, we all make our own destiny, but we do not make it just as we please. We are born into determinate social conditions...

The significance of Fantin is already demonstrated in that several recent academic authors have mentioned his life and death. Unfortunately too many of these references have tended to be too cursory, dismissive or wrong. I myself have been in the past too quick to see a coverup in the circumstances of Fantin's death³. Others may have a vested interest in continuing to do so. A full scale biography of Fantin is thus appropriate. Although there is plenty of documentation readily accessible regarding his death in the National Archives of Australia, extensive research into the primary and secondary sources regarding his Italian background has not previously been attempted. As stated above, the great bulk of the background work meant to spare the Australian reader a knowledge of Italian national politics as it impinged on Fantin has had to be edited out for reasons of space, so that knowledge is here regrettably assumed and pieced out with passing references. The reader is referred to the bibliography for further reading. Nevertheless because Fantin was a worker, the documentation for lengthy periods of his life is fragmentary. It was this consideration above all which counselled a 'life and times' approach, exploiting inference from context to subject and vice versa to sustain continuity, especially as regards his formative years in Italy. My thesis is essentially that this biographical profile is both feasible and desirable.

Oral and documentary sources in Italy and Australia have been used to amass personal particulars, and the historical literature of two continents selectively ransacked to obtain pertinent circumstantiating details. Limited funds have meant that I have sampled rather than surveyed the Italian historical canon. Nonetheless I hope to have given an encouraging idea of what might be achieved granted the right opportunities and support in the future. I have further had access to a surprisingly good collection of Italiana in the Barr Smith Library, which was however never comprehensive and has perhaps suffered from inadequate funding in recent times.

Let us once more quote from memory: capitalist society does not know itself. In the hurley burley of the war of all against all which is life in such a conflicted society, the past lives within the present, conditioning it in ways undivined. The past is largely unknown in so far as it is the history of the disaggregated mass of the people, initially defensively organised by its own popular and labour institutions and progressively seeking to express an historical alternative to the ascendancy of the upper classes.⁴ This unknown or emergent history of the subaltern classes is labour history, the socioeconomic and political history of the working people. In a related manner the history of Australia's migration homelands (the British Isles included) represents our

pre-history, our history before successive generations of proletarian settlement. It is in this sense as much as any other that the past in Australia is literally as well as figuratively a foreign country. The present is thus a study in both multicultural and labour history. As such it is in all these senses a history of the history we do not know we have. And yet, in both its Italian and antipodean phases, this study is very much Australian history too. It is submitted that such an approach is timely, for even multiculturally sensitive Australian historiography languishes somewhat as did US scholarship until recently in that 'the various societies left behind by...immigrants are rarely explored in historical, cultural or geographic depth.'⁵ This has not always been so. MacIntyre records that at the University of Sydney 'it is said that the course taught there on Australian history gave such faithful attention to British origins that the First Fleet was often yet to leave Portsmouth when the first terms lectures ended. At the University of Melbourne until the 1960s, no student could enrol in Australian history without first completing British history.'⁶ There were those who did not consider this altogether a bad thing. At the University of Adelaide in 1967 Douglas Pike was still complaining that 'for too long British and Australian history have been kept in separate compartments'⁷. Without wanting 'Land of Hope and Glory' to be intoned at the beginning of all lectures on the antipodean past, the issue of striking a balance in the account of our experience and that of our original 'migration outcomes' remains problematic, and this study accordingly seeks to address these issues.

There is another reason for studying Fantin's background which must also be mentioned. Italian history is a case study in politics itself. Not for nothing did Burckhardt hail the Italians as the inventors of modern politics, the first chapter of his seminal history of the Italian renaissance being entitled 'the State as a Work of Art.' It is no accident that a genius like Machiavelli, a statesman like Cavour, and an inspired rogue like Mussolini, were all Italian. Italian history has been a school of public affairs and a theatre of class struggle. So it was during the youth of Francesco Fantin, and his anarchism was his considered response to this. Fantin and his political values cannot be understood out of context. We think nothing of applying a life and times approach to the biography of princes and politicians. But it is also called for from time to time to capture the popular perspective on the life of a community. The rank and file of society also deserve our attention. They too had political views, and when they uprooted themselves from their homes to seek refuge in far off countries, they brought with them cultural baggage which became part of the social endowment of their host communities. Moreover, as Franco and Luciana Benigna Ramella have argued⁸, a biographical approach allows us to verify concepts

such as 'political and labour migration' and 'class struggle' to ensure that they have explanatory power in respect of individual experience.

And of course we must not pass over the modest pretensions of this work to make an historical and political contribution to the labour movement for which Fantin lived and died, very much committed to the aspirations for human aspirations exemplified by 'the Red Flag.' It is no accident that Fantin hailed from a district where a socialist youth group had been named for the communards of Paris. What Lissagaray said of the Communards, applies very much to foot soldiers of democracy such as Fantin.

This history...is due to their children, to all the working men of the earth. The child has the right to know the reason of the paternal defeats, the Socialist party the campaign of its flag in all countries. He who tells the people revolutionary legends, he who amuses them with sensational stories, is as criminal as the geographer who would draw up false charts for navigators.⁹

This then is the methodological framework of our biographical investigation. I further submit that the proper relation between historical narration and argumentation is historiographically embodied in the narration of an argument. We narrate arguments and argue narrations according as our emphasis is concrete or logical. I agree with Collingwood that historical philosophy or historiography is nothing but the epistemology or methodology of historical knowledge. My subject is one at the limits of historical visibility, but this enhances rather than diminishes its significance, because here more than ever, a lack of method means that one has no story to recount. In any case, just because the evidence regarding the Epicurean philosophers, for example, is also fragmentary, we do not therefore regard them as unimportant. Even they have their place in this story, as ancient harbingers of the hedonism and materialism which gave rise to humanism, democracy, anarchism and socialism. Throughout this work, themes in the life of Fantin, such as emigration, are interpreted in relation to what is known about his life, understood in its economic and political context. Like Hobsbawm we see history as a discipline taking a comprehensive view of its intrinsically social subject matter, inclusive of subdisciplines such as migration history and political, economic or national, regional, provincial and local history. We have thus striven at all times to integrate awareness of

The general regularities of social organisation and change, [bringing] them into relation with the institutions and events of politics, and also [taking into] account... the uniqueness of events and the peculiarities of conscious human decision.¹⁰

As mentioned above, this study was originally conceived with a set of chapters which had to be dropped for motives of space concerning the politics of the liberal era into which he was born and to which his anarchism was a reaction. It would be as well then to summarise the findings of that assumed knowledge. From unification until it was succeeded by another party of institutionalised revolution in the form of the fascist state, Italy was ruled by the liberal party. Because it was factionalised amongst conservatives and progressives not to mention innumerable clienteles, it was not technically a one party state, but the property franchise was initially so extremely restrictive that the distinction was academic. The liberal state failed to establish a popular basis, hamstrung by liberal exclusivism with its solicitude for the freedom of private economic power and nationalist militarism. The inherent weakness from a democratic point of view of the Albertine constitution of 1848 was expressed in recurrent attempts to insulate the executive from public opinion and authoritarian solutions to the problem of opposition. Given the continuity of these factors, fascism with its hard manchester doctrines of public sector retrenchment and intrenchment of a national security state may be considered an extreme form of liberalism. The strange death of liberal Italy, with its ready sacrifice on the altar of the rights of property of individual civil and collective labour rights, which terminated the national crisis opened with the Italian Intervention of 1915 in the Great War, not to mention previous adventures in Africa and the domestic crisis of the late 1890s, followed the collapse of political liberalism in Great Britain before the war. Fascism was very much an ultimately abortive final solution to a tradition of dissent and resistance to which Italian anarchism contributed. The Italian case is significant because it raises perennial questions over the limitations of liberal conservatism in late capitalist society today.

The story of the identity of Francesco Fantin thus begins with the birth of modern Italy several centuries before his birth, culminating with the industrialisation and politicisation of his native Vicenza Province in the late nineteenth century. We then examine the development of anarchism in Vicenza province and in Fantin's immediate circle. The early years of his precocious working life were years of war and post war crisis, darkened by the rise of fascism as a mass reactionary movement prosecuting a civil war in defence of capitalism against the

proletarian left. It was against the background of the eventual fascist coup of 1922 that his decision to emigrate matured in the wake of the Matteotti crisis of 1924. Landing in Melbourne in December 1924, Fantin maintained his connections with other Vicentine Italian emigre`s, and we follow him in his personal, political and working history along the eastern seaboard of Australia. These were years in which the consolidation of the fascist regime at home kept the antifascist diaspora active, and fulfilled in due course their predictions of the dire consequences of its chauvinist character. Ultimately war came as a prescient minority had said it would, and on a national basis which confounded contemporary ideas of citizenship and ethnicity. This was the final cause of Fantin's death, being the underlying reason for his detention along with complicating personal and political factors. Finally we examine in detail the hitherto imperfectly told story of the manner of his death and the response of the Australian authorities, overthrowing the received account thereof. Having outlined so much, we further advise that the fascination of the story is in the detail which bears out the interpretation advanced.

As appears from this introduction, one way in which this study has sought to innovate is in viewing the transfer of political culture within the migration process holistically. Hitherto treatments of migration and political culture have tended to discuss in separate localised studies the questions of origins and exotic political heterodoxy in the host country. This is a procedure defensible from the practical point of view, but it tends to give a false picture of discontinuity. One of the important findings of this study is of the biographical continuity of the lives of those political emigres who like Fantin combatively continued in exile the activities which they had first undertaken in their homeland. Likewise this study has sought to make capital out of the exploitation and integration of the historical literatures of Italy and Australia, with a practical rather than ideological view to benefiting from the internationalisation of both traditions which is one happy implication of multiculturalism.

As regards terminology, it should be noted that the world in which Francesco Fantin moved was easily as closely structured by class relations as our own. Bourgeois authority overshadowed his life and fired his anarchism. We would fail to understand our subject if we sanitised our perceptions in the hopes of affecting an anodyne style. Thus the terms `bourgeoise' and `bourgeoisie', `proletarian' and `proletariat' will be fully integrated here as borrowings forming part of standard English.

A word on the structure of the argument may be called for, as I have felt obliged to be somewhat innovative on this score. The life of Francesco Fantin falls into three parts, and the thesis has been organised accordingly with an introductory part and a postscript wrapped around three core segments. Part I 'Origins' 1901-24' treat of the circumstances into which he was born. I have taken care here to describe the socioeconomic forces operating on him and his environment. Part II sets the scene of Fantin's early years in the village of San Vito de Leguzzano, emphasising what is known about Fantin himself and the associates from whom he derived his anarchism. Part III 'The Bros Fantin in Australia' discusses his adult working life and political activities in exile in the antipodes. As his activities begin to come under official Italian notice, we come to grips with the paper trail of surveillance of a politicised proletarian. Here again his individuality is seen in context, synchronised with supplementary evidence on the circles in which he moved and contemporary trends in Italian, Australian and international history of which he was cognisant or to which he was subject. Part IV 'Death in Custody' discusses the tragedy of his assassination and the subsequent miscarriage of justice as a case study in community relations and national institutions in Australia. This involves taking issue with the deficiencies of previous accounts of his death, some of which were only ever preliminary, and one of which is downright unhistorical. Specifically, the thesis that Fantin was a minor comrade, 'accidentally assassinated' or randomly targeted and opportunistically mythologised by his comrades is rejected. Part V charts the official handling of the death in custody of Fantin as an affair of state, demonstrating that there was no high official coverup in the senses feared by his contemporaries or supposed since. Furthermore, photographs are presented as documentary evidence in Part VI: Iconographic Appendix. The Bibliography forms Part VII

A word on style may also be in order, lest deliberate choices be mistaken for ignorant errors. It will be seen that I have adopted the Italian custom of avoiding capitalisation wherever possible. Thus abstract nouns such as 'anarchism' 'communism' 'catholicism' and 'the state' all appear in understated mode. It does not seem to me that these are such frivolous entities as to require fancy dress. At any rate written English is already much more demotic than it was in the seventeenth century, when philosophical texts discussing abstruse argument often appeared a veritable riot of capitalised pretension. I have sought to benefit from my biculturalism to promote the democratic linguistic tendency in English, [since one must in the end be conservative or progressive in these matters], for a language is a living historical process. I have left to a future generation the assault on national adjectives, which I have cravenly left

undisturbed and capitalised, finding them odd looking otherwise. I hope moreover that my articulated style is not too uncomfortable a vehicle for my argument. Lastly the occasional adoption of the plural personal pronoun denotes no claim to blue blood by this republican. Rather I have occasionally adopted what might be termed the authorial plural, agreeing with Umberto Eco that an author ought to assume that he speaks for at least one reader or give up altogether.¹¹

Abbreviations.

b.	<i>busta</i> / envelope, binder
f.	<i>fascicolo</i> / file, bundle or sheaf
ff	<i>fluravit</i> / flourisheth an extended discussion
<i>idem</i>	as before
<i>ibid</i>	as above
<i>passim</i>	in passing, an indefinite citation of multiple points in a text

Italian Archives & Libraries

ACS	Roma	Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Roma
“	MI	Ministero degli Interni
“	MG	Ministero della Guerra / Ministry of War
“	AGR	Affari Generali Riservati
“	DGPS	Direzione Generale della Pubblica Sicurezza
“	CPC	Casellario Politico Centrale/ Central Political Case Archives
	J – 5	Sovversivi Stranieri / Foreign Subversives, naturalised emigres etc
“	VI	ACS Vicenza
ACSchio		Archivio Comunale Schio
ALS		Archivio Lanerossi Schio
ALBCS		Archivio Lanerossi Biblioteca Civica Schio / Lanerossi archives Schio Civic Library
APS		Archivio Pretura Schio / Archives Schio District Court
ACSVL		Archivio Communal San Vito de Leguzzano / Municipal Archives SVL
APSVL		Archivio Parrocchiale SVL / Parish Archives SVL
INSML		Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione in Italia Milano
IF		Istituto Feltrinelli Milano
IP		Istituto Pinelli Milano

BNB

Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense Milano

Australian Archives & Libraries

NAA	National Archives of Australia
SRSA	State Records South Australia
SLSA	State Library of South Australia
MLSA	Mortlock Library of South Australia
ACA	Adelaide City Archives
LSCSA	Library Supreme Court of South Australia
SCA	Sydney City Archives
SLNSW	State Library of New South Wales
SLQld	State Library of Queensland

Acronyms

ALP	Australian Labour Party
AWU	Australian Workers' Union
CGL	Confederazione General del Lavoro
Confindustria	Confederazione delle Industrie
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
FIOT	Federazione Italiana Operai Tessili
PCd'I	Partito Comunista d'Italia / Communist Party of Italy
PCI	Partito Comunista Italiano / Italian Communist Party
USE	Ufficio Storico Escercito

Note on Endnotes

In general end notes discharge two functions, namely the designation of sources and the brief location of evaluations in historical and scholarly context. In the latter case there is sometimes 'a little fun in the 'footnotes'', as the saying goes. Notes occurring in the body of paragraphs specify particulars. Notes toward the ends of paragraphs relate their general sense and diverse particulars to one or more sources.

Sources are ordinarily designated by the author's surname, the short title of the work cited, and a page reference. This is sufficient identification in the age of computing. Where this practice would be misleading, as for a classic source variously republished, reference is given to an internal subdivision of the original text. Where details of a publication are cited in the text, these are not cited over again in the relative note. Frequent citations of a single work by a given author are cited eg: Tasca cit p etc. Where more than one work by a given author is cited this is done by the standard short title reference. One frequently cited work is cited by cipher: Franzina ed La classe, gli uomini e i partiti, hereinafter Franzina acd CUP. Likewise ADB refers to the Australian Dictionary of Biography. Citations from Gramsci's Prison Notebooks are translated and given from the critical Italian edition of the Quaderni del carcere edited by Gerratana, employing a numerical code reference to the notebook & note concerned, rather than to page numbers, given the importance of reading Gramsci in context eg: Q 21.10. Where the titles of Italian works or newspapers cited in the text are readily accessible by the medium of a latin root current in English, the title is not translated. Latin voices and foreign borrowings such as 'de facto' or 'coup de grace' are given in plain text as integral to contemporary English.

Part I. Origins

Capitalist industrialisation over the long term conditions the destiny of every individual and community

Lanaro¹²

Substantial evidence exists concerning the Italian origins of Francesco Giovanni Fantin. This evidence throws light upon the surroundings which shaped his identity and the motivations of the young personality who emigrated to Australia, carrying on there what he had begun in Italy. The evidence may be categorized as concerning political culture in the first instance and political and industrial events in the second. In the first case, it is established that by the dawn of the twentieth century an anarchist tradition was well radicated in his native Province of Vicenza, and particularly amongst the textile workers of the Schio district. Secondly events occurred in the Schio district during Fantin's youth [1915-24] in which Fantin participated at the very least as an engaged spectator.

In short, under the impact of dramatic events, Fantin had recourse to a political tradition available to him to understand and criticize what was happening around him. This process of formation of a political identity was fundamentally complete by the time Fantin embarked for Australia late in 1924. The grass roots political activity sustained by Fantin in Australia, not to mention the political testament jotted down by Fantin shortly before his murder, will remain fundamentally incomprehensible in the absence of an appreciation of the extent to which his activities in exile were animated by a desire to remain true in the face of adversity to the core sense of himself based on his origins.

The Schio district as it was known to Francesco Fantin from 1901-24 was an industrial barony under the sway of the Rossi textiles dynasty. The site of the chief town straddles the torrent Leogra, which descends from the Dolomite Alps to irrigate the valley bearing its name, a nor-westerly arm of the Padana Plains. On the surrounding foothills were situated villages destined in the industrial era to become reservoirs of labour. In one of these, San Vito de Leguzzano, Francesco Giovanni Fantin was to be born to working class parents in January 1901.¹³ Settled since Neolithic times, the manufacture of woollens in the area was first organized under a factory system by the Venetian noble Nicolo Tron early in the

eighteenth century.¹⁴ Drawing on these hydraulic resources and local craft traditions, the Rossi family began applying its capital, derived from land, to industrial production of woolens, and in 1809 established a factory at Schio for this purpose.¹⁵ Subsequently discrete processes were established on their own footing in such foothill localities as Piovene, Pievebelvicino and Torrebelvicino. In 1873, Alessandro Rossi, first scion and then patriarch of the family firm, refinanced the enterprise as a publicly listed company, 'mobilizing local agrarian and merchant capital for industrial development.'¹⁶ The re-organization of the firm was to consolidate its growing eminence as the principal textiles concern of newly unified Italy. As the firm grew, Alessandro Rossi assumed Olympian functions. To his roles as chief shareholder and managing director of the firm he had re-founded he associated public functions as Senator of the Realm, and local Councillor. He also figured as and philanthropic endower of housing to his workforce in New Schio, though his tutelage in the ways of home ownership came at the price of a rigidly enforced industrial discipline. Rossi had the parish church rebuilt on an imposing scale to dominate the central piazza of the district capital, which was in time renamed piazza Rossi in his honour. Little wonder there were critics who saw little distinction at Schio between Church and State, private and public power.

The firm became a power to be reckoned with in the district, determined to forge a public life and collective culture for the community in its own image and to its own liking, in the interests of ideological management of its workforce which extended well beyond resistance to national factory legislation. In 1879 Rossi erected at the gates of his Schio High Factory the 'Monument to the Weavers', which was really a monument to the ideology of the firm. Around the pedestal supporting the relaxed figure of a weaver untaxed by labor were displayed in emotive terms such as 'the art of our fathers', homilies justifying the extraction of profit: 'From the weaving frame savings, from savings property' opined one, while another ran 'Capital the labor of yesterday, labor the capital of tomorrow.' As a nationalist and advocate for colonialism in north Africa in conjunction with a pietistic work ethic, Rossi praised his employees as ready at the shuttle for the family, at the carbine for King & Country.' The Monument now stands before the Church in Piazza Rossi in the heart of modern Schio. Four years after his death in 1898 a statue was erected at the entrance to the town 'to the illustrious industrialist, poised in the proud stance of orator and scholar, receiving the floral homage of a child held aloft by a young mother symbolizing the city of Schio desirous of proposing to youth the Rossi life ideals of Labour and Scholarship.'¹⁷

But Rossi was well aware that mere policy and liturgy were insufficient in themselves to manage his employees. In 1873 he fitted out a barracks for a company of Public Security police at Schio. His proposal that the firm pay 500 Lire towards their salaries had to be declined by the Ministry of the Interior because it 'could not recognize other than the Municipality for the payment of one half of the stipends.' When Council discussed five years later the suppression of the platoon, which had deluded expectations, Rossi advised 'that nonetheless, it would be imprudent to leave unsubstituted the present arrangement by some other provision for public order in a working class district such as ours.'¹⁸

The first recorded collective representation to management by Rossi employees dates from 1867, when a delegation was received by Alessandro Rossi, who persuaded it to desist in its application for a reduction of working hours. The first major industrial unrest encountered by the firm came a few years later in 1873 just as the firm was being reorganized and refinanced. A strike which had broken out in the establishment of Rossi's Schio competitor Garbin spread to that of another, Vonwiller, and from there to the Rossi workforce, which was experiencing financial hardship due to a reduction in the work available as a consequence of the introduction of mechanized looms. Rossi immediately had resort to his political influence to overawe his workers, 'invoking a great deployment of troops, putting the city almost in a state of siege, occasioning expenses to several ministries' as was reported in the provincial capital. This was despite the fact that 'during five days of strike with eight hundred workers on the streets the most perfect calm reigned: there was not a cry which revealed animosity, not a single symptom of antagonism towards the propertied classes.' The show of force was attributed in the press to a desire to claim as a pretext 'that wise and prudent measures taken by the authorities had suffocated and prevented disorders that had never broken out in the first place.' The severity of repression inside the factory also suggests that Rossi acted with an eye to future coercion of his employees. About one hundred workers were dismissed, a fate which given the Senator's power and prestige amongst his peers meant virtual blacklisting, homelessness and expulsion from the Schio district. Here was an ominous precedent for the future. Factory discipline intensified with heavier punishment for infractions and closer managerial supervision of the productive process. The Senator increased the rate of exploitation and the return from it, and it was many years before the Rossi workforce stood up for itself in a like manner again.¹⁹

In April 1890 the weaver's assistants at Torrebelvicino struck briefly, suggesting that the Rossi myth and the defeat of 1873 were beginning to wear off amongst younger workers. Rossi was to refresh their memory. The direction of antagonism against the factory's director Bortolo Comin however suggests that the consciousness of the strikers was still quite traditional, conforming to the ancient stereotype of the mass rebellion against the 'evil counsellors' of a power not directly challenged.²⁰ The brevity of the strike also suggests impulsiveness amongst the workers. But the discontent had only subsided, not disappeared. Within a few months unrest broke out in July 1890 at another Rossi establishment at Pievebelvicino. Some 180 weavers stopped work. Particular grievances were shift work and managerial fines, with antagonism being directed at a foreman by the name of Dal Pozzolo, whom the strikers wanted dismissed. A sympathetic observer, Count Eleonoro Negri, reporting these particulars to the radical L'89 of Genova, observed that public opinion was generally supportive of the strikers so long as their demands were considered reasonable. Baron Giovanni Rossi responded by closing the factory, locking out over 400 workers, a measure which Senator Rossi fully approved. On the eighth of July Alessandro Rossi wrote to his godson, disparaging the strikers demands, boasting of his complete knowledge of their inspiration and intentions, and foreshadowing reprisals tailored to fit the 'crime' of industrial heresy.

To pretend that Dal Pozzolo should be sacked is worse than refusing night work, and is rather proof that they were determined to strike for one reason or another. As I said to you yesterday, poor boys, I am saddened by the consequences they are bringing upon themselves... We knew about it two days before, as soon as they made their decision, how they would implement it and when. Poor boys, as if it was an outing or a festival. The subscriptions to Il Fascio and L'89 will have cost the workers of Pieve 6,000 Lire a month, the salary of eighty male weavers. Now, and it is here that the authorities ought to be forewarned, of these eighty, forty are to be dismissed immediately and forty in six months time. The management at Pieve will select them with consideration for criteria of need and good conduct, not disregarding satisfactory performance. Whatever the outcome of the strike, this is the bottom line. Notwithstanding that the Lanerossi is run along humanitarian lines, it is not a charity. Even if we wanted it to be, the struggle for life of 1890 does not permit it.²¹

In 1873 and 1890 Rossi exploited spontaneous industrial unrest to identify and industrially decapitate tactically naïve employees. Before the effect of the second wave of

reprisals at Torrebelvicino had dissipated, in late 1890 the Senator decreed a wage cut of almost 30% for weavers at Schio, forcing down the terms of employment to levels of maximum return to him. Wages in his factories arrived at starvation levels in 1891, Rossi having allowed real daily wages for a twelve hour day to decline since 1874 to a point where they would purchase no more than a litre of wine, a kilo of bread and three hundred grams of flour, hardly sufficient to sustain an individual, let alone a family.²² Whilst Rossi may have been moved to underwrite his profits in view of objectively difficult economic circumstances, it is hard to see this savage wage cut outside the context of calculated, opportunistic and punitive precedents both longstanding and recent. The industrial unrest which culminated in the indefinite strike which broke out at Schio on 17 February 1891 can hardly have been unexpected by management, and has all the hall marks of an ambush deliberately sprung to catch the workforce off guard and cull it. Certainly the socialist Giornale Visentin was to later recall the strike as ill conceived, while the Lotta di Classe [Class Struggle] described it as 'disordered and disorganised' and suggested openly that the workers might have fallen into a trap prepared by their employer.²³ By provoking a strike Rossi identified the more active moiety of his workforce and transferred as much as possible of the opprobrium for reduction of the workforce onto the workforce itself. As in 1873 and 1890, the Senator closed the trap by a stern refusal to negotiate, immediately informing the delegation which waited upon him that he 'absolutely could not offer them any relief, and had to make these wage cuts if he was to continue offering them work, otherwise he would have to refuse orders on the books and dismiss them.' On the 18th the strikers, whose numbers were already depleted,²⁴ met under police surveillance and voted to continue 308:112²⁵. This shows that the grievances which had driven them to strike ran deep. Nonetheless, the strikers were no longer united in the face of managerial resistance. The strike collapsed in four days.

At first only two 'agitators' were dismissed. The socialist press reported more victimization and attendant intimidation in ensuing months²⁶. But by and large Rossi shed his workers not by sackings but by economic pressure. Some felt unable to refuse the Senator's meager pay. Others were unwilling or unable to stay in the Schio district on his terms. How then were they to finance their departure? The Artisans Mutual Aid Society which had long enjoyed the Senator's patronage decided to liquidate great part of its capital to subsidise emigration. It disbursed an unprecedented 2,715 Lire in 1891. From 1861 to 1890 it had disbursed only 890 Lire: from 1892-1910 it disbursed only 1,496 Lire.²⁷ The wave of emigration to which it responded was of historic magnitude. There are press reports of groups

of workers and their families of four and five hundred departing Schio for Brazil, with local labour conditions being cited as the motive.²⁸ In 1891 some 1534 persons departed the City of Schio, 69% of departures from the city for the decade 1884-93. This figure rose to 3152 for the same year in the Leogra Valley embracing all the associated industrial and dormitory communes of greater Schio, or over 90% of departures for the same decade, a figure which only falls to 87% when the district figures are calculated inclusive of emigration from the rural Val d'Astico.

The enduring resentment felt by many in the wake of showdowns like the 1891 strike in some cases took the form of anarchism or a generic opposition to authority in the Schio context, where property, church and the state were so closely identified. Thus we find the patriarch's heir, Baron Giovanni Rossi, exhorting his workers in a manifesto execrating the 1900 assassination of Umberto I by the anarchist Gaetano Bresci 'to judge as one ought the work of the true assassins who with infamous doctrine prime the arm of a vile degenerate.'²⁹ The fact that Baron Rossi called on his workers to 'open their eyes' suggests he suspected that some amongst them sympathized with the regicide as a response to the repression of 1898. This nationwide crisis had reached its climax in Milan when general Bava Beccaris had put down demonstrations with fusillades and cannonades. Umberto I had ostentatiously decorated the general for suppressing a revolution. Such workers would have muttered their protest when the management suspended production and enjoined participation in a funeral mass in a church built by the firm.³⁰ As for the Church, its position during what Italian historians call the 'crisis of the close of the century' was clear. With the publication of Papal Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* [New Developments] in 1891 regarding the condition of the working class the Catholic Church adopted a frankly antisocialist stance. In 1894, a year of global economic crisis particularly acute in Italy, the Catholic Agrarian Worker's Movement published a weekly entitled the *Operaio Cattolico* [The Catholic Worker] On the front page, after an editorial homily of the spiritual blindness 'much more sorrowful...than physical blindness' of those who 'obstinately live in conflict with the church', a par was expended to specifically attack 'THE ANARCHISTS

Who are the anarchists? They are those who have the devilish taste to plant bombs that blow up houses, palaces and churches, killing hundreds of people.

Who are the anarchists? They are those who would destroy all authority, beginning with God, and would have everyone command and none obey.

Who are the anarchists? They are those who love bloodshed, massacres, and the property of others. The anarchists derive from the socialists, because socialists predicate in fact hatred of the rich, war between workers and masters, and the abolition of property. Extreme socialism produces anarchism.

The same tensions were evident on the ground at San Vito a generation later in Fantin's day. After the Great War, the parish priest of San Vito Don Antonio Catalan had occasion likewise to raise the ancestral complaint 'What times, what manners'.

The day of 1 June 1920 passed tranquilly but on the morning of the 2nd two unknown thugs levered open the main door of the parish church and by means

of large iron bars broke open the offertory of souls, stealing about one hundred lire donated by the faithful. This sacrilegious theft was condemned by the people.

Fruit of the impious doctrines sowed by the socialists, thugs and anarchists.

What manner of men disseminated anarchism in Vicenza Province, and how did Francesco Fantin come in contact with their teaching? We shall address these twin queries by first examining Fantin's early years and then returning to the issue of the roots of Vicentine anarchism.

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please. They do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time honoured disguise and this borrowed language

Marx³¹

Chapter

- #2: What's in a Name?
- #3: Upbringing
- #4: Education
- #5: 1905: the Specter of Tyrannicide
- #6: Politicisation
- #7: Industrial Mobilisation in the Schio District 1915-1919
- #8: The Great War at San Vito 1915 - 19
- #9: The Red Biennium & its Aftermath at Schio 1919 – 24
- #10: The Diana Affair 1920 – 21
- #11: Labour, Capital & the State: The 1921 Textile Strike at Schio
- #12: Industrial Deportation at Schio, 1921 - 2
- #13: A Proletarian Exile 1924

#2: What's in a Name?

Land of no fathers, but of sons

Who walk in pride, knowing that all their names

Are those of exiles

Buckley³²

The names of all but aboriginal Australians are an index of the fact that we hail from elsewhere. They are a clue to who our ancestors were. The first thing to be noticed about the surname 'Fantin' is that it is obviously Veneto in form, clipped of the typical Italian final vowel. Howsoever Italian the etymology of the name, the family must have been well established in the Veneto for this to have occurred. On occasion the family was referred to in the plural as 'i Fantini', a dialectal variant sometimes mistakenly taken up as Italian and incorporated in official sources.

How Francesco Fantin came by his given names is also important. It would seem that he was named in keeping with the popular custom, current to this day in Italy, of naming children to perpetuate the memory of ancestors held in particular affection and respect. It would seem that this accounts for the eldest brother Fantin having been named Luigi Francesco and the second brother Francesco Giovanni, with both being known within the family as Francesco: certainly Luigi Francesco signed a 1923 postcard to the family as 'Francesco'. This was to cause much official confusion, principally at the expense of Francesco Giovanni, after the brothers came to notice in Australia. But this is to anticipate developments. Nonetheless if they are to be understood in their full significance in due course, the facts must be established from the beginning. It appears that the given name 'Francesco' was associated with the history of how the Fantin family came to San Vito from the provincial capital of Vicenza. Family tradition has it that the grandfather of the brothers Fantin removed to San Vito after he lost employment as a coachman to the household of a well to do kosher butcher in Vicenza, having been wrongly accused of murder. This ancestor's name was Luigi, and he is remembered as a man of fortitude who

overcame injustice. His eldest son, Giovanni Battista, the father of Luigi, Francesco and Alfonso Fantin, was born at Vicenza in 1868 and entered the Lanerossi Pieve establishment in 1885 at the age of seventeen, transferring to the Torre works in 1931. His brother Luigi was born at San Vito in 1872, and entered the Pieve works in 1894 at the age of twentytwo, dying while in the company's employ in 1930 at the age of fiftyeight.³³ This enables us to date the family's transfer from Vicenza to San Vito as between 1868 – 72. Given the recurrence of the names Luigi and Giovanni over these years, and the recurrence of the name 'Francesco' in the names Luigi Francesco and Francesco Giovanni, it would seem that the original Francesco may have been either the second name of the ancestral Luigi or the given name of a close male relation of his, or perhaps on the maternal Manea side of the family. Family tradition has to date furnished no further elucidation on why two brothers were named so similarly and seem, within the family at least on occasion, to have passed under the one name. As we shall see, it is also possible that the boys were named for a friend of the family, Francesco Basso, a local socialist luminary.

#3: Upbringing.

'The greatest pleasure of life is love, and the greatest treasure contentment, the greatest possession health, the greatest ease is sleep, the greatest medicine is a true friend.'

Sarah Churchill nee` Jennings 1st Duchess Marlborough³⁴

Fantin was born into a close and emotionally secure family circle as a *poveretto*, an object of compassion and tenderness. The people of San Vito, as it is called, to this day conform to their charming regional idiom in designating anyone who inspires compassion as a 'poor thing'. Hence all babies are metaphorically 'poor darlings', especially beautiful ones with wonderful eyes, whether labouring under some disability or not. To this day the good people of San Vito and environs are inclined to commiserate with anyone welcomed into their midst as a 'poor thing' should you have a cold.³⁵ Those babies who labour under some real misfortune are most particularly 'poor darlings.' Francesco Fantin was one of these. As is recorded by the parish priest of the day, Don Antonio Cattalan, Fantin was a frail winter's child. Thus his family and community feared for his life. Therefore in keeping with ancient European custom he was not publicly baptised into the community until his life was reckoned safe on 17 March 1901 as the spring thaw set in³⁶. At Malo, just up the road from San Vito into the hills, when Fantin had already gone to Australia, the infant Luigi Meneghello still lived in the shadow of a God who was at once pervasive and a local character. God lived behind the altar in the church, and blessed the family hearth with cosy thunderstorms. He was perspicacious, but his powers did not run to effective prevention of 'impure acts' by children, which the village clergy coached them to confess.³⁷

Francesco Fantin was the fourth child and second son of Catterina Manea and Giovanni Battista Fantin. Francesco had two elder sisters, Maria and Erminia, who like all children and especially girls were expected to pull their weight in the household as much as they could. As such their affection for their special little brother drew them into a role as virtual deputy junior mothers. Thus between his mother and his sisters Fantin was in his formative years wrapped in the reassurance of female love. He was to remain close to his

sisters for the rest of his life, as he was to his brothers and parents. His family and close friends in turn commonly referred to him as `Checco`, a diminutive of `Francesco` which had some little currency in the district: the author Meneghello had an uncle Checco.³⁸ The use of nicknames was widespread locally. Francesco had a cousin named Maria who lived at Magre` di Schio adjacent to San Vito, and was known as `Gina`, a contraction of the affectionate `Marigina`³⁹. Nicknames were in fact the normal form of address amongst the people of the district, providing, like dialect, a certain amount of camouflage and protection from the enquiries of officialdom.

In her dual photographic portrait with her husband, the father of her children, Catterina Manea Fantin appears calm and sure of herself and the support of her husband. The strength of the bond with her son Francesco which is apparent over his lifetime suggests she was a reasonably warm and intelligent woman. Her traditional marriage should not be anachronistically assumed by the politically correct to have been one of institutional oppression for her. A great deal needed to change over the course of the 20th century before the possibility of a more equitable division of labour between the sexes could come about. In the interim, psychologically stable people who sought to make the most of their emotional and sexual lives did so in accordance with relations between the sexes as they found them, commonly looking to the substance of good relations rather than their unequal form. Under the social conditions of the day the marriage of Gianbattista and Catterina constituted a loving and mutually supportive arrangement, providing her with an income for herself and their children, and him with the support necessary to sustain himself as a breadwinner. Women were not employed in local industry in any numbers it must be remembered until the Great War.⁴⁰ It should not be assumed that their marital cooperation was a prison for either party. Rather it was a psychologically healthy framework in which the children grew up. On Francesco Fantin the socialistic essence of his mother's personality and evangelical popular Catholicism were to have a decisive effect. Shortly before he was murdered in 1942 Fantin was to recall with gratitude the implicit values of equity and humanity in which his mother had raised him.

How many dreams in those twenty years of mine, twenty years prior to these poor lines...in common with my good mother. How many hopes in those winter evenings round the family hearth, for a just society where bread may be within the reach of all, where the brotherhood of nations may not be an empty phrase.⁴¹

The keynote of these aspirations is their universality. It is not necessary to imagine Catterina Manea handing down an anarchist banner to her son in any literal sense⁴². This is inconsistent with the photographic evidence that Catterina Manea like most Italian women of her day wore a crucifix throughout her life. Italian women of a century ago did not wear crucifixes as a fashion statement, as is done nowadays by the epigoni of 'Madonna' (a stage name which then would have been unconscionably sacrilegious towards the patroness of maternity and womanhood). Wearing a crucifix was at this time a conscious avowal of the common ethical creed of the community, a community so ethnocentric that people referred to each other as members of human society by the simple designation of 'christians'⁴³. People thought of themselves as 'us christians', even designating themselves 'poor christians' if they conceived themselves afflicted. The crucifix was then an eloquent, unambiguous and generalised symbol of moral eligibility and belonging. It represented the very nature of morality as a communal and conventional social ethic.

It was entirely natural therefore that the ethical frame of reference of Catterina Manea should have been a form of the popular 'bare bones' catholicism recorded by Meneghello. It represented an existential *modus vivendi* between the proletarian experience of life as a laborious business which did not allow of psychological complications and the invasive spiritual preoccupations of the church as a totalitarian ideological institution. People were more inclined to credit the ethical essentials of the creed than they were to participate in the cult, or for that matter, pay too much mind to the political teachings of the church. Thus it was quite possible to be catholic without a theological caste of mind, to be an ordinary christian without being zealous or 'churchy' ('*da chiesa*'). Popular catholicism looked primarily to the generally received essentials, reinforced by confession as a guarantee both for the conscience and against the pains of hell. Otherwise the church far from imposing itself was almost required to officiate on behalf of the community in rights of passage such as baptism, marriage and burial.⁴⁴ This sense of popular entitlement to official blessing of the life cycle survived into the postwar world of Don Camillo and Peppino. Word of mouth and press report advertised the church's pretension to veto the nuptials of unbelievers. But from time to time even communists would demand church weddings.

The values of equity and internationalism attributed by Fantin to his mother were perfectly at home within the framework of such a popular catholicism. Indeed catholicism owed much of its social success to the elasticity with which it contained such incipiently

radical tendencies within a conservative synthesis. Catterina Manea may have had definite opinions about socioeconomic justice and war and peace. It would have been in keeping with the times if she had. But in any case such views would have been grafted onto a stock of ethical commonplaces applied to popular aspirations about what was due to her family and others like it. To take this view is to interpret Fantin's ethical education as a process of normal development in his social context. In growing up the impressionable young Checco would have become aware of the critical nature of the values he imbibed at his mother's knee around the family hearth. There was injustice in the world. Workers were treated as if they were not worthy of their hire, when in fact it was their work which made others rich, and upon which society was based. Workers were subject to political and economic victimisation. One did not need to be a convinced socialist to recognise these things, although it helped. Evangelical belief that the meek should inherit the earth was sufficient. In the case of Catterina Manea Fantin, she probably did not need to translate her values into a specific political creed. That role fell to her son.

It is thus most likely that one of the prime sources of Fantin's anarchism was in fact popular religiosity. This is not as surprising as it might seem. Anarchist emphasis on 'the idea' as an inspiring libertarian ideal betrays a naïve philosophical idealism deriving from centuries of popular exposure to religious thought on the one hand, and the later influence of philosophical radicalism *alla* Voltaire on the other. Both were forms of abstraction rather than historical analysis. Francesco Fantin would seem then to have grown up in an ambiguous cultural context, influenced perhaps by the popular myth of 'Christ socialist'⁴⁵ in the first instance and more corrosive critiques of traditional wisdom thereafter. Something of the original theological template survived the evolution of his traditionalistic egalitarianism into an anticlerical and atheistical heresy.⁴⁶ Fantin's origins thus moulded him into the mainstream of anarchist thought as it subsists to this day, when in this 'time honoured disguise and...borrowed language...tradition...weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.'⁴⁷

It was typical that a Vincentine son should get his core values from his mother. In Italian the concept of 'upbringing' is translated '*educazione*' and has a strong sense of primary moral education. In Italian society this is delivered first of all in the home, generally under the principal moral stewardship of the mother. This is so much taken for granted that anyone who is considered ill mannered, rude or inconsiderate ('*maleducato*') is liable to be

asked rhetorically *‘Non ti ha detto niente la mamma?’* (Hasn’t your mother told you anything?)⁴⁸ The upbringing of children being a female province, it was entirely normal and natural that Fantin owed his ethical formation to his mother, and knew that he did. Indeed catholicism idealised women as the moral partner in marriage, attending to the spiritual health of the family. It was a role for which women were thought to be particularly suited, and men constitutionally unfit. According to Meneghello the adult male was seen as being a natural born pagan, a savage given to the pleasures of drinking, gambling, swearing, womanising and fisticuffs. Correction of these supposedly inborn male tendencies was not attempted. Rather there was a gender specific division of spiritual labour, with conspicuous piety and churchgoing being public women’s business. This conceptual framework was general throughout provincial Italy along the length and breadth of the peninsular. It survived postwar urbanisation after 1945 and transmigration to the antipodes. Generally speaking, if the missionary wife could get her spouse to church often enough to stay on the right side of heaven and eligible for salvation on his death bed, she was reckoned to have done her duty.⁴⁹

It was as well that a woman’s scope had some limits. Apart from attending church and praying for her wayward husband a woman functioned as a domestic cook, seamstress and maid of all work, giving birth to numerous children and raising those which survived. In addition, especially during and after the Great War many worked to supplement the family income for discounted ‘feminine’ wages in the textile mills of the district.⁵⁰ Maternity benefits were unheard of. Indeed on the contrary nursing mothers went to work and made arrangements to nurse their babes during workbreaks.⁵¹ Doubtless the lot of the majority of women throughout human history has ever been thus. This detracts nothing however from the fact that the role of the mother in Vicentine popular culture was in reality as impressive as elsewhere in the Veneto and throughout Italy in the early twentieth century. The stereotype of the Italian’s typical attachment to his mother hints comically at a reality which needs to be born in mind and treated seriously.

Their offspring owed these generous, larger than life proletarian mothers a great deal. Indeed Meneghello, in his superlative memoir of the little universe of Malo between the wars, records that providing for and raising ones offspring was the central duty of the popular moral code, whose implication of unremitting labour went practically unquestioned.⁵² Once again, the fact that such beliefs are central to popular culture to this day the world over does not detract from their significance for Vicentine social history, but rather emphasises the

importance of its universal aspects. As beneficiaries who witnessed the herculean strivings of the women who had borne them, Vincentine children were inclined to be grateful. Such relationships were liable to be successful given a modicum of intelligence and human warmth on the part of the woman. Given that child rearing was a domestic task which fell within a woman's ambit, it was thus not surprising that core values tended to be transmitted, as Meneghello aptly puts it, 'along gynecological lines'.⁵³

But if we should be wary of assuming that Catterina Manea was a convinced anarchist who deliberately indoctrinated her son, neither should we presume that she was altogether unpolitical. In her final years she suffered from dementia, and in the words of her grandson Valentino Bortoloso 'barely knew she was alive.' She clung however in this mental twilight to fragments of what was dearest to her. Thus she would sing on request the Italian socialist anthem 'Bandiera Rossa' a catchy tune with the memorable refrain 'The red flag will triumph; Long live socialism under liberty!'⁵⁴ However commonplace the cultural resources upon which she drew in bringing up her son, Catterina Manea did not hand them on uncritically, but rather imparted her own democratic interpretation.

Thus it appears that Fantin owed the core of his political commitment as a young man to his upbringing, just as he believed. It was a commitment which drew on his earliest moral convictions about the proper place of equity in interpersonal dealings and human affairs. It was moreover associated with his deepest affections. This process of pre-political orientation took place during his childhood around the family hearth and, as we shall see, in dealings with family friends. It furnished an ethical imperative in his outlook, and the basis of a sense of identification with his family, community and class as related dimensions of his personality. Without this prior personal formation, it is doubtful that he could have been so politicised so young. And without it he would have been radicalised less as a mainstream figure and more as an outsider.

#4: Education

Literacy is the supreme amplifier of human abilities...

Watson⁵⁵

One of the most important features of the by no means unilateral tendency towards social democracy which was a feature of the twentieth century was the extension down the social hierarchy of literacy to the broad mass of the people. At the beginning of the century, 12% of the world's people were already literate.⁵⁶ Although this competency was correlated with class privilege, Francesco Fantin was to be one of the early beneficiaries of the notion of public responsibility to teach literacy to the people. Literacy was to have a profound impact on his life, allowing him to read further concerning the radical democratic principles of which his family and peers spoke, and to communicate them in writing to others. Mass literacy, as its conservative detractors and radical friends agreed, had revolutionary and subversive implications. Education in modern Italy was a controversial issue, with the left accusing the state of keeping the population in ignorance, and the church arguing that demand was for confessional not secular education.⁵⁷

Across from the Commune in the Piazza stood 'the local public school' as one teacher characterised it⁵⁸. Generally known by its situation 'in Piazza'⁵⁹, the school with the handsome stone façade is also mentioned as having premises 'in via Chiesa'⁶⁰. This may have been an alternate designation of its location at the head of the main street giving off the Piazza and running along to the parish church by the torrent skirting the foothills. It was so well known that it was designated in one school Register as being simply 'in the township.'⁶¹ A Girl's School is recorded as having premises in via Rigobelli, so it would seem that the school was housed in more than one locale, with the Boy's School enjoying the premier position. Perhaps the Girl's School had been an historical afterthought. Certainly the only Girl's School Register to have survived to our knowledge is for the school year 1915-16, although an Elementary School Register for a co-educational class survives from 1902-3.⁶² Whatever the case and in howsoever many locations, the school was institutionally an expression of the Commune which faced its principal premises and represented the local community, however imperfectly. Moreover no location in the town was very far from any other, and like the classrooms of any era at any time or in any place they would have been a principal focus of

many children and their families. They would also have been central not only to the lives of the teaching staff, but also to the communal office bearers who supervised them.

Writing of the 'Civil Question' of education in 1918, the propagandists Zimmern and Agresti in New Italy were concerned to counter the preconceptions of 'the foreigner' regarding 'the Italian elementary school'

as being still what it was twenty years or more ago, a dirty, ill ventilated, badly lit hovel in some wretched alley, in which a handful of street arabs, frozen in winter and stifled in summer, collected to listen to the half hearted instructions of a underpaid, untrained teacher, looked down upon by the local authorities, who were almost always opposed to education.

The fragmentary records of primary education at San Vito before and during the Great War give some colour to the picture of improvement painted by the propagandists of conflict which had saved the soul of the nation.⁶³

No record has survived of the schooling of Francesco Fantin. However the fragmentary records of the municipal Elementary School at San Vito do refer to his elder brother Luigi and his younger brother Alfonso. Before Francesco was quite two years of age Luigi was enrolled under teacher Elena Sterle in her first year of service in December 1902. He was much absent during January through March 1903. The behaviour of the eldest brother Fantin was assessed as imperfect, and his performance at exercises in reading, writing and arithmetic averaged a lower pass. He passed in physical education. He was held back for revision in August 1903.⁶⁴ The following month a third brother Fantin was born to the family and named Alfonso.

The Elementary School records show that Alfonso Fantin sat and passed a comprehension test at the end of the school year in August 1914, the portentous month of high summer when the continent slid into the Great War.⁶⁵ The village priest Don Antonio Catalan noted in his Parish Chronicle the 'unhappy.. outbreak of the European war.' 'The first spark' he wrote 'was struck by Austria, as a result of the assassination at Sarajevo...of the heirs to the throne.' The *casus belli* had occurred on Italy's Balkan frontier, and provoked

the Hapsburg Empire to her immediate north. The alpine border indeed ran virtually within sight of San Vito. Don Antonio did not doubt its implications for his community. 'The war' he remarked 'became complicated in such a way that within a few days the whole continent was in flames. So far (August 21) our Italy is neutral. How long can it remain so ?'⁶⁶

Alfonso Fantin was no better or worse behaved than his eldest brother had been before him, and like him had a bit of an attendance problem, being thrice absent with permission and fourteen times without. As to literacy and numeracy he graduated with a pass average. It would appear that neither the eldest nor the youngest of the Fantin brothers were particularly engaged by the primary education on offer at San Vito. There is no record of the Fantin sisters receiving a primary education at the village school, but as with Francesco this is most likely due to gross defect in the municipal educational records, most of which have been tragically destroyed.⁶⁷ The Bortoloso family tradition is that the Fantin daughters were educated like the sons of the family. Certainly the brothers and sisters corresponded in later life when separated by the emigration of the males. It is unlikely that their working parents would have had the time and energy, even if they had the knowledge, to teach their children their letters, so it is most likely that they were all educated to basic literacy at the local school. It is true however that the following year, some parents clubbed together to pay for private tuition for boys at a loose end in the wartime town, the premises being provided by a church youth facility.⁶⁸

The municipal school records also enable us to gauge the nature of the unrecorded education Francesco Fantin received circa 1906-12. The first thing they enable us to note is that Fantin may have benefited from pre-schooling at San Vito. At Malo, a commune bordering on San Vito, the comparatively prosperous family of little Luigi Meneghello sent him as a fee paying scholar to a private 'dame school', which he remembers as a 'curious relic of another world', where he learnt his first letters before graduating with advantage to the First Grade of the Communal School.⁶⁹ There also appears to have been a kindergarten at San Vito. Local Grade One registers for the scholastic year of 1915-16 frequently mention pupils as being 'from the kindergarten.'⁷⁰ If this preschool was functioning circa 1905, it can be conjectured that Fantin may have been a pupil. It must be remembered however that his family may not have availed themselves of this option. It would appear that at San Vito it may have been subsidised, at whatever price in social stigma, but it may not have been seen as educationally necessary or desirable.⁷¹ Nonetheless it should be noted that pre-schooling

was available at San Vito before the Great War. Certainly preschooling was well established at San Vito by the time of Fantin's emigration in 1924.⁷²

It can be positively asserted however that in the earliest years of the twentieth century primary education was provided at San Vito by qualified teachers. The teaching staff at San Vito in the years between the turn of the century and up to and including the Great War numbered as few as two teachers at any one time. It included at various times one young man, three young women, one of whom was a native of San Vito, and one middle aged man who was qualified to teach secondary school. Marriage was the exception rather than the norm whilst on the teaching staff at San Vito. The marriage of female teachers may have been one factor contributing to a certain turnover in the teaching staff.⁷³

It is unlikely that the salaries paid teachers would have inhibited staff turnover. Before 1870 an Italian primary school teacher had been paid less than a manual labourer.⁷⁴ The situation for teachers had not markedly improved when Signorina Elena Sterle took her first, numerous class of beginners in late 1902, being paid a base grade salary of 400 Lire.⁷⁵ Around this time a female industrial worker was paid between 1 and 1.5 Lire a day.⁷⁶ That same year her male colleague Signor Geremia Roncan was employed for the third year running to teach intermediate and advanced boys at a salary of 700 Lire.⁷⁷ In the scholastic year 1913-14 Signorina Maria Pizzardin, a native of the town in her third year of service there, was paid 1200 Lire for teaching a class of beginners. Two years later she was paid 1680 Lire for the same task, while a colleague with nine years service at San Vito, Angelina Mancassola, was paid only 1050 Lire for teaching a class of female beginners.⁷⁸ It is possible that the better paid teacher had supervisory duties; otherwise her higher salary would be hard to explain. Inflation and industrial muscle may partly account for the upward trend of teacher's pay in the Giolittian era from the early years of the century to the eve of the Great War. But with salaries notoriously modest and class sizes commonly around 40, teachers were entitled to grumble about being underpaid and overworked. This of course did not necessarily undermine their commitment to their charges or the respect in which teachers were held by their parents and the community generally.⁷⁹

The teachers at San Vito were employed by the Commune, in accordance with the barely adequate Piedmontese Education Act of 1859. This Casati Act¹ involved an abnegation of responsibility by the State, which was unwilling to tax the propertied electorate to provide for state education. It called upon local governments to 'provide [for elementary education] in accordance with their means and the needs of the inhabitants'. It provided only for one year's compulsory and another year's optional elementary instruction.⁸⁰ In 1874 in the dying days of the government of the aristocratic Historic Right a bill for compulsory elementary education was presented, but rejected by a Chamber of Deputies unwilling to shoulder the financial burden of public schooling and concerned at the losses which would be occasioned by the discontinuation of child labour. The democratic Left bit the bullet and legislated in 1877, but its provisions were widely evaded.⁸¹ As late as 1921 the local budget for new premises for the school at San Vito excited criticism for extravagance in the provincial press,⁸² not however without having its defenders.⁸³ An absentee state was the essential problem affecting Italian primary education: absentee pupils were merely a secondary complication. Indeed it was still proverbially remarked after the Great War that 'public life depends more on the municipality than on the government'⁸⁴, and education was a good example of what was meant by this. The Italian bourgeoisie initially provided for its own education and neglected that of the people, in the sense that Italy had one of the highest percentages of university graduates *and* illiterates in western Europe.⁸⁵ Thus Fantin owed his education only indirectly to the state. This devolved regime weighed heavily on the poorest communities, accounting for a fair degree of local variation. Some local authorities were more embarrassed than others by their educational responsibilities. Others again were concerned to keep down the rates on property.⁸⁶ This longstanding situation began to change during Fantin's lifetime, shortly before he began to attend primary school. In 1903 Giolitti's second ministry voted eight million Lire for primary schools and their teachers, with what the premier later recalled as 'a generosity hitherto unknown'.⁸⁷ In 1904 the Orlando Education Bill increased the age of obligatory schooling to twelve, and Francesco Fantin, a child of 1901, will have been schooled under this dispensation.⁸⁸ Up to this time, in defiance of regulations, almost a quarter of Italian children were not attending primary school.⁸⁹ Illiteracy in northern Italy was down to around 30%, reflecting the prosperity and culture of the middle classes and the skills required for many working class employments. But most people spoke dialect in daily life. Italian was spoken by no more than 16% of the population. Still this was a

¹ Italian legislation is named after its parliamentary proponent.

reflection of how much state endorsement had done for a language spoken by less than 1% of the population at unification.⁹⁰

At San Vito the Commune and the community were evidently not altogether without territorial, commercial and industrial resources, being able furthermore to draw to some extent on those of the state funded Provincial Educational Council.⁹¹ Thus the Commune had the means to provide at least some education for some of the children of the working poor. It was a facility of which the local working class availed themselves as much as possible. Few workers were willing to visit by neglect upon their children the illiteracy which had traditionally stigmatised the peasantry. Nonetheless many families required assistance with school expenses. Printed school registers provided for the recording of subsidies in books, food and clothing to pupils. The Boys School beginners' class of 1915-16 numbered 48 enrollees, of whom 21 were subsidised scholars. The same class at the Female School that year numbered 45 enrollees, of whom 13 were subsidised. In the first year of Italian Intervention in the Great War, poverty was evidently a significant problem at San Vito.⁹² Francesco Carmagnola, a very near peer of Francesco Fantin, recalled in later life that poverty was general in the village, with not a few children half starving. The borderline between mundane penury and desperate indigence will have been determined by the emotional resilience of families, forbearance from dangerous behaviours such as alcoholism and gambling, a work ethic and access to land or employment, the good fortune to be spared congenital or endemic illness, and generally luck in what must have been a very chancy life full of incident. Carmagnola recalled that the trauma of the remembered emotional pressure of poverty on couples was one of the reasons why he did not marry.⁹³

Sex segregation was one of the pre-eminent cultural factors impinging on the primary curriculum at San Vito in the period up to and including the Great War. This differentiation was so profound in the minds of local officialdom that it led to some uncertainty as to whether the Commune's educational establishment was best thought of as a school or schools.⁹⁴ There was a disposition to differentiate the curriculum sexually too. The Register for the beginners' class at the Female School went so far as to provide for the girl's education in 'Women's Work' and 'Home Economics'. But this orientation was not thoroughly carried through, as the girls were not assessed in these subjects, and may not even have been taught them.⁹⁵ In any case girls were taught the same core curriculum as the boys with the same

heavy emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy. A beginners' class in 1902-3 was mixed, but there is no record in our sample of other co-educational classes.

Another implication of the emphasis throughout the San Vito school registers on 'the Three Rs' of basic literacy and numeracy was the marginality of historical and civic education. Zimmern and Agresti boasted that 'history from the days of ancient Rome to the Risorgimento, and geography' were a feature of the Italian elementary curriculum,⁹⁶ but the records at San Vito suggest that this generalization was somewhat hollow. Instruction was envisaged in a compound subject known as 'History, Geography & Human & Civic Rights & Duties.' But this was not regarded as a core subject. Luigi Fantin was not assessed in it as a beginner in 1902-3, although Geremia Roncan gave young Giuseppe Fabris from his advanced class a pass mark in this subject that same year. By the 1913-14 scholastic year History and Geography were being registered as discrete subjects, but were still not assessed except in so far as they were encompassed within 'Moral Education & Civic Instruction'. This set the pattern which was followed in subsequent years, even when the Great War brought history on a grand scale to the doorstep of the school. Zimmern and Agresti maintained that 'the rising generation is being taught at school why their fathers are fighting; the children in the elementary schools...are being prepared to show themselves worthy of the sacrifices made...at the front.'⁹⁷ Perhaps the dramatic events in the locality were addressed formally and informally at school in San Vito; Francesco Fantin clearly gained more critical instruction at home. The apparent emphasis on literacy and numeracy is not surprising when it is considered that the primary school was on the frontline in the fight against illiteracy. But it is strange when it is considered that primary school teachers were considered along with their secondary and tertiary colleagues as 'an important instrument for transmitting the culture and values of the new state' and as the outlying exponents of a restricted polity, notwithstanding their being municipal employees.⁹⁸ The other recurrent concerns addressed at primary school at San Vito in this period were physical education and that adjunct of moral education, behaviour. Here the character of the teacher appears as much as that of the pupils. Maria Pizzardin seems to have been more disposed than her peers to give high votes for good conduct.

Lastly, the relative secularity of the primary education offered at San Vito deserves to be remarked upon. In the Province of Verona, immediately to the east of Vicenza Province, priests generally qualified as teachers and commonly served in local schools in the late

nineteenth century.⁹⁹ At unification fully a third of all Italian primary and secondary teachers were priests.¹⁰⁰ The catholicity of Vicenza Province is not to be doubted, neither at the dawn of the twenty first century nor the twentieth. Nonetheless at San Vito in Fantin's day there was no such clerical predominance over infant education, despite the prominent role of the Church in local society. None of the four teachers mentioned in the sample taken of surviving municipal educational records were in holy orders, though some or all may have been catholic. Nevertheless, whilst moral education pro scholarly effort figured in the dictation exercises set in 1914, the seizing of this pedagogical opportunity did not involve religious indoctrination.¹⁰¹ There was therefore a faint democratic humanism about the elementary education received by Fantin, which did not teach humility and social subordination, and reinforced his infant appetite for freedom and contributed to its later political expression. The radical nature by default of secular education can be assayed against the catholic emphasis on catechising the poor as a religious consolation for the injustice of this world with a view to encouraging political quietism. Shortly before unification the Jesuit journal Civiltà Cattolica gave expression to the traditional clerical view.

Now the poor workmen who is hungry and has no food for his children; the miserably oppressed to whom blindness, or worse the venal iniquity of men, negates justice and does not know what to do, what consolation is he to obtain? Happy is he who at least knows his catechism! He will remember that Lazzarus when a hungry beggar was borne by the angels to the bosom of Abraham; he will remember that the Son of God was condemned to the death for misdeeds by the entire Synod of the Pharisees; and he will find the way to be at peace with himself and sometimes even to be happy, and in the simplicity of his heart to bless God who makes him patiently expiate his own sins and increase his merits in eternal Paradise...But suppose that the miserable wretch has not learnt his catechism or forgotten it: How will this unhappy soul console himself in adversity? Not otherwise than by cursing heaven and earth and giving himself over body and soul to those who promise him bread and justice, the levelling of the social classes and the equal distribution of property.¹⁰²

Many of the pedagogical norms and customs which applied at San Vito before the Great War are familiar within living memory, as they altered little throughout Italy in the ensuing century¹⁰³. Scholars were marked out of ten, a vote indicating practical perfection which was customarily rarely given. A vote of nine effectively indicated a high distinction,

eight a distinction, seven a credit. Six was the pass vote for satisfactory competence, indicating that a higher pass was deemed necessary for graduation. A mere vote of five indicated failure to master the subject, an unstable equilibrium between knowledge and ignorance. Four was an inadequate vote and lower votes were disgraceful. Most infant scholars at San Vito in our sample were pass scholars. One pupil, Silvio Carmagnola, who acquired a reputation for intelligence and went on to become a skilled tradesman,¹⁰⁴ was a pass scholar at least at one point in his primary schooling. Perhaps the curriculum bored him.

There were other subtleties to the system of instruction and assessment at San Vito. Pupils had to qualify for examination, and if they performed satisfactorily, were 'promoted' or passed to the next grade or graduated. Those preselected as manifestly competent were '*dispensati*' or excused examination and passed. Doubtful worthy cases were examined and mostly passed. The privilege of being tested was not wasted on the under prepared, who were excluded from the exam. Others who were unprepared by virtue of absenteeism were '*assentati*' or 'absented'. The San Vito registers report absenteeism fairly commonly, suggesting that it conformed to national experience. Around a quarter of Italian children in the early twentieth century defied compulsory primary education regulations and did not attend school. When a scholar failed to present for a test, this was noted separately¹⁰⁵. Assessment involved qualitative teacher evaluation as well as a supposedly objective testing procedure. It paid to turn up and stay on-side with the teacher at San Vito. Those who did not perform satisfactorily were 'sent back' to repeat the course until their performance was adequate.

Accordingly repeating a class as Luigi Fantin did in 1903-4 was not an uncommon experience. The expectation of later generations and other jurisdictions that all but the most backward would progress annually with their peers from grade to grade seems not to have applied. It seems to have been more nearly true that average students were expected to be held back at first examination and only promoted subsequently. Thus there were only three classes in the primary school at San Vito before the Great War. Primary education was delivered to pupils effectively differentiated into beginners, intermediate and advanced classes. Pupils were classified according to relative competence; age was at best a secondary criterion. On the whole the advanced pupils in Geremia Roncan's senior classes of 1902-3 were older than the intermediate scholars, but both classes numbered students from well across the six to twelve age span. A few of his intermediate pupils were under six years of

age or over ten, the bulk being between six to nine years of age. The advanced class was fairly evenly distributed between those under nine, under ten, under twelve and one teenager. The most common age of these intermediate and advanced pupils was in the comprehensive under-nine age bracket, which coincided with the required years of primary schooling. In fact the San Vito Registers for the 1902-3 scholastic years characterise those ten years and over as non-compulsory students. Giovanni Maria Grotto has recalled that he completed his education by passing the third grade in the year of Italian Intervention, 1915.¹⁰⁶ Francesco Carmignola, another San Vito scholar, who in adult life was to demonstrate political intelligence, initiative and leadership, completed his schooling at the age of ten and worked in the building industry and a chocolate factory prior to the outbreak of the Great War.¹⁰⁷ This triadic competency based grade system was a national rather than a local convention. Geremia Roncan taught his combined classes from two text books, each written specifically for its respective class and published for the national market. Elena Sterle taught her little horde of beginners from an official syllabus supplemented by a text book entitled First Steps.

It would appear then that the education received by Francesco Fantin in his native village was very basic, and unadorned by much in the way of civic education. Its inadequacies as to a sense of history and the state would have contributed by default to the anarchism which arose from the ethical formation received from his mother and the specific ideological input of family friends. Within this matrix of interpersonal familiarity, the medium of political instruction would have been primarily oral. But we must not sneer at the formal instruction Fantin received, or underestimate its significance. The teachers of San Vito equipped Fantin to read and write. It was an accomplishment pregnant with practical intellectual implications. In later life he would correspond with family and comrades, including some of the most eminent of Italian anarchists, such as Berneri and Malatesta. He would read anarchist and socialist literature, some of it quite demanding, and correspond for anarchist publications in his Australian exile. His education, basic as it was, furnished a logical infrastructure to his thought and communication, which informed his activities as a publicist and organiser. It seems from his testamentary diary of 1942 that he may have been prevented from going on with his schooling by poverty. This was by no means an uncommon fate at the time. Pietro Munari and Emidio Brando suffered such a destiny¹⁰⁸, and they too went on to careers in political activism, which may have partly satisfied frustrated intellectual needs alongside other political aspirations. Nor should we underestimate Fantin's subsequent intellectual achievements. Already as a young man, Fantin understood the evil of fascism,

which better educated people were to ignore until they belatedly realised that a deal could not be cut with Europe's chauvinist dictatorships. It is true that Fantin's critical acumen derived primarily from his own native intelligence and his conversation with intimates and political and industrial peers, rather than from his schooling. But he would have been a more limited activist if not for the benefit of basic literacy that compulsory primary schooling had given him.

#5: 1905: the Spectre of Tyrannicide

A spectre is haunting Europe...

Marx & Engels¹⁰⁹

It is important to recognise that Fantin, like his fellow subversives at San Vito and in the Schio district, was a representative rather than an atypical expression of his milieu. The anarchists and socialists of this industrialised locality represented the working class dissent of their day. Many of them shared significantly common values and a substantially traditional cultural background with their less politicised peers. Fantin and the comrades he followed into exile were thus well spoken of in after years at Schio and San Vito by peers who did not share their politics. They were not thought of as outcasts but rather as the decent sons of good, honest working families. Evidently as far as their fellow townfolk were aware, their behaviour was considered more or less consistent with generally accepted values. There was harmony between the politicised minority of the working class and the broad apolitical mass of their peers who have been described as 'proletarians without a revolution.'¹¹⁰ There were common bonds in the name of which the former felt and substantially were representative of the latter and their interests, notwithstanding their being statistically atypical of the politically quiescent majority. Nonetheless the proletariat typically expressed an anarchosocialist spectrum of activists rather than liberals, who were the 'organic intellectuals' of the middle class, and this was no accident in either case. One important technique in these inquiries is the identification of themes recurring in the lives of these anarchists.

If the subversives of San Vito were certainly a minority, they were none the less an accepted and indigenous one in the eyes of the commonality. It was the powers of church and state and their well to do associates, who were in the ruthless and time honoured fashion of Italian politics and in line with the classical precedent of ostracism, to recognise the importance of the subversives as antagonists and drive them out. Integral members of their community, theirs was a leave taking which already had an anthem in the hauntingly beautiful 'Addio Lugano Bella' by the libertarian lawyer Pietro Gori, which spoke of how 'blameless the anarchists depart, singing with hope in their hearts.'¹¹¹ Gori, who proselytised at Schio and in Vicenza province,¹¹² followed in the footsteps of the Italian national poet Dante, the most famous political exile of the communal era. The young Dante was a

bourgeois proponent of civic autonomy who was proscribed by the clerical wing of his own party when a French army took Florence on behalf of the Pope.¹¹³ Dante famously complained that 'the bread of others is salty' i.e. not in the Tuscan style, a bitter reference to his gilded servility as a humanist retainer at Italian courts foreign to him. But before we describe Fantin as an exponent of the long Italian tradition of political exile, we must retrace our steps and explore the sense of belonging that gives it its poignancy. It is the reality behind this wrench, of the specific social roots of anarchism in the Schio district, as opposed to its general preconditions in popular culture, that we now turn to explore. Just how well radicated was this culture of dissent, which fascism offered to uproot, representing itself indeed as the final solution for subversion ?

Anarchism did not emerge fully formed in Vicenza Province or anywhere else like a myrmidon fully equipped for battle. Its first steps were feeble and beset with difficulties. As elsewhere in Europe and the Italian peninsula it was initially but a tendency of 'internationalism' or post bourgeois nationalist thought, which struggled to establish a following. Thus the publication in his provincial youth by the classical economist Tullio Martello of his History of the International from its Origins to the Hague Conference in 1873, two years after the repression of the Paris Commune and the year after the parting of the ways between the followers of Marx and Bakunin, is an early sign of proletarian dissent in the Vicentino and a milestone in the history of vicentine anarchism. After all, the International Martello described was more inchoate than not, as anarchist as it was marxist organisationally and culturally, and its early following in Vicenza Province drew together internationalist workers whose socialism was anarchic and whose anarchism was socialist.¹¹⁴ In other words, provincially as nationally and internationally, the origins of anarchism were intertwined with those of socialism.

But within a generation, anarchism was already a distinct endemic doctrine in the Province of Vicenza with a small but significant popular following amongst indigenous activists and sympathisers. After the municipal elections of June 1892 the official socialist organ in the province, El Giornale Visentin, commented that at Schio

the workers in great part abstained, in part due to the propaganda effect of certain little abstentionist posters signed 'the Anarchist group', in part due to the lack of popularist nominees backed by the liberal democratic committee, which to be truthful, had about as much to do with democracy as cabbages with afternoon tea.¹¹⁵

Anarchism emerged just as conservatives realised that they could only check the democratic tide by suborning it, relying on their wealth and influence to manage consensus. In October of that same year El Giornale Visentin reported an act of apparent anarchist defiance during the annual celebration by the Lanerossi of its paternalistic cult of labour relations embodied in the statue of 'the man'. As workers arrived for the official ceremony

In the midst of general attention the anarchist Calappo mounted the pedestal and said: Comrades! Workers! Today we have been called together to celebrate the festival of the Weaver. What a grim, cruel irony! What a poor festival we celebrate when our families drown in poverty, when our resources are inadequate to our needs, when our future is one of hunger and unemployment... Ah! The day will come that will cancel these lies, which will help our vendetta... There are workers who, instead of sharing our struggle for social resurgence, seek to denigrate us, to betray us. May they be cursed! Praise be to the assassin who buries the dagger of vengeance in the breast of his exploiter. Death be to him who betrays his brothers, death to the spie!

Speaking of spies, there is some doubt as to whether Calappo was a licenced political fool or even an agent provocateur, since his outburst did not attract the dismissal which was normally dispensed by the firm in the face of open defiance. Was the firm seeking to divide and rule, provoking resistance to identify and dismiss labour agitators as it had done during the strike of the previous year? In 1902 the election of officers of the General Mutual Aid Society of Schio Artisans was disputed between socialists and the Rossi interest, which laid out funds to stack the meeting. El Giornale Visentin commented

There were seen at the Theatre Jacquard faces never before seen at an Assembly, including old timers who didn't even know where to find the traditional meeting place... Even the famous Calappo was brought out from the peace and tranquillity of rural retirement to save the tottering forces of order. It is said that he declared his trip had cost him nothing...¹¹⁶

Such events contributed to socialist views that anarchists were politically unreliable extremists. At the very least it suggests that there was some inconsistency in the attitude of the Lanerossi towards anarchists as distinct from other labour antagonists.

The death in custody by hanging of the regicide Bresci on 22 May 1901¹¹⁷ had quite an impact in the Schio district, where the official explanation of suicide motivated by shame at his crime was understandably little credited. Political surveillance in the Province in due course recovered a libel celebrating the fifth anniversary of the assassination of 'the most monstrous and infamous of kings', entitled July 29: Who Lives by the Sword Dies by the Sword¹¹⁸ The author, one O.R., condemned 'the prostitute press, subservient to Church and State' for 'vomiting mud on the anarchists and their ideas' and overturned the official interpretation of the assassination, condemning the dead king and praising the assassin, whom he alleged had been murdered by henchmen of the son and heir of 'the crowned monster', Vittorio Emanuele III. Hailing 'the brave weaver, humble soldier of the revolutionary army, heroic avenger of the oppressed and impoverished people' O.R. damned 'the infamous monarch' as a tyrant of classical proportions, comparable to Sulla, Caligula and Nero, and condemned his reign as one of internal repression and chauvinist expansionism.

To him we owe the massacres of Conselice, of Sicily, Carrara, Minervino, Murge, Milano. To him are owed the frightful hecatombs of Dogali, Makalle and Abba Garima, the state of siege and the emergency legislation, the impoverishment and the moral brutalisation of the country.

Two arguments were notable for their novelty in this philippic. The first was the concern displayed for foreign victims of the monarchy, above and beyond the conscript Italian victims of the dynasty's expansionism.

By the cliffs and ravines of sweltering Abyssinia the bones yet whiten of the children of the indigenous people slaughtered in their thousands by unrestrained ambition for conquest and rapine.

Clearly the internationalist sympathies of the author were such as knew no ethnocentric bounds. Whilst this was undoubtedly an advanced opinion, racism as a defensive posture of the labour movement cannot be automatically assumed, neither in Italy, or as we shall later note, in Australia, as a general stance amongst workers. The reality was complex in accordance with the contradictions of the context in which the racial dilemmas of labour competition had to be addressed. It is also noteworthy that O.R. was faithful to the populist roots of anarchism in that he justified Bresci's homicide on the classical populist grounds recorded and celebrated by

Camus as 'murder...identified with suicide'.¹¹⁹ This is an argument made actual for us by the contemporary practice and traditions of muslim fundamentalism, from which the term 'assassin' derives.

Gaetano Bresci did not kill one of his fellows. He killed a rogue...He did not kill in a cowardly fashion, because in taking life from another, he offered up his own for the cause of the oppressed. He did not suppress a tyrant to succeed him, but in the hope of liberating the people from his domination, to excite in them sentiments of hope and rebellion against every form of exploitation and despotism.

The argument is not convincing, despite the circumstances of oppression which so often make it plausible. Anyone could argue thus, and proceed to bathe the world in blood. But it does emphasise that the anarchists were a movement with a conscience, who sought to justify their actions to themselves and the world. As noted above, it was an argument which Camus adopted in the late 20th century, if only to criticise later revolutionaries who, he submitted, did not as a rule surrender themselves to the public executioner on principle.

The figure of Bresci, a man who died in custody as a prisoner of a state which did not officially practice capital punishment, became a lightning rod for discussion about resistance to the state, seen by anarchists as an inherently criminal association for the implementation of homicidal policies. This can be seen in the life of one of the most eminent of vicentine anarchists, the intellectual Ettore Molinari. Born at Cremona on 14 July 1867, he took his degree in chemistry at Zurich in 1887, from whence he was sent by Italian émigrés to the III Congress of the Italian Workers' Party [POI] at Pavia. Moving to Paris where he found work as a pharmacist, he became acquainted with the anarchists Jean Grave and Luigi Galleani, meeting Malatesta and Kropotkin on a visit to London. Expelled from France in 1890, he repatriated. By 1893 he was working as a chemist in the Veneto wine industry, and gaining the local knowledge and connections which saw him assumed, notwithstanding his notorious politics, at the Lanerossi establishment of Piovene Rocchette near Schio. He became involved in the political education of local comrades, and is believed to have been central in the warm reception accorded at Schio at the turn of the century to the leading anarchist lawyer Pietro Gori. In 1901 he left Schio, establishing himself as a chemist in Milan, where Molinari threw himself into debate in anarchist circles there concerning Bresci, whose deed he was still justifying in 1910 giving a seminar entitled 'July 29 and History'.

Bresci was also linked in the minds of the police with another anarchist from the Schio district, Luigi Bertoncello. Born to Domenico & Santa Maria Bittante at Bassano del Grappa 30 August 1862, he moved to Schio in 1892. He was converted to Bakuninism by anarchists at Schio, who nicknamed him 'goose' on account of his original pietism, yet another indication of the links between populism, religiosity and anarchism. An artisan who made clogs, he emigrated in 1899 at the height of the political crisis in turn of the century Italy, which may have been a factor in his decision along with economic considerations, and took up residence in Paterson New Jersey at a time when Bresci was politically active there. In 1902 he repatriated to Schio. There one night in a hostelry within the hearing of a police informer he

declared himself a friend of Bresci, whom he had known at Paterson, and said that Bresci in killing His Majesty Umberto I had done his duty and ought not to be considered an assassin. Rather Bresci himself had been assassinated.

Here we have thanks to the ever vigilant authorities an authentic popular political voice, and there is little reason to doubt that Bertoncello had met Bresci in the United States. Even if he was boasting of a slight acquaintance, this would be a significant piece of evidence of the prestige Bresci enjoyed in life and death in proletarian circles, especially amongst fellow workers. Arrested on 11 October 1902 Bertoncello was found in possession of a pistol. Whilst on bail he escaped to the United States via Milan and Le Havre. In 1917 he came again to police attention as the editor of a fortnightly newspaper Per la Vita [For Life], published by the Parma Chamber of Labour, which from its title must have been critical of the war. He was last noted by the Italian police in the United States. Bertoncello was another organic proletarian intellectual of anarchist persuasion active in the Schio district and, in his own small way, nationally and internationally. As such Francesco Fantin was in due course to follow in his footsteps and that of others.¹²⁰

As noted above, there was considerable debate, nationally and provincially amongst Italian anarchists about the political morality of assassination after the Milan massacre of 1898 and the avenging regicide of Umberto I by Bresci in 1900. This can clearly be seen in the life of one of the most characteristic and eminent of vicentine anarchists, Sante Barbieri. Sante Barbieri was born to Domenico and Maria Vanzo at Rozzampia, a hamlet in the vicinity of Thiene in the Val Leogra on 25 June 1880. In 1882 the family moved to nearby Dueville, before moving again to Cavazzale in 1888, when the eight year old Sante began working in the Roi textile mill,

one of the local competitors of the Lanerossi. In 1894 the teenage Barbieri moved alone to Piovene and began working at the Rossi establishment there. For three years he served a hard apprenticeship, most probably compensated by the political mentorship of the anarchist chemist Ettore Molinari, who was on the staff at Piovene Rocchette at the time. At the age of seventeen he emigrated to Austria before removing to Mannedorf in Switzerland, where he married in 1900 an Italian woman, Maria Zanzotto, with whom he had three children, only one of whom survived. Barbieri brought his surviving daughter home to his mother at Dueville in 1901. By the following year Signor and Signora Barbieri were in West Hoboken NJ, that magnet for textile workers and Italian and other anarchist activists. Signora Barbieri in due course found work as a weaver in Haverstraw NY. Until this point Barbieri may be said to have lived a fairly typical life for a politicised proletarian.

But in 1905 he again repatriated, apparently temporarily, leaving his wife working at her place of employment, and the Italian consular and security apparatus scrambled to respond in a manner which says much for their appreciation of the vitality of expatriate vicentine anarchism. On 5 July 1905 the Italian Consul General wrote to the Ministry of the Interior at Rome, following it up with a telegram the next day to the effect that '29 June USS La Lorraine destination Le Havre departed with anarchist Barbieri Sante circa 30 years of age from Schio, supposedly with mandate to kill His Majesty the King' The anonymous source of this information was described as 'trustworthy'. Barbieri was suspected by the authorities of being their worst nightmare, an underground anarchist activist effecting a clandestine infiltration from beyond their purview in the hope of emulating and avenging Bresci. By 8 July 1905 Barbieri had arrived in Torino, and been arrested and taken to the Questura for questioning. There he told a tale of the private misfortunes and ill health of a struggling worker, visiting his native province to see his sister and the child being raised by his aging mother and to take the waters at Recoaro Springs. Queried as to his politics, he gave an account of himself as a non violent anarchist in terms evocative of Marx and prefiguring Gramsci. Indeed it is significant that Barbieri was to describe himself to the Prefecture of Vicenza approximately a week later as an anarchosocialist, and that by the end of the month the Italian Ambassador to France was vouching for him on the basis of prior knowledge as 'the most innocuous person in the world, and not even an anarchist, but rather with some tendency towards socialism',¹²¹ officially recognised as an altogether distinct and safer designation.¹²² The voice of Barbieri which addresses us from inside the Turinese Prefecture of a century ago is thus that of an 'internationalista':

I have professed anarchist principles for many years, and am convinced that a better society must arise when the working class gains a sufficient level of intellectual development necessary to unite its forces in common cause against the present form of society. I have never engaged in acts of violence.¹²³

There is no doubt that Sante Barbieri was a senior anarchist activist in Vicenza Province, the Canton of Zurich, and in New York and New Jersey. Anarchism was an individualistic ideology which was inherently incapable of expressing democratically accountable leadership structures based on delegated responsibility. It was thus all the more dependent on networks which devolved leadership to charismatic activists, some of whom were more equal than others. This as Gramsci knew, who had experience of working with anarchists during the Red Biennium, was their strength and their weakness.¹²⁴ The better known names of Italian anarchism, such as Malatesta, were recognised by their peers as the foremost exponents of a movement which had many lesser lights whose relative prominence was likewise acknowledged. For every Malatesta there was a Barbieri. And as we shall see, for every Barbieri there was a Fantin.

#6: Politicisation

'Children grow into the intellectual life of those around them.'

Vygotsky¹²⁵

By its nature vicentine anarchism has left few traces of itself as a movement as such: no minutes, accounts or lists of membership or press subscriptions. During the fascist era secret police were to trace Fantin from the purloined notebooks of Malatesta and Berneri, but these national and international figures were the subject of special attention in an age of systematic surveillance, which did not apply so widely in the liberal era. Surveillance criteria were much more restrictive under liberal rule, focussed most particularly on the specific risk of anarchist assassination attempts after the killing of Umberto I. Indeed documentation of political surveillance by the Rome Directorate General of Public Security is ironically the prime source of historical memory about the personnel and connections of these sworn enemies of the Italian state. They now live for us like a reflection in the eyes of their enemies.¹²⁶ One of the prime means of reconstructing the networks which were the infrastructure of the anarchist movement is therefore the retracing of the interlocking security dossiers of its activists.

We resume therefore the search for Francesco Fantin with the profile of another vicentine anarchist from Schio, Stanislao Quinto Baratto. He was born 12 September 1868 the son of Giovanni and Elena Pinzon at Cavasso del Tomba in the foothills of Monte Grappa in upper Treviso Province. In 1881 his family moved to Torrebelvicino, where young Quinto began working underage for the Lanerossi establishment there. During the strike of 1891 Baratto was sacked. In due course he took the hint and exported his human capital to the New World, where it was not blacklisted, specifically to New Jersey, where he knew there was an established textile industry that could employ him and which had already attracted likeminded workmates. Exactly when Baratto removed himself to the US in view of his altered circumstances is unclear. If the Statue of Liberty had not beckoned before he was laid off, it must have shone more brightly thereafter. Funds permitting, none the less, especially if he was able to find other temporary employment locally, he need not have acted rashly. Like the life of Francesco Fantin after him, that of Baratto emphasises the falsity of any hard and fast distinction between political and economic emigration. Industrial victimisation punished Baratto for his political and socio-economic ideals, and left him destitute of the means of maintaining them in his native Schio

district. Baratto had to provide for both his stomach and his politics, and his workaday activities were the means of doing both together. His employment thus sustained his political work. As for internal migration within Italy, he would have been no less a stranger in many an Italian city than in New Jersey, and arguably less likely to find employment. By 1901 Baratto had been established at West Hoboken NJ for some four years and was known to the Italian Consul General as

A Veneto from a village near Schio and one of the most ardent and fanatical of anarchists. He is one of the most influential in the `Flying Circus'² He is presently ill and unemployed and has decided to return to Italy to settle in Milan. I will not fail to signal the departure of this individual, who will require close political surveillance at home.

We do not know of his repatriating prior to June 1906, when another Consul General alerted Rome that Barbieri had boarded La Provence bound for Le Havre. This was done without any specific information having been received on Baratto's account as to criminal intent. Indeed the Consul General went on to report

I must take this opportunity to add that Baratto, according to the assurances of the Consular Agent at Providence, has in recent years maintained a good standard of moral and political conduct, disassociating himself completely from his old anarchist comrades. He is in funds at the moment and is proceeding to Milan on business.

Continuous surveillance of the circles in which Baratto moved must have been activated in this instance on the mere occasion of his repatriation, assuming a security risk on the basis of his reported politics alone. Moreover this risk evaluation appears not to have distinguished between political criminality such as regicide and political activity eg philosophical proselytism and organising.

These factors were not clearly distinguished in the official, any more than in the subversive, mind, but were rather implicit for the former in all their nebulosity on the basis of the precautionary principle. Given the anarchist track record, officials felt that they never could be sure when the preaching and practicing of anarchism might not lead to an assassination

² The `Flying Circus' was an anarchist circle dedicated to mobile propaganda.

attempt, and they watched anarchist activity and movements accordingly. As to Baratto's movements in 1906 there is little mystery about them, nor did consular informers play any role in their ascertainment. Hoping to demonstrate the lack of any necessity for surveillance, which like Barbieri he found irksome, Baratto informed the authorities of his intentions in person and in writing with a fine administrative awareness of the departmental workings of Italian bureaucracy. First he reported to the nearest Royal Consular Agente at Providence, Rhode Island, and then to the Mayor of Torrebelticino, his community of residence in Italy. The Prefecture of Vicenza, which reported the above facts to the Directorate General of Public Security in Rome on 22 September 1906, went on to report Baratto's protests that he had always done the right thing by the authorities and had not breached the peace, whatever others might have said of him.

From 11 July to 11 September of this year he has been at Torrebelticino, Venezia, Arsiero, Recoaro, Schio and Vicenza without being the subject of any complaint.

He had always shown himself respectful of the authorities and forthcoming in providing them with notice of his travels, whether this was requested or not. He maintains that his brother in law, one Danielli Danielle of Torrebelticino, resident in America, with whom he has never seen eye to eye, has placed him in a bad light, for motives of vendetta, with the Italian Consul at Providence, and that this is the origin of his mistaken indication as an anarchist. Given the above the Command of the Royal Carabinieri at Schio believes that Baratto is not an anarchist, and saving your approval, proposes that he be dropped from the related register.

Clearly the Schio Carabinieri had believed Baratto's story. But should we? To begin with, Baratto's itinerary, as noted by Simini, is strikingly similar to that of Barbieri in upper Vicenza Province the year before, which suggests that their purposes may well have been similar, knowing as we do that they had moved in similar circles in West Hoboken in the preceding years. Did they both make nice political distinctions in reporting their politics and intentions to the authorities? Had they gone upon their travels armed with a cover story of high minded dissidence misunderstood by malefactors who had sought to use the government against them? The circumstantial evidence suggests that both men were circumspect with the truth, as is only wise when dealing with the police, but that there was much truth in what they said. In particular, it is unlikely that Barbieri had any more serious intent to murder Vittorio Emanuele III than did Baratto, who was indeed never explicitly accused of regicidal intent. Their probable

intent was to mix the business of anarchist propaganda to comradesly networks with a private journey to their old provincial haunts.

Thus there were influences of a specifically anarchist character which contributed to the precise definition of the political philosophy of the young Fantin, above and beyond the evolution under conditions of industrialization of the family's philosophy from popular religion to secularism. These influences were brought within the family circle by friendship with the members of the parentela of the Basso and Carmagnola families. That the Fantin and Carmagnola families were fast friends was remembered at San Vito long after their young men had emigrated to Australia. Although the identity of Francesco Fantin as a worker was not confirmed until he took service under the Rossi dynasty as his father had done before him, he was already initiated into working class politics before he made the transition from the family hearth to the factory floor. It is then to these political conduits of family and friendship, well known by the authorities to be the lines of transmission of the subversive incubus, that we now turn our attention.

The first official trace of this process of political education through affiliation is discernible in the DGPS dossier of Francesco Giuseppe Basso, born on 15 October 1870 to Pasquale and Lucia Schievano of Montegalda, a village on the south eastern border of Vicenza with Padova Province. In November 1882 the family moved to San Vito di Leguzzano¹²⁷ and found employment with the Lanerossi, including, it is believed, the underage Francesco Giuseppe. On 18 July 1895 he married Lucia Costalunga, the daughter of Girolamo and Caminato Maria, born at San Vito on 26 May 1870. Both were employed in the textile industry. When three years after their marriage they were issued with a certificate drawn up by the Comune of San Vito on the basis of its civil register on his 28th birthday; their combined wages were so miserable their union was documented by the Comune on plain paper because they could not afford stamp duty given their 'recognized poverty'.¹²⁸ It was a condition which did not sit well with the young Francesco Basso, which became indeed more acute in this year of national crisis when he was sacked in 1898, the year of the military occupation of Milan, 'because of his extreme socialist ideas.'¹²⁹ This development left him with little choice but to follow the path of exile which so many of his class and persuasion had trodden before him. Indeed it is likely that the certificate was effectively a travel document requested to provide proof of their marriage knowing that it might be useful for purposes of accomodation.¹³⁰ Armed with this document Francesco and Lucia entered upon

exile in nearby Switzerland. He left instructions to his father to forward copies of the socialist national newspaper Avanti!

Francesco Basso was briefly noticed by the Procurator General of the Swiss Federation,¹³¹ but thereafter Basso dropped below the horizon of cooperative Italo-Swiss political surveillance, only to re-emerge in the United States in early 1908 as an emulator of Bresci, Barbieri, Baratto, Bertoncello et al. On 24 March 1908 the Italian Royal Consulate at New York wrote to the DGPS that

It has been communicated to this Office that one Basso Giuseppe, an anarchist of approximately 35 years of age thought to be a veneto textile worker, resident at Philipsburg NJ, friend of the noted anarchist Baracchi Giovanni, has probably through the good offices of the latter obtained a loan from the anarchist Fila Paolo to proceed to Italy, from where it is believed he may proceed to France on the 26th instant...Basso appears to have recently taken part in important anarchist meetings in New Jersey and our informant therefore attributes special importance to his departure.

It was not until mid April that Vicenza was able to supply Rome with retrospective and updated details shedding light on the suspect's itinerary and intentions.

Basso Francesco Giuseppe was to be found in 1906 at Wadenswill Switzerland whence he emigrated to the US...His wife Costalunga Lucia remained at Wandenswill sending modest amounts every so often to the two children entrusted to her father in law Basso Pasquale presently resident at San Vito di Leguzzano (Schio)¹³²

The next day Prefect Fasciolati felt confident enough to inform Rome that the purpose of the suspect's journey was 'to join his wife at Wadenswil', which was right, only he thought Basso was still at Patterson preparing to leave America.¹³³ Midway through May Rome advised Fasciolati that in its view Basso 'had obtained money from other anarchists to travel to Italy' and requested prompt report of his repatriation.¹³⁴ A month later New York replied 'that our informant assures us, that the anarchist Basso Francesco, who is known by him, has established himself, together with his wife, in a city of the German canton in Switzerland, where he works as a weaver.' Within a fortnight however Rome was advising its

Legation in Berne that it suspected that Basso was traveling 'with criminal intent.'¹³⁵ There was in fact not a shred of evidence for this view beyond the earlier inconclusive report that the travels of Basso had been partly funded by comrades in exile in the US.

The surveillance of Francesco Giuseppe Basso during 1908 establishes inter alia that he had been resident at San Vito from 1882 to 1898. He never knew Francesco Fantin, Nonetheless he is a vital link in the chain attaching the village to legendary figures such as Molinari, Bresci, Bertoncetto and Barbieri. The direct connection with the family Fantin came through Basso's sister Emilia, six years his junior, who remained behind in San Vito after his departure. It is highly likely that she kept alive the political example of her brother and shared it with the family Fantin. In 1927 as the structure of the fascist police state was being laid down by new legislation extending the traditional practices of the liberal state apparatus, with new information on another wave of exiles being elicited from the diaspora, the Prefect of Vicenza replied to an inquiry concerning her from the DGPS.

Permit me to communicate that the above indicated has never openly professed subversive ideas or been a member of a political party. Nonetheless, being a member of a family with communist ideas, it is to be believed that she shares them. She has not however to date given rise to any notice, and convenient surveillance has been organized regarding her.¹³⁶

The DGPS liked to think that the passivity reported might be at least in part a function of the political surveillance it supervised. Despite having little to go on, a dossier was opened in her name to hold the above-mentioned notes regarding her. One of these was a typescript inscribed in ink with the annotation 'See original in Category 1 Carmignola Francesco Giuseppe of Lino.'¹³⁷ For Emilia was the wife of Lino Carmagnola, and her friendship with Catterina Manea Fantin was a matter of oral tradition at San Vito into the late 20th century.¹³⁸ The politics of Emilia Basso Carmagnola, like that of her friend Catterina Fantin, was one of values and emotions, principles and ideas usually expressed within the protective confines of the family circle. The prime public expression of their political outlook was to be the friendship between their families and the activity of their sons.

Francesco Giovanni Carmagnola was born to Emilia Basso and her husband Lino Carmagnola at San Vito on 25 May 1900, roughly six months prior to the birth of Francesco

Fantin. The lives of the two boys were to be entwined through infancy, boyhood, adolescence, youth and maturity, until Francesco Fantin was assassinated in 1942. It is virtually certain that Carmagnola came by his education as the Fantin brothers did at the local communal school, although the state of the school records does not permit us to document this. The socioeconomic condition of the two families was identical, they were contemporaries, and they lived close by one another, befriending and supporting one another. As the children grew to adolescence and work, keen to uphold the values passed on and re-elaborated around their hearths, the bonds between the younger generation grew deeper and more intense. Their circle of friends was politicized and enjoyed a sense of shared growing awareness challenging the confines of a local community which offered them limited prospects. The urges to fight and flight rippled under the surface of a status quo despised as unjust. Imperceptibly some of their activities, if not most, came to focus on a style of dress and other public gestures which made their dissent plain, and the circle of friends came to recognize itself as an anarchist cell or network, an entity participant in one of the youth movements of its day.

Luigi Meneghello recalls these dynamics as they were played out at nearby Malo a generation later under fascism.

This being together, and contented, is supremely important. There emerged amongst habitual friends a scheme of stable relations. Our friends became a gang. We seemed not only to be the center of the world, but also invested with special privileges. For the youth of a town the gang is the maternal institution. It is a free association, a club without a clubhouse and constitution, whose bonds seemed in those years stronger than any other association natural or traditional. It arises obviously between old schoolmates, neighbours, peers; it corresponds to the various generations... That which gives the most vivid sense of the generations is the subdivision by gang. Each gang had its chronological range, perhaps of half a dozen years, with relatively little overlap at the margins. Friends grouped themselves around two or three central annual classes determined probably by chance. A small compact constellation was formed, and above and below one sensed the void. With preceding and succeeding companies there was little rapport. They were extragalactic. We could just discern their general structure, finding them similar to our own. In adolescence and youth the gang was the most important institution of all, the only one that seemed to make life

make sense. Hanging out with one's friends was the greatest of all the pleasures, before which all others pale....In essence the gang was a free association with one's own peers. Normally there was no pecking order, and there were no real leaders. The various capacities of everyone were of course recognized and appreciated, but the fundamental requisite was the pleasure of being together as equals. Either this pleasure was enjoyed or it wasn't. When it was, personal gifts and defects were secondary.¹³⁹

There was at the height of the Red Biennium (1919-20) an anarchosocialist group of about fifty at Malo`, lead by a bricklayer named Carlo Girardelli, originally of Verona, assisted by Leone Marchioro, Luciano Ferracin and Giuseppe Bartolotto. It rented a meeting room through the Vicenza Confederal Chamber of Labour and subscribed to L'Avanti! and Malatesta's Umanita` Nuova. Having received an anonymous denunciation, Prefect De Pieri reported to the DGPS in January 1921 that the group had been wound up in May of the previous year due to local hostility, and that Girardelli had been arrested for holding an illegal demonstration in the town square, after which he had been quieter. He assured the DGPS that the past principals of the group had not been lost sight of.¹⁴⁰ It would seem apparent that one such peer group at San Vito in the wake of the Great War was also effectively anarchist. Anarchism as a political creed would have well suited such a peer group, because it too was loosely structured. When its members were forced into exile by the rise of fascism, they took this network of fellow feeling with them, and were accordingly effectively politically operational virtually from the day they set foot in Australia. While it took a few years for them to establish an organisational structure, this grew naturally out of networks which never ceased to function and were transplanted from continent to continent.

#7: Industrial Mobilisation in the Schio District 1915-1919

I shall study to always attend to the views of the authorities before taking any measures. It would be desirable that these women leave the factory because their presence might intimidate those desirous of returning to work. But I would have to remove them by force, and I don't intend to do this, lest this be interpreted as a provocation. I am very disappointed to hear that our lord and master has suffered a relapse into fever. I most fervently hope that he is restored to health soon. Please be so kind as to convey my most cordial salutations.

Engineer Fontana, Lanerossi 1917

At the outset of the Great War, notwithstanding its centuries old protoindustrial history, Schio was an industrial company town embedded in a provincial sea of petty peasant property. Of the 2,800 looms operating in the Province of Vicenza, 2,500 were the property of the Lanerossi. It ran almost half of the 95,000 spindles in operation and consequently used about half of the 5,000 horsepower of energy consumed in the province. Five thousand textile workers were employed as against 300 metalworkers in the five metallurgical firms of the district. Together with some timber firms destined to boom during the years of trench warfare, a kaolin mine, a few printeries, small silk mills and other small firms operating as outsources supporting the textile and metal industries, these constituted the non agricultural sector of the district economy. It was fortunate then that every second inhabitant of the district was a peasant landowner who could at least cultivate a kitchen cum market garden on an average of two hectares of land. At Malo near San Vito 19,000 smallholders earned between one and 100 lire per annum from their land, with a mere seventy seven earning over a thousand lire annually from larger holdings¹⁴¹.

It would appear that Francesco Fantin and his nearest sibling Maria, born in 1899, were assumed together at the Lanerossi mill at Pievebelvicino in January 1915, when Francesco ceased to be a minor under Italian industrial law. It is possible that either or both of them had worked for the Lanerossi prior to this, because the company did have a history of employing some minors, and the personnel list of 1921 in which their names first appear may

have recorded a legal fiction. This is however unlikely, as both youngsters appear to have been employed with a fresh intake of labour assumed during the new year, very likely in view of contracts received or anticipated as a result of the economic revival brought about by the war raging in continental Europe. Young as they were at any rate, it would have been reassuring to the family that they would go to and from work together in the mill where their father had worked since 1885, when he had turned seventeen. Their uncle Luigi, also resident at San Vito, had worked in the same mill since he had turned nineteen in 1891.

That Maria was older might reflect the value of her domestic labour, or alternatively the widespread view, broadcast on the catholic right, that industrial labour exposed a girl to moral risk.¹⁴² There was some substance to this, if cases of intimidation and sexual harassment, by foremen for example, are taken into account.¹⁴³ Nonetheless Maria went to work, one of the thousands of women who feminised the Italian working class during the war, most signally in the production of woolen textiles. In August 1915 employers were licensed to assume females and minors for the duration of the war. By the end of 1918 less than 20,000 of the 62,000 employees in the woolen manufactory were men: youths accounted for barely another 3,000 places. By then women accounted for 23,000 jobs in the industry, young women 5,000, and female minors another 10,000. By August 1918 70% of employees in the mobilised textile industry were women, another 9% minors, and only 21% men whose skills had often been recycled into supervisory roles. In late 1916 a joint employer-union Industrial Mobilisation commission found that average daily pay for female textile workers was around 2.5 Lire.¹⁴⁴ The textile industry was an extreme case of labour policies designed to reserve manpower for the army as much as could be reconciled with industrial requirements, which contributed to the muzzling of organized labour during the war, before a countertendency towards radicalization of unorganized labour was set in train.

At any rate poverty, combined with wartime employment opportunities, forced the family to put their children out to work at an early age, and it would have been felt that Maria and Francesco could look out for each other in a workplace with which the family was familiar and into which it had a minimum of *entrée*.¹⁴⁵ But the discipline under which they were to begin their working lives was different from that under which the older generation had worked. Once Italian Intervention in the Great War had been decided upon, workplaces deemed strategic for the war effort were placed under military administration. The Lanerossi mills in the Val Leogra were amongst those gazetted as *'auxilliary'* to the war effort. Some

thirty industrial establishments in Upper Vicenza Province were involved, including the Marzotto textile works in the Valdagno to the west of Schio. Altogether the militarized industrial capacity of the Province's textile sector totaled 100,000 spindles, approximately 2,000 looms, and some 3,000 workers, of whom a third were employees of the Lanerossi.¹⁴⁶ Simini estimates that of the 2,800 looms in the province all told, 2,500 were the property of the firm, fed by 95,000 spindles, consuming about half the provincial energy supply. Complemented by dependant artisan enterprises in textiles and the metal trades, all that lay outside the firm's industrial monoculture in the Schio district at the outbreak of the Great War were the extractive timber and kaolin industries.¹⁴⁷

Along with the mill at Pievebelvicino, Lanerossi establishments at Torrebelticino, Dueville, Marano, Piovene Rocchette, Schio and Cogollo del Cengio contributed to the war effort, producing, besides military and other cheap coarse cloths, ponchos, shawls and blankets. Finer quality products such as fabric for women's woolen stockings were also produced, along with combed and carded yarn for the textile trade.¹⁴⁸ The national demand for woolens tripled, complemented by increased foreign demand, and declared profits rose from 5.18 to 18.74%¹⁴⁹ All this was accomplished by a decentralized industrial structure in which different plants were dedicated to diverse phases of the productive cycle, in a war zone whose busy transport infrastructure represented a bottleneck.¹⁵⁰ These were the days of the advent of the lorry and the automobile, virtually monopolized by the military for deployment near the front. Military demand on railroads rose from 1.1% nationally in 1914 to 42% of passenger traffic and 26% of freight by 1918.¹⁵¹ The rail link to Schio via Thiene from Vicenza became particularly strategic and saw heavy traffic in 1916 as Cadorna was forced to transfer forces from his eastern front to fend off the Strafexpedition, the Austrian spring offensive intended to seize the Schio – Thiene railhead. What means of transport were not dedicated to the military were scarce and prioritised in favour of war industries, which would have had to compete for them amongst themselves. To gauge the wartime working experience of the family Fantin and the larger socioeconomic issues involved, of which they would have been more or less cognizant, we must therefore examine the wartime regime of Industrial Mobilisation in Italy.

In Italy, a country where the military had traditionally been represented as contributors to national unification in parliament, the Ministry of War was by convention reserved for a 'technician', a serving military officer enjoying the relative confidence of his

peers. Thus when prosecution of the war demanded 'industrial mobilisation', the chairs of the national and regional boards instituted were put into the hands of generals, advised by experts and representatives of capital and labour.¹⁵² The regional articulation of industrial mobilization was intended to maximize local resolution of problems in production. Since unification Italy had sought to source its military technology needs first from state arsenals and subsequently from private industry, but industrial underdevelopment had forced it to become a customer of Krupps, which limited its political and strategic options. The naval superiority of the Entente meant inter alia that the issue of war supplies was predominantly a matter for the Ministry of War's Directorate General of Artillery and Engineering, under the capable command of General Alfredo Dallolio. It fell to him to fight and lose the battle for a public sector war effort with the Treasury as war raged on the continent, and to consequently define in conjunction with Cadorna a policy of reliance for military requirements on a fully mobilized private sector¹⁵³ Accordingly, or never the less, Italy did not adjust institutional arrangements for military resupply until after it declared war in May 1915. On 26 June 1915 Italy created by Royal Decree no.993 an Undersecretariat for Arms and Munitions under the direction of General Dallolio, subsequently upgraded to a ministry, which expanded dispositions in decrees of 28 January no.49 and 22 April no.506 regarding the expropriation of private property and requisitions. Article 8 of Royal Decree 993 established on the basis of Article 7 of the law of 20 March 1865 no.2248 Appendix E that

The Government has the power to declare subject to military jurisdiction wholly or in part the personnel of establishments producing war materials for the armed forces whensoever this shall be necessary for the continuity of supply and the growth of production required by the war effort¹⁵⁴.

A national Committee for Industrial Mobilisation and a Supreme Command for Arms and Munitions were established by Royal Decrees dated 26 June, 9 July and 22 August 1915 to provide for general supervision of the emerging war economy. Regional Committees were established to optimize local resolution of difficulties in production. Initially the Veneto came under the jurisdiction of an exceptional bi-regional Committee embracing the Romagna with headquarters in Bologna, but in due course responsibility for production in the Veneto was transferred in late 1917 to a regional committee which sat in Venice. On the last mentioned date the Minister of War General Zuppelli addressed the Supreme Command illustrating the four primary purposes of the new instrumentality and the Industrial Mobilization Regulations

it was to administer. Firstly it was to be a decentralized trouble shooting institution, unblocking local bottlenecks in production. Secondly it was to put into effect legislation and administrative decisions, ensuring national uniformity in the war effort. Thirdly it was to centralize production for the military. Lastly it was to ensure equity for the militarized workforce, providing for the hearing of grievances without industrial stoppages.

This last provision followed the Giolittian precedents of 1906 & 1912 respecting railway and public transport employees. With Circular no 26700 of 28 October 1915 reinforcing Articles 20 and 24 of the Industrial Mobilization Regulations, the Supreme Command assumed the power to regulate pay rates, resignations, dismissals, penalties for infractions of labour discipline, promotions and transfers between establishments declared auxiliary to the war effort. Likewise regulated were industrial conditions [Viceregal decree no 1684 5 November 1916] and exemptions, usually temporary, from liability to military service. By the end of the conflict some 57% of the 1,224, 000 engaged in war work were employed under these exemptions, with the remainder being made up of women, militarized workers, prisoners and conscripted Libyans in that order.¹⁵⁵ It was also provided that labour contracts were to remain valid for the duration of the war subject to modification as deemed opportune by regional committees. Articles 6, 7 and 11 of the Industrial Mobilisation Regulations accordingly provided for state jurisdiction over industrial relations in auxiliary establishments, enforceable by the Carabinieri. It was recognized by Zuppelli that the efficiency of this system of state supervised production was in great part dependent on its apparent relative equity `in the interests of production itself.'

There was doubt however that industrial mobilization could last the distance under the strain of its contradictions. During the Turin bread riots of August 1917, within days of Giolitti's declaration that the war was the worst disaster since the Great Flood and the Pope's concurrent stigmatization of the `useless slaughter', fortyone demonstrators were killed. Gramsci, who was working as a socialist journalist in Turin at the time, thought these tragic events were due to incompetent government provisioning and Giolittian sabotage, intended to bring down the Boselli government of national unity in favour of a liberal nationalist government accountable through Nitti or Orlando to the Piedmontese statesman [Orlando did in fact seize office after Caporetto with Giolittian support]. This was at a time when consumption of staple comestibles of meat, wine, and diary products was declining throughout urban Italy in particular. This was largely due to currency inflation fuelled by

increased insurance premiums passed onto imported supplies of foodstuffs and coal running the gauntlet of German Uboats, without which Italy could not have stayed in the war.¹⁵⁶ A hasty Viceregal Decree of 2 September indexed the wages of auxiliary employees against the rising cost of living.¹⁵⁷ Even before this industrial mobilization had progressively involved extensive measures pro control of wage and other costs, including

ration cards, provision of refectories in factories and schools, concession of subsidies for the families of those conscripted, price fixing of gas for lighting, coke, fossil carbons, electrical energy, and many comestibles, including diary products, rice whole grain and broken, wheat, maize, rye, barley, oats, sugar, potatoes, flour, beans including broad beans, and olive oil.

Many of these measures were put into effect with the assistance of local government.¹⁵⁸ Nonetheless they hardly compensated for the halving of real wages during the war, when nominal wage rises of approximately 150% were depreciated by price increases for goods of basic consumption of around 300%.¹⁵⁹ Piece rates paid to maximize production increased the rate of exploitation, as workers were forced to work harder and longer to earn sufficient for subsistence. Piece rate payments ranged between 100-300% of the low guaranteed hourly base rate¹⁶⁰ To its ideators, with their perspective based on nominal prewar hourly skilled labour rates, industrial mobilization seemed equitable and wage depreciation marginal. It seemed otherwise to the workforce, especially to women and other unskilled workers recruited during the war at the lower end of the pay scale. On balance this system underwrote its own credibility rather than workers' wages by factoring in marginal discretionary wage flexibility within military regulations designed to prevent disputation and guarantee output.¹⁶¹ Average real wages fell by a third during the war according to official statistics,¹⁶² not recovering until industrial correction by the strike wave of the Red Biennium, as may be seen from the table below:

Year	Nominal Daily Salary in Lire	Real Salary [1913 Lire]	%
1914	3.71	3.71	100.00
1915	3.80	3.55	95.69
1916	4.14	3.09	83.33
1917	5.44	2.87	77.74

1918	6.67	2.52	67.92
1919	10.37	3.86	104.04
1920	15.15	4.29	115.63

Source: La Mobilitazione Industriale Italiana Nella Grande Guerra 1915-18 USE p132

Fourteen and sixteen hour days were accordingly common, as the firm made profits off the backs of workers driven to work to live to make a bare living, and twenty four hour shifts were by no means unknown. The Milanese Regional Committee for Industrial Mobilisation reported as late as October 1918 that there were 'women who must accept working for 134 hours plus a fortnight for a wage of no more than 28 Lire'. This was despite the fact that the problem of excessive hours under this regime of patriotic full employment, which represented a risk of industrial disputation, had been of concern to the Central Committee for Industrial Mobilisation since 1916, resulting in the legislation by circular no.98030 of a sixty hour week in July 1917.¹⁶³ Not surprisingly the deployment of inexperienced low skilled labour at elevated work rates comported a deterioration in industrial safety precisely in those sectors, such as the textile industry, where employment growth had been greatest. Yet the industrial welfare body, l'Istituto Nazionale Assistenza Infortuni sul Lavoro was excluded from raising contributions from textile workers and the textile industry during the war. Between 1916 and 1917, the rate of industrial accidents nearly doubled, from 167 cases per thousand insured workers to 335. In 1918, when the rhythm of work had if anything abated after the crisis of 1917, 1,665,728 days were lost to war industries through industrial accidents.¹⁶⁴

At Schio the rate of exploitation drove female workers to strike against the sexual wage differential implicit in general wage increases granted in compensation for rises in the cost of living in early 1917. The matter was one of need not greed because many families, including some with men at the front, depended wholly or in great part on the take home pay of the new female industrial workforce. The workforce occupied its workplaces despite threats of prosecution between 17 –20 January in the Rossi works at Schio, Pievebelvicino and Torrebelticino. At Torrebelticino on 20 January the workforce had no further employment because of the suspension of carding necessary for weaving, and so the workforce decamped to the gates of the works at Pievebelvicino. They were dispersed by the Carabinieri. The following day some four hundred female workers gathered once again outside the works at Pievebelvicino. Representatives of management and the Commissioner

of Public Security unsuccessfully attempted to persuade them to desist from their action; a delegation of male workers employed to the same effect was received with whistles and insults. As the situation became more excited, the Commissioner of Public Security ordered the Carabinieri to charge on horseback, surely one of the most ignominious military³ actions of the war. Twelve women were arrested and lodged in nearby premises owned by the Lanerossi. An attempt to liberate them was beaten back by the Carabinieri, who made eight further arrests. Those arrested were prosecuted the following day in the Schio Court of Petty Sessions. Two ringleaders were sentenced to pay Lire 100 or spend ten days in gaol, the others being sentenced to lesser penalties in accordance with their age and assumed degree of responsibility. The penalties were discounted to allow for the day already spent in custody. The women then negotiated successfully with management a return to work in exchange for a promise not to victimise the women prosecuted. Terms were agreed including the signing of an industrial good behaviour bond and the communication of the accord reached at Pieve in the name of the workforce to employees at Torrebelticino. Whilst unsuccessful, the conduct of these women in their first industrial dispute was resolute and courageous. It appears that they may have made the most in those pregenderist days of male experience by consulting the expertise of Pietro Pietrobelli, Riccardo Walter and Giuseppe Cauduro, all socialists on leave from the front at this time at Schio. One of the women arrested was Caterina Marchiorio, the feisty twentyfour year old sister of the revolutionary socialists Isidoro and Domenico Marchioro.¹⁶⁵

From the first this wartime production regime was recognized as a form of 'nationalisation', in the sense of the global direction of production in the national interest, and was christened 'war socialism',¹⁶⁶ being in effect a limited command economy in which the state as principal consumer did not expropriate private property but rather enforced a national interest in the orientation and maximization of industrial output. Where national survival was concerned, the Italian state chose to take no risks with the providential mercies of the hidden hand. The liberal economist Einaudi admitted after the war that designation as an auxiliary establishment quickly became highly desirable as capitalists sought to secure supplies and state contracts with a view to making war profits. In 1915 221 firms were enlisted for the duration, which grew to 797 within a year and 1976 by the end of the conflict, employing 571,000 employees, 404,000 in the northwestern industrial triangle of Milan, Turin and

³ Carabinieri are military police.

Genoa.¹⁶⁷ The state offered its military suppliers fixed price contracts which allowed little margin for war profiteering.¹⁶⁸ Capitalists in return underwrote their margins by supplying inferior goods to the troops¹⁶⁹. A postwar parliamentary inquiry took the Marzotto firm of Valdagno to task over this, the firm virtually admitting as much by claiming that it had been forced to use available supplies, and brazenly insisting that 'the goods were accepted without protest or reservation.' The Associazione Lanieri, founded in the nineteenth century by Alessandro Rossi, was accused of acting as mediator for such frauds.¹⁷⁰

Thus stakeholders were appeased at the expense of the men in the trenches, who accordingly developed a sense of grievance against those, including workers in auxiliary industry exempted military service, who were said to be 'gone bush' *imboscati* in the rear. There was an element of battlefield mythology in this resentment. The Lanerossi honour roll counted 115 men sacrificed to the trenches, not counting survivors. Nonetheless the resentment whipped up an apparent conflict of interest between the rural peasant soldiery and the urbanised industrial workers¹⁷¹, notwithstanding the militarisation of the later and the liability to military service under the temporary exemption regime which hung like a Damoclean sword over the work force, inhibiting their industrial militancy. At least one socialist organiser, the youthful Domenico Marchioro, was interned during the war for ostensibly disrupting production.¹⁷² The Interventionist press fuelled ill feeling against workers, stigmatizing their wages and recreational revelries, obliging Dallolio and Boselli to defend them.¹⁷³ During the war, the internal terms of trade between agricultural and industrial products shifted in favour of the latter, which trebled in price whereas the former only doubled. Together with the policy of regulating agricultural prices to prevent rises in urban industrial cost pressures, resentment between town and country was easily stirred. By the end of the war there had been antiwar protests in the hinterlands of the provinces of Milan, Toscana, and Emilia.¹⁷⁴ There was cynicism too about the way that the slogan of 'land to the peasantry' had been raised in a panic after Caporetto and then quietly dropped after the remnant brigades of peasant infantry had proved steadfast on the Piave in the winter of 1917-18.¹⁷⁵ This was the faux Jacobin moment of Italian liberalism, a completely delusory momentary alliance of town and country, peasantry and bourgeoisie.

War profiteering in these circumstances was rife, although its scale can only be estimated given the widespread and notorious under reporting of wartime profits. The war represented a massive opportunity to renew plant with a view to capitalizing on postwar

demand prospects, ploughing unreported earnings back into the firm, a consideration not lost on the Lanerossi. The destruction by Austrian artillery of the mill at Piovene Rocchette in 1916 saw the relocation of plant outside the Vicentino, in the Bergamasco, Veronese and Piacentino. Intended initially as a reluctant measure protective of war production, the Lanerossi soon realized that it would be best advised to consider these older facilities in new locations as ancillary to new capital investment in its old haunts, much increasing the firm's capacity. Anyone who wanted to know where Lanerossi had salted away its clandestine war profits need have looked no further than the fixed investment in new machinery installed in the Schio District as a result of the war, and announced at the 1919 annual Lanerossi shareholder's meeting. Zaccaria has corroborated these astute manoeuvres. In a fascinating statistical appendix Zaccaria reports amongst other things that in 1919-20, effectively the first postwar year of business operations in Italy, the Lanerossi admitted to doubling its capital from 22-44.55 million Lire *and* almost doubling its dividend from 1.98 million -3.63 million Lire.¹⁷⁶ Simini, by profession an accountant, reports that the Lanerossi accumulated between 1915 and 1918 almost 8,215 million lire profit. The five executive directors awarded themselves a total of 205 thousand lire, a sum the female workers denied equal pay could only dream of. The wage scale itself was a masterpiece of 'divide and rule' policy, its fragmentation by status, job, age and sex providing ample scope for every imaginable desperate shift of petty envy and recrimination. The system worked well for the shareholders, who typically owned between one and several hundred shares and took home 100 lire per share, whilst their pay fragmented workforce worked from between three to four lire per day less than their brethren at Biella in Piedmont.¹⁷⁷

Was Francesco Fantin an anarcho-syndicalist? We must be alert not to fall under the spell of terminology. We know he was an anarchist, and certainly he was a syndicalist, which is to say a trade unionist, but this is insufficient to demonstrate that he was doctrinally committed to sabotage, violence as a form of industrial action, the revolutionary general strike, or other characteristics of the creed. Sorelian ideas represented an intellectual challenge to the prevailing reformism of the Vicentine labour movement as the Giolittian era drew to a close, but there is no evidence one way or the other as to whether Fantin paid any particular heed to the journalism of Sorel and his acolytes which circulated intermittently on the fringes of the national and provincial labour press.¹⁷⁸ It is probably safest to view him as an anarcho-socialist unionist, generically influenced by syndicalist opinions amongst others in his community at a time when such views were one expression of the generational

transformation of the labour movement being effected by wartime employment conditions. The war was a time when unskilled labour, a good deal of it of peasant extraction and susceptible to anarchist ideas, was being radicalized by its torrid introduction to factory life¹⁷⁹, and there was increasing rank and file unrest about the failure of collaboration with the liberal state to maintain the real value of wages in return for the cooperation with the war effort delivered by reformist union officials representing the prewar vanguard aristocracy of skilled labour. By the same token, as we shall see, he was involved after the war in paramilitary activity out of revolutionary conviction.

This shift in anarchist thinking towards the politicization of industrial activism and the rejection of institutional politics was a characteristic feature of dissent throughout Europe dating from the Belle Epoque, and not only in Italy, where French influence amongst labour radicals was marked.¹⁸⁰ Inroads were also made at this time into the reformism of British trade unionism.¹⁸¹ Syndicalism in this broad sense was the restless chiliastic mood of 'the new unionism', of a younger, more combative, more proletarian working class, of which Fantin was a member. Fantin was regarded by his admiring cousin Maria Fantin as 'an organiser', a description which might refer to both political and industrial activism.¹⁸² As such Fantin was pretty certainly an anarchist of his generation, in that 'anarcho-syndicalism was, with some slight exceptions, the sole form of coordinated action among anarchists in the first two decades of the twentieth century.'¹⁸³ This movement however, with which Fantin may well have sympathized, was not notably coordinated in the Schio district. While a syndicalist journal, the Lotte di Lavoro [Struggles of Labour], was published at Vicenza between 1909-10, provincial socialism was engaged in the political experiment of progressive municipal administration under the aegis of the Giolittian historical compromise with the labour movement. Political protest at Vicenza against the state visit of the Czar to Italy at this juncture was characteristic of minoritarian idealism rather than mass support, and syndicalists were unable to effectively support a month long strike at the Peron woodworks at Schio, when Fantin in any case would have been only 8 years old, and in political tutelage to family and friends rather than any contemporary industrial movement.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, without making too fine a distinction, family tradition would in due course make Fantin only an active unionist of anarchist persuasion, not necessarily a doctrinaire syndicalist. It is in this sense that Cerrito, the historian of Italian anarchism just cited, is willing to aver that "'anarcho-syndicalism' never existed in Italy, but only partially in France, Spain and Latin America.'¹⁸⁵

There is evidence too that Fantin saw himself both in Italy and Australia as a member of a broad church labour movement. When interned in Australia in 1942 Fantin reported that he had been a member in Italy of a *Federazione Operaio Tessile*.¹⁸⁶ There was a *Federazione Italiana Operai Tessili* active in the upper vicentino before the Great War.¹⁸⁷ Fantin was a member after the labour discipline of Industrial Mobilisation had relaxed in 1918, through the Red Biennium until 1921, the year of the defeat of the postwar strikewave both in the textile industry nationally, at Schio and across industry generally. He then spent a year out of the workforce doing military service before rejoining the union in the year 1922-3¹⁸⁸, after which upheaval in his private life and the worsening employment, industrial and political situation turned his thoughts toward Australia. The FIOT however was an affiliate of the socialist General Confederation of Labour, the CGL, not the dissident syndicalist *USI Unione Sindacale Italiana*, formed in 1912¹⁸⁹. Either Fantin was more loyal to his class than his faction, or the latter was not present on the ground at Schio, and did not represent a viable organizational option for him. It must be remembered that in these difficult and heroic early days, the Italian working class was still a small minority, potentially strategic in production, but as yet only minimally organized. Prewar rates of unionization in industry oscillated between 2-4%, and did not exceed 5% until after the strain of the war had radicalized the new semi-skilled working class.¹⁹⁰

The other thing we do not know is to what extent Fantin realized that in working for a private firm operating to produce and trade goods under regulated market conditions, he had worked under a regime which had validated certain elements of his own socioeconomic utopianism, prefiguring the state of things to come. If he had been more of a marxist, he might have been more inclined to do so. As an anarchist, he thought in abstractly political and ethical terms, and would have found the analogy harder to draw in so far as it was implicitly historical in its dialectical logic. The course of the twentieth century was already working towards the realization that neither a pure command economy nor *laissez faire* capitalism were sustainable, that only a mixed economy can be both dynamic and stable. Capitalism was not as liberals claimed inherently pacific, and Liebknecht, Luxembourg and other socialists had earnestly debated the link between capitalism and imperialism in an effort to understand and prevent a general European conflagration. One thing which had been demonstrated was that capitalism was no less warlike than feudalism. It was seen that sections of capital invested in warfare and that there was work when there was war, whilst other objects of expenditure which would have eased socioeconomic dislocation, embodied in disappointed

military plans for a Civil Mobilisation to manage postwar adjustment, were set aside as intrinsically illiberal, all in the name of an impossible retroactive 'normalisation'.¹⁹¹ The effect of this doctrinaire response to the challenge of the future by political liberalism, capital and both organized and unorganized labour, all heartily sick of wartime restrictions, was a 'hard landing' transition to peace, which maximized the exposure of the lower and middle classes to insecurity. Socioeconomic pressure on the state was thus increased at a time when it should have been moderated. The liberal State accordingly did not survive postwar 'normalisation'. 'The war was truly a cyclone which radically changed the structure of Italian society, modifying its social fabric. A new working class emerged, formed physically in the militarized factories, with an altered organic composition, profoundly diverse, younger and more impatient than that which had undertaken the great trade union struggles under Giolitti.'¹⁹²

#8: The Great War at San Vito 1915-19

I remember as though it were yesterday that adolescence of mine, an infancy without games, growing up among the clash of arms in that little industrial city of Schio, the pain of seeing all that slaughter. And then the end (one thought it was forever) of Prussian militarism.

FG Fantin Internment Diary 1942¹⁹³

Above and beyond the effects of the wartime reorganization of work in the Schio district brought about under industrial mobilization, the situation of San Vito in a district and province which was a gazetted war zone brought the army to San Vito, and with it the rigors of military discipline under the Italian Chief of Staff Cadorna. The war which came to San Vito in mid 1915 was a total war. Roads walked daily to work came under random artillery fire. Signora Rosa Martini recalls seeing the bell tower of a church within sight of San Vito felled by Hapsburg artillery.¹⁹⁴ The Rossi works at Piovenne Rocchette at the mouth of the Val d'Astico was razed during the Strafexpedition of 1916 by Hapsburg gunnery from the adjacent heights.¹⁹⁵ San Vito was used for military encampments and military supplies were also stockpiled there. This added to the anxieties of families with small children. Signore Girolamo Clementi remembers obtaining with playmates two or three SIPE grenades in 1918, which boys being boys they wanted to see explode. Not knowing how to activate them, they scattered to their homes to hurriedly eat lunch, pacify their elders, and reconvene. Signora Clementi noticed something was up, and asked, but did not persist when an innocent face told her 'nothing'. Back at the rendezvous, the children made a fire underneath the grenades in a pit. Still nothing happened. So young Giralmo impatiently began poking one grenade with a stick. This had the desired effect, and he was invested with fragments all down one side. His screams were heard by a nearby English soldier, [attached to one of the five English and six French divisions which reinforced the Piave front after Caporetto],¹⁹⁶ who picked him up and rushed home with him. It was a lucky escape. Don Tarcisio Raumer of Malo records that an eleven year old boy, whose surname was Ceola, was killed in a similar incident in May 1917, other youngsters being injured.¹⁹⁷

Another species of restriction which adversely affected the citizens of San Vito during the war was the ban on hunting in a war zone, a recreation and means of dietary

supplementation with precious protein. Clearly the military wanted a monopoly of violence in their zone of operations, and individual hunters circulating armed and unaccountable to military command would have seemed inconvenient if not suspicious. In October 1917 Giovanni Battista Zuccato of San Vito was arrested for hunting at nearby Monte di Malo` with an unlicensed rifle.' It appears that gun licences were an expense which people tried to avoid, much like TV licences in another era. He was sentenced to one day's gaol, hefty fines totaling over one hundred and fifty lire, and his rifle was confiscated.¹⁹⁸ Eleven year old Pietro Ernesto Bariola was charged with similar offences at San Vito but absolved `by reason of exemption due to lack of discernment' [ie minority] but his rifle and ammunition were confiscated.¹⁹⁹ It should be recalled that Bariola at that age would have been hunting to contribute to the family pot, for most children of his age at San Vito in that era would have been turning their hands to account in some fashion.

A little work was created around the village, some of it compulsory manual labour to which women and children were also liable or attracted given that the flower of village's breadwinning manpower had been conscripted for the front.²⁰⁰ Giovanni Maria Grotto, born in 1903, recalls being employed as a boy labourer by the Corps of Engineers to dig trenches about a kilometer from San Vito.²⁰¹ The hospitality sector grew to cater to the troops. A number of hostelrys sprang up in the district, giving employment to local women in particular, for example Signora Carmine Martini, born in 1892, who worked during the war in a trattoria at Dueville.²⁰² The Schio lumber industry received a boost from the trenchworks required by the war.²⁰³ Communications between the village and the outside world were impeded by the need for military passports in a war zone, with roads being choked by military traffic. The municipal school was evicted from the Comune building in the main square, which was taken over as a military headquarters.²⁰⁴ The town played host to as many as 1500 soldiers at a time, not to mention refugees from the overrun alpine north of the province. There was even a small holding camp for enemy prisoners. San Vito came close to being evacuated on two occasions, during the Strafexpedition [1916] and after Caporetto [1917]. Apprehension would also have been raised at San Vito as at Malo by reports that other villages in the district including Poleo, Piane and Sant'Orso were to stand by for evacuation in early May 1917.²⁰⁵ The villagers simply had to accommodate the military, whatever they might think of their proceedings, and with the Austrians on a war footing in the nearby Prealpi Vicentini, many will have felt that a military presence was reassuring. Certainly the patriotic parish priest Don Antonio Cattalan thought so, attributing to the Holy

Virgin the 'miraculous' Italian seizure without a fight of the bulwark of Mount Pasubio just across the frontier to the north west of Schio. Not being educated in matters military, Don Antonio did not realize that Hapsburg forces had merely retired to give the Italian army a warm reception from within more defensible lines. And so he gave thanks, having feared 'that otherwise the Germans would have made a fearful massacre of our villages including San Vito which would have been destroyed by Austrian barbarism as happened to poor Belgium.'

In the meantime Don Antonio reorganized the parish he had led for a generation to meet the challenge of war. He listed in his Historical Chronicle the measures taken:

- (1) Until today 21 June three general communions were celebrated for peace.
- (2) Every Friday the Holy Sacraments were displayed with the singing of the Misere`
- (3) The high priest [himself] has instituted at the rectory a postal office for the soldiery, so as to assist relatives in their correspondence with soldiers far away, a measure which has attracted the gratitude and applause of the village.
- (4) Sunday 17 June the Holy Mass was sung for soldiers who find themselves under arms.
- (5) A Convocation is being instituted for the Assistance of the families of those called to the colours.
- (6) The children have been entrusted to the maternal care of the nuns.²⁰⁶

These pastoral measures provided for, Don Antonio began with his parishioners to settle by degrees into the reality of a long war, not without a sense of wonder at the scale of events in which the village was caught up. On 9 November a unit of one thousand Sicilian and Milanese soldiers were already being billeted in the town. Don Antonio prayed that 'God will permit no disorder, especially as regards the youth.' Like her priest, Signorina Giovannina Campanaro was concerned at the effect of the war on sexual morality.²⁰⁷ The industrial scale

of the war impressed itself upon him before the end of the year when a large howitzer passed through the village and was for a time the talk of the town.²⁰⁸

Two episodes particularly attracted the attention of the folk of San Vito, disturbing the fragile patriotic consensus in support of the war effort. The first was the execution in Novembre 1916 over popular protests of two soldiers for a minor disciplinary infraction at Magre, on the road from San Vito to Schio, in an incident which became politically symbolic after the war. The evening of 4 Novembre 1916 a quarrel broke out between a group of five anti-aircraft gunners attached to the 44th Foot stationed on Mount Pasubio and their acting Sublieutenant, who had ordered them to quit a hostelry and return to their quarters notwithstanding the fact that they had a leave permit signed by the lieutenant in charge of their battery. Reluctantly obeying, the men decided to break their journey at another hostelry, where they were discovered by the irate sublieutenant, one Gallo of Padua, who threatened Sergeant Adalberto Bonomi of Naples with a pistol, and was disarmed by Antonio Bianchi of Gallarate Milano. Subsequently the lieutenant commanding the battery arrived upon the scene, disarming Bianchi and returning to Gallo his weapon, undertaking to inflict an adequate penalty upon the men and begging Gallo not to report the matter to General Graziani commanding the Division.

One of the problems with Cadorna's policy of zero tolerance for indiscipline was the encouragement it gave to junior disciplinarians to go over the heads of their immediate superiors. In this instance the sublieutenant appealed over the head of the lieutenant to General Graziani, who convened a military tribunal for 7 Novembre at Magre`. Graziani, rather like Patton, was capable of becoming very emotional when his men fought and died like heroes, as in the resistance to the Strafexpedition on Mount Pasubio, but was savage in repressing anything he took for weakness. For example, he raised units of Czechoslovak refugees for the fight against the Hapsburgs, but shot eight of them for indiscipline. Presiding at the trial, Graziani brought down death sentences for Bonomi and Bianchi. They were early victims of a general who was to be the most disciplinarian of the war, being responsible for thirtyfour executions.²⁰⁹ Two other gunners were sentenced to 29 years military reclusion, and one absolved. News of the severity of the court spread rapidly by word of mouth about the town, the two soldiers to be executed attracting sympathy as family men. An impromptu demonstration broke through the lines of the carabinieri, but was not able to prevent the executions being carried out. The following day the women of Magre`, whose men were by

and large away at the front, again defied Graziani, placing flowers on the graves of the General's victims, giving rise to an inquest by the infuriated Graziani.²¹⁰

The year 1917 was the nadir of a war which had become by military default a war of attrition²¹¹. Mutinies afflicted the armies of virtually all the combatant nations at this time. San Vito was a microcosmic theatre in which the horrors of discipline under Cadorna were played out. One of the most extensive episodes of wartime decimation of Italian troops, rivaling any reported by Forcella and Monticone, the historians of this phenomenon under Cadorna²¹², occurred unexpectedly in the village early in August 1917 within two months of the useless sacrifice of the VI Army at Mount Ortigara on the nearby Asiago Plateau.²¹³ At this time, Francesco Fantin was a young textile worker, developing his own opinions about work and war and society, and liable with an elder brother already away at the front to military service himself 'if the war goes on' as Herman Hesse put it.²¹⁴ Francesco Fantin was of the class of 1901, only three years younger than the class of which the regiment concerned was principally constituted.

The arrival in the locality of troops withdrawn from Monte Pasubio pending redeployment had involved little rest for the men. Incessant movements of men and materiel occasioned a sense of apprehension²¹⁵ exacerbated by the sound of artillery duels on the Plateau.²¹⁶ Moreover there were clear signs that morale in the regiment was low. During the time that the regiment was out of the frontline at San Vito the Military Tribunal of the V Army Corp prosecuted a steady stream of soldiers of the 8th Regiment of Foot of the I Army's 3rd Roma Brigade²¹⁷ for 'desertion'. On the morning of 6 August 1917 rumours began to spread at nearby Malo that the Regiment had refused to march for the Carso on the eastern front. The 27th Aquila squadron of cavalry and the 205th platoon of mobile carabinieri left Malo for San Vito to encircle the town with the assistance of troops of the 219th and 220th Foot and machine gun sections of the V Army Corp stationed at Magre` and Schio. The Corp's Military Tribunal then took charge, presided over by General Franco commanding the Brigade in the presence of General Pecori Giraldi commanding the I Army. Also present were Chaplain Professor Don Secondo Dalla Zanna, assisted by two chaplains attached to the troops stationed at Magre`. The Tribunal according to Don Tarcisio sat between 19.00 and 22.00 hours. Sentence of death was passed on seven soldiers and their sentences read out before the regiment. Five of the condemned were teenagers born in 1898, with two being corporals and thus older and more experienced. There is every reason to believe that Fantin

would have shared in the horror which the parish priest records as having been the natural emotional response of the villagers. It is reasonable to assume that a response to this incident was incorporated in his recollection in the last days of his life of what he rightly termed 'the awesome bloodbath' of the Great War. The incident has been recorded in precise and somber Italian by the usually patriotic Don Antonio Cattalan.²¹⁸ There is an oral tradition at San Vito that a sergeant was one of the seven men executed, his defence being that a weapon which had been fired had been substituted for his own being disallowed. It is possible that oral tradition has here promoted a corporal. Nevertheless, together with the evidence of Don Antonio and the Military Tribunal of the V Army Corp, this suggests that the demoralization of other ranks had come to be shared by a number of non commissioned officers.

An hour elapsed between the sentencing and the execution of the condemned. In this time, the general present took supper at the house of Signora Bettanin Amelia, then a child of eight, 'and inquisitive as one is when one is young, especially when one is female.' The general commanded the cook to make a proper meal, or he would become the eighth man to be shot. The general was served a vegetable and broth minestra, meat and peas. The young Amelia had never seen so many peas on a plate. The vulgar general with the obscene sense of humour was thought by a number present to be General Graziani,²¹⁹ Cadorna's particular disciplinarian. Signor Girolamo also recalls General Graziani being spoken of as being in the village. This may reflect the fact of Graziani's field command of the 44th Infantry Division on nearby Mount Pasubio.²²⁰ San Vito was clearly used as a depot to rest troops stationed on that sector of the front. His notoriety for draconian discipline after the prior incident of summary justice in the adjacent Comune di Magre in 1916 may also have contributed to the belief that he was present. Certainly by the time of Caporetto the following year, Andrea Graziani was effectively exercising a roving disciplinary commission on behalf of the Commander in Chief. Whilst no respondent was able to give a positive identification of Graziani by photo, it was remembered by Signora Bettanin that he was a short man, but this is not a discriminating detail. Like Graziani and Cadorna himself, Pecori-Giraldi commanding the I Army on this front, was elderly, vertically challenged and autocratic, the epitome of the traditional aristocratic officer 'all salt and pepper'. Count Pecori Giraldi was an exponent of one of the most patrician Florentine families, with a pedigree of civil and military office stretching back to the renaissance.²²¹ Certainly General Pecori Geraldi had visited Malo as recently as early April.²²² It is likely that the reputation of Graziani spread wider than his real zone of operations. It would be prudent to prefer the contemporary written record that other general

officers were present over oral tradition concerning the notorious Graziani, to the extent that they are in conflict. Nonetheless the tentative identification of Graziani elicited cannot be absolutely discounted. He may have been present to lend 'moral support' to General Franco commanding the Brigade and General Pecori Giraldi. Nevertheless, it would seem on balance that the general who ate a hearty meal whilst seven of his men prepared for their execution on his orders was Pecori Giraldi, understandably mistaken by the villagers for Graziani.

The condemned men, were dragged to their place of execution, some of them crying pitifully 'mamma, mamma'.²²³ After being shot at eleven in the evening near the torrent, their bodies were loaded on a cart, and as Don Antonio Cattalan records 'buried just inside the gate on the left hand side the same evening of their execution.' It is recalled that there were some recriminations in the village regarding the supply of the chairs and rope used to secure the condemned men. These were in fact useless, apart from giving vent to deeply held feelings about the incident, because the military had the right and the power to take anything they needed. The subdued regiment left the next day for the front without further incident. Those in the village who had men away at the front received a shocking reminder of the sadistic military discipline inflicted upon the private soldier in the Italian Army.²²⁴ It would appear from the military record of two officers that the regiment soon saw action on the eastern front, and that the Brigata Roma distinguished itself in resisting the enemy during the rout of Caporetto.²²⁵ Little wonder after such events that ill feeling about the war was considered by the High Command to be general throughout the Vicentino, and scholars have reported latent antiwar sentiment in neighbouring provinces of the Veneto in the postwar period.²²⁶

The divisions excited within Italian society by its intervention in the Great War were certainly not assuaged by such events. Along with the endless casualty lists and unconvincing bulletins from Cadorna they were inducing war weariness on the part of many citizens. On 12 July 1917 the socialist Deputy Claudio Treves declared 'Next winter no longer in the trenches' in a secret parliamentary session. This quotable slogan was immediately leaked and had a vast echo in the country and the trenches themselves. Don Tarcisio Raumer was taken aback in early September to hear it adopted by a local soldier who had been one of the foremost interventionists. This was moreover at a time when the Pope's diplomatic note of 9 August 1917 deploring 'this useless slaughter', also immediately rendered public, was being hotly debated. It is this background of unprecedented and industrialised slaughter, persisted in beyond the point of futility, which embittered postwar politics in Italy and Europe.

Contemporary misconceptions of socialism like Bolshevism, with its distinctive conspiratorial contempt for democracy, which tempted the leftwing of the movement throughout Europe and in Australia, are incomprehensible otherwise. The Great War made civil war seem a trifling and necessary resolution of unfinished business, having better prospects than warfare between the constituted military and economic powers of proving a war to end all wars, sweeping away the militarism and inequity which had led to the devastating tragedy of the Great War.²²⁷

Before the war was officially over the Fantin family was itself caught up with other villagers in the toils of military justice. Catterina Manea Fantin and her youngest son, fifteen year old Alfonso were charged along with Giovanna Gobbo, Emilia Sbalchiero, Maria Baglion, seventeen year old Natalino Roncali, Maria Cora`, Catterina Strotte, Teresa Boschi, Teresa Capovin and fifty year old Rigotello Giuseppe with having `in Novembre 1918 possessed themselves of unknown quantities of wood to the detriment of the military administration.' As the only adult male involved was in advanced middle age, the two other males were minors and the other eight defendants were women, this looks very much like a conspiracy of housekeepers to replenish their domestic woodpiles with free fire wood with winter coming on, doubtless in the conviction that after the armistice the army wouldn't be needing it. Indeed they would have probably have thought it a crime to leave such a *ben di Dio* [gift of god] lying around going to waste. Unfortunately the military administration took the view that armistice or not the wood was its property and arranged for charges to be laid. The case hung over the heads of the defendants until 12 April 1920, when they were relieved to be acquitted in the Schio Court of Petty Sessions because they had taken the wood after the armistice `not understanding that they were performing an illicit action'²²⁸. The court had understood that it was dealing with poor people who did not understand the legal niceties of property rights pertaining to a higher and more literate station in life than theirs, who thus had no criminal intent. It was, besides the successful defence of the district and the return of surviving veterans, about the only happy ending in the story of the Great War at San Vito. A similar prosecution for theft did not end quite so happily for a group of twenty three landholders charged with having in the second quarter of 1919 harvested war materials the property of the military administration in the environs of monte di Malo and Isola Vicentina They had done so in the belief, mistaken in the eyes of the state, which was legislator, complainant and judge in the case, that they were entitled to any scrap metal lying around in recompense for war damages. The three judged most culpable were sentenced to one month's

gaol, three were acquitted and the others sentenced to three days gaol [which they had probably served prior to and during trial] ²²⁹ Here again we see how during the war the state had a heavier footprint on the territory of the Schio district, clashing with worker and peasant notions of right. Its impact as we have seen was to stay with Francesco Fantin for all his life.

#9: The Red Biennium (1919-20) & its Aftermath at Schio

It is highly necessary to study further the links between emigration and political struggle. One thing is certain. Within the migratory phenomenon that assumed a mass scale in those years, those zones where there was agitation and subsequent repression were prominent.

Dada`²³⁰

Schio in the postwar years prior to the advent of the fascists to state power was in relative terms an industrial and political citadel for its working class. Outrages such as beatings of socialist and other labour activists did occur, but Schio itself and much of the district was spared the worst of fascist violence until after the national, regional and provincial calvary of the labour movement at the hand of fascism had been substantially accomplished. This gave no sense of immunity to labour activists in the district capital and environs. Rather it emphasized a gathering sense of isolation, and an awareness that a time would come when local fascism would call in its favours with regional fascism and expunge a nut hitherto considered both too hard and too small to warrant cracking. Not surprisingly, hoping for revolution and fearing reaction, the socialist left at Schio armed itself. Its mettle was soon put to the test, with Schio leftists showing more tactical acumen in the management of their own defence than was generally the case elsewhere. There was more than enough military experience²³¹ amongst those also used to the discipline of labour to enable the effective deployment of the political intransigents of the Schio socialist left.

In January 1921 Schio fascists hosted a party of colleagues from the provincial capital, who had arrived by train at about nine in the evening, proceeding to confer and bond with their hosts at the Hotel Two Swords. They mustered a combined force of fifteen. The Schio *Arditi Rossi* [Red Guards], an anarchosocialist paramilitary formation independent of but at the service of the leftist party branches of the district, were alerted and a pre-arranged defensive contingency plan put into operation. Two Red Guards kept the Hotel under observation. The Schio Chamber of Labour in Via Palestro [now via Pasubio], the most likely target of the fascist squad, was put in a state of defence under the leadership of the Secretary of the Schio branch of the Socialist Party Angelo Pietrobelli, Igino Piva and a number of

other prominent leftist activists including the anarchist Luigi Sperotto. A detachment was posted at the Castle to interfere with any attack on the rear of the building. Another detachment waited on nearby roofs controlling two routes of access to the gated front courtyard. The intention was to hold fire until the fascists penetrated the courtyard, and then open up with crossfire rifle volleys and hand grenades. There is little doubt that this well laid plan would have worked. In effect it did work, from a tactical if not a security point of view, because the fascists got wind of the Red Guard's dispositions and chose not to attack. The visiting fascists left the hotel for the railway station before dawn, the Red Guard pickets informing Pietrobelli, who gave orders for arms to be stacked before leading a party to see the unwelcome visitors off armed with a pistol. On the way to the station he attempted to shoot at them, but his pistol failed to fire. The report of the successive hammer blows proved sufficient to urge the blackshirts to make all speed towards the station.²³² The Schio Red Guards had successfully defended the bastion of local unionism by their own unaided efforts. The problem was that fascism was not a local phenomenon, and could not be indefinitely held at bay by such encouraging local victories. As Simini observes, the Schio Red Guards basically discharged their military objectives, 'but could not address the national situation, already determined in the negative'²³³. The early constitution by middle class nationalist antisocialists of a *Fascio di difesa nazionale per le provincie del le Polesine e del Veneto* prefigured the shape of things to come in what had been the warzone of the alpine fringe and the lower Po plain.²³⁴ This continuum of uneasiness that grew with the rise of fascism and the employer offensive after the Occupation of the Factories of 1920 prescribed an arc that ran from paramilitary preparations for revolution to defensive scavenging for weaponry and munitions. These activities took their cue from the local industrial and political cycle as it was impinged upon by the national context.

This local sense of isolation echoed to the tempo of national news, with the provincial commercial and party press reporting incidents 'From the Kingdom of Violence'²³⁵. It was compounded first by the split between the reformist and maximalist wings of the Socialist Party²³⁶, and after the formation of the Communist Party in January 1921 by the conflict within the Communist Party between Bordiga and Gramsci.²³⁷ Although both men were tough minded, Bordiga, a Neapolitan engineer, took a more intransigent line than the Sard culturalist Gramsci. This suited the determination of labour activists of Vicenza and the Schio district, with their anarcho-internationalist heritage, better than the subtle historicism of the canny Sard. There was a good deal of tension arising between these contrasts in style and

substance. As late as 1986 the Bordigan Riccardo Salvatore stoutly maintained his leader's logic chopping critique of Gramsci:

Gramsci wasn't a marxist. He came out of left Crocean idealism. He grafted the economic component of marxism onto this concept and from thence came the concept of factory councils. This was supposed to be the germ of the society of the future. It was a conception which sinned of syndicalism, and here we were completely outside marxism.²³⁸

Gramsci in his youth was influenced by the *historical logic* of Croce²³⁹, and by the revolutionary appeal of syndicalism, but this does not reflect against his mature grasp of marxism, being symptomatic of his concern for intellectual standards and thirst for knowledge about ways and means of mobilising the working class. These concerns lead him first to marxism and then to its cross fertilisation. The importance of this point with respect to the Schio district was that it left labour activists outside the Communist Party [PCd'I] line under Gramsci, when they were already at odds with the rural evangelical socialism of the word and of the administrative reformism of the provincial capital. The result was that after the Occupation of the Factories spread from Milan to Turin where it had already found its theoreticians in Gramsci and the Ordinovisti, at Schio and in the Vicentino maximalist exponents [ie radical socialists in close competition with the PCd'I] were increasingly aligned with Bordiga and began to debate the themes of class struggle to conquer political power and the creation of a communist party, remaining in great part extraneous to the themes expressed by the Turinese group around L'Ordine Nuovo.²⁴⁰ Gramsci of course did not believe that factory councils could bring in the millenium without a socialist seizure of power.²⁴¹ What is true is that, while the Italian working class experienced one revolution, the Schio working class experienced another, whose local character is well worth examining.

The local industrial scene in the Schio district was a university of hard knocks for its working class, in which class feelings were formed in the interaction of individuals such as Fantin and their antagonists during the Red Biennium. Postwar structural readjustments were of course the apple of socioeconomic discord. When for example Croci the secretary of the Vicenza Chamber of Labour returned from visiting the workers of Biella in the nearby Province of Turin who were on an extended strike, this was perceived as a threat to his prospective costs of production and by extension his livelihood by one Pozzan of Malo. He

thereupon took it upon himself to assault Croci with the assistance of hirelings in broad daylight in the provincial capital on 14 June 1919²⁴². Such criminal acts of employer intimidation spoke volumes about effective bourgeois commitment to democracy and the rule of law. Not to be intimidated, and realizing that victory at Biella would have flow on effects at Schio, socialists took up a collection for the strikers with the slogan 'Give a days pay for our Biellesi comrades!', drawing on unionisation of smaller businesses. Here as in the larger establishments socialist unionists were in competition with catholic unions regarded by employers as the lesser evil, which the socialists condemned as 'the bosses hirelings' and criticised for taking union dues and then not giving representation.²⁴³ The catholics gave as good as they got.

This structural disunity amongst worker's, which was a feature of the politics of the 'white' Veneto²⁴⁴ complementing and displacing fascism, contrasted with the unity of the capitalist regime in the district around the Rossi interest. This ascendancy also had its structural basis, with many of the smaller businesses having begun life as Rossi outsourcing arrangements. They commonly looked with habitual reverence to the family for leadership. As in the days of Senator Rossi, so in the days of his heir Baron Rossi the Rossi dispensation was more severe than that of the national employers' peak body. The settlement of the Biella strike after five weeks with the mediation of the Prefect of Turin had indeed been followed as Pozzan had feared by the lodging of a claim for equiparation by the Schio Socialist League. Wage increases of 40% from a subsistence basis with indexation were involved, with equal pay for women. The matter had been referred to the peak national confederations of capital and labour, the Confindustria and the CGL, which after further negotiation had agreed on the original log of claims. Subsequently Baron Rossi told his fellow Veneto woolen manufacturers that the Confindustria 'was too hasty in accepting these heavy rates. No single industrialist would have accepted such heavy obligations, even at the cost of a long strike.' Clearly the Baron would have preferred that the Confindustria had drawn the strike out longer. He foresaw such ill effects as the end of all exports, unemployment and the impossibility of competing with imports without high protective tariffs, making in general the usual complaint of employers that the sky would fall if his share of profit should decline.²⁴⁵

Among the strikes most prominent in the Schio district during the Red Biennium was the bakers' strike of spring and summer 1920, which affected the firms of Marchioro and Santomio of Malo and the firm of Anzolin – Bianchini & Gelmetti of San Vito, lasting many

weeks.²⁴⁶ But the climax of industrial disputation after the Great War came with the timber industry dispute of the summer of 1920. This was no accident, involving as it did transition from a war economy to peacetime conditions. The Rossi family had made its fortune on canny investment with the benefit of local knowledge and prominence, and legal difficulties in the Carrara timber firm had provided the family with the opportunity to profit from the demand for lumber for trenchworks and other military consumption. By the end of the war the timber industry was a close third to the metal industry and the dominant textile industry in the Schio industrial hierarchy. After this public sector demand fell off with the Armistice, and rather than explore new markets, the firm of Rossi & Carrara sought to rely on contracts for rail sleepers and the employment of the traditional Rossi policy of tightfistedness with a workforce suffering from inflationary cost of living increases which had brought wages back down to subsistence level. Caught between a rock and a hard place, the timberworkers went out on indefinite strike on 22 September 1919. A month later they secured a 25% increase, bringing to 100% the increases in respect of prewar wage rates won over a year of tough negotiations. But the inflationary pressure brought about by wartime currency inflation and cost increases due to wartime economic dislocation afforded little respite before these new wage rates were being eroded again. In the second trimester of 1920 the cost of living as monitored by the Comune of Schio rose 45%.

The timber workers of Schio therefore determined to demand the application of 'the international accord agreed last April in Venice and already in force in many cities of the Veneto and Venezia Giulia...counting on our solidarity strengthened by past experience.'²⁴⁷ By mid June the absolute intransigence had been established of the management of Rossi & Carrara, the leading firm in the sector in the district, and the workers published the pay scale to prove how unacceptable was the remuneration on offer. A first class timber worker was not paid even two depreciated postwar lire per hour, a labourer a lira and twentyfive cents. About a week later a number of smaller firms indicated a willingness to negotiate. Rossi & Carrara however persisted in their intransigence right throughout July and into August. A demonstration was organised by the strikers for the early evening of 20 August in the central piazza at Schio. About one thousand strikers and sympathetic workers attended according to police estimates. The Bar Summano faced Mount Summano to the northeast across the piazza, a favourite resort of the better heeled citizenry. Unexpectedly, after the orators Dettin and Isidoro Marchioro had addressed the assembly, the demonstrators found themselves coming under a sustained verbal assault from Baron Rossi and Signor Carrara themselves,

positioned in the doorway of the Bar Summano. Little did the strikers know that these provocateurs were accompanied by the fascist messers Plebani, Cazzola and Giuretto and a number of Carabinieri. These had indeed conspired to set a trap, but they got a more vigorous response than they bargained for.

The Schio Red Guards had been organising since the Armistice in case of attack on just such occasions. A certain Luigi Sperotto, remembered as one of the senior anarchists in the Schio of his day, was one of the Red Guards which had been raised locally and who attended demonstrations and protected worker facilities to provide against fascist or police assault²⁴⁸. Finding at a certain point that the bosses had gone too far, of his own libertarian initiative he lobbed a grenade into the Bar Summano. Before the report had died down elements of the crowd surged willingly towards the smoking locale, and the line of retreat upstairs of Rossi and Carrara was with difficulty secured by their minders. Several people were injured on both sides, including one of the Carabinieri, who called for reinforcements that arrived with the Commandant of the local Division. As Simini comments, this was an historic occasion, 'the first clash in which all the actors of the postwar era locked horns: proletariat, unions, capitalists, police and fascists. And each and every one played out the roles assigned to them by History.'²⁴⁹ Indeed the Prefect of Vicenza promptly notified the DGPS of the event, assuring his superiors as was customary in the service that he would keep the situation under control.²⁵⁰

It is likely that Francesco Fantin was present at this demonstration, the peak appointment of the moment of the district labour movement. With his passion for politics, he would hardly have missed the occasion. He was not liable to military service for another three weeks, presenting to the colours of the 6th Alpini in lower Bassano Province on 16 September 1920. Sperotto as we have seen was to be one of the defenders of the Schio Chamber of Labour some months later in January 1921. Almost exactly a year later, after the pursuit of a party returning from the mountains regarding which the police had been tipped off, Sperotto's domicile was searched for weapons and a recently oiled Austrian rifle, a trophy of military service, was found in a cabinet. Sperotto was prosecuted and convicted of possession of an unlicensed weapon and sentenced to three months gaol.²⁵¹ It is highly probable that Fantin would have been involved as a junior in any political activity in which Sperotto was prominent. Moreover Gaetano Panizzon was to eulogise Fantin after his assassination in a letter to his family as 'an Antifascist of the first hour...one of that valorous host who for

many years in the upper Veneto struggled against Fascist barbarism and held it at bay until they were by bans and proscriptions and above all...by hunger constrained to seek work and refuge in distant Australia.'²⁵² Given that the prime purpose and achievement of the Schio Red Guards was precisely to hold fascism at bay, this eulogy rings very much like an allusion to Fantin's precocious militancy within the ranks of the Schio Red Guards.

This supposition is supported by the recollection of the brothers Fantin by Gaetano Pegoraro,²⁵³ one of the leading exponents of the Schio Red Guards, as youths associated with the formation. Moreover Maria `Gina' Abram nee` Fantin of Magre`, a cousin who enjoyed a close relationship with Francesco Fantin, recalls that he showed her the hand grenades he kept secreted near the Magre` House of the People, and that he went about for his own protection armed with knuckle dusters, a Luger pistol and a sword stick. Owning the pistol and the swordstick without a licence would have placed him beyond the law, not that the latter would have offered him any protection. We may confidently assume therefore that Fantin never made any effort to register these sidearms, permission to bear which would in any case have been denied him because of his politics.²⁵⁴ The pistol and the grenades could certainly have been picked up on Mount Pasubio in the period between the Armistice and the Piazza Rossi incident, and suggest that Fantin was a junior rank and file member of the Red Guards on duty on that occasion. He was away on national service during March 1921 when the Red Guards were in attendance to fend off threatened fascist disruption of the antimilitarist ceremonial remembrance of the two soldiers shot at Magre` in 1916 for disobeying an order to stop socialising with civilians. The plaque placed in their memory into the cemetery wall was obliterated by the military authorities, but not before a photograph of it had been taken which in due course came into the hands of the Fantin family, probably through Luigi or Alfonso Fantin, perhaps through some third party on behalf of Francesco Fantin.²⁵⁵ Whatever the particulars, this photograph establishes another link between the brothers Fantin and the Schio Red Guards.

The organisation at Schio of worker defence formations came much to the discomfort of local fascists at this time. Tasca considered that `in all the "invaded" regions [of which the Veneto was certainly one] multiple and recurrent complicity linked the authorities with the Fasci.'²⁵⁶ Nevertheless they not always saw eye to eye. On 21 July 1921 the Honourable Alfredo di Stefani wrote to the Minister of the Interior, renewing his efforts on behalf of the fascists of Schio²⁵⁷:

The Directory of the Fighting Fascio of Schio (Vicenza) informs me that whilst the local Public Security authorities impede the Fascio in its economic activities, they have permitted the formation of a battalion of 300 peoples shocktroopers trained in arms who have publicly paraded their insignia. The members of this group make public display of their weapons, and have great quantities of grenades, rifles and machine guns....I feel in duty bound to communicate these particulars to Your Excellency because the fascists would not permit **and would never permit** the acquiescence of the local authorities to reconstitute those antinational nuclei that they have dispelled. Only the prompt intervention of Your Excellency can prevent the defence of the State by public authority being substituted by private resolve.

On July 25 1921 on his last day as Minister of the Interior before taking over the premiership, the interventionist socialist Ivanoe Bonomi requested through the DGPS that the Prefecture of Vicenza check the facts and inform him. It wouldn't have been wise to have a provincial corner of the civil war veering out of control unsupervised.

As it happened the Prefecture was already alerted, and the wheels of Italian centralised administration were turning smoothly, potentiated by the linkages between official and unofficial power. The Fighting Fascio of Schio had already written to the Venetian Regional Fascist Directorate, which had referred the matter on to the Venice Questura or Police Headquarters. Duly informed, on 23 July the Prefect had dispatched a high powered team to investigate, made up of the Questore of Vicenza Cesare Tarantola and the Commandant of the provincial Division of Carabinieri Major Sir Felice Tango. War as Clausewitz says is violence, and as such cannot be maintained at maximum intensity indefinitely. Armies must be resupplied and this is particularly true of civil wars, in which the combatants live side by side and must often maintain productive activities if they are to sustain themselves and fight at all. Local truces and standoffs are thus a common feature of civil wars [as in Lebanon for many years], and the situation at Schio proved in this fashion to be delicate rather than critical. Indeed the conservative flagship La Provincia di Vicenza had commented in a front page editorial as early as January 1921 that 'the fact is that we are in a continual state of guerrilla warfare, with its truces and negotiations and alarums.'²⁵⁸ The alarmist tone of the correspondence between the Directory of the Fighting Fascio of Schio and the Venetian Regional Fascist directorate was because the former were resigning. No urgent intervention of a regional or provincial order of fascist 'action' squads was envisaged to back up the Fighting Fascio of Schio, as had seemed the

case from the shrill tone of the ill considered letter. There had in fact `been no provocation by the communists', and they had certainly not been conducting military training in public as alleged, although a paramilitary athletics association, the Schio group of the provincial *Gruppi Proletari di Educazione Fisica*²⁵⁹ numbering some three hundred had been founded. There was then some substance behind the fascist reports, above and beyond the exaggerated details.

The exaggeration of the original reports was explained by the small size of the Fighting Fascio of some fifty adherents `because Schio is an important workers' center, which numbers many subversives...The few members of the Fascio...are impressionable and given to exaggerating every move of their adversaries.' The Schio fascists were in fact afraid they were outnumbered. This made for delicate management issues for the local Vice Commissar for Public Security Dottore Olindo Cellurale, but there was no crisis of public order at Schio in August 1921. To restore the work of mediation disrupted by the paranoia and resentment of the Fighting Fascio, which had sought to reduce its own regional fascio and the authorities to instruments in a struggle it had not the courage to face itself, the Directory of the Fighting Fascio, messers Arturo Dal Brun, Cesare Zanella, Giovanni Ferrari and Mario Dal Medico, were convoked before the authorities and requested to subscribe a reaffirmation of their commitment to keep public order. This they did, stipulating that they were `far from any idea of provoking disorder at Schio as shown by their performance to date...without tolerating thereby any exuberance of public demonstrations.' With these guarantees insisted upon and given the face of both the fascio and the authorities was thereby saved, the Schio Fascio undertaking to inform the Regional Fascio, lest there be any further misunderstanding.

Likewise messers Murino Feltrin and Guido Griso were convoked by the authorities as the promoters of the People's Shocktroopers to give undertakings to respect the peace, the transcript being forwarded to Rome [together with the report of the investigation which was relayed to the Minister by the Director of the DGPS] bespeaking the sense of duty which informed both parties:

The same being interrogated as to the facts in respect of the rumours current of formation of squads of People's Shocktroopers and plans of conflict with local fascists, respond;

We propose to establish squads of People's Shocktroops with a view to safeguarding the interests of the working masses, repelling any provocation as might arise from any association of any political description in the interest, we repeat, of the proletariat.

We wish to make clear that to date we have not suffered any provocation and that we have at all times refrained from committing any. Any rumours of our evil intentions as may have reached the fascists and the authorities are therefore false. Also false are the rumours of our intervention next Sunday at Vicenza, there being no need for it.

We understand the warning issued by the Illustrious Signor Questore of Vicenza and the Illustrious Signor Major of Carabinieri to avoid on our part any disorder, given that otherwise the authorities will impartially enforce the law.

These terms of truce clarified, communists, fascists and police at Schio at the cost of foregoing the satisfaction of sorting each other out could settle down to waiting out the civil war in a defensive posture locally whilst attending upon or even discretely assisting events elsewhere. This last implicit proviso particularly concerned the liberty of action of the fascists.

In one respect however, the anxieties of the Fighting Fascio were not figments of their own imaginings, and that was the light weaponry endowment of the People's Shocktroopers. The problem was that the means of civil war were available both to the left and to the right, given the detritus of battle littering Italy's alpine frontier and the lax custody of military magazines not to mention the reactionary sympathies of many of their custodians and private stocks of war surplus. At the 1919 Socialist Party congress the Vicentine giurist Angelo Galeno spoke for Veneto socialism in successfully drawing attention to the social problems specific to the war torn region.²⁶⁰ As late as March 1921 attention was being directed in the provincial press 'for our bush destroyed in the war.'²⁶¹ Others too were taking note. In August 1919 the Direzione Generale Artilleria admitted that there was little accounting for 'the cartridges, projectiles, grenades and various munitions' dispersed in military depots around the country, 'which can easily be taken by the ill disposed without any responsibility emerging.'²⁶² In September Minister of War Albricci advised Premier Nitti that 'the question of explosives is one of the gravest and most ponderous bequeathed to the country by the war and continually preoccupies and assails this Ministry',²⁶³ having previously forwarded in late August an estimate that at the end of hostilities in the war zone and related arsenals there were twenty six

million Italian and enemy shells, nine million grenades and fifteen thousand tonnes of explosives. Lesser amounts were in production at the armistice, and there was a national stockpile of nine hundred and fifty million cartridges.²⁶⁴

The problem in Vicenza Province was amongst the most acute. In August 1919 one Angelo Vicari inspecting the Veneto had reported to the liberal premier Nitti that 'in...the invaded regions...the work of collecting abandoned war materials is not proceeding at all. It is all just lying there amidst the fields, at the mercy of the first to arrive.' The Prefect of Vicenza confirmed to the Ministry of the Interior on 2 October 1919 that 'the recovery of abandoned war material is in fact proceeding very slowly' in a brief communication giving a well circumstantiated account of operational difficulties and shortcomings.²⁶⁵ It was as a result of a comprehensive national effort to avert the risk of armed political conflict that the delicate situation in Vicenza province began to emerge. As early as April 1919 all Prefects in the Kingdom were wired to ascertain if in their provinces 'individuals or associations of a revolutionary character have constituted depots of arms and munitions. Such an hypothesis is considered to be not without foundation by this Ministry [of the Interior] in so far as we find that in the early days after the conclusion of our war, great quantities of arms and munitions were left in diverse localities, without any or scarce custody, such that it seems not improbable that weapons have been imported into the interior of the country'²⁶⁶ As late as the summer of 1921, with a major textile strike in progress with paramilitary support in the Schio district, the situation with respect to the availability of weapons had not changed. Such that on 17 October 1921 the Prefect of Vicenza Gutierrez could remind the DGPS 'in respect of the substantial quantity of arms and explosives of all kinds confiscated, and that not indifferent which remains hidden, goes to show, as repeatedly reported, that having left for such a long time great quantities of arms and munitions completely abandoned on Monte Pasubio gave every possibility to subversives and the ill intentioned of every kind to furnish themselves withal in great quantities'²⁶⁷

The risk of armed social conflict had moreover increased with the Socialist Party congress of October 1919, which had announced a 'revolutionary' outlook, although as Gramsci bitterly remarked, it remained on a 'parliamentary' rather than a 'proletarian revolutionary' footing. Parliament of course, to use Lenin's concept, could have been employed as a revolutionary platform broadcasting socialist policy while worker defence squads were armed to prevent reaction. For many involved, the risks of bloodshed must have seemed trivial after the wholesale slaughter of an unnecessary war. Indeed the Director General of Public Security was

of the opinion as early as May 1920 that 'after a long war in which millions of citizens were engaged, the thought of shedding blood seems to make no impression and all sense of legality seems forgotten.'²⁶⁸ Among the individuals arrested during an extensive dragnet for illicit weapons at Schio Prefect Gutierrez named Luigi Penazzato, Giacomo Cavion, Francesco Scapin and Giovanni Sperotto. Confiscated in this haul were French and Italian rifles, two revolvers, some dozens of grenades, sixty magazines and three kilo's of gunpowder.²⁶⁹ As the industrial situation became more tense at Schio, and the political situation in the country degenerated into civil war, widening circles within the Schio workforce became involved in paramilitary activities intended to protect local workplaces and labour institutions. One of the prime unintended consequences of this was the involvement of some Schio comrades in the worst anarchist terrorist attempt in Italian history, the Diana outrage which occurred in Milan in March 1921. Otherwise, the Schio workforce was able to defend itself locally against the mayhem sweeping the province, the region and the country until the March on Rome in October 1922. Thereafter, and particularly after the loss of the national textile strike in the district in late 1921, many of those who had figured industrially and in the related paramilitary activity and their judicial sequelae were sacked and emigrated. Because Fantin was out of the district doing his national service at the time of the strike, he was not personally victimised in this way. But those who were so victimised were his comrades, and the factory in which he had worked had struck and its workforce had been defeated. The assertive working class of which Fantin had been a member during the Red Biennium was a memory when he returned home, its leaders driven into exile. He would have been fully informed on his homecoming on the saga his people had endured in his absence. Only his most personal attachments detained him from joining his comrades in exile immediately.

#10: The Diana Affair 1920 - 21

IN PROVINCIA / SCHIO / THE DEMONSTRATION OF SYMPATHY for the victims of Milan has had a profound echo in our Schio. All houses and public offices flew the tricolour at half mast. All shops were closed from the hours of eleven until noon with shutters lowered. The local fighting fascio affixed a serious and moving poster. No incidents.

La Provincia di Vicenza 31 March 1921

To the socialist left at Schio, the Armistice signalled the transition from one phase of civil war to another, nothing more, and they were determined to be prepared. It was a time after all, as the Ministry of the Interior itself noted in a 1921 report 'just after the war, when in Italy combatants, veterans, crippled soldiers, shocktroopers and the fighting fasci were all organising'.²⁷⁰ As the government feared, the traditional networks of affinity between *sovversivi* became comradely conduits for the introduction of light arms, munitions and explosives into the interior, with the typical weapon being the model 91 rifle. Luger pistols were also much prized, and hand grenades and explosives abundant. Anarchist networks ferried arms from Schio to Milan. Confirmation of this came on 10 June 1919 from the Prefect of Vicenza who reported that two anarchists had been overheard marvelling that the authorities had been unable to discover explosives and hand grenades deposited in the cellars of noted Milanese revolutionaries.²⁷¹ On 13 June the Prefect of Milan assured the Ministry of the Interior that he was investigating 'the existence or otherwise in this city of clandestine deposits of arms and munitions, searching the houses of suspects this very day' proceeding with caution to test suspicions about the premises of the provincial edition of the socialist daily Avanti!, 'given the condition of overexcitement prevailing amongst all social classes, and especially the subversive organisations.'²⁷²

As Milan is one of the capital cities of northern Italy, to which many roads from alpine districts lead, there is considerable evidence of traffic in arms, munitions and explosives between Schio and Milan during the Red Biennium, all in the name of revolutionary solidarity and worker defence, with materials of death and destruction being moved in truckloads on a no questions asked basis of good faith between comrades. These conditions were to result in March 1921 in the Diana Theatre bombing which killed seventeen and injured over one hundred.²⁷³

The bombing shocked the nation and was a key moment in the legitimization of both fascism and state persecution of the left. It is very likely that Francesco Fantin and others of the informal San Vito anarchist youth cell had minor if perhaps unwitting roles in all this. They may have served the revolution without being aware that they were assisting terrorists. Alternatively they may have thought that the class war was not fought according to Queensberry rules, and participated knowingly with grim determination. In either case, the circles in which Fantin moved were involved. Simini reports that the Schio Red Guards, as the local manifestation of the People's Shocktroopers preferred to be known, at the time of the great strikes of the Red Biennium 'partially resolved the arms problem with numerous, fatiguing and highly secret excursions to Mount Pasubio',²⁷⁴ The key particulars to be identified so far as the involvement of Francesco Fantin is concerned regards the generation of anarchist elders operating in the Schio district who could have mobilised the young Fantin and his peer group to participate in these paramilitary activities. It is clear that there was indeed just such a set of experienced anarchist activists who had an influence over Fantin's formation as an activist and were his senior local contemporaries in the Schio district. These men were the most renowned anarchists of their day in the district, and oral tradition and press and official documentation has preserved their rebel reputations. Anarchists were amongst the pioneers of the labour movement in the Schio district, and accordingly even once anarchists and socialists had come to work in competition as evolutionary alternatives comradesly relations were maintained with substantial goodwill if not without difficulty.²⁷⁵ This mirrored the situation at Turin, where Gramsci gave anarchism short theoretical shift but worked amicably with anarchist comrades.²⁷⁶ These men operated with a minimum of regional and national support. During the Red Biennium there was a degree of regional coordination amongst Veneto anarchists. In November 1919 a *Unione Anarchica Veneta* met at the Vicenza Chamber of Labour, about eighty activists attending from the provinces of Verona, Padua, Treviso, Venice and Vicenza, with the Schio district sending representatives from Schio, Magre` di Schio and Poleo. The Gruppo Anarchico di Chioggia and that of Brescia signalling their support by telegraph. A Secretariate was established at the Vicenza Chamber of Labour, to which Umberto Mincigrucci, Carlo Melchionna and Marcello Mambrini were elected. The agenda discussed were the campaigns in support of the Bolsheviks and for the repatriation of Malatesta and the diffusion of Umanita` Nova. Collections were taken for the newspaper and the fund Pro Vittime Politiche.²⁷⁷ These efforts at regional coordination were conducted in the teeth of police surveillance and disruption. On 30 October 1920 the Corriere Vicentino gleefully reported 'Fourteen anarchists arrested at Padua' at a regional assize:

The other day, at the Railwaymen's Circle at Padua a Triveneto anarchist convention took place. Representatives participated from Trieste, Venezia, Vicenza, Treviso, Verona, Bassano, Schio, Padua etc. Discussion lasted over two hours. Meanwhile numerous detectives under the orders of Commissioner Zavagno arrived at Piazza Mazzini with the obvious intent to wait for the anarchists and complete a general dragnet. The conspirators left a little after four pm, proceeding in groups towards Piazza Mazzini. Immediately the police, dispersed in all directions, concentrated themselves, launching themselves with revolvers drawn towards the first bell tower, rendering their objective impotent. At the same time the stragglers amongst the anarchists gave themselves to flight, followed in hot pursuit by the agents, so that little by little, one by one, the anarchists were handcuffed. Three of them however succeeded in escaping all pursuit. Those arrested, none of whom were found to be carrying arms, were conveyed to the Barracks of the Royal Carabinieri at Levante before being sent to the Paoletti prison. Particulars of their interrogation are not as yet known, nor are all the names of those arrested known, amongst whom were Battipaglia and Dioda` of Padua.

Umberto Mincigrucci as a regional anarchist leader is known to have maintained links with comrades from Schio. About six months earlier in early March 1920 he had addressed at Schio a demonstration in support of the Hungarian communists lead by Bela Kun.²⁷⁸ There is evidence also that anarchists from Schio had links outside the district. Luigi Spiller, born at Magre` near Schio on 3 August 1876, as a stonemason and unionist had professional and political links with Carraran anarchism in Tuscany, as befitted Schio's leading prewar anarchist²⁷⁹.

Another senior local anarchist of the period embracing the prewar and postwar periods was Giuseppe Mariani. He was something of a philosopher in the popular sense of the term of an individualist with doctrinal views, and indeed at Schio he lived in a shanty like Diogenes the Cynic acknowledging no master rather than pay rent and be subservient to a landlord.²⁸⁰ Mariani was a principal in the Diana outrage and in 1953 published Memorie di un Ex-Terrorista, which establishes beyond a shadow of a doubt that the explosives for the atrocity were supplied, culpably if unwittingly, and perhaps even consciously as to purpose, by Schio anarchists. The history of the Diana affair dates back to the heady days of the Biennio Rosso and its turgid aftermath, when state repression and fascist aggression followed

hard upon the heels of the resolution of the Occupation of the Factories. The year 1920 had opened with Mariani in Mantova amongst his old comrades, amongst whom he started a social studies circle with money donated by a Val d'Aostano comrade. Then he began searching with two friends, Messora and Zaccaria, for arms and explosives for the 'insurrectional movement' that he believed inevitable as the Biennium reached its crisis. Initially Zaccaria was the treasurer of the group, Messora the courier who collected the weapons and munitions at places indicated by Mariani. At a certain point, after various bourgeois resorts in Milan had been bombed, and Malatesta, Borghi and Quaglino had been charged with conspiracy against the state, Mariani and another confederate, Boldrini, thinking discretion the better part of valour, retired to Switzerland. They returned to Milan when the Occupation of the Factories was at its height. 'From Luino to Milano the sight of the red and black flags on the chimney stacks and at the factory gates fed our enthusiastic determination to fight to the finish for the victory of the workers.'²⁸¹

It is clear that Mariani's revolutionary illusions preceded any call from the proletariat, that his impetus was one of offering rather than response. But in the alarmed climate of the Occupation, a call in due course came that seemed to vindicate his predisposition. This seems to be the point when Mariani's collection of war materials moved into higher gear. Mariani recalls that the spur to action came with a request from the occupants of the Franco Tosi works in Via Borgognone Milan for weapons with which to defend the factory and the provision of a truck and driver to collect them. The driver was a socialist, and with him came a mate from his socialist circle. Together these four drove to Gallarate in the north eastern periphery of Milan to pick up an old comrade who knew exactly where to go to pick up the munitions together with another by the name of Pietro Canavesi. In case they were waylaid by the police on the road, they carried with them a false document purporting to be a directive from the chief engineer of the factory to repair the electricity station at Vicenza. In the evening at Brescia they were virtually out of petrol. Proceeding to the Chamber of Labour, they met Mincigrucci, who provided for their refuelling. They made Verona by early morning, and Vicenza towards midday. Here the lorry broke down, and some hours passed in its repair, and they took on more fuel. They arrived in Schio in the rain towards evening. Here they were met by comrades Spiller and Panizzon, and this handover effected, the old comrade who had acted as guide from Milan left the party to take the train back to Gallarate at Mariani's suggestion. He seems to have been considered unfit for the heavy lifting anticipated on the mountain.²⁸² We know from Mariani that eight men were involved in

collecting war materials on Mount Pasubio on this occasion.²⁸³ Carmignola or the brothers Fantin from the San Vito anarchist circle could have been mobilised by Spiller or Panizzon. Certainly Fantin subsequently maintained a lifelong association with Panizzon, which suggests a bonding as brothers in arms, such as might have developed on this or other expeditions to Mount Pasubio. In any event it is clear that Francesco Fantin moved in circles which were involved in the collection of weapons and munitions on Mount Pasubio, out of which the Diana outrage resulted, if not on this specific expedition, on others undertaken by the Diana conspirators or on account of the local labour movement. Fantin, Spiller and Panizzon may not have known that the principals come from Milan had terrorist intent. Certainly Mariani and Boldrini should have kept any terrorist intent to themselves if indeed they had any at this stage, when indeed their purposes may have been limited to fulfilling their commission from the Franco Tosi works. But their associates however unwitting in subsequent expeditions would have known that they were at risk of implication as accomplices once they read of the arrest of Mariani and Boldrini in March 1921.

The party thus constituted proceeded in a thunderstorm to Mount Pasubio, taking the Road of Heroes built up the side of the escarpment by the military during the war to the concave summit where much war material lay still in the open on the wartime battlefield. Then began the perilous return journey, with the young driver beginning to tire, and the way being lit with hand held lamps with a live flame. On the way to Malo`, the socialist driver was relieved by his associate, but unfortunately he proved unequal to the task, and drove the vehicle off the road at a curve at the perimeter of Malo`. The lorry overturned and spare fuel carried in the back inundated the cabin. Boldrini and Canavesi headbutted their way through the windscreen, Mariani also making his escape; then they returned to secure the driver trapped behind the wheel. By this time the fuel in the cabin was igniting, and it proved impossible due to heat and exploding projectiles to save the principal driver. The whole payload exploded, waking Malo`. Supporting a badly burned Boldrini, Mariani and Canavesi proceeded to the Spiller domicile at Schio, where the lady of the house found them clothes for their singed rags, and a fund of fifty lire was put together for their escape to Milan. Once there, Mariani lost no time in going to the Tosi works so as to give them time to invent an alibi for the lorry `against the moment when the authorities, from the number plate of the truck, would identify the proprietor and question them.'²⁸⁴ His caution was very timely, for on 24 September 1920 the catholic Corriere Vicentino gloatingly carried the following item.

AT MALO` The corpse discovered yesterday morning in the burntout bomb lorry has been identified. It is that of a twentyfive year old Milanese, a certain Mazzuchelli Angelo. The authorities are on the substantial trail of his four comrades and are shedding light on the mystery. Caution forbids us to say more.

Why then was it that in Mariani's words `notwithstanding that the brother of the deceased allied himself to the police to discover those who were with him, they never found out anything'?²⁸⁵ Surely the number plates of the truck would not have been illegible. Mantovani also notes that `stangely the investigations on the lorry...and those on the victim came to nothing.'²⁸⁶ Surely it would not have been so very hard to arrive at the name of the socialist comrade of Mazzuchelli, and then proceed to make enquiries at the Tosi works? The centralised Italian administrative system was designed to assume information from the periphery and emanate directives from the top. Why was it that the promising leads reported at Malo` went cold in Milan? By the end of the year these queries were compounded when a hunt for the usual suspects was unleashed by the police. Some eighty anarchists were arrested around the country between 15 and 17 October 1920 and their premisses searched.²⁸⁷ At Milan in December a group of shocktroopers led by Mario Carli, editor of the paper Testa di Ferro [Commando], who had coalesced with some anarchists to plan terrorist attacks, were arrested. Tasca wryly remarks that the police had an easy job of scotching these plans, since the leaders were amongst their informants. One of those involved was a student, Antonio Pietropaolo, who was subsequently involved in the Diana affair.²⁸⁸ At the very least the involvement of Pietropaolo in the Diana plot suggests amatuerism on the part of Mariani and Boldrini. In any case it is extremely suspicious that a person involved in a plot led by agents provocateurs should be involved, and in such short order, in another plot. Had the police determined to allow the Diana affair to mature, with at least two further trips to Monte Pasubio²⁸⁹, the better to observe subversion in action? Did it all get away from them? Or did they cynically allow the Diana attack to procede to fruition the better to incriminate and persecute the left?

Under police surveillance or not, the Diana plot matured rapidly in late March 1921, with a stock of plastic explosive so large that it would not all fit in a suitcase having been handily buried in the old Moiazza graveyard in metropolitan Milan. On the morning of 21 March, Malatesta and his comrades in prison entered their fourth day of hunger strike. Malatesta had refused water, and the rumour began to circulate that the septagenarian was at

death's door. He collapsed from weakness, and on the 22nd, his newspaper, Umanita` Nova, came out with the headline: `Comrades! Malatesta is Dying' That evening Prefect Lusignoli sent a situation report to Giolitti, mentioning that the Tosi works had come out on strike. At 10pm a fascist squad assaulted a socialist circle at Foro Buonaparte, murdering a worker. The next day Ordine Nuovo commented `legal protest shown to be insufficient against squadristo.'²⁹⁰ The conspirators, together with one Aguggini, occupied themselves with logistics, the evolving political situation and the movements of their target. That evening, on the basis of information or disinformation that Police Chief Gasti would be attending a performance at the Diana Theatre, the bomb placed there was exploded with devastating effect. But Questore Gasti was not there. Was his good fortune a matter of chance, of routine alteration of his plans as per security protocol, or did he act on precise knowledge of the terrorists' intent? Altogether the Diana affair still raises more questions than it lays to rest.

A subsequent report suggests that at the very least police had well laid plans to disarm the defenders of the socialist press in Milan, which they looked upon, rather perversely, as covering operations for insurrectionary purposes, notwithstanding that no more compromising or unlikely headquarters could be supposed. In early December 1921 Prefect Lusignoli of Milan reported retrospectively to Premier Bonomi, under the heading `Milano – Anarchist and Communist Movement; `I consider it opportune to communicate to Your Excellency the results obtained from the work of prevention and repression by this Questura to frustrate the effects of the dangerous propaganda employing every means undertaken by anarchist organisations and the communist party.' Nothing backward Lusignoli claimed that `to this work, which had great influence upon all the subversive organisations of the province and the Kingdom, is to be credited above all the failure of the communist and anarchist groups of this city to conserve the vitality they exhibited in the past biennium, during which their propaganda disseminating class hatred reached its maximum intensity, creating serious preoccupation and embarrassment on the part of the authorities entrusted with maintaining public order.' This, in short, was the conspiracy to which Malatesta, Borghi and Quaglino had supposedly been parties. Lusignoli attributed to the anarchist circles of the city a precise `strategy of tension'²⁹¹

Anarcoid and violent elements had passed from theory to practice inciting the more ardent to terrorist action by means of dynamite outrages so as to excite public panic amongst the bourgeoisie, thus giving form to an initial revolutionary movement from which according to them would issue forth the great revolution....The anarchists

believed that the hour had arrived to act and attack, doing as they said everything necessary to channel the revolutionary movement towards its objective, without any inhibition or half measures as desired by 'fellow travellers'

As examples of the preliminary episodes of this strategy, Lusignoli cited street fighting in the central Milan Galleria [celebrated in a painting as magnificently colourful as it was politically noxious by Bocconi], and bombings at the Restaurant Cova, the Hotel Cavour and 'the abominable crime at the Theatre Diana', all of which had occurred in the city of Milan. This analysis, apart from its underemphasis upon fascist violence, artful, artless or both as the case may have been, seems to be a fair report of thinking in some anarchist circles at least. Mariani was to recollect in his memoir that with activists being prosecuted for terrorism and the Occupation of the Factories underway 'we were convinced that the Italian people had finally decided to confront the great challenge of the revolution....no sincere revolutionary would question that the necessary prelude of a radical transformation in social relations had arrived.'²⁹² Moreover Lusignoli reported that

the premises of Umanita` Nova, the offices of the Committee Pro Political Victims [with which Fantin and comrades were to remain in contact after going into exile in Australia] and the headquarters of the [anarchosyndicalist] Unione Sindacale Italiana which unconditionally supported these anarchist operations were considered by this Office to be the propulsive centre of the nascent movement which was being organised.

Simini has noted that the authorities were plotting to collect evidence and build a case against the anarchists in general, the official models of the subversive, and Malatesta in particular, as early January 1920 in response to the Red Biennium at its height.²⁹³ It was this police work which led to the incarceration of Malatesta on charges of conspiracy against the state and his hungerstrike and collapse. Rumours of the old man's death in the days immediately preceding the Diana outrage were the trigger for it²⁹⁴. Traditional prejudice may well account for the inactivity or other involvement of the police whilst L'Umanita` Nova and L'Avanti! were being ransacked. Certainly there were lacunae in police knowledge of the Diana affair for many years after. Whilst Gaetano Panizzon was kept under routine political surveillance in Australia as an antifascist, the police were never aware that he had been one of the suppliers of the explosives used in the Diana outrage.²⁹⁵

Some of the mystery surrounding the Diana Affair was dispelled in 1929, when an informer came forward. The Ministry of the Interior noted on the CPC file of Luigi Spiller that

The Foreign Ministry...reports that Scorzato Luigi pater Orlando born Schio domiciled at Costermano Provincia Verona actually resident at Gondrecourt Department of the Meuse, one time member of the Communist Party, has revealed to the Royal Consul at Nancy that hitherto only the material executors of the massacre at the Theatre Diana have been arrested, whereas the suppliers of the explosives remain unpunished. These would be Spiller Luigi of Magre` di Schio who has taken refuge at Vailly Department of Aisne for fear of being arrested; Saggis Ottavio domiciled at Poleo near Schio and a third person also resident at Schio whose name he does not recall. All three would have collected hand grenades, sticks of dynamite and projectiles of every sort in the surrounding mountains, burying them in the garden of Saggis, consigning these materials shortly after to the principals come from Milano by automobile.

This sounds very much like an accurate account by a local source of one or more of the subsequent visits of Mariani and Boldrini to Schio. Clearly Scorzato was unaware that Spiller was dead, so to that extent the trail had gone cold. The forgotten third person could have been either Sperotto or Panizzon or another anarchist. If Sperotto or Panizzon was meant, it would appear that many of those concerned in the traffic of arms and munitions to the revolutionary movement including the brothers Fantin later emigrated. They may have had many reasons, but escaping the Damocles sword of living in a jurisdiction wherein they had committed a major criminal offence of a political character may well have been one of them. Certainly the five year suspended sentence hanging over Luigi Fantin as of October 1921 for verbally assaulting police was one of these considerations²⁹⁶, confirmed by the circumstance that he emigrated in the company of a committed subversive like Francesco Carmagnola, another probable participant in paramilitary activities.

In assessing these activities, we need to recall that they occurred in the context characterised by Spriano historically as one of civil war, and declared to be such by Malatesta in Umanita` Nova 8 September 1921, and in circumstances where the authorities were deeply compromised. The crime committed at the Diana Theatre was worse than a crime, it was a blunder, but we don't know to what extent accessories to the fact in the Schio district were in the know as to the intentions of the principals. The more professional the approach of the terrorists

to their grim work, the less their associates will have known, and the more determined these associates were, the less they will have asked. In that sense, ignorance would not constitute innocence, since as La Provincia di Vicenza remarked, those who visited Monte Pasubio to obtain explosives did not do so with pacific intent.²⁹⁷ That said, the principals at first came to Schio with a commission to collect weapons and munitions for the defence of a specific workplace, and is likely that they were received on this basis in good faith, since the workers of Schio also found themselves obliged to provide for their own defence. The materials collected on Monte Pasubio may in this sense be seen as having been diverted by the principals in the outrage from their intended purpose. But once the news of the lethal event at the Diana became public, all those involved will have known that they were at risk of coming to the attention of the police. This may well have been one of the factors that contributed to the decision of Francesco Fantin to emigrate.

#11: Labour, Capital & the State: The 1921 Textile Strike at Schio

The executive director communicates that the Federation of Industrial Wooleners has in recent days determined the repudiation of the labour contract.

Lanerossi Board of Directors 28 May 1921

While Fantin was away from the Schio district doing his national service in Bassano Province, an event occurred which was to powerfully condition his future and turn his face towards emigration to Australia. This was the textile strike of 1921, the defeat of which in upper Vicenza province led to the expulsion around the world of a generation of industrial and political activists from the Schio district, depriving them of the means of support for their resistance to nascent fascism. The strike was provoked by a massive wage cut in retaliation for the wage rises of the Red Biennium that had compensated for the wage depreciation of the Great War. This came as part of a wave of wage cuts imposed in the wake of the resolution of the Occupation of the Factories and the national elections of May 1921, bespeaking a new determination on the part of employers to worst the labour movement nationally. Locally the decision of the Lanerossi Board of Directors marked a decided return to the nineteenth century practices of labour coercion associated with the founder of the Lanerossi, Senator Alessandro Rossi. But while the decapitation and deportation of the leaders of the Schio labour movement was not unprecedented, one result of this episode of employer aggression was new. This was the emergence of Australia as a new migration destination from the Schio district. Ultimately, although Francesco Fantin was not personally involved in the 1921 textile strike, the departure of family, friends and comrades as a result of the strike and related factors was a major factor leading Fantin to the personal decision to join those who had preceded him in the antipodes.

If the Schio district was a provincial labour market and theatre of industrial conflict with many individual features, the post Great War era was one of increasing national integration industrially. The most important industrial development of the period was the establishment of the Confederation of Industry, the *Confindustria*, as the peak body of urban Italian industrial capital in March 1920, with a brief to confront organised labour. Thus it was that industrial hostilities in the Schio district which had been held over so as not mobilise

worker resistance during the national elections of May 15 1921 were opened by a report to the Lanerossi Board of Directors that another peak body, the *Federazione Industriali Lanieri*, [Federation of Industrial Wooleners] had repudiated the labour contracts in force. This meant that the gains of the Red Biennium, amounting to an improved subsistence won with industrial muscle, had been obliterated at the stroke of a pen, leaving Schio textile workers, the main body of the local workforce, no choice but to work at onerous management rates or strike. The economic context could not have been worse. May and June 1921 saw the extension of depression & unemployment. The collapse of the *Banca di Sconto* [Discount Bank] involved the Ansaldo industrial complex, a reckoning of accounts which had been coming since the Great War. Official unemployment rose precipitately from 102 156 in December 1920 to 400 000 in September 1921. The textile industry went into free fall in the woollen and the silk sectors.²⁹⁸

Hostilities opened with the dismissal of twenty five workers for absenteeism at the Lanerossi Pievebelvicino works in July 1921²⁹⁹, where Francesco Fantin had worked prior to being called up in September 1920 and where his cousin `Gina' Fantin, a year his younger, was caught up in events³⁰⁰. The executive director there, Engineer Gavazzi, later a prominent fascist, followed this provocation, announcing the dismissal of one hundred and fifty employees. The workers responded by demonstrating their resolve, sending a deputation to Gavazzi in Vicenza, which he did not receive, and challenging him to lock them out, which, with the example before him of other workplaces locked up in dispute, he chose not to do, effectively biding his time. He had given notice however to the workforce and the firm of his willingness in respect of the real measures to come. So it was that on 8 August 1921 the Lanerossi posted at its factory gates wage cuts of 6 Lire per day for men and 5 Lire for women, amounting to a reduction of over 30%. This low pay diktat was a virtual decree of little more than starvation wages. In keeping with the requirements of peak advocacy, negotiations were opened in Milan between the *Federazione Italiana Operai Tessili* [FIOT, affiliated to the CGL and the Socialist Party] and the Federation of Industrial Wooleners, affiliated to the *Confindustria*. The capitalists soon demonstrated their intransigence, with the FIOT accordingly declaring a strike for 11 August. Prefect Gutierrez advised the Ministry of the Interior that the textile workforce employed by the Rossi combine were striking `notwithstanding assurances received that negotiations at Milan between their representatives and the industrialists were proceeding with agreement probable' because `the conditions which the Federation was likely to accept were inferior to those which Lanerossi

management had initially offered³⁰¹. The strike thus involved one of the periodic crises of worker confidence in the union, with perhaps a tinge of syndacalistic thinking amongst the rank and file.

Again it cannot be too much emphasised that communists like Gramsci and Pietro Tresso represented a new generation of socialist, critical of the culture and institutions of their contemporaries and forebears in the labour movement whom they found wanting in political and industrial militancy. Communists saw themselves, not without reason, as bringing greater ethical and intellectual rigour and a higher standard of organisation to their socialism, above and beyond the proselytism of ideals that had been the hallmark of the socialists of the previous generation. For them, class struggle was not a phrase, but a revolutionary way of life in which hard knocks were expected, requiring, as Gramsci put it 'pessimism of the intelligence and optimism of the will'³⁰² This was one reason why, together with the failings and class nature of the liberal state, that communists, especially the followers of Bordiga but also Gramsci, tended to adopt the attitude of 'so much the worse, so much the better' [*tanto peggio, tanto meglio*]³⁰³ The rise of fascism was thus seen as clarifying class struggle, to the point of revealing the shortcomings of social democracy. The 1921 textile strike at Schio thus became a conflict on two fronts, between capital and labour and between different conceptions of socialism at odds as to how to wage the industrial action which the employers had forced onto the Schio working class. It was not surprising then that the strike showed some early signs of faltering. In mid August Prefect Gutierrez reported to the Ministry of the Interior the prospective return to work of employees of the firms of Rossi and Cazzola, but this seems to have been an optimistic interpretation of the industrial behaviour of a minority.³⁰⁴ Others took measures to challenge the authorities' protection of strikebreaking. This function of strike protection was one of the purposes for which the Red Guards had been formed, demonstrating anarchosindicalist tendencies within the socialist spectrum of the Schio labour movement, without however there being any affiliation to anarchosindicalist organisations. There were moreover, as we shall see, reservations about the practice of violence among the Schio Red Guards which distinguish this tendency as a partial one.

On 14 August 1921 a party lead by Luigi Sperotto was intercepted by a small party of carabinieri around sundown at Poleo as it made its return to Schio from collecting arms on Monte Pasubio the previous evening. The Red Guards dispersed effectively in the rough terrain, only Marcello Rader being apprehended with a machine gun belt of five hundred

rounds. Sperotto's house however was subsequently searched that same day and he was charged forthwith with illegal possession of an Austrian rifle, which he claimed to have brought home with him upon his discharge from military service in 1919. Sperotto was sentenced to three months imprisonment, this when fascists were bearing arms up and down the country with relative impunity. At any rate he appealed but lost, being further sentenced to pay 75 Lire costs.³⁰⁵ As of 17 August La Provincia di Vicenza was regularly reporting paramilitary action in support of the ongoing strike. On the previous evening the carabinieri stationed at Ponte Capre attended the scene of explosions in the vicinity of Fonte Margherita, where a car directed towards Schio had been attacked. Three individuals were discovered with explosives on their persons Giovanni Pietrobelli, Giovanni Eberle and Girolamo Cioccarello, 'all of them' as La Provincia di Vicenza reported 'workers at the Rossi establishment'. Just why they saw the car as a legitimate target was not stated. They may have associated it with the Rossi management, or alternately seen it as a bourgeois vehicle, given that cars were still beyond the means of proletarians in the district. A party of ten characterising themselves as People's Shocktroopers of Schio were challenged by the manager of the Merenzi firm which was engaged in collecting abandoned war materials and found in possession of 108 grenades and other explosives, plus five .91 model rifles with 100 full magazines. Those identified were Giovanni Piazza, Antonio Berna, Pietro Manea, Emilio Pietribiasi, Vittorio Mercante and Angelo Murari.³⁰⁶

Having provoked industrial tension by proposing savage wage cuts, and having sacked in fact 370,³⁰⁷ the Lanerossi sought to sabotage negotiations by further provocations. In the days preceding 18 August six workers were sacked for having held an industrial meeting at work. The intention was to incite retaliation by the workforce so that an excuse could be made for withdrawing from negotiations, entrenching wage cuts as a status quo ante. The workers however, whilst less industrially seasoned than the management and proprietors, were not stupid, and refused to be drawn, determining that they would reserve rectification of this injustice until the resolution of the dispute.³⁰⁸ By the end of August the employers had reconciled themselves to assuming responsibility for their own intransigence, and broke off talks refusing to countenance anything less than a 25% wage cut with mass sackings. Prefect Gutierrez reported a variagated pattern of resistance on 1 September 1921, with only forty women reporting to work at the Lanerossi Schio works, some 130 striking at Pievebelvicino, and no one striking at Piovene Rocchette.³⁰⁹

It was at this point in early September 1921 that the structural dichotomy of the workforce, divided between socialist and catholic unionists, began to play into the employer's hands. The catholic *Sindacato Italiano Tessili* [Italian Textile Workers' Union] made known its 'determination' to concede 'no more' than 22% wage cuts. Thus the SIT allowed itself to be an instrument of the management's bidding on rates of pay, and made no comment on the proposed sackings, against which its membership would have been indemnified, notifying its members that they should work if the FIOT went out on strike. This was nothing more than strike breaking under another name, justifying the socialist view of the SIT as a bosses union. This attitude was hardly surprising when the clerical Corriere Vicentino as early as May Day 1919 had observed that men of property were losing their antipathy for catholic unions 'as they are becoming convinced that only by coming to reasonable agreements with our unions can they avoid the first fruits of bolshevism.' The day the FIOT struck, the SIT formally fell into line, but at least two hundred of its members went to work under police guard. Even the conservative La Provincia di Vicenza found the behaviour of the catholic strikebreakers strange.³¹⁰ This ambiguity was even made public on 3 September in one clericopopulist weekly Il Popolo, in which the SIT, whilst declaring an unshakeable commitment to resistance, declared that only defeat would be secured by industrial action. This view was followed up by the signing of an accord with the employers on 6 September 1921, with Il Popolo on 11 September announcing victory on page three and inciting the workers to continued resistance on page four!³¹¹ By September 12 Prefect Gutierrez was able to report that 170 Lanerossi employees had returned to work at Schio, at Pievebelvicino 160 and at Torrebelvicino 60. At the smaller firms of Cazzola and Conte 20 and 40 workers had gone back to work. These were encouraging signs for the employers and the authorities, but they implied nonetheless that the bulk of the workforce remained on strike.³¹² What was happening in effect was that socialist organisation of the strike was holding, whilst the catholic union was functioning as a strikebreaking counterweight. Gutierrez reported as much on 15 September, noting that

The woolen establishments of Schio and nearby towns have reopened and some hundreds of workers from the catholic unions have returned to work, whilst the great majority of members of the socialist unions are persisting in the strike and agitate for its complete success.³¹³

But by this time the split between the catholic and socialist components of the workforce was giving Guterriez headaches from a public order point of view. 'The struggle between the factions' he reported to Rome 'is extremely heated, there are daily demonstrations and outrages are committed with bombs being thrown.' Guttierrez hastened to assure his superiors that he was protecting public order and the 'liberty of labour', the quaint official euphemism for strikebreaking. The liberal state had since Giolitti permitted the right to organise and strike whilst protecting strikebreakers' 'right' to accept the employers terms and take strikers' jobs. This allowed the state to permit the workers to collectively bargain, building a safety valve into the industrial relations system, whilst forcibly protecting bourgeois labour relations under cover of a language of even handedness. Thus the state conceded the right to strike whilst reserving the right to oppose strikes. It can readily be seen how strikers at Schio conceived of the necessity of paramilitary action to enforce the strike, becoming somewhat anarchosyndicalist in temperament in some quarters without necessarily being ideologically committed to the views of Sorel or affiliated to anarchosyndicalist organisations: the matter was practical, not theoretical. The authorities too saw their stance in terms of natural justice. Thus without once mentioning the strikers' interest, Gutierrez reassured Rome

I have given repeated categorical dispositions for absolute protection liberty of labour and maintenance public order and I have concentrated on the spot all the Carabinieri available, more than a hundred, sending also some companies of troops. Two days ago I established patrols by trucks which transit these localities and which have given good results with arrests for violation of the liberty of labour and carriage of weapons. It is foreseeable that the agitation will worsen...

Guterriez went on to complain of the lack of zeal of the young Vice Commissar of Public Security in charge of the dispute, requesting his replacement with one Commissioner Cavaliere [Knight] Francesco Mondojo, resident at Porto Maurizio in Liguria. This request was acceded to.³¹⁴ The confrontation was set to intensify.

On 16 September La Provincia di Vicenza reported scuffles between catholic unionists and strikers and carabinieri at key points of disturbance particularly at the Rossi establishments of Pievebelvicino and Torrebelvicino. On the previous morning a group of strikebreakers escorted by two Carabinieri had been attacked on their way to work in the

vicinity of Cristo, a grenade being thrown from cover of the terrain. Two of the strikebreakers were injured and their comrades much disconcerted. The assailant was undetected and made a clean getaway. Evidently he had been well trained in how to use groundcover and throw a grenade, probably by the military. At Poleo scuffles between strikebreakers and strikers led to the arrest of six of the latter. Another three strikers were arrested on suspicion of carrying grenades but were presumably found with none on their persons, else this would have been reported.³¹⁵ On 17 September the *Confindustria* wrote to the Minister of the Interior to complain that the implementation of the accord between the *Federazione Industriali Lanieri* and the catholic 'White Workers' Organisation' was 'being seriously impeded by extremist socialist elements' and requesting that the Minister 'give opportune and urgent dispositions for efficacious protection of the liberty of labour.'³¹⁶ This request begged a number of questions as to the implicit violence involved in provoking and breaking the strike, not to mention the behaviour of the police, questions which the *Confindustria* had no interest in asking, and the Government no inclination to answer, dispositions which amounted to a mutually agreeable understanding to oppose the strike. On 18 September the Socialist Deputy Panebianco foreshadowed his intention to raise a question in Parliament about 'the methods being used by the authorities towards the striking wooleners at Schio.'³¹⁷ By this time Il Popolo was reporting the partial return to work in triumphal tones, although it could not conceal the reluctance amongst the catholic rank and file to do so on the employers terms, such that 'the sirens wail unanswered their call to work.'³¹⁸ Within days Prefect Gutierrez reported to the DGPS that he had the situation at Schio in hand, acting as ringmaster for the employers and the catholic union whilst isolating the strikers.

I have been formally assured that the liberty of labour at Schio is absolutely protected as is recognised by the proprietors and management of the works themselves. The few isolated attacks to the contrary are quickly and energetically repressed and are not renewed. The very fact that the workers who have resumed work, although they are a minority of 500, opposed by 3200 strikers, go regularly to work at the mills, proves that they feel protected. Active and extensive surveillance continues and dispositions concerning possession and carriage of weapons are enforced with confiscation of arms and explosives and many arrests.³¹⁹

In this context the accusations of police brutality just would not go away, with the communist Deputy and former union official Domenico Marchioro acting as tribune and

alleging 'ferocious beatings' of strikers in custody.³²⁰ Prefect Gutierrez replied to requests from his superiors for information³²¹ by alleging that he had 'received no complaint or news of ill treatment of striking workers under arrest since the 19th instant, the day on which the Honourable Deputy Marchioro spoke to me of it vaguely without specifying names and particulars', all of which may have been true as far as it went. He launched a police inquiry, sending Cavaliere Alvera, Commissioner for Public Order and Commandant of the local Division of Carabinieri to Schio to investigate, and he reported 'excluding substantiation rumours.' He had interviewed alleged victims of police brutality indicated by Marchioro, but found they had 'presented no proof and couldn't justify their failure to make complaint, nor the circumstances of their failure to visit a doctor for the contusions they claim to have received.' In short the police claimed to find it suspicious that those alleging abuse should not have spent time and money on medical verification of injuries for presentation to police investigating police, who were indeed incensed by these allegations. Late in the strike in mid November Marchioro accused Doctor Cellurale, the Schio Deputy Commissioner for Public Security of beating one Carmassi, an organiser from Valdagno who had lead a party of strikers from there on a sympathy demonstration at Schio, and making mortal threats against others of his party. For this Deputy Marchioro intemperately styled him 'an ugly instrument dressed up as an agent of the law'³²², the offended official insisting that he would take legal measures against the authors of the allegations.³²³ Throughout the strike the 'impartiality' of the police was repeatedly affirmed by the Prefect, Police Chief and subordinate officers. The species of 'impartiality' dispensed throughout the strike may be best understood in the words of Commissioner Mandoj, the Public Security officer of iron sent in by Prefect Gutierrez at the height of the strike to stiffen the official response. At the end of the strike he wrote

Every morning three lorries property of the Lanerossi escorted by carabinieri collect workers from the more distant localities to transport them to Schio and then they are returned to their houses after work, whilst along the roads cavalry lead by carabinieri patrol to protect those workers on foot....During the strike over 200 domiciliary searches of the most noteworthy subversives were undertaken, many of which were unsuccessful...but many of which...issued in confiscations [of weapons, munitions and explosives].³²⁴

From a survey of the columns of La Provincia di Vicenza Simini estimates that over forty persons were taken into custody and more than fifty charged and released on bail. His

estimate of the weapons, munitions and explosive seized is of a similar order of substantial magnitude to that reported by Mandoj.³²⁵ Besides the two squadrons of cavalry from Verona and Padua³²⁶ and dozens of carabinieri stationed at Magre`, Poleo, and in the Rossi mills at Pievebelvicino, Torrebelticino and Schio together with the Cazzola mill at Schio,³²⁷ reinforced by the Verona Mobile Battalion of fifty carabinieri,³²⁸ two companies of infantry were involved in repression of the strike³²⁹ provoked by the employer. No wonder that the Signora Maria `Gina` Fantin Abrams recalled decades later that during the strike in which she participated as a worker at Pievebelvicino, `there were carabinieri everywhere.`³³⁰ Moreover a squad of around fifty fascist volunteers assisted the authorities in their duties, including breaking up pickets, employed much like special constables.³³¹ It is clear that the net effect of the efforts of the authorities, however nicely defined, was to exert constant pressure against the strikers and assist the imposition of the employer's will upon the workforce. This in turn provided justification for armed struggle for any strikers leary of violence.

In corroboration of these official denials of partiality the Lieutenant commanding the carabinieri at Schio offered the opinion that these `unfounded' accusations `were to be attributed to vendetta for the energy with which the liberty of labour was enforced.' We may taken it as given then that the liberty of labour was indeed energetically enforced at Schio during the textile strike of 1921. Satisfied with so much, Prefect Gutierrez was willing to address persistent rumours with another police investigation.³³² The strike leaders Isidoro Marchioro and Pietro Tresso, a gifted orator³³³, were prosecuted for offence against the liberty of labour for exhorting strikers `to prevent by any means the entry of white league workers to the mills', being defined for good measure amongst other sympathisers as extraneous to the strike.³³⁴ These exhortations were considered the ultimate political cause of dynamite attacks against the houses of catholic workers including a catholic unionist, one Murari of Schio. According to provincial Police Chief Poli, there was a further grenade attack on 22 September at Magre` adjacent to San Vito, with further attacks on catholic workers' domiciles and the church presbytery on the 23rd being reported in La Provincia di Vicenza the next day. Damage to the electrical line serving the Rossi works at Pievebelvicino was stigmatised in the same issue as luddite `vandalism' as if it were random and senseless and not industrially focussed.³³⁵ Having clearly identified the church as an ideological support of strikebreaking, the church at Poleo was attacked just prior to 30 September by means of explosives attached to the clapper of the church bell. Another charge laid inside the church failed to go off.³³⁶ In this period five of the strike leaders at Schio and ten in the Valdagno

were arrested for design upon the liberty of labour by means of explosives. Another half dozen youths were arrested at Schio on the vague charge that 'the city lacked normal tranquil public order'. The protests of the CGL failed to disturb the confidence of the Prefect in the impartiality of the men under his command and he dispatched the Police Chief and the commandant of carabinieri to make the usual inquiries. Since by definition in defending the liberty of labour of the strikebreakers the authorities did not cease to 'impartially' permit the right to strike, there was no doubt as to the findings of this further official inquiry. Meanwhile thirty strikers, mainly women, were arrested for impeding the return to work, with half a dozen being charged with making armed threats against the carabinieri and others charged with illegal possession of weapons or throwing grenades.³³⁷

The Political Secretary of the Partito Popolare joined in the exchange of allegations on 29 September 1921, writing to Premier Bonomi to complain of armed attacks in the neighbouring Valdagno on 'the white rank and file and their families on the part of subversive elements instigated by their local leaders and propagandists sent hither for that purpose'. If the competition between the rival unions was willing, the Partito Popolare was manifestly wrong in claiming that the authorities 'were totally indifferent to these deplorable incidents'. For his pains the Political Secretary received a note assuring him that the judicial authorities were proceeding in the matter and that 'with opportune preventive measures, such unpleasant incidents would not take place in the future.'³³⁸ The Honourable Panebianco had moreover not disappeared but presented a notice of motion questioning the impartiality of the government's stance on 'economic conflicts' given the favour extended to the employers at Schio, in apparent contravention of the accepted practice of 'impartiality' dating back to the Giolitti era. Specific allegations were made that soldiers in the engineering corp were working as boiler attendants and that military transport was being put at the disposition of the proprietors, together with renewed allegations of arbitrary arrest and brutality. Gutierrez was happy to reply in detail that the transports were the property of the firm and 'are simply escorted by carabinieri to protect them from the violence of the strikers'. As to sappers stoking the boilers two engineers had kept up the boiler pressure but for a few days last September only, 'so as to guarantee the operation of the fire pumps.' They had long since returned to Verona.³³⁹ All of this was perfectly true no doubt, but it was also true that by means of this *fait accompli* and other measures the government as per usual was systematically favouring shareholders in a dispute provoked by management with their workforce. As the liberal era lurched towards its close in Italy, the 1921 textile strike

assumed the classic form of triangular confrontation between labour, capital and the state, with the state 'even handedly' managing the dispute by allowing labour to strike de jure while opposing it de facto. Little wonder that Domenico Marchioro had wired the Socialist party leadership quite early in the proceedings 'authorities at complete disposition of the bosses'.³⁴⁰

#12: Industrial Deportation at Schio 1921 - 2

Every emigrant has a drama within, even before leaving Italy

Gramsci³⁴¹

By late September the Schio textile workers were beginning to tire and attempting to garner support. At Biella in Piemonte a national convention of textile workers was held with the CGL in attendance. The proposal of a general strike in support of the textile workers was supported by the category, but not by the CGL.³⁴² Refusing to be discouraged, the proposal was put on 8 October to the General Council of Labour of Vicenza and Province, which sent a delegation to the CGL endorsing the proposal of a general strike, but the CGL preferred to propose a commission to ascertain the real financial state of the firms in dispute with their workforce.³⁴³ As early as 5 October a return to work was underway in the textile sector, with workers who had been starved into submission appearing at the factory gates. At the central Rossi works at Schio 561 workers were at their stations, with 2,500 job applications in the hands of management.³⁴⁴ By 9 October Prefect Gutierrez was reporting to Rome that the strike was 'stationary', with a 'recrudescence of attacks directed against workers going to work.' In the late afternoon after an early morning attack at Pievebelvicino on the house of Mario Mercante, a catholic activist, a well executed attack by rifle fire was made on a truck carrying strikebreakers at Poleo. Carabinieri escorting the transport returned fire and gave chase, but no one was arrested or wounded.³⁴⁵ It is probable that the intent of the attackers was to disable the vehicle by blowing out its tires.

By this stage it was clear that the strikers were coordinating their attacks to disrupt strikebreaking. As the issue of the strike lay in the balance incident followed upon incident. On 10 October there were three separate episodes of property damage at Poleo to the houses of catholic workers. On one of these occasions the explosion was followed up with a fusillade of some twenty shots, and in two incidents, one at Torrebelticino, charges laid failed to explode. In a sixth case an inadequate charge to an aqueduct servicing a Rossi establishment inflicted light damage. At this time half a dozen grenades were found in an open field at Magre` near San Vito.³⁴⁶ On 11 October La Provincia di Vicenza reported 'New Attacks at Schio' by 'anarcoides'. Again these were domiciliary attacks with explosives, the first against a catholic unionist and the second against Signor Crestana, one of the Rossi managers. Power

limes were several times attacked with explosives. Clearly the intent of these attacks was to intimidate scab labour and interrupt energy and other essential inputs to the Lanerossi. That no one was killed in these incidents must be attributed to good management by the strikers, who lacked homicidal intent and were more concerned to show what they could do rather than take life if that could be avoided.

In these interesting times a Prefect's lot was not always a happy one, for the judiciary from time to time exercised its independence. Thus Gutierrez was disconcerted to report on 12 October that the Valdagno strike leaders had been released, a development that would have heartened their comrades at Schio as much as it irritated the mainstream press.³⁴⁷ It was a tidings however of forlorn hope, not that the authorities did not have their problems. An ineffectual attempt to dynamite the electricity substation in cul de sac Museo Vecchio at Schio was reported by La Provincia di Vicenza on 13 October.³⁴⁸ It was one of the last major incidents of its kind. On the 14th the Ministry of the Interior was obliged to report that it had not received a request for reinforcements, requesting that it be repeated, adding 'recommend intensify activity to avoid repetition attacks with firearms and explosives.'³⁴⁹ An attack against an electrical pylon serving the Rossi works at Schio was reported to the Ministry of the Interior on 17 October. That same day Prefect Gutierrez reported that at Torrelvicino and Poleo weapons and munitions had been found in the vicinity of strikers' homes. He accordingly requested reinforcement by the fifty strong Verona flying squad of carabinieri, and banned demonstrations and transit by bicycle 'because the authors of these outrages adopt this method to subtract themselves from justice.'³⁵⁰ In short the Red Guards were adopting hit and run guerrilla urban warfare tactics aimed at intimidation rather than loss of life, and they were employing bicycles for mobility and communications. Their objectives, partly achieved, were intimidation and disruption, but were deliberately short of being lethal. It was at this very moment of the crisis of the strike when news and parliamentary representations of the strike attracted the Premier's attention and Bonomi requested details of the situation.³⁵¹ Gutierrez replied the same day that 'the workforce is extremely tired and disposed to accept readmission to available work.' The Prefect undertook to redouble his efforts to persuade workers and management to resolve the dispute.³⁵² Here the state acted as an 'honest' broker, catering to vested interests, easing the acceptance of the worst possible terms for the people, removing a risk to the peace for its own convenience. The firm chose this moment to reassert its intransigence offering work 'with antistrike conditions' at a pay rate of 20% less than formerly.' It also claimed the right to politically cull its employees, as

Prefect Gutierrez replied to the earlier enquiries of Premier Bonomi, ostensibly because 'current industrial conditions do not permit the rehiring of the entire workforce.'³⁵³ At the end of October, with the outcome of the strike in the balance and social tension in the Schio district at its height, the Prefect suspended the right to demonstrate, preventing a manifestation of solidarity between the strikers of the Valdagno and Schio on grounds of public security³⁵⁴. By 7 November the resistance of the strikers was weakening as they began to be starved into submission. Gutierrez reported

This morning at the Schio mill another 356 strikers presented for work, making a total workforce of 1202.³⁵⁵

Remembering that a skeleton workforce of five hundred catholics had staffed the mill since September, this meant that a workforce double that size was now drawing as many recruits again from those who had previously refused to work on their masters' terms. This was the day the strike became, in the words of the Prefect who had helped the employers wrestle it into the ground, 'a lost cause.'³⁵⁶ On the 10th he updated the Ministry of War that 'another 350 workers are back at work which permits hope that the end of the strike is near.' Clearly the return to work was well underway by this time. But with 3000 still on strike Gutierrez felt it would be premature if the cavalry squadron on duty at Schio were withdrawn.³⁵⁷ The following day the trend again handsomely warranted the Prefect's confidence.

At the Schio mills 1425 workers presented for work today. Between today and yesterday 1500 job applications have been made...the strike may be said to be virtually over.

The same day the Provincia di Vicenza reported the failure of the De Pretto strike, the workers returning without punitive dismissals but at a salary reduced by 15%.³⁵⁸ Nonetheless as late as 17 November the vicentine General Council of Labour struck a levy to provide for strike pay, and Tasca for the Communist Party argued vehemently that the Italian proletariat could not afford a defeat for the textile workers struggling in isolation. The CGL however meeting at Verona once again refused to countenance the extension of the strike.³⁵⁹ Within a matter of days, on 23 November 1921 the National Textile Workers Convention sitting in Milan declared the end of the strike. Tresso for the communists of Schio plausibly blamed the national leadership of the FIOT and the CGL for the defeat³⁶⁰, but their lack of enthusiasm

for a dispute provoked by the employer at a time of its choosing was understandable. They had merely forgotten that sometimes it is better to fight and lose than not to fight at all. Defeat was absolute, with many hundreds of the strikers being refused work.³⁶¹

This process of victimisation was traditional Rossi labour management policy, in the early twentieth century under Baron Rossi as in the late nineteenth century under Senator Rossi, allowing the decapitation of the leadership of a militant workforce and its replacement with cowed survivors and strikebreakers. Periodic industrial disputes provoked by wage cuts were at the heart of the Rossi labour management policy of turning over its workforce to keep it docile and productive at low rates of pay over a period of generations. These Rossi traditions were brought into play in 1921 with the national industrial situation as exemplified by the wage cut decreed by the Federation of Industrial Wooleners. The Rossi management assumed no responsibility for its actions, not only citing employment conditions as objective 'industrial' conditions outside its control as reported by Gutierrez to Bonomi, but also taking the opportunity to inform its shareholders, in reporting its 1921 dividend of 100 Lire, that the strike had been caused by the refusal of the workforce to accept 'a reasonable wage cut'. The management was quite explicit that it had acted in keeping with long term practice, the strike having lasted for some three months 'due to serious disciplinary divergences regarding which your Board did not feel inclined to yield so as not to compromise the fundamental principles of the governance of the firm.'³⁶² In the name of these 'fundamental principles' the firm was permitted to breach the industrial and social peace of the community, with the state 'evenhandedly' providing security for the supply of strikebreaking labour through the industrial wing of the Church, long complicit with Rossi management. Many another industrial relations regimen can be imagined which would have given less encouragement to firms like the Lanerossi for industrial blackguardry and bloody mindedness. The liberal state was complicit in these processes at the very highest level, as the reply of Prefect Gutierrez to Premier Bonomi demonstrates. Gutierrez implicitly endorsed company policy on selective rehiring of the workforce by default in failing to comment upon it in his report.³⁶³ In the wake of the strike in early December 1921 some 2,000 were unemployed at Schio, almost as many as were in employment.³⁶⁴ It is accordingly not to be wondered at that the Italian labour movement was not particularly grateful to Giolitti for his grant of the right to organise, hemmed about as it was with insidious legal fictions. It is true that almost any state apparatus might have contested the paramilitary activities of the strikers. But it is even more fundamentally true that the arming of the labour movement in late liberal Italy was a function

of the unjust industrial relations system and postwar conditions. Had their experience and expectations not been otherwise, the case for paramilitary worker defence would not have been so plausible. As it was, the Schio labour movement did not have a paramilitary arm because it was doctrinally anarchosynicalist, although many of the Red Guards may have had tendencies in that general direction. Rather the Red Guards arose because from any practical point of view they were a structural necessity of contemporary industrial relations and politics.

There is plentiful evidence moreover of the attention to detail with which the Lanerossi and its institutional and political allies went about the victimisation of the defeated labour movement. As early as January 1922 the catholic Mayor of Schio, who had publicly supported strikebreaking during the textile dispute, wrote

To the Illustrious signor Royal Police Chief, Vicenza. The bearer of these presents is one Sperotto Luigi of Schio, who has requested a passport. Sperotto, unemployed for some months, is in a most miserable condition, and therefore has urgent and absolute need to emigrate overseas where he has been assured of immediate employment. In his regard the office of Public Security will have furnished Your Excellency with detailed information to the same end. I therefore pray that Your Excellency will give all valid facilitation so that the aforesaid may be given a passport with all dispatch. Thanking you in anticipation, with my respects, the Mayor.

The reference to the period that Sperotto had been unemployed suggests that he was one of those whom the firm had sacked at the outset of the strike. It will be remembered that he was a prominent Red Guard, instigator of the attack on the Bar Summano in August 1920, involved in the successful defence of the Schio Chamber of Labour in January 1921 and arrested in August 1921 just as the textile dispute was breaking out for unlicensed possession of a weapon after he had been reported for leading a party of youths to Monte Pasubio to collect explosives. The three month jail term he was sentenced to at that time³⁶⁵ meant that like Fantin he was not further involved in the dispute. Since he was destitute and blacklisted on release he must have had financial support to purchase his ticket to Australia, which oral tradition and the documentary record have established as his destination. It is virtually certain that the Lanerossi, anxious to be rid of him, would have done this, if indeed he did not employ the last of his own funds.

Certainly it did so in the case of dozens of those who were amongst the most resolute strikers. The archives of the firm contain a document entitled 'Workers leaving Schio subsidised by the Mill.' The typescript list covers one and a half pages detailing the names of the workers concerned, the destination and the amounts paid. The most common destination was Belgium, whose textile industry and mines offered alternative employment. Destinations included internal transfers to such Italian cities as Ivrea, Milan, Florence, Bergamo, Porto Maurizio, Inveruno, Mirandola and Magenta. But most chose foreign exile, in places designated as New York, Brasile, America and France. The second most common destination of these socioeconomic deportees was Australia. A dozen Lanerossi employees accepted the substantial sum of 2500 Lire, about half their former annual salary, to emigrate to Australia. Their names headed this list of industrial deportees, as befitted those on whose exile most expenditure had been lavished. Two more accepted amounts of 100 Lire to defray their expenses to the same destination. Amongst the most distinguished dozen were names to conjure with in the annals of the Schio labour movement. Valentino Montanaro had been the designated philosopher of the Red Bicyclists who before the war had carried the socialist gospel to those they were pleased to consider the priest ridden peasantry of the district. Montanaro as such was certainly known to Pietro Tresso, socialist youth organiser and Red Bicyclist with responsibility for sociocology and rhetoric,³⁶⁶ and editor after the war of Communist Struggle [*Lotta Comunista*] which would report the exodus of the local proletarian industrial vanguard. The anarchist Gaetano Panizzon of Magre` near San Vito, one of the suppliers of explosives to the principals of the Diana outrage, who was to be a friend, comrade and workmate of Fantin in Australia, was likewise paid to disappear from the district. This accords with Panizzon family tradition that he was persecuted and owed his escape to a Lanerossi executive who authorised his departure. Panizzon is believed by Fantin's Bortoloso descendants to have been the author of a posthumous letter hailing Fantin as 'an antifascist of the first hour', which certainly corresponds with another posthumous commemoration of the anniversary of his assassination which emphasised the youthfulness of his early political commitment in the Schio district.³⁶⁷ When Montanaro and Panizzon left together for Australia in January 1922 as victims of the strike 'to hunt for their bread', the event was recorded with sorrow and solidarity by Communist Struggle, the PcdI organ for the provinces of Vicenza, Verona and Trento.

Communist Struggle was very close to the defeated strikers. One group which departed for Australia in March 1922 made a parting donation of 6 Lire to 'their fighting

paper’³⁶⁸ Likewise commemorated in April were the ‘dear comrades Fabris Iginò and Gresele Luigi’, the two civilians who had been socialising with the two gunners subsequently shot for trivial insubordination at Magre` by General Andrea Graziani in 1916. Another departure recorded by the communist journal in May 1922 was that of Guerrino dalla Costa, a member of the third group of strike victims to leave for Australia commemorated by Communist Struggle.³⁶⁹ Giovanni Piazza was one of the Red Guards bailed up collecting weapons and munitions on Monte Pasubio in August 1921 at the outbreak of the textile dispute by the contractor Merenzi.³⁷⁰ These were the elders, near contemporaries and peers of Francesco Fantin and his brothers. The first of these three groups, which left for Australia in April made a donation for the rebuilding of the textile union and promised to return ‘to resume their battle stations.’³⁷¹ This was an ambition of Fantin also, and evokes Rushdie’s characterisation of exile as ‘a dream of glorious return.’³⁷² Simini records the recollection of the emigration to Australia of the brothers Alfonso, Francesco and Luigi ‘Fanchin’,³⁷³ their surname orally transmogrified but the given names too distinctive as a trio to be mistaken. As late as April 1987 an anonymous elderly gentleman in the bar of the ‘Due Spade’ Hotel recalled the brothers Fantin as amongst those who emigrated to Australia at this time, and was aware of the ultimate fate of Francesco Fantin.³⁷⁴

Along with those whose industrial deportation by the firm can be demonstrated, there were many who accepted emigration rather than work on the employer’s harsh new terms or simply departed because they felt that earning a living had become too difficult. The emergence of Australia as a migration destination in the Schio district can be traced from the registers kept by each municipality as a record of the police clearances necessary for each applicant. Prior to the 1921 textile dispute, there were very few requests in the Schio district for passports for Australia. The register of passport requests for Magre` di Schio 1911 – June 30 1914 shows only two such requests, in September 1911 for the agriculturalist Giacomo Ruana and the worker Ernesto Riccardo Lupo. The ensuing register for this municipality for late 1914 to 1928 records no other passport requests for Australia prior to the textile dispute. Then in December 1921, shortly before the requests of Panizzon and Montanaro were lodged on Christmas eve no less, two were lodged by the peasants Vittorio Gavasso and Giovanni Meneghello. In January 1922 Luigi Spiller requested a passport for France: his motives for wanting to leave the country have already been discussed. In February 1922 the labourer Luigi Gresele, a victim of the textile dispute, applied for a passport to Australia, followed within the month by fellow labourer Gino Fabris, also paid off by the Lanerossi, together

with fellow labourers [and Lanerossi employees?] Giovanni Gavasso, Luigi Ciscato, and Francesco Sartori, alongside the carpenter Antonio Caiceholo, the mechanic Massimiliano Carraro and the peasant Silvio Zanrosso. They were followed in March by the bricklayer Umberto Bonollo and the agriculturalist Giovanni Dall'Amico. In May they were joined by the carpenter Gaetano Zanrosso, by the agriculturalist Giuseppe Casarotto, and by the waitress Apollonia Buzzucopero, the first female emigrant from Magre` to Australia. She was emulated in 1923 by Maria Fontanin Bonollo, who applied to join her husband Umberto, and Virginia Zanrosso. The next to apply for a passport for Australia from Magre` was Emma Ciscato in 1925. She was followed in 1927 by Giuseppe Fillipi and Clelia Lapo, possibly a relative of Ernesto Lapo who had applied to emigrate in 1911 and was subsequently one of the defendants tried for treason by the military tribunal at Pradamano³⁷⁵. In the same year Giovanni Gavasso, Silvio Zanrosso, and Emilio Bonollo applied to leave Magre`, probably to join relatives who had departed after the textile strike. They were followed in 1928 by Luigi di Munari, originally of San Vito, and Luigino Dall'Amico. The wood working trades at Magre`, and as we shall see at Schio, seem to have suffered also from the employers offensive. The character of female migration seems familial in the Bonollo and Lapo cases, in keeping with the traditional practice of women joining relatives or partners who had preceded them to scout the destination.

It would appear then that the sequelae of the textile dispute and the deteriorating industrial and economic position of the working class in the years extending from late 1921 to the consolidation of the fascist police state in 1922-9 saw the advent of Australia as a migration destination due to industrial deportation and chain migration involving political affinities, parentela and locality. In Montanaro and Panizzon, Gresele and Fabris, Magre` lost key exponents of its characteristically leftist labor movement, centred on its House of the People, where, as Comunist Struggle reported in January 1922, there habitually gathered

to exchange communications, to read, instruct and divert themselves, socialists, anarchists, communists and workers sympathetic towards one or another tendency without belonging to any. All interested themselves more or less dutifully in the labour struggles which regarded them.³⁷⁶

Fantin is known to have frequented this institution.³⁷⁷ Similar findings result from the analysis of contemporary passport registers of the city of Schio. The Schio city register for

passport applications from 1915 – 20 contains only two requests for passports to Australia. In the wake of the strike such applications became numerous for the first time, with known victims of the strike being amongst the first to apply to emigrate. It is interesting to note indeed that the Schio passport register for 1920 – 24 records only two requests for passports for Australia prior to November 1921 when the fate of the strike became apparent. Giovanni Piazza, Cirillo Prendin, Gerardo Pozzan, Luigi Organo, Giuseppe Miglioranza, and Guerrino Dalla Costa were amongst those paid half salaries by the Lanerossi to leave the district for Australia. Dalla Costa was one of the signatories for the statement made by the third party of strike victims to leave Schio for Australia in May 1922, along with Giuseppe Santacatterina,³⁷⁸ who once dismissed from the Schio works seems to have funded his own exile, and Raimondo Quartese, formerly of the Pieve works,³⁷⁹ who accepted 750 Lire to decamp to Belgium. Indeed almost everyone who applied to emigrate from Schio in December 1921 and January 1922 had a political profile and political and industrial motives for emigrating amongst others. Emilio Pietrobiasi who applied to emigrate in February 1922 was one of those bailed up collecting weapons on Monte Pasubio by the contractor Mercante in August 1921.³⁸⁰ These foremost of comrades applied for passports in late 1921 or the first quarter of 1922, and emigrated by the end of Spring 1922, judging from La Lotta Comunista. Once defeated industrially they had to make alternative arrangements fairly quickly, lest their cash reserves ran out.

Just how politicised were the other emigrants of this period is uncertain, but if few were as political as these cadres it seems likely that a good many who applied for police clearance to emigrate to this novel destination would have shared in some part their outlook on the industrial and economic scene in the district. Even the apolitical would have been radicalised by the severity of the prospect facing them if they stayed in the district. Certainly there was an upsurge in emigration inclusive of Australia at this time that suggests a degree of likemindedness on the part of other applicants. [See Table below] Short of comprehensive biographical profiling of all emigrants to Australia from the Schio district, these probabilities define the extent of our knowledge about the motivation of these migrants. What is certain is that political emigration was from the outset a catalytic aspect of the migration process from the Schio district to Australia. Just what prospects these migrants believed awaited them in Australia is also uncertain, but they must have been hopeful, and as we shall see, vague utopian ideals of equity for workers in the antipodes were current in Vicentine socialist circles, and we know Fantin, who delayed his emigration until 1924, was affected by these

notions.³⁸¹ We can see also how chain migration processes such as family reconstitution arose once political emigration had pioneered and fuelled migration. The emigration of Mario Niovanni in March 1922 may very well have been a consequence in part of that of the cooper Umberto and the carpenter Giuseppe in September of the previous year, yet more evidence of industrial fallout in the district timber trades. It should be noted that this family were originally from San Vito, suggesting that the village had an early pedigree as a migration homeland. The Berlato and Dal Brun cases are also examples of family reconstitution integral to chain migration.

Schio passport register [Nulla Osta] 1920 – 24:

Applications for passport to Australia June 1921 – December 1922

Date	Application No	Surname	Given Name	Vocation	Born
Sept 1921	55	Niovanni	Umberto	Cooper	SVL
November	73	“	Giuseppe	Carpenter	SVL
	75	Cerbaro	Angelo	Labourer	
	76	Giuretto	Giuseppe	textile worker	
	77	Basso	Pietro	Driver	
	78	Aramini	Lucillo	Peasant	
	84	Prendin	Cirillo	textile worker	
December	85	Organo	Luigi	Peasant	
	86	Miglioranza	Giuseppe	worker peasant	
	92	Marchiori	Francesco	fitter & turner	
	94	Sperotto	Luigi		
	95	Pozzan	Gerardo	textile worker	
	96	Lissa	Domenico	Peasant	
			Silvio		
			Luciano		
			Totelina		
	97	Lissa	Angela		
		[Rader in]			
	99	Di Cocco	Raffaello	Butcher	
	103	Meneghini	Santo	Bricklayer	
Jan. 1922	16	Quartese	Raimondo	Labourer	
	24	Piazza	Giovanni	textile worker	
February	30	Dalla Costa	Guerrino	Carder	
	31	Santacatterina	Giuseppe	textile worker	
	33	Cuttere	Francesco		
	34	Veronese	Basilio		
	35	Savio	Pietro	Worker	
	36	Danieli	Francesco		
	44	Cattelan	Giuseppe		

	51	Pietribiasi	Emilio	textile worker	
	54	Santacatterina	Domenico		
Mar. 1922	57	Santacatterina	Giuseppe	Stonemason	
	58	Meneghini	Giovanni	Worker	
	61	Piazza	Giuseppe		
	62	Zambon	Luigi		
	69	Dall'Alba	Emilio	Bricklayer	
	70	Dal Brun	Francesco	Bricklayer	
	71	Serman	Gelindo		
	72	Gasparin	Marco		
	73	Niovanni	Mario		SVL
	77	Berna	Attilio		
	82	Scapin	Giobatta		
	83	Sella	Luigi		
	84	Dal Brun	Alvise	Printer	
	85	Soliman	Antonio		
	86	Baton	Francesco	Labourer	
	88	Dal Brun	Albina	Housewife	
		[Menara in]	Aurora		
	89	Dal Brun	Elvira		
	91	Zanella	Pietro	cement worker	
	92	De Rizzo	Santo	Carpenter	
	93	De Rigo	Francesco		
	94	Dalle Mese	Giacomo		
	95	Dettin	Pietro		
	96	Trentin	Basilio		
	100	Raumer	Giuseppe	Carpenter	
April 1922	101	Cavion	Giulio		
	102	Ruaro	Pietro		
	103	Pozzan	Marco		
	104	Cremonese	Teresa	Worker	
	105	Sartori	Angelo	Porter	
	120	Carlini	Riccardo		

July	147	Bertolato	Silvio	Worker
	148	Cosa	Alessandro	Mechanic
	149	Pietrobelli	Guido	Mechanic
	150	Comin	Giuseppe	Mechanic
October	187	Cavion	Giacomo	Peasant
	188	Cavio	Giuseppe	Peasant
	198	Raumer	Maria	
	199	Raumer	Libero	Carpenter
November	202	De Munari	Luigia	
	203	Beninca`	Irminia	
	204	Beninca`	Pietro	
	205	Beninca`	Elvira,	
		[Carlini in]	Rinaldo & Rinato	
December	224	Santacatterina	Antonio	Bricklayer
	227	Dalla Ca	Maria	Worker
	230	Berlato	Maria	
		[Pietrobelli in]	Bruna	

After the industrial defeats of 1921, the labour movement belatedly attempted to implement a united front in February 1922, the Alliance of Labour. This failed because of fascist violence and the political contradiction between its reformist leadership under D'Arragona of the CGL and the communists, who while supportive of the concept of the Alliance, thought the industrial militancy of those in the labour movement who remained resolute after the March on Rome should be organised into a general strike against the nascent fascist regime.³⁸² At Schio in early 1922 a demonstration in favour of the Alliance at the *Teatro Sociale* saw the unprecedented appearance of a representative of the syndicalist *Unione Sindacale Italiana*, an exception which proves the rule of the marginality in the district of syndicalism.³⁸³ These tensions, which evoked the recent communist polemic about social democratic 'social fascism', lead directly to the debacle of the belated Legalitarian Strike of early August 1922. The Legalitarian Strike at Schio as elsewhere was a footnote to the coercion, divisions and industrial defeat suffered after September 1920³⁸⁴. The strike saw the labour movement isolated against the united array of employers, press, and church, with the authorities everywhere supporting the fascists against the strikers³⁸⁵. As in the 1921 textile strike, lorries transported catholic strikebreakers to and from work under police escort. At the factory gates uniformed fascists armed with the streetfighting accoutrements of dagger, pistol or cosh stood at the orders of a carabinieri, or even in command of several of these military police.³⁸⁶ The defeat of the Legalitarian Strike destroyed the Alliance and was a matter of too little too late. Conceived as a form of out of doors support by the increasingly isolated parliamentary wing of the Socialist Party, and undertaken with considerable reluctance by many unionists,³⁸⁷ it was doomed to failure once the antifascist parties had failed to provide for paramilitary defence of a united front through the People's Shocktroopers. Indeed the strike was only successful there where some local remnants of worker defence militia remained operative.³⁸⁸ Otherwise it had no defined objective beyond protest, and exposed workers to fascist reprisals endorsed by broadsides from the liberal press, far more concerned with worshipping at the altar of mammon as a guiding principle than with the defence of so called constitutional liberal democracy.

Had the demands which had emerged from the war for a constituent assembly embodying labour rights not been overthrown in favour of verbal sovietism and facile talk of the dictatorship of the proletariat, socialism would have been better served, with paramilitary mobilisation being held in reserve for defence against the risks of reaction. Institutional guarantees which remain visionary to this day could have been laid down. But this is not to

say that a more timely, opportune and circumspect projection of socialism as an expansion of the rule of law would have failed as did the Legalitarian strike. In fact at the conclusion of his study on the advent of fascism, Tasca argued that experience had shown that a legalitarian revolution was the only way to defeat fascism. Certainly the sort of mass enthusiasm which was mobilised and sustained during the Red Biennium would have been necessary, and in this sense as Gramsci argued in June 1921`only an insurrection of the masses can shatter a reactionary coup',³⁸⁹ Nevertheless, starting from the point that `antifascism can only prevail with difficulty if it is obliged to conduct a struggle on two fronts' Tasca argued that

The antifascist struggle is a *three cornered fight*: on the *antifascist front* which must be as broad as possible, with the *fascist bloc* which must be overwhelmed as much as possible, and the *state* whose forces must be mobilised in defence of democracy.

Victory over fascism is not possible except through a *political* strategy which takes account of these three elements and which arrives at their deployment in such a way that `the balance of power' is on the side of democracy',³⁹⁰

The Legalitarian Strike was the Caporetto of Italian socialism precisely because, under pressure and amidst the contradiction of many points of view, the necessary political lucidity was lacking. From a progressive point of view, it has to be admitted that the political elite of the liberal state gave little enough grounds for confidence. By the same token, loose socialist talk of the violent overthrow of a constitutional regime embodying a measure of democracy in the face of the authoritarian challenge as it had emerged from the Crispi regime and thereafter had hardly helped matters. The political shadow boxing of all parties on the democratic spectrum from liberalism to socialism left all concerned wrestling with phantoms. Even in the weeks prior to the strike Mussolini had taunted his adversaries with their disarray. On July 15 1922 he boasted in the Popolo d'Italia

The maximum of confusion reigns in the enemy camp. There are those who appeal to the government; those who threaten a general strike; those who recommend patience and delay. They have no watchwords, they have no plan. Once again they call us bandits, rabble, barbarians, slave drivers, sold out brigands. As if we give a f*** You publish useless insults, gentlemen. We respond sabotaging your bones politically and industrially, with clinical remorselessness.³⁹¹

After the defeat of the Legalitarian Strike, with the complicity of the state, the liberal press and the bulk of bourgeoisie civil society, the way was clear for the March on Rome. Italian liberalism was effectively content to allow the subversion of the constitutional state, so long as it was associated with its own side of politics and the rights of property.

Francesco Fantin was discharged from the 9th Alpini Regiment on 16 June 1922. His cousin Maria `Gina' Fantin Abrams will have brought him up to date on the textile dispute as it had played out at Pieve in his absence. Whilst Fantin had been under the colours, his world had changed in his absence. His brother Luigi Fantin had already emigrated in February 1922 in the company of Francesco Carmagnola³⁹² to subtract himself from the Damocles sword of a suspended sentence for having upbraided for officiousness carabinieri enforcing the ban on circulation by bicycle during the textile strike of 1921.³⁹³ This was a precedent of some force given Francesco's paramilitary associations. Gaetano Panizzon and other comrades of the Worker's Circle at the Magre` House of the People had been dismissed and paid off to emigrate to Australia. The district labour movement, which had been the school of his dearest ideals and aspirations, had been defeated and its activists dispersed. The Schio to which he came home must have seemed a suddenly empty place to him. It is likely too that Francesco Fantin was a participant in the Legalitarian Strike a couple of months after his discharge, although it is just possible that he had so little faith in it as to have stood aside from it. Nevertheless his participation is more likely, both because he was a member of a union affiliated with the CGL³⁹⁴ and because the Red Guards attempted to provide security for the Schio labour movement until the very eve of the March on Rome, in the teeth of concerted attacks by the authorities and local and provincial fascists focused on the Workers Circle at Magre`.

In January 1922 Communist Struggle complained of police persecution by the Schio Delegate for Public Security over liquor licensing of the Circle. Simini reports oral tradition that carabinieri searched the building on four separate occasions on one day and into the night, rousing and arresting the caretaker, who was subsequently released by the magistrature. By order of the Delegate, the Circle was closed for a period. Then on 26 September some twenty fascists from Vicenza lead by a few Schio fascists attacked and savagely beat a gathering of about fifty dancers at the Magre` House of the People whilst carabinieri stood guard outside. Late in October, just prior to the March on Rome, the remnant Red Guards, about fifty, attempted to lay an ambush in the environs of the Magre`

House of the People and the bridge over the Leogra for a party of fascists who had gathered in central Schio with the apparent intent of effecting a second attack on the Worker's Circle. As on the occasion of the abortive fascist attack on the Schio Chamber of Labour, the fascists got wind of the reception planned for them. The standoff lasted all day. Towards evening the Red Guards gathered in a copse in the locality of Barona` to consider their options. At first the emotional satisfaction of attacking the fascists at Schio proved appealing, but then wiser heads prevailed, counselling caution in respect of consequences which could not readily be foreseen or controlled.³⁹⁵ It is very likely that Francesco Fantin participated in this swan song of the Schio Red Guards, having both motive and opportunity to do so.

#13: A Proletarian Exile 1924

2nd Class Waiting Room Schio Vicenza

National Institute for Italian Labour, Via Sallustiana 58 Roma

Rapid & Economic Remittance Service for Emigrants

For All Emigration Financial Services

Emigrants: Make your remittances through the

ICLE

Request your employer to execute remittances through the

Stamp duty exempt Article 6 DL 15/12/1923

On June 29 1924 the Provincial Delegation of Vicenza of the Commisariate General of Emigration issued a circular. It was directed to local authorities issuing travel documents and otherwise facilitating emigration. The circular discussed labour demand and conditions internationally, particularly underlining the opportunities existing for Italian labourers in the canefields `outlet' of North Queensland. Anyone who approached a vicentine commune for migration advice in late 1924 would very likely have been advised of this information. But the voice was in any case abroad in the community about this new destination and the prospect of work it represented. Luigi Fantin had been in Australia since 1922. By late 1924 many factors were turning the thoughts of his brother Francesco to the antipodes.

Some of these factors were personal, some political and some economic. Indeed Franzina, one of the foremost historians of Italian emigration, emphasises `the mixed origins, political, religious and work related, of the most recent exoduses...of emigrants fleeing abject need...and even concrete risks of persecution...The hybrid nature of the causal nexus is to be observed in the first massive shifts of individuals from the old world across the ocean, driven by material economic imperatives and political, religious and ideological discrimination.' These are indeed the characteristic features of what he terms `political and labour migration.'³⁹⁶ Already in the era of the Risorgimento `Garibaldi on Brazilian soil was but a typical emigrant seeking his

sustenance overseas...for political motives also.'³⁹⁷ Calling in 1983 for further research into the policing of 'proletarian expatriation of a more marked 'subversive' or 'politically dangerous' character', Franzina effectively endorsed the views of the Ramellas on the need for biographical research into rank and file political emigration, capable of demonstrating the fundamental unity of the socioeconomic processes involved.³⁹⁸ Franzina has summarised the essence of a generation of labour tradition in Vicenza Province as 'the history of the working class and socialist movement in a white province', white being the idiomatic political colour code of catholicism. Enlarging upon this theme, he has described how this 'white' context

harboured in its bosom generation after generation of subaltern and working classes...which expressed a socialist and labour movement of some magnitude and substance over half a century..., dispersing for the most part to the rest of Italy and around the world thousands upon thousands of militants and sympathisers with subversive ideals.³⁹⁹

These politicised proletarian emigrants were reluctant émigrés, who felt themselves and were recognised by their peers to have been compelled to go into exile, by socio-economic and circumstantial political necessity if not by outright police persecution. Indeed on 28 July 1920 the Prefect of Vicenza De Pieri advised the DGPS that 'the subversive parties inculcate in the minds of the workers that they have a right to find employment in their homeland', and that this was a significant brake on the cross border mobility of labour.⁴⁰⁰ Francesco Fantin was a representative figure of this provincial homeland of exile. It is as such that he is of interest to the democratic historian. If this rehearsal of his origins has conveyed some sense of their human richness and thus of the cultural baggage which Fantin brought with him to Australia, it will have served its intended purpose. We will now review the complexity of the motives which were to take Francesco Fantin aboard a ship bound for the Great South Land in November 1924.

General political conditions formed a large part of Fantin's motivation to emigrate, for San Vito, the Schio District and the Veneto were not what Italians call 'a happy island' [*un'isola felice*] insulated from national trends. When trades halls were burnt and worker activists murdered in other parts of the peninsula and indeed his home region and province, the implications for Vicenza Province and Schio were understood. By the end of the year 1924, after the national elections and the subsequent Matteotti crisis, it was clear that the fascist regime was

entrenched and could only be overthrown by long term resistance. For an opponent to remain in Italy meant being subject to political surveillance and harassment, with a high risk of unemployment, given that employers regarded fascism as a capitalist revolution whose opponents were to be considered as potential troublemakers on the work site. Fantin by the end of the year could tell how things stood, and his personal affairs were therefore resolved in his mind by consolidation of his understanding of the national political situation. Like many others, he emigrated in the hope both of better economic prospects and determined to resist fascism in exile openly in a way which was no longer possible in Italy. It is important then to review the national politics of 1924 before discussing Fantin's personal affairs in relation to the consolidation of the fascist regime.

In 1923, within months of the fascist coup in Italy, a topical apology for the new regime was published in London for the isolationist US market. Entitled Understanding Italy, it offered 'an understanding of the Italian people and a clear knowledge of the economic and industrial renaissance which has been sweeping through the country of late.'⁴⁰¹ The Italy to be understood was the industrialising, united Italy of the last half century. The new regime, continued the journalist Clayton Sedgwick Cooper, had supplied the want of a government which had characterised successive administrations since 1920. 'These so-called Governments have failed to preserve law and order in the face of all kinds of seditious attacks by bolshevists, communists, and a multitude of forces classed under the general title of Reds.'⁴⁰² As to the illegality of fascist violence, 'there are at times certain laws that make for lawlessness, and certain lawlessness that makes for law.'⁴⁰³ The example of fascism was international in its implications. 'As a revolt of the middle classes and a rising up of youth in a new renaissance, Fascismo is active in many places in Europe, and this new life contains some of the most hopeful signs of European revival and reconstruction.'⁴⁰⁴

The Italy captured so recently by Benito Mussolini and his youthful crusaders, who, whatever we may think of their methods, represent the spirit of vigorous youth in the nation, while back of them, acting as supporters, are the industrialists, bankers, foreign traders and also the merchants and manufacturers of the country...It is of this modern Italy now being rejuvenated and revived by all methods, including the shedding of blood, in order to break up an unsatisfactory traditional regime, that we write.'⁴⁰⁵

Chapter XII was dedicated to ITALY AS A COLONIZER, wherein the reader was assured that this virile New Italy...would be outward looking as part of the new dream of a United Italy . Expansionism would take its natural place in the vitalistic, neo-liberal counter revolution that was fascism.

In this context of conservative self congratulation, 1924 saw the defeat of the antifascist opposition which had survived the March on Rome. It was prepared by the electoral law of summer 1923 which was a sign of Mussolini's strength and preoccupations. Alternating constitutional declarations with consummated threats of renewed violence, the regime effectively legislated itself a landslide. To the ticket topping the poll with a minimum of a mere quarter of the national vote were to be awarded two thirds of the seats in the parliament. The remaining third of seats were to be allocated proportionately amongst the vanquished. All the regime had to do to sweep aside the opposition in the next parliament was to top the poll as a minority government by building a coalition. Amalgamated with the nationalists since the beginning of the year, fascism with the aid of this nearest to the post premium disaggregated and absorbed liberal and conservative clienteles, especially in the South, attracting an electoral 'megaticket' or *listone* as careerists sought to associate themselves with the biggest battalion. The platform was one of a restoration of order and laissez faire fundamentalism garnished with protectionist accommodations for special interests on the side. It appealed to middle class opinion, but primarily to big capital, with measures in the first year of fascist government including income tax relief and tax reform favouring investments, deregulation of rent, and privatisation of insurance and telecommunications. Landowners were relieved of anxiety about the land reform bruited on the aftermath of Caporetto and free trade in land was restored. Along with these boons went the subjugation of labour. The Italian national politics of 1924 represented the descending arc of the parabola of postwar industrial relations that had begun so promisingly for the labour movement.

By 1924 the labour movement had been intimidated by years of officially permitted or endorsed violence. Industrial disputation had dropped to minimal levels. This decline in industrial action occurred against a background of an economy rebounding from the immediate postwar slump with unemployment falling [officially down from 382,000 in late 1922 to 122,000 in 1925],⁴⁰⁶ although real wages which had clawed back wartime depreciation were again falling below prewar levels.⁴⁰⁷ Prices were rising, undermining the incomes of those on wages and fixed lower middle class incomes, causing discomfort and resentment.⁴⁰⁸ Einaudi calculated that the cost of living stood at its highest in Octobre 1924 since July 1920. Based on

an index of 100 at September 1914, the cost of living over those nine quarters had risen from 384 to 492, an increase of around a quarter.⁴⁰⁹ Union membership had atrophied.⁴¹⁰ The capacity of socialist and catholic unions to indemnify their members against wage depreciation was destroyed by violence. Unions were reduced to their basic administrative functions, shop committees were rendered inactive, and police surveillance became stricter.⁴¹¹ In these circumstances understandably few had the necessary courage and stamina to stand as opposition candidates. The few public meetings held during the campaign were held in the big cities and were routinely disrupted.⁴¹² With the dissolution of the Chamber in late January 1924, the persecution of the Partito Popolare, the socialist opposition and the liberal press were renewed.⁴¹³ The antifascist priest Don Minzoni was murdered on 8 August at Argenta Ferrara. The liberal leaders Amendola and Nitti were assaulted, and communist leaders were arrested in Milan.⁴¹⁴

Not surprisingly the opposition had to consider whether or not it was better to participate in the elections under such undemocratic conditions, or boycott them in protest. This afforded yet more scope for division.⁴¹⁵ The communists were for participation without false confidence in the integrity of the electoral process, as a form of struggle. They proposed campaigning in the teeth of the permanent fascist revolution which they believed had rendered constitutional opposition nugatory for a united workers front for a workers and peasants' government guaranteeing labour rights. This somewhat doctrinaire formula, which begged the question of the likelihood of successfully mobilising either the working class or the peasantry, was rejected by the reformist socialists on the equally dogmatic ground that it would inhibit the formation of the widest possible coalition for the reconquest of democracy.⁴¹⁶ It was very much a situation such as Dean Swift might have recognised of whether the egg should be opened at one end or the other, as with the debate within the labour movement in 1920 over worker control. In the end the communists negotiated a 'Proletarian Unity' ticket with the left wing of the socialist party, known as the *terzini* [literally 'thirdists'] for their commitment to affiliation with the Third International.⁴¹⁷

The 1924 national elections degenerated as they were intended to into an authoritarian plebiscite which recorded the extent to which the majority thought it the wiser part of valour to acquiesce in coercion and vote as required, with significant core minorities signifying their resistance to intimidation. The administrative elections of March 1923 had served as a dress rehearsal for all subsequent coercion of the vote. The making of generalised threats to whole

communities complemented those made to specific groups and individuals. At Arona in the northern Province of Varese the fascists put up posters all around town declaring 'Whoever does not vote is ill. Whoever is ill needs castor oil'⁴¹⁸. The threat had the desired effect of bringing out the vote. The administration of a purgative, a common folk therapy at the time, may seem a comic form of violence, and was so regarded by the mocking blackshirts who inflicted it, but overdoses deranged the electrolytes of victims, causing death. It was a characteristic form of fascist thuggery, along with the assault with the *manganello* or blunt instrument and the deployment of overwhelming numbers. Fascists virtually never faced their antagonists man to man. Sforza records that in the village in the anarchist Lunigiana where he stayed on election day 6 April 1924 the first fifteen voters were unanimously oppositionists. They were abducted and soundly beaten, their cries being the signal for the carabinieri to leave town for the rest of the day. Thereafter the other citizens were escorted to the polls and made to vote the official fascist *listone*.⁴¹⁹ In urban constituencies and especially in towns and villages across the country, people voted in fear of local knowledge and retaliation. As is usual in such situations the ruling party won by a landslide, polling just over four million votes or two thirds of the total electorate. The gerrymander premium had produced a perverse vindication of the regime, as it was intended to, with reactionary opportunism and intimidation potentiating one another. It is highly unlikely that the Mussolini government would have polled so well without coercion and the distorting effect of the nearest to the post premium. Among the minorities whose returns represented residual hard core defiance, catholic and social democratic candidates polled half a million votes respectively, with maximalist socialists polling a third of a million. The communist and internationalist ticket polled a quarter of a million votes. All told after allocation of the near to the post premium the fascist majority of over three hundred and fifty faced a divided opposition of one hundred and sixty one catholics, socialists, communists, republicans, democrats & regionalist deputies.⁴²⁰ Matteotti for the reformist United Socialists and Gramsci for the Communists were returned from the Veneto.⁴²¹ Anarchists of course stood apart in blessed impotence, disassociating themselves from the whole tawdry farce.

It is a matter of general historical consensus that the Aventine Secession of parliamentary dissent from the fascist parliament returned in 1924 translated from June to 3 January 1925 and beyond into a political failure. The Secessionist walkout ended in delusional attendance upon a royal constitutional intervention which never came in response to the wave of popular feeling against the abduction and assassination in mid June of Matteotti, who had denounced the elections in Parliament on May 30 and called for them to be disallowed.⁴²² Why

a King who had not intervened in the constitutional crisis of 1922 would have done so in that of 1924 was something that the Secessionists were never able to explain. `The first two weeks passed without any appreciable result. And in those two weeks Mussolini had time to save himself.'⁴²³ At first Mussolini was obliged to deny all knowledge of the crime, relinquish the Ministry of the Interior to the nationalist Federzoni and sacrifice his Director General of Public Security General de Bono, but this was all window dressing and as time passed, and the formalities of charging his henchmen were gone through⁴²⁴, Mussolini became more secure, and the opposition more divided as to how to proceed. The Communists under the leadership of Gramsci showed resolution and insight, calling for an immediate general strike and organisation of an armed popular insurrection against `this government of assassins'⁴²⁵. Amendola and General Bencivenga were prepared to support this under Communist leadership.⁴²⁶ These appeals the working class refused to answer without proof of opposition unity. As Gramsci put it, the regime survived for want of opposition unity and leadership:

In June, immediately after the Matteotti affair, the blow sustained by the regime was such that immediate intervention by a revolutionary force would have jeopardised its prospects. That intervention was not possible because the majority of the masses were incapable of mobilising themselves or were orientated towards intermediate solutions, under the influence of the democrats and socialdemocrats.⁴²⁷

The Aventine parliamentarians were afraid of another Red Biennium, and beyond that, a bolshevik revolution, and so chose to rely almost totally on a press campaign, which is to say on their own resources,⁴²⁸ which the regime weathered.⁴²⁹ This bound them to the liberals who had remained in the fascist parliament, objectively maintaining the social basis of the regime. The socialist maximalists brought up the rear of these reluctant democrats. The left rapidly dissolved into recriminations with a disgusted Communist Party wearing out its welcome and patience, damning the socialists as the left wing of the bourgeoisie.⁴³⁰ The King as at the time of the March on Rome effectively protected by his inaction Mussolini, who was clearly guilty by omission or commission as Senator Sforza pointed out⁴³¹, and the magistracy was his majesty's accomplice in silence by failing to prosecute its enquiries to the full.⁴³²

The failure of the Aventine Secession was above all a Hamletic failure of indecision and distrust. In the stand-off which resulted, Mussolini enjoyed all the benefits of incumbency, while the Aventine Secessionists waited passively upon developments. By the end of August

Mussolini was threatening to unleash his blackshirts on the opposition should it go beyond 'vociferous molestation'.⁴³³ The Aventine Secession died a lingering death in full public view. What might have been the most glorious moment of Italian democracy ended shamefully in December 1924, when upon publication of information from Cesare Rossi, the former head of the Fascist Press Office who had been one of those charged with Matteotti's murder, Mussolini brazenly accepted full political responsibility for the assassination of Matteotti in open parliament, and reactivated a 1923 decree to muzzle the press.⁴³⁴ There was then some truth in the Communist prejudice that the democratic parties were too comfortable with the parliamentary talking shop to seriously oppose fascism.

There is not the slightest doubt that Fantin was seized with the significance of the national scandal that was the Matteotti crisis. In life a reformist socialist faction leader, in death Matteotti became the archetypical martyr to fascist barbarity and illegality. It was no accident that the antifascist club established in Melbourne by Carmagnola, Fantin and Ciotti was named in memory of Matteotti in keeping with its broadly unsectarian character. In addition Matteotti was a Veneto from Rovigo Province and a Deputy for the Veneto, and as such known to Fantin. Cresciani has stated moreover that Fantin was cited in a police report as a 'fervent supporter of the PCd'I'⁴³⁵ in the period extending from its foundation in 1921 to the Matteotti crisis. This assertion must be qualified. The Vicenza Prefecture informed the DGPS to that effect regarding Luigi Francesco Fantin in March 1928. This however was at a time when the Italian authorities were having difficulty distinguishing the two brothers, so this report could be false regarding Francesco Giovanni or true of both brothers. It is noteworthy that it was reported at this time that Luigi Francesco had no criminal record or outstanding legal liabilities. This is odd given his suspended sentence for 'outraging' the Carabinieri, which had however expired by this time.⁴³⁶ Nonetheless it is likely that Francesco Fantin would have been a communist sympathiser given the common radicalism of anarchism and communism within the broad church of the labour movement. Certainly the oral tradition within the Bortoloso family is that Francesco Fantin sympathised as an antifascist with both the communists and the socialists.⁴³⁷ It moreover is the case that the leading exponent of early communism in the Province of Vicenza was designated by Gramsci and his local peers to be Pietro Tresso, a native of Magre` di Schio adjacent to San Vito.⁴³⁸

Australia had begun to emerge as a migration destination at Schio about a quarter century before the antifascist generation of émigrés took ship. In every respect except as to

destination they were following in the footsteps of the many nineteenth century industrial deportees from the district. Otherwise they were pioneers. The first refugee to Australia from Schio capitalism seems to have been Pietro Munari, who having been dismissed from the employ of the Lanerossi for a petty theft which ought not to have concerned his employer, was harshly dealt with by the law and local society and gave up the struggle to earn his living as a street vendor of press publications and emigrated. Munari had settled in Sydney and been active in its internationalist scene and written of his adopted country favourably from a socialist point of view. News of Australia also seems to have filtered back to Italy and Vicenza Province from the journalism of the Venetian socialist Giuseppe Prampolini, who published the first Italian newspaper in Australia Uniamoci! [Unite!] at Sydney on 18 July 1903. The weekly was short lived, closing for financial reasons on 4 July 1904, with Prampolini returning to Italy. But the baton of ethnic solidarity had already been passed in the antipodes through Dr Quintino Ercole, a socialist medico and refugee from the repression of 1898,⁴³⁹ who was associated as co-editor with 'Count' Giovanni Pulle` on 8 March 1904 in the publication of the first bilingual paper of the Italian diaspora in Australia L' Italo Australiano, which stayed in business until 1908. In 1912 Pulle` returned to the fray, bringing forth the weekly Oceania along similar lines of generic socialism and ethnic Italian solidarity. Oceania also collapsed for financial reasons in 1915, and publication of an Italian press in Australia was not to resume until new financial and ideological bases were laid with the rise of fascism.⁴⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the first generation Italian press in Australia had meant that Australia was a name to conjure with in socialist circles in Italy, if only in a hopeful whisper.

The next Schio socialist to send tidings of Australia back to Schio was the engineer Domenico Piccoli, who in keeping with his petty bourgeois social standing was able to take himself off to the antipodes more in a spirit of adventure than due to considerations of socio-economic necessity. On May Day 1900 *El Visentin* the 'popular periodical' published in Italian and Vicentine dialect by the Federazione Provinciale Socialista Vicentina carried correspondence by Piccoli from his Wellington Street cottage in the vicinity of the Swan River, where his neighbour was a self respecting bricklayer, under the title 'How One Becomes a Socialist in Australia'. Piccoli related how he had become acquainted with an elderly gentleman at the Esplanade Hotel in Fremantle when taking the sea breeze at the port, who was hard of hearing but participated with gusto in political discussions through a metal fan or tin ear he held in his teeth. Like Billy Hughes after him he knew how to exploit his infirmity: Piccoli reported that 'when he was short of arguments he would drop his fan, which hung around his neck, thus

giving the appearance of having the better of the argument.’ Signora Piccoli was subsequently surprised to be informed by the publican that this affable gentleman was Mr Throssell the Minister for Lands. In due course the minister paid a visit to the Piccoli household on a day when they were entertaining their neighbour. After Throssell had departed, Signora Piccoli asked her husband ‘What difference is there between a minister and a worker in Australia?’ Piccoli replied ‘None, because the old minister was a worker, and the worker can become a minister.’

Signora Piccoli replied that in Australia socialism seemed ‘a dream which will soon be a reality’ rather than the attractive chimera it had seemed to her in Italy. Thus it was his Signora Flora Piccoli nee Mancini, daughter of the Neapolitan jurist PS Mancini and mother of Piccoli’s four children who became in this narrative the socialist convert prefigured in the title of the story.⁴⁴¹ George Throssell was the youngest of three Irish brothers who had landed in the Swan River Colony in 1850. At twentyone years of age he opened a small general store in Northam on the Avon River northeast of Perth, reinvesting his profits in land. He was elected to the colonial parliament for Northam, and was briefly the State’s second premier. He had made his fortune in trade, but he was otherwise no more proletarian than Piccoli himself. The previous year Piccoli had made it plain that he thought that there was exploitation in Australia, but he attributed it to the absentee English rentier and embodied in hard labour without intellectual pleasure.⁴⁴² Nevertheless it was true that social distance was less of a consideration in the new world than in the old. The old man’s thirteenth child Hugo was educated at Prince Alfred College Adelaide and won the VC at Gallipoli. He married the avantguard novelist and communist Katherine Susannah Pritchard.⁴⁴³

These remote historical convergences of Vicentine and antipodean radicalism were however in the future. What matters in terms of Fantin’s decision making was that the year before he was born Australia had registered once again in the consciousness of the Vicentine left as a destination tinged with utopianism. It is known that Fantin and Carmagnola had utopian notions of Australia prior to emigrating, because they were unpleasantly surprised that clerical influence in the Italian diaspora and the Australian host community was almost as extensive as at home in San Vito.⁴⁴⁴ It may also be the case that some good news of Australia may have returned by post by this time from survivors and their descendants of the Marquis De Ray’s 1881 ‘New Italy’ colonial folly on New Ireland in Melanesia, which had principally involved Vicentine and Trevigiani families. Subsequently dispersed throughout Australia, ‘they made of

its history almost a legend'⁴⁴⁵ It should be remembered also that Australia had been touted as a destination by the emigration industry much earlier, the liberal economic ideologue Jacopo Virgilio having published at Genova in 1855 a Guida dell'emigrante: Notizie storiche, economiche, statistiche sull'Australia⁴⁴⁶, an antipodean application of his views in favour of free trade in labour. Even the fact that the Lanerossi imported Australian wool may have constituted one of the faint echoes of Australia from various sources contributing to the definition of Australia as a migration destination in Fantin's mind.

The industrial and emotional life of Francesco Fantin converged after he returned from military service under the colours of the Bassano Battalion of first the 6th and then the 9th Regiment of Alpini. It is clear that he had found the army irksome, because he threw his Alpini cap into a corner and discarded the rest of his uniform exclaiming *'Basta! Enough!'*⁴⁴⁷ There is a chronological issue here as well. His military record shows that he was given unlimited leave after 17 June 1922, which confirms the family tradition that he served about eighteen months. On 4 March 1921 in anticipation of his resumption of his position it was transferred from Pieve to the central Schio works, as that of his sister Maria had been on 23 February 1920.⁴⁴⁸ These adjustments were more likely to have been made for the industrial convenience of the firm rather than at the request of the workers concerned, although after the strike of 1921 their first cousin *'Gina'* Fantin, who had been blacklisted at Pieve, benefited from her good standing with the management of the Schio establishment and found work there. It is not clear exactly when he began courting Maria Zambon, remembered by *'Gina'* Fantin under her mother's maiden surname of Galvan, [a feminine custom sometimes observed to this day in Italy],⁴⁴⁹ but it is likely that he met her after he assumed the position reserved him at Schio, where she worked and resided. Maria Zambon is remembered by Fantin's Bortoloso relatives, not her greatest admirers, as being very beautiful,⁴⁵⁰ but both families, if they agreed on nothing else, disliked the match. Her family objected that Fantin was not a churchgoer, whilst the Fantins doubted her character. As Maria was virtually two years older than Francesco, *'Gina'* Fantin thought her cousin Francesco, whom she considered handsome and sensible, could do better, and told him so.⁴⁵¹ These complications beset and lengthened what was considered a long courtship. For Fantin the postwar era was a springtime of humanity and freedom, when dreams of liberation were mingled with the joys of nature and love.

As the first rays of the sun of the morning bring songs to the lips. So with my thoughts and my heart, to return to the great nest of tall trees that stir and unfold themselves to

receive the kisses of the hot sun, to be among that whispering of the wood, among the budding of grasses and of wild flowers to be amongst a gentle breeze that sounds in all things and has in its voice the sweet concert of the dawn and the dusk. Dreams?...The Spring. Life which is ever renewing itself, with a hymn to love, to liberty. Spring with the warm kiss of a young woman, a caress of the sun, when I remember you across the highways of a young world with dear friends. They were days when blue seemed bluer, green greener, the light more illuminating, love more loving. How many dreams in those twenty years of mine...

On 24 November 1923 Francesco Fantin, textile worker of San Vito, married Maria Marina Zambon, carder, daughter of Antonio and Emilia Galvan of Schio before an official of the bride's municipality of residence, depriving his doubtless scandalised in laws of the satisfaction of a church wedding. As the age of consent was set higher for men than for women, he was required to give evidence of his parents' consent.⁴⁵² The following day Maria Zambon Fantin was struck off the Schio anagraphy as an emigrant to San Vito, where she took up residence with her husband's family.⁴⁵³ The marriage quickly fell apart. One reason for this was the attentions Maria began receiving at some indeterminate point from an older man remembered as being a fascist because of his activity and associations, a public security functionary or *Delegato* with the rank of Commissioner [Inspector or Superintendent]. At the outset of the textile strike in early September 1921 Communist Struggle published a complaint about the brutality suffered by a party of workers waylaid on the road from San Vito to Magre`, which had been driven home the following day by the ransacking of San Vito by a party of thirty carabinieri lead, in the words of the editor `by the fascist delegate of PS',⁴⁵⁴. The officer concerned was almost certainly Dr Ollindo Cellurale, the Vice Commissioner of Public Security at Schio. By the same token, the senior officer whose rank, income and urbanity assisted him in seducing Maria Zambon with the bright lights of the big city was possibly Cavaliere Francesco Mondojo, the Commissioner for Public Security brought in by Prefect Guterriez in mid September 1921 to stiffen the official response to the textile strike. Such a man would have been equally considered a fascist on grounds of association, for many of this class of official did indeed harbour fascist sympathies. Within a year of the marriage, Maria Zambon Fantin had left the district with this man, and appears to have lived with him at Turin where she died in 1978. Whilst Fantin will have been heartbroken, his cousin `Gina' was less appalled at her infidelity than by her poor form in `going off with a fascist, just imagine!'⁴⁵⁵ Just as his relationship with Maria Zambon detained Fantin

when other concerns were turning his thoughts to emigration, so the failure of his marriage will have made those political and industrial motives more compelling.

By the time Francesco Fantin came to ponder emigration in keeping with secular regional traditions of heretical and dissenting proletarian political emigration, he was bringing up the rear of a wave of antifascist emigration which had fundamentally altered the nature and prospects of antifascist opposition in Italy. The *Arditi Rossi* had dispersed, and arms were harder to come by. Many protagonists of the Red Biennium who had contested the rise of fascism had already gone into exile, anarchist activists numerous amongst them, particularly after the March on Rome.⁴⁵⁶ Many others had been imprisoned. According to the *Soccorso Rosso Internazionale* [International Red Aid] there were some 5,500 antifascists in prison in November 1924, the majority communists, 20% generic subversives & another 20% politically unaffiliated..⁴⁵⁷ These last two categories will have numbered many anarchists. From this time on, the figure of the Italian opposition activist was that of the itinerant whose feet trod the path of exile, as recorded by Hemingway.⁴⁵⁸ When Francesco Fantin left Italy, the liberal institutions under which he had grown up had been toppled, but not only by reactionary subversion. Like the strange death of liberal England before the Great War, so the death of liberal Italy thereafter was a murder suicide, and much of the guilt lay with the victim. Constitutional liberty ultimately came a poor second in liberal hearts to the rights of property in the face of the socioeconomic challenge of mass politics. The limitations of progressive oligarchy had been laid bare for all to see. Having failed to commit to the democratisation of society, liberalism died unmourned in Italy, surviving only as the faction of doctrinaire bourgeois economics, the form it takes to this day.

When Fantin took ship at Venezia, he left behind him his parents and sisters. He turned his back on the scenes of his youth, but then most of his friends and comrades were already in Australia, having indeed pioneered mass emigration to Australia from the Schio district. His language and his dialect he took with him to be spoken again in the antipodes amongst his fellow emigrants. On the smoking ruins of the system under which he had been born and precociously put to work for the profit of others he would have wasted not a second thought. He would have shared the notion common amongst emigrants to the scandal of bourgeois nationalists that Italy was a stepmother to her people. National politics and personal circumstances converged in the life of Francesco Fantin in Novembre 1924, and so he took ship for Australia. To paraphrase the poet of another revolutionary generation, you

didn't need to be a weatherman to tell which way the wind blew. And hanging over his head, as over that of his elder brother Luigi, was the risk of legal troubles. In Francesco's case, this risk was in regard to the curiously suspended police investigation into the connection between the traffic in war materials from the Schio district and the Diana outrage, which might be reactivated at any time, potentially terminating an activism which could be continued overseas. For Fantin, discretion was the better part of valour.

Part III: The Brothers Fantin in Australia 1922-42.

Even the most innovatory colonies are populated by people who came from some society with an already long history.

Hobsbawm⁴⁵⁹

We talk of White Australia, and insinuate that Italians are not white...

Brisbane Courier 30 March 1928⁴⁶⁰

Chapter

- #14: Australian Landfall
- #15: No Pasaran
- #16: Barbed Wire Disease

#21: Australian landfall.

Into the newly opened lands of the planet, originally peopled by military camps, trading posts, religious missions, small agricultural settlements, there came an inundation of immigrants from countries suffering from political oppression and economic poverty. This movement of people...filled the sparsely occupied regions of America, Africa, Australia....

Mumford⁴⁶¹

Francesco Fantin disembarked in Melbourne on 27 December 1924 from the Re d'Italia [King of Italy], one of a wave of Italian immigrants to this country propagated by economic and political circumstances in his homeland.⁴⁶² Italian immigration to Australia rose from 963 in 1923 to 4,498 in 1924 and 5,182 the following year.⁴⁶³ At the 1921 census there were about 1500 Italians in North Queensland, concentrated in the sugar districts of Ayr, Ingham, Innisfail and Cairns. In 1924 the Quota Law restricted Italian migration to the US, and mass immigration to North Queensland began.⁴⁶⁴ According to 1927 Italian government estimates, two fifths of Italian emigrants to Australia were Veneti like Fantin, and another two fifths were from the northern provinces of Piedmont and Lombardy.⁴⁶⁵ According to the ruling racial theories of Lyng and others, this 'Alpine' Northern Italian preponderance over the distinctly 'inferior southern Mediterranean type' was all to the good. As late as 1942 Fantin was categorized as racially 'Alpine'.⁴⁶⁶

The anglophile Stanley Melbourne Bruce was the Nationalist Prime Minister, and the national agenda focused on 'men, money and markets'. The first term of this colonial neomercantilism was a populate or perish emphasis on immigration, labour capacity and

military potential. Fantin was a foot soldier of this process. The last term referred to the export drive for national postwar recovery which would see the Bruce – Page government progressively enter into conflict with the labour movement as it sought to reduce labour costs and root out ‘foreign agitators’.⁴⁶⁷ The Immigration Act had been amended in 1920 to exclude the entry of anarchists and communists, and was amended again at the time of the 1925 maritime strike in an effort to deport two Australian Seamen’s Union officials, Walsh and Johnson, who were only saved by representations by HV Evatt before the High Court, which ruled that they were residents of too long standing to be classed as immigrants.⁴⁶⁸ The following year the Crimes Act was amended by Attorney General Latham to enable the deportation of immigrants ‘for using subversive language, for membership of subversive organizations, [and] for taking part in strikes.’⁴⁶⁹ Section 30L of the Act was in force throughout the bulk of Fantin’s working life in Australia. However the beliefs of immigrants proved hard to test, and droves of humble subversives slipped through like Fantin. One Italian who failed the English test at Townsville was detained pending reference to his sugar farming brother and the Italian authorities. In the event the Italian consul found that he was too ill educated to be a dangerous propagandist, and ventured to suppose that hard work and success would cure him of his ideas of socialism and equality.⁴⁷⁰ Fantin was an unheralded protagonist of this political process too, as he must have become aware in due course as the national debate touched electoral peaks of orchestrated paranoia.⁴⁷¹

Indeed as in Italy Mussolini was seen by conservatives such as the Premiers of NSW and Victoria as a ‘man of Providence’ who had saved Italy from bolshevism. In 1923 an eminent Sydney surgeon, Dr HM Moran showed the limits of his acumen by publishing ‘Letters from Rome’ which portrayed the blood stained Italian dictator in nauseatingly Christ-like terms:

By the fruits of his work you can know him. He found Italy broken and disillusioned – a prey to wild eyed extremists and to despair. He cleared from the temple the politicians who had been corrupt and ineffective. He rallied the people...He preached the apostleship of work and gave them a mission...He has touched nothing that he has not transmuted, and in every sphere of human activity you can see his hand.⁴⁷²

The Sydney Morning Herald editorialized in 1925 that 'Italy was only saved from Red dominance by the heroic remedy of fascism – a dreadful medicine to be sure, and yet less bitter than the plague it stayed.' The Melbourne Argus rationalized terroristic crimes of *squadrisimo* including the murder of Matteotti as grim necessities.⁴⁷³ These Australians anticipated Churchill's 1926 declaration that 'if I had been an Italian I am sure that I should have been wholeheartedly with you from start to finish in your triumphant struggle against the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism.'⁴⁷⁴ In this it had performed a service to the world, he said in 1927 visiting Italy as Chancellor of the Exchequer, adding that fascism rested on popular foundations.⁴⁷⁵ So virulent was Churchill's antisocialism that in the wake of the General Strike he was viewed by the Labour Party as 'the potential Mussolini of a wave of reaction.'⁴⁷⁶ In Australia echoes of these controversies were played out in a context of colonial provincialism.⁴⁷⁷ 'The dead level culture probed not the problems of existence. Its shallowness gave it a curiously classless quality. Neither middle class nor working class found much need to elucidate or justify or analyse the conditions of their existence...Critical analysis of the productive system had become something to avoid, a dangerous activity associated with foreigners and Communists.'⁴⁷⁸ Even within the ranks of the labour movement, Fantin was exotic and heterodox in his new social context from the moment he stepped off the boat. The redoubtable socialist Maurice Blackburn did however, by contrast, stress internationalist issues such as opposition to Mussolini.⁴⁷⁹ But 'for many people in

Australia during this period Mussolini was a synonym for law and order and fascism was very creditably identified with anticommunism.⁴⁸⁰

In this largely unreceptive context Fantin would emerge as a leading Italo-Australian anarchist activist alongside other émigrés from the Veneto like Francesco Carmagnola and Isidoro Bertazzon amongst others. Barely educated but intelligent, this generation of émigrés from fascism were primarily products of three northeastern provinces of Italy, Vicenza, Treviso and Belluno⁴⁸¹. If not bereft of artisan and manufacturing sectors, these provinces lay well outside the 'iron triangle' of heavy industry described by Turin, Genoa and Milan. Anarchism had provincial not metropolitan roots, a fact which may have helped Fantin to adapt to the agricultural landscape and labour opportunities of North Queensland. Nevertheless, until the end of his working life he considered himself primarily a textile worker.⁴⁸²

Fantin was armed with a request from his elder brother Luigi that he join him as a cane cutter in the Innisfail district. The sugar industry was barely developed enough to exploit this raw labour. For over a generation and particularly in the wake of the 1891 efforts of CV Fraire, attempts to exploit local indentured and imported kanaka plantation labour had given way to recruitment of cheap labour from other sources, including Italy.⁴⁸³ These attempts were typically based on the mistaken premise of a supposed inherent suitability for tropical agriculture of migrants hailing from the subtemperate north of the peninsular or the arid south, neither zone tropical.⁴⁸⁴ Italian settlement in Queensland after the Great War was concentrated in the north in Hinchinbrook and Johnstone Shires and the Cairns district, with smaller colonies in the Ayer, Cardwell, Douglas and Proserpine Shires.⁴⁸⁵ At Ingham Italians, including the native born and naturalised soon constituted the great bulk of the population.⁴⁸⁶

Mourilyan near Innisfail, where Fantin settled⁴⁸⁷ was known as Little Italy. Many Italians in North Queensland were veterans of the Great War.⁴⁸⁸ Likewise the Communist leader Jack Henry was well aware that `many of the Italian cane cutters were refugees from Mussolini.'⁴⁸⁹ The sugar industry was a specimen of the continued reliance of the economy as a whole on primary production, alleviated by wartime import replacement and capital development. Yet Australia could not at this time supply her own domestic market with manufactures of its prime staple product, wool. Vere Gordon Childe in the course of a postwar marxist sketch of national economic structure conditioning the labour movement put the situation in the sugar industry succinctly.

Another characteristic crop is the sugar cane, which is largely planted all along the Queensland coast and in the extreme northeastern corner of New South Wales. This industry is likewise of relatively recent growth, the yield having doubled between 1891 and 1901, and again by 1915. Nevertheless, the amount of sugar exported is now negligible, the greater part of the crop finding a local market and indeed being insufficient in bad years to satisfy home requirements.⁴⁹⁰

Overshadowing the whole industry was the monopoly of the Colonial Sugar Refinery, the major Australian outlet for refined sugar. Indeed there would have been no place in the industry at all for prospective contract cutters and farmers such as the brothers Fantin had not the CSR abandoned the plantation system for the central milling system, subletting the risks of supply to small farmers whilst keeping them economically dependent.⁴⁹¹ In a sign of the times the leadership of the firm flirted with fascism, particularly after 1933.⁴⁹²

The first efforts of the brothers Fantin in Australia were dedicated to establishing themselves in the sugar industry as canecutters,⁴⁹³ but it may not have been long before Francesco was politically active, and this would have been in character. In 1929 it was retrospectively reported to Rome by the Townsville Consulate that Luigi Fantin was principally responsible for rough treatment meted out to one Giovanni Marchetti and other fascists arrived in the Ingham and other districts of Queensland in 1925. At this early stage, it is impossible to say definitely if it was really Luigi or Francesco Fantin who answered to the description by the DGPS as in respect of these episodes as 'one of the most fervent antifascists in Australia'⁴⁹⁴. It is likewise noteworthy to recall that uncertainty hangs over the official attribution of communist sympathies to Luigi at home in San Vito during the Red Biennium. But in their early years in Australia the question is whether Luigi slipped the leftist moorings of his family's traditional political culture as an earlier or later consequence of improvement in his affairs in Australia. The vagaries of the Italian political police work of the day make it difficult to differentiate the exact roles of the two brothers. But given his lifelong disposition, it seems doubtful that Francesco Fantin was altogether inactive during his first years in Australia. He therefore, independently of or together with his elder brother Luigi, may have been involved in incidents of antifascist payback in Australia during their early years in North Queensland. It is known that Carmagnola enforced such a policy at Halifax in the Ingham district in March 1925, certainly one of the incidents complained of by the Townsville Consulate to the DGPS, causing the semi-official Italo-Australian to lament the intense antifascism of most Italians in North Queensland.⁴⁹⁵ Indeed Carmagnola advocated forceful measures through the anarchist press at the time, and remembered his leadership in this sense in retirement. This policy of countercoercing fascists on their Italian or antipodean precedents as in the Marchetti episode first preceded and later complemented the organisation of a club infrastructure for the emerging antifascist diaspora.⁴⁹⁶

There is furthermore circumstantial evidence that Fantin's activism in Australia at this early period complemented internationalism with domestic industrial concerns. These were years of industrial tension and agitation in the canefields of Innisfail's South Johnstone Shire in the context of disputation between the industrial and parliamentary wings of the Queensland labour movement over the role and administration of the public sector in view of the allegedly competing claims of the working class and the wider public. This was in a Shire in which anarcho-syndicalist 'Wobbly'⁴ influence had penetrated both the 'British' and immigrant rank and file of the Australian Worker's Union., challenging the leadership of the union.⁴⁹⁷ Douglass reports that calls for racial quota's to shore up conditions and employment for 'British' labour complicated the dispute.⁴⁹⁸ Long standing tensions came to a head when the McCormack Labor government privatised the South Johnstone sugar mill, transferring propriety to a farmer's cooperative at the behest of the Secretary of the Innisfail Canegrowers Association, Gillie 'Storm Petrel' Hudson.⁴⁹⁹ The new hardline management sacked the entire staff on 29 April 1927, announcing the intention to reduce employment overheads and exclude 'troublemakers'. In the event victimisation was astutely targeted, the Industrial Magistrate ruling indeed that none had occurred since 85% of the 103 men selectively rehired from 1,208 applicants were 'old hands'. None the less the workers struck, alleging that active unionists had been discriminated against and demanding the customary preference for those who had worked the previous season. On 17 May 1927 the workforce voted 193: 32 in a ballot conducted by the AWU to continue the strike, which extended to union cutters in the district. It is known that Fantin was cutting in the district until 1928 and that he was an AWU member during his time in Queensland.⁵⁰⁰ He thus may well have participated in the strike, or at any rate been a fascinated 'industrialist' observer of its politics. In any case it is known that 'the large Italian camp at Silkwood was particularly

⁴ 'The Industrial Workers of the World' espoused the 'One Big Union' practicing 'direct action' and the general strike for the overthrow of capitalism. For an account of 'the Wobblies' & De Leonists in this country see per index Turner Industrial Labour & Politics 1900-21, Sydney's Burning & Farrell International Socialism & Australian Labour 1919-39

active in opposing the use of non union labour.’⁵⁰¹ Silkwood is a little to the south of Mourilyan. On 5 July 1927 picketer Jack Hynes was shot dead, and Acting Premier Forgan Smith ordered the seizure of all firearms in the area.⁵⁰² Police raided the Silkwood area and confiscated strikers’ few weapons, munitions and explosives.⁵⁰³ On 24 July the Innisfail Trades and Labour Council declared the South Johnstone mill black. Complaining of the intensified picketing, the conservative Brisbane Courier of 26 July referred to the global reputation of the Red Biennium, stigmatising ‘the brutal sabotage practised by the extremists in the immediate post war period of convulsed Italy’. The Queensland Figaro of 16 July had gone further: ‘We want a Mussolini here to deal with our industrial anarchy...the organisers of the South Johnstone revolution are infected by the Soviet microbe.’⁵⁰⁴ The protracted confrontation progressively involved sympathy action on the wharves and a lockout on the State rail network, which involved communists such as Fred Paterson.⁵⁰⁵ The government was applauded by the establishment, but the dispute ended in industrial stalemate and the discrediting of parliamentary Labor with its own constituency and contributed to disaster at the ensuing 1929 elections.⁵⁰⁶ Fantin as an anarchist would have been disgusted but not surprised.

One international movement in which Fantin was involved in this period was the agitation around the cases of Sacco and Vanzetti, two Italian anarchists resident in Massachusetts who were prosecuted, convicted and executed for armed robbery. This case of labour movement persecution, for the politics of the hapless defendants told against them to the extent of rendering the trial unsafe, cemented the longstanding impression in the wake of such events as the hanging of the Chicago anarchists for the Haymarket bombing of 1887 and the judicial murder of the IWW organiser Joe Hill in Utah,⁵⁰⁷ that the US was a ‘rich man’s country’.⁵⁰⁸ In August 1928 the Matteotti Committee, of which Fantin was a founding member, under the editorship of Isidoro Bertazzon, a long term Fantin confederate, published Il Calvario,

a commemorative edition observing the first anniversary of the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. The anniversary was also commemorated the following year with the publication by Bertazzon of In Memoria.⁵⁰⁹ By mid 1930 Bertazzon, having been ostracised by the Matteotti committee, was publishing L'Avanguardia Libertaria; a note commemorating Sacco and Vanzetti appeared in number 3 of that year. In July 1931 the Matteotti club published an edition of La Riscossa [The Counter-attack] which included commemoration of the fourth anniversary of their execution. Fantin was involved with Bertazzon in a commemoration of Sacco and Vanzetti reported in the September 1931 issue of L'Avanguardia, donating five shillings in their memory. Fantin was to sustain donation of several shillings and even a few pounds at a time to L'Avanguardia throughout its life, regularly recorded in its subscription column. By issue 7-8 of 1932, the rift between L'Avanguardia and the Matteotti Club was sufficiently healed for it to carry notice of a Club commemoration of Sacco and Vanzetti. Clearly these martyrs to 'the idea' were names to conjure with to their Italian anarchist comrades in Australia. Fantin was almost certainly aware of this issue and distributed this literature in the Port Phillip district and North Queensland. Another item distributed prior to June 1930 according to the Ministero degli Affari Esteri [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] 'in a great number of copies in all North Queensland centres' was a well argued flyer entitled 'La Patria', criticising the concept of patriotism and rehearsing the traditional leftist critique of mass emigration from Italy as deriving from her being 'a stepmother' to her people. Again Fantin was very likely involved in its distribution, laid by the Townsville Consulate at the door of his friend and comrade Francesco Carmignola as a Matteotti Club initiative.⁵¹⁰

Meanwhile Fantin's antifascist activities had been attracting metropolitan attention. Since 1926, with the Matteotti crisis safely buried, the fascist regime had been tightening its grip on Italy by overhauling the legislation governing political surveillance in the country and

abroad, using its ascendancy over the parliament to pass a unified code of public security law, the infamous Testo Unico Leggi Pubblico Sicurezza (TULPS) Under this framework, the practice of political surveillance, fairly restricted under the liberal regime, was much expanded. Over the life of the fascist dictatorship, the Directorate General of Public Security grew greatly and came to manage in its Central Case Archives dossiers on some 160,000 individuals.⁵¹¹ It is one measure of the prominence of Francesco Fantin that he was among the first to come within the enhanced purview of the DGPS as it pursued its new mandate in conjunction with the Italian consular service to follow antifascist émigrés into the worldwide Italian diaspora. On 19 January 1927 in reply to a DGPS wire of 23 November 1926 the Royal Italian Consulate at Brisbane wrote to the DGPS regarding Cesare De Luca, Costante Danesi and 'Francesco Frontin, native of Schio where he worked in the Rossi textile works, in Australia for over two years and currently resident at Ingham, Queensland, where he conducts anarchist propaganda.' His association with the journal Roma Fede was also noted. A file was opened on 'Frontin' and marked 'for further development'⁵¹²

The vagaries of intelligence derived from informers were to bedevil the closer identification of 'Frontin' by the Italian authorities for some years. The process began with an enquiry by the Chief of Police Bocchini regarding 'Frontin' to the provincial Prefecture of Vicenza in April 1927.⁵¹³ No passport by anyone with that surname could be traced by the DGPS as of mid May 1927.⁵¹⁴ By the end of the month the Vicenza Prefecture was also reporting to the DGPS that 'the above named anarchist is absolutely unknown in the Comune of Schio, where he does not figure in the Registry, just as it does not appear that he worked in the Rossi textile works.' The DGPS however would not be baulked and ordered further enquiries.⁵¹⁵ The picture became more confused in July 1927 when the Vicenza Prefecture received 'an ignoble foglio' from Francesco Carmagnola, 'textile worker and fervent

Communist' who, it emerged later in the month, had emigrated to escape fascist reprisals on 23 February 1922 from San Vito Leguzzano in the company of his political comrade Luigi Francesco Fantin, textile worker, born 19 May 1896. Carmagnola's connection with the association Pro Political Victims was also noted.⁵¹⁶ It should be emphasised here that Carmagnola would not have taken Luigi Fantin with him as a travelling companion had there been any such marked disparity in their political views as later appears to have developed between the brothers Fantin. Therefore it seems fair to assume that Luigi Fantin was at least generically leftist in his leanings during his early years in Australia. At any rate the 'ignobile foglietto' presented the Italian authorities with a conundrum concerning 'Frontin', which was resolved by effectively confounding the two eldest brother's Fantin, both of whom, as it happened, had at the time been in Australia 'for over two years.' In October 1927 and again in January 1928 Bocchini solicited further information from the Brisbane Consulate whence the intelligence on 'Frontin' had originated.⁵¹⁷ In March 1928 the Vicenza Prefecture confirmed to the DGPS the youthful communism of Luigi Francesco, a retrospective assessment reiterated as late as June 1930. The Prefecture was evidently convinced that he was 'Frontin', giving his date of emigration as March 1922 and advising that he had no criminal record or outstanding warrants against him.⁵¹⁸ This was a trifle odd, given the suspended sentence for 'outraging' the Carabinieri which had hung over Luigi Francesco at the time of his departure for Australia, even if its five year term had expired. Nonetheless the oversight was later to be corrected and figure in the state's reasoning about the brother's Fantin in Australia.⁵¹⁹

As late as May 1928 the Brisbane Consulate was unable to retrieve passport details concerning 'Frontin'. But in June of that year the penny dropped, and Consul San Marzano was able to correctly report, on the basis of 'enquiries made by the political police here', the particulars of Francesco Fantin to the DGPS, born in 1901 and emigrated in 1924, noting that he

was 'currently employed at the Australian Sugar Mill Mourilyan Queensland.'⁵²⁰ In early August 1928 the DGPS duly informed Vicenza, which confirmed the 'correction' of the dates of birth and emigration of Francesco Fantin, but at the end of the month the DGPS was still uncertain if his real name was not Luigi Francesco, and 'filed for now' the note from Vicenza in a common Fantin dossier.⁵²¹ But it was not a correction which was needed at this juncture, but a distinction. In the meantime the identities of the two brothers could still not reliably be distinguished. In getting the early attention of Bocchini Fantin shared a distinction with Carmagnola and the Trevigiano activist and editor Isidoro Bertazzon.⁵²² In December 1929 Bocchini was still persevering with his systematic enquiries, circularising the Prefects of the Realm re 'correspondence France one Fantini not better identified resident Australia. Pray urgently identify maximum vigilance especially frontiers'⁵²³

Meanwhile the affairs of Luigi Fantin had been developing apace in Queensland. In June 1928 he applied for naturalisation as a British citizen, declaring that he resided at Edmonton via Cairns and that 'during my residence in Australia I have not at any time offered my services to a nation at war with Great Britain, or taken any action detrimental to the interests of the British Empire.' In his August report under the Nationality Act 1920-25 Constable J Herbert verified Luigi Fantin's good character and referred that he had made his application 'To become a British Subject and own his own property.' Luigi Francesco Fantin took his Oath of Allegiance 'by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth his heirs and successors according to law' in December 1928, but by oversight his naturalisation was not gazetted until June 1931.⁵²⁴ In his application Luigi described himself as unmarried, but it is clear from events that his mind was turning to striking root contemporaneously in this connection. He was seeking not only to acquire property, but to set up a household. By June 1929 he was back home in the Schio district as a British citizen, much to

the consternation of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Bocchini as to what might be the purpose of the repatriation of the aforementioned pre-eminent scourge of fascism in Australia, 'brother of the communist Fantin Francesco'.⁵²⁵

On July 19 Foreign Affairs chimed in referring a report to the DGPS through the Townsville Consulate from Marchetti, supposedly the historic victim of Luigi Fantin in 1925, stating that the latter had quietened down remarkably of late, perhaps, the Consul commented 'in view of a proximate trip to Italy!' Perhaps indeed. The same day the Vicenza Prefecture reported to Rome that Luigi Fantin had repatriated a month previous and married in mid May Giuseppina Saccardo at San Vito before returning with her to Australia.⁵²⁶ According to family tradition, the Saccardo family were small proprietors, from the other side of the tracks socioeconomically and politically in the small society of San Vito. As he contemplated settling down, Luigi Fantin may well have come under the cultural influence of his future bride. Meanwhile, unable to sift reports from distant climes, the Prefecture fell back on the impossibility of excluding that there was some substance in the original Marchetti complaint given the suspended sentence in the Schio Pretura of Luigi Francesco Fantin to one month's imprisonment.⁵²⁷ Clearly a consistent political orientation and an irascible temper were here supposed. It therefore cautiously requested that Luigi Fantin be kept under observation and that his citizenship status be checked. In the dying days of 1930 the file of Luigi Francesco Fantin son of Giovanni Battista was passed from the Central Political Case Archives to DGPS Section III,⁵²⁸ wherein was managed the J-5 Series of dossiers of 'foreign subversives' of interest, mainly expatriates who had naturalised overseas.⁵ By December of 1932 the DGPS had understood enough to return all papers regarding Francesco Giovanni Fantin to the CPC.⁵²⁹ From this point there were two files and distinction between the brothers Fantin became systematic and substantial for the Italian authorities. Yet

⁵ Other figures of interest included cosmopolitan antifascists such as Professor Robert Shaw, who held the chair of Italian at the University of Sydney. Shaw was an affiliate of the liberal socialist 'Giustizia e Liberta' See ACS MI CPC J - 5 Shaw R. A 1938

they were still obliged to rely on informers, who told them in June 1931 that 'amongst other things he has acquired a sugar cane plantation in cooperation with his three brothers and their communist ideas of universal division of inheritance are greatly modified'.⁵³⁰ This may have been true of Luigi, as we have seen, and also of Alfonso, who also married a woman, [Signora Ines, a Mantovana⁵³¹], from the other side of the tracks, socioeconomically and politically. There is no corroboration that Francesco Fantin however wavered in his anarchism.

A sequel to the repatriation to Italy and marriage of Luigi Fantin was the case of mistaken identity involving Maurizio Fantin, a person as it proved quite unrelated to the brothers Fantin of San Vito or to any subversive activity. In late 1929 after the return of Luigi Fantin to Australia Maurizio Fantin was caught up in the dragnet predisposed to prevent the infiltration into the Kingdom of Italy of another subversive assassin like Bresci, not to mention those who had already attempted the life of Mussolini. Thus the case of Maurizio Fantin was a comedy of errors by no means without its serious side, and another measure of the attention devoted by the metropolitan and consular fascist authorities to the activities of Francesco Fantin in Australia, difficult to identify as he was. The essentials of the case are that in December 1929 and January 1930 Maurizio Fantin was the subject of DGPS correspondence with the Treviso Prefecture [in which Bocchini interested himself] and the Anversa Consulate in Austria as to his identity and movements.⁵³² In February he was arrested crossing from Italy into France.⁵³³ On both occasions the question was asked of the DGPS: might he not be the antipodean troublemaker suspected of having repatriated as mentioned in correspondence? As it emerged Maurizio Fantin proved in the eyes of the authorities

'to be of good moral and political conduct. He has never explicated subversive activity...He was a participant in fascismo at Viareggio from its first hour, and enrolled

in the Partito Nazionale Fascista until 1924 when he was expelled for inactivity. ...For many years now he trades in motor cars.⁵³⁴

October 1929 saw the Wall Street stockmarket crash.⁵³⁵ Prices for Australian rural exports fell precipitately in the early years of the Depression, and the modest recovery after 1933 did not restore prices in real value terms to those of the previous decade until the outbreak of World War II. Employment and wage levels assumed a similar profile. Returns from trade unions, whose membership fell to less than a third of the workforce, indicated that over a fifth of wage and salary earners were unemployed from mid 1930 to late 1934. In the second quarter of 1932 trade union unemployment reached 30%: as many as half of a workforce of just over two million were underemployed. The 1934 census found that barely two thirds of all breadwinners had received the basic wage the previous year.⁵³⁶ The human tragedy of the Depression will have appalled Fantin, confirming in his mind his convictions about the shortcomings of capitalism. But it did not maul him directly. Throughout his working life in Australia he was employed in the Queensland canefields or the woollen mills of Geelong. Politically it did however cramp his style. For small political organisations like those of the Italo-Australian anarchists, these were times of falling memberships and revenues and internal dissension.⁵³⁷ Economic circumstances furnished the framework of a devilish decade of difficulty and drama.

Meanwhile in North Queensland political skirmishing between antifascists and their anatagonists proceeded apace. In May 1930 the coat of arms of the Innisfail Consulate was severed from the consular flagpole and damaged in its fall. Almost three weeks later the blazon was discovered in thick undergrowth on a bank of the Johnstone River. Despite a reward of two hundred pounds being offered by the Queensland government in June and the dispatch of special investigators, no one was ever prosecuted. These events were sufficiently significant for a young

scholar in the Department of History of the University of Queensland, TP Fry, to write up their legal and diplomatic ramifications as 'The Consular Incidents in North Queensland' in the 1935 Proceedings of the Australian & New Zealand Society of International Law. In retrospect Fry emphasised the fractured political context in which police enquiries came to nought. He remarked upon the

high feeling existing in Innisfail at the time between various industrial, racial, and political organisations and groups – such as the British Preference League, the Returned Sailors & Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia, the Australian Workers' Union, the Italian Club, the Queensland Cane Growers Association, the Italian Fascists and the Italian antifascists.

Owing to these dissensions, 'great difficulty was experienced by the police in obtaining information.'⁵³⁸ At the time of the events in question Fantin had moved north from Mourilyan with his brothers to Edmonton near Cairns. But he was still very much on the North Queensland scene and a party to the milieu which generated these symbolic acts. Certainly he would have sympathised with the perpetrators. It was no accident that anarchism, as propaganda of word and deed, was very much a politics of gestures.

Under Carmagnola's leadership Ingham was the scene of two of the most exuberant incidents in the history of the rough and ready methods of Italian anarchist antifascist counter-coercion of fascism in the antipodes. In August 1930 an official tour of the canefields by the Brisbane Consul General Count Gabrio di San Marzano was seriously disrupted. The Consul was beaten at Ingham, Babinda and Cairns, with the hapless official being spat upon, stripped of his fascist party badge, obliged to hear the band persuaded to play the *Internazionale* and forced

to enter Innisfail under police protection. For good measure the anarchist publication La Riscossa [The Counterattack] boasted of the successful spoiling effort. On 26 December 1931 there occurred a second incident, which was to signal the increasing cooperation between Italo-Australian anarchists and native communists. On this occasion the Townsville Vice Consul Mario Melano was assaulted at a reception by Francesco Carmagnola, Mario Tardiani and Tom Saviane, his party badge being torn from his lapel. Later in the day a party of forty antifascists stormed the Vice Consul's hotel and a glass was thrown at him. It would have been like Fantin to have been present on either or both of these occasions. Carmagnola and Tardiani were charged with assault and released on bail of one hundred and twenty pounds. Their case was tried on the eleventh and twelfth of February 1932, the communist lawyer Fred Paterson appearing for the defence, contesting with his characteristic energy⁵³⁹ a determined prosecutor, Mr Quinn. Paterson made much of the risk that if convicted the defendants would be deported to an uncertain fate in Italy. The jury was fortunately composed mainly of waterside workers, who ignored the recommendation by Acting Justice MacGregor of a conviction for 'atheists,..people who have been anarchists but are not now, and people who are not communists...putting forward their cranky beliefs,' and acquitted the defendants to the delight of the Italian crowd outside. Again, Fantin could well have been present. Certainly the close association of Paterson and the CPA with the North Queensland Italian community dated from this incident and this period.⁵⁴⁰ If the paths of Paterson and Fantin did not cross at this time, they were to do so later on.

Cresciani argues that Paterson's successful defence of the Italian trio encouraged further anarchist initiatives in North Queensland. In October 1934 the Italian cruiser Armando Diaz proceeding on a goodwill tour of Australia, berthed at Cairns. This was at a time when Mussolini's bellicose intentions toward Abyssinia, under contemplation since 1931, were

beginning to mature, with the Wal Wal *casus belli* of December 1934 in the offing. After a long fascist propaganda campaign, rumours of war were already in the air by October.⁵⁴¹ North Queensland anarchists and antifascists printed handbills for the occasion in Italian, inciting the sailors to desert. They were successful in persuading one seaman, Casaburi by name, and hiding him until the ship steamed away. It will be remembered that both Carmagnola and Fantin had anti-militarist precedents in Italy, and is likely that they gave expression to their disposition on this occasion.⁵⁴² Italian anarchist antimilitarism, a longstanding variant of Italian leftist opposition to nationalist imperial expansionism in Africa going back to the Abyssinian debacles of 1887 and 1896 and the Libyan adventure of 1911, found expression in North Queensland during the Abyssinian crisis as a prelude to antifascist activism during the Spanish Civil War,⁵⁴³ contributing to the consolidation of the united front in 'the Red North.' Once again Paterson and the CPA were prominent in solidarity with the Italian community, Paterson remarking in retirement 'I would say my greatest work prior to the war was done in the anti-fascist struggle.'⁵⁴⁴ According to the communist leader Ralph Gibson, the Abyssinian conflict was a turning point for the left nationally.⁵⁴⁵ [One example of this at the University of Adelaide was law student Ronald Johnson's 1936 League of Nations Prize winning essay on Abyssinia, Italy & the League, very critical of Italian defiance of the League and international law.] This was in marked contrast to the right wing view, brutally clarified by Churchill in October 1935, that 'no one can keep up the pretence that Abyssinia is a fit, worthy and equal member of a League of civilised nations.'⁵⁴⁶ A more substantial example of this phenomenon in Australia was the foundation of an Australian chapter of the international communist front the Movement Against War and Fascism, initiated by Barbusse and Muenzenberg in Amsterdam in 1932, which attracted proletarian and intellectual support around the country from its foundation in the course of 1933-4. The MAWAF was present on the canefields, and indeed the involvement in industrial action there of the communist activist and novelist Jean Devanny began as a tour of duty on the

multicultural Sugar Coast as a MAWAF organiser.⁵⁴⁷ European as they were, Fantin, Carmagnola and their comrades in 'the Red North' were undoubtedly intellectually and politically alive to these developments, whereas they had nothing to say publicly about the emerging threat of Japanese militarism of these years.

Until dual dossiers for the brothers Fantin were established in the early years of the Depression most activity on file related rightly or wrongly to Luigi except for the initial and unmistakable notice of 'Frontin'. Thereafter a series of documents attest to the seniority of Francesco Giovanni Fantin as one of the foremost anarchist exponents in this country. This was not a particularly august position, and inherently part time, but it did involve a lifetime's commitment. Certainly it is wrong of Associate Professor Nursey-Bray to disparage Fantin as unlike his peer and comrade Francesco Carmagnola in that he allegedly 'did not play a leading part in the national organisation of the anarchist or anti-fascist movements.'⁵⁴⁸ In the first place this overstates both Carmagnola's role and the modesty of the movement in which he and Fantin were eminent among equals. Secondly these two young men from San Vito were friends⁵⁴⁹ who shared a common social background and political culture which negates such invidious distinctions. Thirdly it conflicts with the wartime conviction of the Queensland branch of the Security Service that 'Francesco FANTIN's name seems to be connected fairly prominently with the infiltration of Anarchism amongst the Italians in Australia.'⁵⁵⁰

As Carmagnola was himself to recall during World War II when making representations to have Fantin released from internment, at the time the Matteotti Club was established as an antifascist organisation in 1927, Francesco Fantin was one of the three principals together with Carmagnola and Valentino Ciotti.⁵⁵¹ This may have been the occasion on which Fantin and Carmagnola had themselves photographed together with another emigrant from San Vito,

Emilio Marta, at Melbourne's famous Talma studio, toasting undying resistance to oppression. Alternate dates would be later in the life of the Matteotti Club, or earlier upon Fantin's arrival (with Marta?) in Melbourne in December 1924.⁵⁵² By 1928 the Matteotti Club had 500-700 members,⁵⁵³ dozens of whom paid up to dance in defiance of fascism up to three times a week, funding an occasional anarchist press and sundry antifascist causes, particularly support of victims and opponents of the Italian fascist regime in Europe.⁵⁵⁴ Photographic evidence also associates Francesco Fantin as early as 1927 or earlier with the Mourilyan Italian Progressive Club founded in 1923 and lead by the Danesi brothers, champions of Italian interests in the canefields.⁵⁵⁵ It will be remembered that 'Frontin' was first denounced in January 1927 to the DGPS as an associate of Costante Danesi. Like the Matteotti Club, it was non-sectarian and organised community dances as a means of fundraising and aggregation. The first dance was held in April 1924 and was a great success with the Italian community and the entire Innisfail district⁵⁵⁶ Both clubs were the result of the organisational efforts of a handful of anarchist activists and sympathisers who were successful in attracting support. The Innisfail Hospital and Ambulance and the Mourilyan School of Arts were amongst the beneficiaries of the astute policy of sponsorship in the Italian interest, conducted as an integral part of advocacy to the wider community.⁵⁵⁷

It is true as Cresciani notes that no specialised intellectuals or organisers formed part of the antifascist diaspora in Australia⁵⁵⁸, but the Italian antifascist emigration generally was predominantly proletarian.⁵⁵⁹ Communist émigrés were under political and economic pressure to remain in Europe, and anarchist ring leaders such as Malatesta and Berneri obeyed the same logic. But the anarchist proletarian émigrés in Australia nonetheless demonstrated a genial political capacity which marks them in Gramscian terms as 'organic intellectuals' adapted to the

leadership requirements of their class.⁶ Fantin deserves recognition as such along with Carmagnola and his other colleagues. In Sydney in late 1926 Carmagnola established an active Lega Antifascista having a membership of three hundred with the assistance of the Piovene communist Giovanni Terribile Antico.⁵⁶⁰ A contributor to the anarchist press, he was another émigré from the Schio district, demonstrating a preference typical of this generation of émigrés for working politically with comrades sharing common origins of community and class.⁵⁶¹ Analogously, Fantin and Carmagnola had too much in common, their families having long been friends in their home town, not to work together as organisers as occasion presented. Inscribed in the *Rubrica di frontiera* at the request of the Vicenza Prefecture in 1930, Antico was naturalised on 4 August 1931.⁵⁶² Macintyre effectively confirms the contemporary report of Chief of Police Bocchini that Antico was from at least 1927 if not before the secretary of the Italian group in the CPA, confirming the connection between Italian émigrés and the Communist Party.⁵⁶³

Above and beyond the organisational harnesses in which they worked together, the analogies in profile and practice between Fantin, Carmagnola and other émigrés were multiple. As early as 1924 Carmagnola's name figured as a subscriber to Pensiero e Volontà, a fact which later emerged when the effects of the deceased Malatesta passed into the hands of the Italian police.⁵⁶⁴ Fantin subscribed to the same journal in 1926.⁵⁶⁵ Likewise in December 1929 Fantin's address (like that of Carmagnola and Bertazzon) was discovered in an address book stolen by the Italian police from the anarchist leader Camillo Berneri. In November 1932 Francesco Fantin was reported by the DGPS as having sent the considerable sum of 2,000 Lire (say two hundred pounds) to Anarchist Aid Geneva, which marks him as a significant donor and fundraiser. He was moreover listed as an adherent of the Antifascist Committee of that city.

⁶ In his Prison Notebooks Gramsci contrasted traditional professional intellectuals with 'organic' intellectuals, such as political and union activists and officials amongst the proletariat and managers amongst the bourgeoisie.

Again he associated himself in this with Carmagnola and Bertazzon, who, after 1925 `sent large sums of money to...Malatesta via the Geneva anarchists',⁵⁶⁶ Apart from being a fellow Veneto, Fantin also shared with Bertazzon and Carmagnola the distinction of being gazetted for arrest at the frontier in the event of repatriation to Italy.⁵⁶⁷ After Carmagnola engineered the expulsion of Bertazzon from the Matteotti Club in 1930,⁵⁶⁸ Fantin retained good relations with both parties. Thus we know from a November 1941 letter to Fantin from Chiara Bertazzon of the `inseparability' of Fantin and Carmagnola, which she found `very strange.'⁵⁶⁹

Then there is Fantin's work as a propagandist to consider, both by word of mouth and as a correspondent and disseminator of the Italo-Australian anarchist press, which on one occasion records his work as an industrial orator.⁵⁷⁰ This general description of propagandist was the one consistently settled upon him by the Italian consular authorities in Australia until June 1940. The same November 1932 DGPS report continued

The Political Police Division has already had occasion to remark Fantin ...The said individual, from enquiries made at the time, seems to be identical with Fantin Francesco, who lives at Edmonton with his brothers Alfonso and Luigi. The aforesaid Division finds that he carries out active political propaganda, as distinct from his brothers, who do not occupy themselves with politics. Indeed according to the Secretary of the Cairns Fascio...Fantin Francesco is a rabid anarchist.

Another document in the DGPS CPC dossier on Francesco Fantin was the List of Compatriots Most Known for their Communist Ideas. This list, originating in a November 1933 report by the Sydney Consulate, received consideration by the DGPS in Rome in January 1934 in a note entitled Object – Communist Organisation. Fantin was listed as a resident of Redlynch, the most

northerly point at which he is known to have cut cane. The fact that this document found its way into his file is yet another clue as to Fantin's real level of activity and significance.

In December 1931 the ALP was shattered at the Federal general elections and the catholic admirer of Mussolini and erstwhile Labor Commonwealth Treasurer Joseph Aloysius Lyons became Prime Minister as the anticommunist champion of conventional and deflationary ideas of financial probity and economic management. The ALP had split under the challenge of addressing the Great Depression, leading to the reformation of the disorientated Nationalists as the 'apolitical' United Australia Party under the auspices of Melbourne corporate establishment interests lead by the stockbroking firm of JB Were. The overthrow of the Scullin government effectively ended the dalliance of the political right with subversion, which had involved ambiguous figures such as the Victorian Commissioner of Police Sir Thomas Blamey, and even seen both private and public appeals addressed to that altogether more honourable man Sir John Monash to assume the dictatorship of the country, appeals which Monash decidedly rejected. Nonetheless these initiatives and the New Guard and White Army experiments of the Depression years demonstrate along with right wing sympathy for European fascism that Australian conservatism had its own fascist tendencies.⁵⁷¹ Ultimately these were sublimated into a conventional synthesis because traditional Manchester small state doctrine common to liberalism and fascism, emphasising economic retrenchment and national security functions, was able to be expressed within a constitutional framework. Men like Fantin however will have noticed the chill similarities between Australian conservatism and Italian fascism and wondered about their destiny in this country.

As smallholders and workers in the sugar industry, the brothers Fantin were as insulated as anybody in Australia from the effects of the Depression. Sugar was Queensland's most

important crop at this desperate time, sustained demand for sugar contributing to lower than the official national average unemployment of 25.8% in a State economy based on the primary sector. Officially unemployment in Queensland peaked in 1932 at 19.9% of the workforce. In 1930 the sugar industry employed 28,000 field workers and 7,000 mill and refinery workers.⁵⁷² Certainly union unemployment in pastoral and agricultural Queensland rose in that year to no more than 11.6%. While this was by no means a negligible figure, it was virtually doubled in the manufacturing states of the southeastern seaboard, where a fifth of unionists were unemployed.⁵⁷³ Still, even in the sugar industry, there were signs of scarcity of work which spilled over into racial tension.⁵⁷⁴ The author Robert Conquest, trying to get a job in Queensland, was told that Italian immigrants were cutting sugar cane at award rates, then handing part of their wages back to 'the god-damned cane growers'.⁵⁷⁵ It was against the background of such labour competition that the dispute over 'British Preference' was fought out in the canefields. In the wake of the 1925 appointment by the Queensland Labor government of the Ferry Commission into the ethnic and labour situation in North Queensland, where millworkers were refusing to handle Italian cut cane, a confederation of unionists, patriotic and Protestant forces [mentioned above by Fry] coalesced, forming in 1930 the British Preference League. By 1931 there were ten chapters in all the major sugar centres of North Queensland. The League opposed further Italian immigration into the sugar growing region and sought to impose an initial employment quota for aliens of 25% on the canefields, reserving 100% of employment to 'British' Australians within three years.⁵⁷⁶

In 1932 Paterson again represented the Italian and immigrant communities when he conducted research and acted in the Townsville Supreme Court for the Foreign Canecutters' Defence Association, another inspired creation of Fantin's associates the Danesi brothers.⁵⁷⁷ Paterson unsuccessfully argued that British Preference was illegal, appealing also to nationalist

sentiment by pointing out that Italy had been an ally of the Triple Entente in the Great War, sacrificing half a million dead.⁵⁷⁸ Nevertheless Paterson believed that the issue had been crystallised by the case for the Queensland Italian community and ultimately led to a political victory on the issue which advanced the appeal to Italians of the CPA, a finding in which his biographer concurs. Of Australia's 26,756 Italian born residents at the 1933 census, 17,658 of them Italian subjects, 8,355 resided in Queensland, most of them exclusively Italian speakers illiterate in English. Of the North Queensland Italian community, the great bulk were concentrated in the Ingham, Innisfail, Tully and Cairns districts.⁵⁷⁹ By the same survey, there were 7,428 Italian born persons resident in North Queensland, 3,912 of them unnaturalised. Many in this community were like Fantin Veneti who considered themselves political refugees. Even before the Great War the process of Italian penetration of sugar small holdings in which the brothers Fantin were participant was underway which was to occasion such resentment between the wars as it became more and more substantial.⁵⁸⁰ Between 1925 and 1940 when wartime labour shortages rendered it redundant, 'British Preference' was the paramount industrial issue in North Queensland.⁵⁸¹ As an Italian canecutter, Fantin's interests and sense of justice were directly affected. His involvement in the struggle at some level may be hypothesised, despite the patchiness of the documentary record. In January 1929 the Italian Consul General in Sydney alerted the DGPS in Rome that Francesco Fantin had attended a convention of the 'Associazione Nazionale per lo Studio dei Problemi di Lavoro', which at least confirms his early interest in industrial questions.⁵⁸² When interned in early 1942, one of the books sequestered from Fantin and subsequently returned to his brother Luigi in 1946 was Il lavoro attraente [Attractive Work], a theme which he must often have pondered as a man who earned his bread from the hard and dirty labour of canecutting.⁵⁸³ Eventually on the eve of World War II he was to write to American comrades saying 'I am tired of the tropics...'⁵⁸⁴ A

photograph taken at this time shows him looking distinctly run down. But before he quit the Sugar Coast, there were major industrial battles to be fought.

Notwithstanding the prominence of the British Preference issue, the high point of industrial militancy achieved in the region between the wars was the major occupational health and safety dispute⁵⁸⁵ over Weil's Disease, a fever occasioned by the virus leptospira icterohaemorrhagiae. Named for its discoverer, a German military physician, Weil's Disease was first diagnosed in the sugar districts by Gordon Morrisey, an Ingham doctor, during the 1933 cane crushing season. By year's end he had treated forty cases. When the 1934 season opened in June thirty-six new cases appeared within a month. In August eighty cases were reported in ten days, all sugar industry workers. The post mortems of the minority of patients who died revealed extensive internal haemorrhage. Both Morrisey and Tim Cotter of the Commonwealth Health Laboratory in Townsville reported that the virus was spread by rats urinating on the cane stands, contaminating patients through abrasions and lacerations due to handling cane trash. That year Morrisey and Cotter contributed papers to the Medical Journal of Australia, initiating a growing medical discussion of the diagnosis in Australia.⁵⁸⁶ Cotter, a distinguished physician and medical researcher, was appointed Medical Superintendent of Innisfail Hospital in 1936, and later awarded an MBE for services to medicine.⁵⁸⁷

But supporting this scientific effort was class action, a strike wave of stoppages in defiance of the AWU rolling through 1934 and 1935, intended to win Industrial Court orders to burn the cane to 'sterilise' it against the virus lurking in the litter. President of the strike committee was Francesco Carmagnola, flanked by two communists Mario Cazzolino and Pat Clancy.⁵⁸⁸ Carmagnola who was resident in Sydney at this time was approached by the CPA to organise Italian labour on the canefields under the cover of acting as a travelling salesman in

work clothing.⁵⁸⁹ Communist leadership, stigmatised as that of 'southern agitators',⁵⁹⁰ such as Jean Devanny, [who published a fictionalised account of the dispute in 1936, Sugar Heaven, emphasising the participation of Italians and women],⁵⁹¹ was a feature of these strikes, and Fred Paterson was an advisor to the strikers in the early phases of the dispute.⁵⁹² Of the Italian strikers Devanny has one of her characters report; 'it's marvellous, the way they submit to discipline...Nearly all of them tend towards anarchism, yet they follow directions implicitly.' She describes six hundred cutters and mill hands foregathering on 7 November 1935 at Mourilyan to ride 'the filthy cattle trucks the government had provided for their transport into Innisfail', disembarking 'in bright sunshine ...to the strains of The Red Flag...The International [and] The Marseillaise...[with] the babel of tongues and uproar of defiance [ascending] to the skies...In Innisfail the townspeople were rent with reflected strife. Business fell away to nothing. The relief committee exploited every means of raising funds and ensured that no real distress went unrelieved...Maltese, Germans, a Spaniard or two, Australian, English, Irish and Scotch fraternised in fine style.'⁵⁹³ We know Fantin lived at Edmonton from 1933-9,⁵⁹⁴ so it appears that he was certainly in a position to second the efforts of his comrade from San Vito in the key years 1934-5, and once again as a comrade of Carmagnola he may have crossed paths with Devanny and Paterson in this period. There is an oral tradition deriving from Carmagnola that Fantin did assist with the organisation of the 1934 Weil's Disease strike. After its successful conclusion at the end of the cutting season in November he turned south to Melbourne with Carmagnola, but finding little work, returned north after a couple of months in which he had presumably shared Carmagnola's activities.⁵⁹⁵

Industrial action resuming in the 1935 cutting season, what was at issue was essentially simple. To burn or not to burn was the question, as the farmers conceived some economic interest in the trash or apprehended damage to their crop. In August 1934 CSR, represented by

ES Smith appearing in the Industrial Court also for the Australian Sugar Growers' Association and the Queensland Canegrowers' Association, presented specious arguments which were rejected by the bench and even its own expert witnesses.⁵⁹⁶ The Court twice granted orders for burning cane in 1934. The whole issue was disputed again legally and industrially in 1935. The communist inspired rank and file Militant Minority Movement⁵⁹⁷ organising the strike in the absence of leadership from the AWU, despised by many of its historically disaffected members as 'Australia's Worst Union', whose Brisbane based officials thought talk of an eight hour day was communism.⁵⁹⁸ Indeed Paterson was an animator of the MMM in the canefields, the local vehicle for communist industrial influence established by the Comintern in its Third Period crusade against social democratic 'social fascism'.⁵⁹⁹ As early as May 1932, even before Paterson moved north to Townsville from Brisbane, the AWU had complained in respect of his opposition to British Preference, that 'Paterson of the Communist Party is taking advantage of foreigners to undermine the AWU.'⁶⁰⁰ The greatest growth of the MMM in Australia, which had been restricted by the Third Period policy, came shortly before its dissolution with the Comintern's return to united front tactics after 1933.⁶⁰¹ Although the 1935 strike was lost, it proved to be one of those losing battles best fought, because in the event this tug of class war was ultimately resolved in favour of the workers. Together with the battle against British Preference, the Weil's disease struggle consolidated relations between the CPA and the Italian & immigrant communities generally in North Queensland, contributing to its reputation as 'The Red North'.⁶⁰² The combination of scientific and legal pressure and direct industrial action was eventually seconded by wartime labour shortages in the canefields. The success of this sustained multimodal class action argues to the industrial sophistication of the defacto united front strategy which the strikers employed, transcending political and ethnic divisions.

The longstanding controversy over 'British Preference' appears to be the background to a portentous remark made by Luigi Fantin and relayed by letter by an informer, James McCarthy, to the Aliens Registration Bureau in June 1940, which ultimately led to the internment of Francesco Fantin. Shaneen Fantin refers that her grandfather Luigi Fantin was in the habit of characterising the work capacity of potential employees by their Italian region of origin or otherwise by race. It happened that one of the elder brothers Fantin, identified simply as the 'eldest brother', had told McCarthy at one time 'I would sooner employ a Hindoo or an Afghan than a bloody Britisher'.⁶⁰³ This remark sounds in character and redolent of rejection of 'British Preference', whereas it is quite out of keeping with Francesco Fantin's protestations of affection for the Australian people, contained in his last letter as an internee.⁶⁰⁴ Moreover Luigi Fantin was in a position to talk like an employer, whereas Francesco Fantin was not. Thus we may discount Nursey – Bray's dismissal of it as a piece of imperial prejudice projected onto an Italian. There is an implicit measure of Italian pride in Luigi Fantin's pronouncement, pride in Italian industriousness. This was in his case associated with pride in Italian success as a colony in Australia and as an empire in Africa.

Although he misinterprets this piece of evidence, Nursey-Bray accepts that it had serious consequences for Fantin.⁶⁰⁵ McCarthy was no philistine informer. He knew enough of Italian antifascism for example to discuss the writings of one time Italian liberal premier Francesco Saverio Nitti with Italians.⁶⁰⁶ He identified others as fascists, including associates of the brother Fantin in question, and on the strength of this it was determined that 'due regard must be given to McCarthy's evidence here as being very accurate.'⁶⁰⁷ This was disastrous for Francesco Fantin because, interviewed at the Aliens Registration Bureau at the Roma Street station on the evening of 13 June 1940, McCarthy, who knew Alfonso Fantin 'as the younger of the two brothers' misidentified 'his elder brother Francesco' as 'a very militant fascist.' Unfortunately

Francesco Fantin had decamped to Geelong, and he could not be identified by photograph because his file had been despatched to Southern Command. McCarthy clearly did not know that he was dealing with three brothers Fantin. Nevertheless his quotation of Luigi Fantin must be considered accurate intelligence given its echoes of the British Preference controversy and Luigi Fantin's own racial views. Its sting lay in the identification of one of the brothers Fantin as antagonistic to all things British, at a time when the imperial community of which the Commonwealth of Australia was under threat, and the national loyalty test applied was to the Empire and the British ethnic and institutional constitution of Australia. How this statement reverberated in respect of North Queensland, amongst the most ethnically diversified white communities in the country, may well be imagined.

#15: No Pasaran

The Anarchists as a whole appear to have considered Spain as their `promised land' from which they hoped to spread their doctrine throughout the world. They consider that during the Spanish war the democracies (through their policy of non-intervention) betrayed the cause of freedom just as much as the Communists.

Security Service Brisbane 14 July 1942

In 1936 through legitimist treason the Iberian peninsular became the cockpit of Europe, theatre of a proxy war where the opening act was played of a larger civil war of hearts and minds which would eventually engulf the continent from the bombardment of Warsaw to the fall of Berlin and beyond into the Cold War. In Europe the Spanish Civil War was the defining emotional experience of a generation.⁶⁰⁸ But in Australia the tyranny of distance induced a more torpid response, except among active minorities. As Menghetti has argued

The Spanish Civil War aroused passions throughout the world, partly because of persistent foreign involvement and partly because of the wider ideological conflict reflected in the struggle for political control in Spain. Indeed it has been suggested that it was in essence a European war confined to Spanish soil by the tacit agreement of the principal European powers. In Australia however, the impact of the war was less discernible than in many other countries. Andrews claims that there were two exceptions to the general low key reaction: the Roman Catholic Church and the Communist Party of Australia. To these

should be added the sugar producing communities of North Queensland whose contribution to the antifascist forces, both in men and in financial support, was out of proportion to their size.⁶⁰⁹

As the historian of Australian isolationism and appeasement during the European crisis of the late thirties has observed, Catholics and Communists held strong opinions about the issues and each other.⁶¹⁰ The pacifism on all sides of national politics which had been one of the most significant consequences of the Great War in Australia was rapidly superseded so far as the antifascist diaspora in North Queensland was concerned by denunciation of the hypocrisy of non-intervention and a desire to bring on the hour of a settling of accounts with fascism, and by extension with the Church, its uneasy partner in the government of Italian society as the official religion of Italy under the 1929 Lateran Pacts⁶¹¹. That same year Carmagnola from the pages of La Riscossa warned the Italian community in North Queensland against the well known Father Mambrini.⁶¹² We know Fantin was an atheist. When he was interned in early 1942 he identified himself as such and one of his books confiscated at that time was Dio non esiste [God Does Not Exist].⁶¹³ There is an oral tradition that Fantin and Carmagnola were disconcerted on their arrival in Australia not to find a socialist paradise but a country in which the Italian community was largely subject to the twin authority of the fascist regime and the Church, the latter influential also in the host community.⁶¹⁴

The position of the Roman Catholic Church in Australia was animated by fear of atheism and anticlericalism in keeping with its longstanding antimodernist, illiberal and antisocialist vocation.⁶¹⁵ It was best articulated by the Primate of Queensland Archbishop Duhig, an open apologist for fascism as a social doctrine⁶¹⁶ and enthusiast for the `marriage' of

the Church and the fascist state.⁶¹⁷ Writing in the Catholic Freeman's Journal in September 1936, after enumerating the crimes of the Spanish government [many of them expressions of anarchist anticlericalism]⁶¹⁸ including the confiscation of Church property, Duhig stipulated:

The Catholic Church does not favour dictators, but it is far better for the Catholic Church to have a dictator and live, than to have a Government like the present Government of Spain. The rebels are fighting one of the most insidious forces that has ever arisen...and all Catholics should be determined to keep that force in check in this country. Otherwise they may find themselves in the position of the unfortunate Spaniards.

This policy of anticommunist philofascism, supported also by Cardinal Mannix of Melbourne,⁶¹⁹ was binding on the Australian faithful. It comes as no surprise that his protégé, the Italo-Australian ideologue BA Santamaria, gained his spurs as a Cold War warrior as a clericalist apologist for fascism and obscurantism in Spain.⁶²⁰ This orientation was echoed by the Commonwealth bureaucracy, which also supposed that the Spanish Republic was the bastard creature of anarchism and communism, and certainly influenced that devout son of the Church, Prime Minister Lyons. It could hardly have been otherwise when the Catholic Coadjutor Archbishop of Sydney [later Cardinal] Gilroy aped Pius XI's designation of Mussolini as a man of Providence in seeing the hand of God in the Franco putsch also.⁶²¹ In September 1936 Lyons appealed to Australians not to subscribe funds or otherwise assist either party in the Civil War in the name of non interference, lest the conflict between two forms of government degenerate into a dangerous international situation.⁶²² But in fact from the first it was an Italian air lift which enabled Franco to invade Spain from Morocco in August 1936: non-intervention was a hypocritical farce from the beginning.⁶²³ The Catholic Worker spoke of `the most ferocious

persecution since Diocletian' and stablemates such as the Melbourne Advocate bruited accounts of anticlerical atrocities which glossed over the historic support of the Church for social subordination and the pronunciamento. As during the Abyssinian crisis conservatives in Britain and Australia continued to cite one another reciprocally to prove that London and the Dominions both wanted non-intervention. Andrews indeed has observed that 'the Commonwealth had become a convenient excuse for politicians all over the world to follow policies which they had decided on anyway.' Even Churchill, who habitually referred to the Franco forces as 'the Anti-Red Movement', wanted imperial re-armament to counter Germany alone: in May 1935 he was still describing Mussolini as 'a really great man', and in October 1937 with Abyssinia laid low and the Spanish Republic mauled by fascist intervention he lionised the Duce as a world historical figure of 'amazing qualities.'⁶²⁴ In this Churchill followed Menzies, who in September 1936 famously wished a pox on both fascism and communism in Spain, echoing Sir Samuel Hoare's reported hope that same month that 'Fascists and Bolsheviks will kill each other off' in Spain.⁶²⁵ Conservative foreign policy in Australia was thought out in terms of an imperial military and trade framework: RG Casey, onetime Australian Liaison Officer in London, told the 1938 Summer School of the Australian Institute of Political Science in Sydney that 'between Australia and Great Britain there is a community of interest that probably does not exist with equal force...between any other two countries in the world.'⁶²⁶ As late as the June 1937 Imperial Conference Lyons argued for imperial appeasement, asking with particular reference to Italy;

Might it not be possible in a comparatively short time for the old traditional friendship between Italy and the British Empire to be re-established? He had recently seen Signor Mussolini who had told him that there was every possible reason why Italy should be friendly with Great Britain. If the relations between the two countries were strained, Italy could not possibly develop her homeland much less her overseas empire...Signor Mussolini had asked

him to inform Great Britain that he wanted peace, and wished to live on the most friendly terms with Great Britain in the true interests of Italy itself.⁶²⁷

From the Abyssinian crisis to the Spanish Civil War, appeasement effectively destroyed any realistic hope of collective security against fascist aggression.⁶²⁸ At the time of the Munich crisis in September 1938 Lyons cabled Chamberlain suggesting that Bruce be sent to Rome to appeal to Mussolini to mediate `because as Prime Minister of Australia, I am on good personal terms with Signor Mussolini.'⁶²⁹ Not until March 1939 on the eve his death, did Lyons admit to the House of Representatives that the dictators had to be opposed⁶³⁰ and, implicitly, the futility of the traditional metropolitan and antipodean conservative policy of seeking to use them in an anticommunist function.⁶³¹ By then Lyons had been gulled, Abyssinia had been conquered, and democracy was dead in Spain and under threat in Europe. This was the context within which antifascists like Fantin and his comrades had to work in the late thirties. It was cold comfort that these men with primary educations had shown on the basis of their direct experience of fascism more insight into it than educated philistines, prelates and conformists in high office with the resources of nations and empires at their disposal. Certainly they had proved more prescient, like the communists, who argued in November 1937 that `Manchuria, Abyssinia, Spain and North China are stages on the road to a new war of pillage on the part of fascism, and unless the aggressors...are checked now, world war will eventuate.'⁶³²

Few outside the Spanish community in North Queensland were as moved by events in the Iberian peninsular as the Italian anarchists.⁶³³ Their imaginations were seized by news of collectivisation experiments being conducted by their comrades in Spain.⁶³⁴ According to the very fair account of the matter prepared in December 1941 by Lieutenant Finzel of the

Interpreters' Section of the Intelligence General Staff Northern Command on Anarchism in Australia

Anarchism advocates the abolition of all State authority, which it regards as a form of tyranny. It is equally opposed to all forms of Government, Fascist, Democratic or Communist. It wishes to substitute for the State an association of free individuals and groups, mutually bound together by voluntarily respected treaties. Anarchism is very strong in Spain, where it sought to achieve its objects by means of Syndicalist Trade Unions, apparently with the idea of organising society on an industrial, instead of State, basis. These unions took a prominent part in the Spanish Civil War. The Anarchists contend that they compromised their principles in the Civil War for the sake of achieving a united anti-Fascist front, only to be betrayed by the Communists.⁶³⁵

Fantin left no record of his opinion of events in Spain. That he emotionally identified with his comrades in Spain is however certain. Among the possessions seized when he was interned and subsequently returned to his brother Luigi in 1946 was a silk bandana issued by the *Federacion Anarquista Iberica*.⁶³⁶ Fantin did however subscribe to three anarchist journals from which some inkling of his thinking may be deduced regarding both the Spanish and the ensuing European war. Il Risveglio Anarchico [The Anarchist Awakening] of April and June 1940 published in Geneva gloated over the fall of France as the first fruits of the discredited policy of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War. 'Only the social revolution can free us from the totalitarian and democratic pest.' Less recriminatory was a July 1941 editorial by Studi Sociali of Montivedeo Uruguay, published after the Nazi invasion of the USSR, entitled rhetorically 'Can we be neutral in the face of the Totalitarian menace?'

Having rejected neutrality as alien to the anarchist ethos and formally reproached the Allies over their Spanish policy, it conceded that 'nevertheless although our aims are not those of the democracies we can still co-exist with them.' Citing the case of an anarchist fugitive from Italy who rejected the distinction between democracies and dictatorships, the editorial concluded 'But he said it from New York.' L'Adunata dei Refrattari [Refractory Convention] published in Newark New Jersey and New York, which the Security Service considered 'seems to be the most widely circulated paper amongst the Anarchists here', greeted Operation Barbarossa as decreasing Axis prospects of victory, but added that 'Russia brings to the Allied block no contribution of revolutionary elements nor do these others bring to Russia any contribution of liberal and democratic elements which can have a noticeable influence on the future of nations.' Russia, Germany and Italy were all imperialistically minded and 'whilst they might sometimes be enemies of each other, they are all, at all times, equally and principally, enemies of the social and Anarchist revolution.' Lest the position of the British Empire escape censure, L'Adunata quoted approvingly the London anarchist journal War Commentary: 'We are against the war in that it is a struggle between rival imperialist interests', adding disapprovingly 'Churchill was right when he said "This is not a class war"'⁶³⁷. In the above cited report of December 1941 on Anarchism in Australia, Lieutenant Finzel quoted an earlier editorial from L'Adunata of August 1940 to the effect that 'the tyranny of the Fascists and the Bolsheviks is just as incapable of giving economic justice to the proletariat as bourgeois democracy and liberalism are of giving them liberty', commenting in respect of the loyalty issue that 'the Anarchists in Australia are obviously not pro-British, although some of the seized correspondence suggests that they are extremely anti-Fascist.'⁶³⁸ As late as July 1942 the Deputy Director of Security for Queensland was to paraphrase this statement to assert that Fantin was 'anti-British' and 'the Anarchists in Australia...subversive'.⁶³⁹ Against these juxtaposed materials we can only set Fantin's

statement in his final letter, written three days before his death, that 'the news is splendid on all fronts.'⁶⁴⁰ It seems certain that he made no exception regarding the Russian front, the history of relations between anarchists and bolsheviks notwithstanding. There may even have been some truth to his enemies belief that Fantin in his last days was involved in fundraising for Lady Jessie Street's 'Sheepskins for Russia' war charity drive.⁶⁴¹ This is however to anticipate events. Certainly he was aware of the historic conflict between the founders of scientific socialism and anarchism with specific reference to Spain, for amongst his books confiscated in 1942 was one entitled Carlo Marx e Bacunin in Spagna.⁶⁴² He was however open minded enough to read at least one translated pamphlet by 'Carlo Marx', but unfortunately we do not know which one it was.⁶⁴³

Once again it is only via a web of personal political connection that we glimpse Fantin amidst a network of comrades. In October 1940 the Intelligence Office at Cairns notified ISGS Northern Command on the subject of Chico FANTINI ...that the above named is a Communist and is an associate of Ernesto BARRATO Communist.⁶⁴⁴ 'Ernie' Barrato was a Veneto from Treviso Province, a naturalised [1933] Mourilyan cane cutter. His DGPS file contained, like Fantin's, the 1934 List of Countrymen Most Known for Their Communist Views. Having served on the 1935 Weil's Disease strike committee before joining the Communist Party, he studied marxism with his local Mourilyan CPA branch. Being Secretary to the Mourilyan Committee Against War & Fascism, his fare to Spain was advanced in 1936.⁶⁴⁵ There he served successive battalions of the International Brigades as a sergeant, captain and commissar. On the evacuation of the Brigades in January 1939 Barrato returned to North Queensland, embarking on a tour of the North lecturing on the war in Italian to large and appreciative audiences.⁶⁴⁶ After Fantin's death North Queensland comrades credited him with activism on the Spanish question,⁶⁴⁷ but the association of the two men may have gone back as far as Fantin's early years

at Mourilyan. Being from the same region they shared a common dialect and customs in addition to their politics. Certainly Barrato like Fantin was early under the watchful eye of the DGPS from July 1929. In August 1930 his dossier noted that Baratto was an associate of the anarchist Costante Danesi, a known associate of Fantin, under whose influence it was thought Barrato might commit hostile acts against the Regime. Other documents on his file bespeak a supposed association with Carmagnola.⁶⁴⁸

The apogee of opposition in Australia to foreign fascist interference in the Spanish Civil War came in the first quarter of 1938 with the goodwill visits in antipodean waters of the Remo in January and the cruiser Raimondo Montecuccoli in mid February. Carmagnola returned to Melbourne to leaflet the crew of the Remo, as had been done at Cairns in 1934 during the visit of the Armando Diaz. Forewarned, the officers of the Montecuccoli briefed their crew against subversion.⁶⁴⁹ The visit of the cruiser was an altogether more portentous affair than that of the Remo. The Montecuccoli was a modern raider, in service since August 1937. Named for an Italian warlord and military theorist,⁶⁵⁰ she projected an Italian vocation for war and was built for speed: her motto was 'Resolutely and Swiftly'.⁶⁵¹ The mainstream Melbourne press dubbed her 'a greyhound' of her class and enthused over her 'ultramodern appearance.'⁶⁵² In the contemporary phraseology of the Italian navy she was designed to negotiate 'the straits' of the 1922 Washington naval disarmament treaty banning the construction of battleships, animated by memories of the naval arms race that preceded the Great War.⁶⁵³ Concern about the imperial trade route via Suez had been one of the motives of conservative British and Australian appeasement of Italy during the Abyssinian Crisis.⁶⁵⁴ It was wrongly believed moreover that the Montecuccoli had been shelling refugees along the Spanish coast, even the city of Barcelona, which had been subject to Italian air attack since January.⁶⁵⁵ In fact she could not have done so, her maiden voyage having been to China

where she held a watching brief over the Sino-Japanese War before proceeding to Sydney to participate in the sesquicentenary of European colonization.⁶⁵⁶ These dark presentiments of the vessel's immediate past reflected antifascist outrage at fascist atrocities in Spain, especially after Guernica in April 1937,⁶⁵⁷ and the knowledge that Italy had engaged not only in aerial bombardment of the city but also in submarine piracy to interdict Soviet arms supplies to the democratic Republic.⁶⁵⁸ If the Montecuccoli was not the instrument of Italian policy in Spain, as the protesters believed, she was nonetheless a symbol of Italian expansionism in the Mediterranean.

The Montecuccoli berthed at South Wharf Melbourne in the midst of a week of antifascist activities, including a dance at a Carlton club on Saturday 13 February, which sailors from the Montecuccoli together with a party of Italo-Australian fascists attempted to disrupt. Knives were drawn and a photograph of Italians in the International Brigade in Spain smashed. Two days later a hapless apolitical Italian taxi driver, Ottavio 'Taffy' Orlando took a fare to South Wharf and was persuaded aboard the ship in the belief that he was Carmagnola, who had been present at the dance. Orlando was beaten unconscious, allegedly in the presence of an officer of the CIB, and might have been taken to Italy pursuant to orders to arrest Carmagnola had waterside workers not come to know of the affair and arranged for the veteran socialist Percy Laidler⁶⁵⁹ to negotiate his release. On the 17th a demonstration conservatively estimated by police at ten to twelve thousand people arrived in two thousand vehicles and was addressed by Carmagnola. Mussolini was burned in effigy. In the estimation of Cresciani it was the last big antifascist demonstration held in Australia. The following day the Montecuccoli sailed for Adelaide.⁶⁶⁰ She would perform 120 missions in the coming war, [many against the Allies, some admittedly as an allied co-belligerent after September 1943] more than any other cruiser in the Italian navy.⁶⁶¹

After this last hurrah, the MAWAF was to suffer from the contradiction that it was increasingly difficult to be against both war and fascism simultaneously. As the Abyssinian Crisis evolved into fascist intervention in the Spanish Civil War and the creation of the Rome-Berlin Axis, the Australian Spanish Relief Committee was formed with MAWAF and International Labour Defence sponsorship in 1936. It was to raise some 21,000 pounds, and send medical aid and some forty volunteers to the International Brigades, more than half of whom died there. The contribution of men and funds from North Queensland was remarkable per capita. Fundraising and propaganda were in particular typical of those like Fantin who fought politically at home.⁶⁶² As criticism rose of the 'malevolent neutrality'⁶⁶³ of the western democracies, the left was increasingly and reluctantly drawn to more realistic positions. ER Dawes of Adelaide put it succinctly at the 1938 Sydney Summer School of the Australian Institute of Political Science:

we are at the stage where we have to make a choice between collective security used in the interests of peace, and folding our arms and allowing arrogant fascism to run over us... I say quite frankly that we are not concerned...about Britain's vested interests...but if Britain's ..interests coincide with our desire to check some of these aggressive nations that threaten to destroy our democracy, then why should we not seize the opportunity to push them back?⁶⁶⁴

The last incident of note of which we have record involving the circles in which Fantin moved on the Sugar Coast was the large Innisfail protest against the visit of Count Von Luckner in September 1938⁶⁶⁵ Von Luckner was an aristocratic German sympathiser with the Nazi regime on a semi-official propaganda tour. The Danesi brothers almost certainly had a hand in organising this protest, and as we have seen, Fantin was as much an associate of theirs as he was

of Carmagnola. As we shall see, Fantin was in North Queensland at this time, when, as the Cairns police division put it in December 1939 `during the crushing season FANTIN obtains employment in this Division as a cane cutter, and was employed by his brothers' and `one Peter Cochrane of the same [Edmonton] address'.⁶⁶⁶ Only banal contingencies would have kept him away from such an event, occurring just at the time of the Munich crisis. The storm clouds of war were gathering.

#16: Barbed Wire Disease

M15, the department of the Security service charged with the examination of the loyalty of individuals to the Allied cause, and in consequence, inter alia with the investigation of the bona fides of refugees, under the stress of recent currents in public opinion and under the influence of high authority in the War Office, has adopted the rule of thumb that any person of foreign nationality is to be presumed (almost, it would seem, irrebuttably presumed) to be hostile, while any person of British nationality is to be presumed to be loyal. This amounts to a confession of failure, for this department exists for no other purpose than the examination and judgement of individual cases.

Richard Latham, Refugee Section, Foreign Office 27 June 1940⁶⁶⁷

Reviewing the history of mass internment of enemy aliens in Australia during World War II, the indefatigable social activist Lady Jessie Street was of the opinion that at the outbreak of hostilities hysterical xenophobia had induced a 'state of war fever' in which senior officials had lost their heads to such a degree that all legal protections and procedures were forgotten in a dragnet which encompassed even refugees.⁶⁶⁸ On this account, it was not inmates who suffered 'barbed wire disease'⁶⁶⁹ so much as the authorities who rolled it out. The weight of modern historiography broadly endorses Street's critique, effectively opposing the official historian Sir Paul Hasluck, who saw the initial wave of internments as a measured, appropriate and effective response to an internal security threat.⁶⁷⁰ The revisionist canon however has the weakness of including but one brief, explicit mention, by Bevege, of Hasluck's apology for internment. There

is reason then to recapitulate the cultural roots and institutional arrangements which led to the detention and ultimately the death of Francesco Fantin.

Great War internment of enemy aliens in Britain and Australia constituted administrative precedents for practice in World War II.⁶⁷¹ This itself was a measure of how the presuppositions of Empire nationalism had endured between the two wars. The War Book, prepared by the Department of Defence, indicated issues to be addressed and laid down procedures to be followed in the event of the outbreak of hostilities.⁶⁷² Modelled closely on its British counterpart, as such it was a monument to cultural dependency in so far as internment policy was concerned. The stated aim of internment in particular and aliens control in general was to prevent an individual 'acting in a manner prejudicial to the public safety, or the defence of the Commonwealth.' Internment was to be kept to the 'narrowest limits consistent with public safety and public sentiment' and reserved for cases where other forms of control were deemed inadequate.⁶⁷³

The circumspection of the prime intentions of internment policy however could not obviate the fact that essentially internment was conceived as a preventive national security measure suspending civil rights. Internees were to be detained on 'reasonable suspicion' not on proof of guilt of any offence. The onus of proof was reversed, and such preventive internment raised disturbing queries about the war aims of a democracy in conflict with totalitarian states. Issues of principle aside, problems of pragmatic rationality arose. Would the opportunity cost of the work of surveillance be prohibitive? Would the money to be outlaid better be spent on military training and equipment? At what cost to the war effort were internees withdrawn from production? Would the guard establishment strain military manpower? All these concerns were implicit according to Bevege.⁶⁷⁴ All however were

overridden by the identification of the foreigner with the enemy: the costs involved were discounted as the necessary price of security. Not until November 1940 were appeal provisions built in,⁶⁷⁵ to protests from the parliamentary far right represented by the Member for Barker Archie Cameron.⁶⁷⁶

Not only was administrative policy drafted on British models but its actual implementation also followed British practice. That the Munich agreement for the partition of Czechoslovakia in September 1938 was not so much 'peace in our time' as peace for a time was increasingly recognized even in conservative and official circles and contingency planning for war with the Axis intensified.⁶⁷⁷ At first the doctrine of 'narrow limits' was respected. As late as March 1940 the Home Secretary told the House of Commons 'there would be no justification for a policy under which all aliens...were treated alike, without regard to the fact that the majority of them are refugees from...oppression...' But in May as the Allied position in western Europe began to collapse the military persuaded the government that aliens presented the risk of a fifth column, thought to have been a factor in the disaster unfolding on the continent.⁶⁷⁸ In the wake of the fall of France and Italy's entry into the war Churchill overthrew months of agonized Cabinet deliberation on internment arrangements with the curt order 'Collar the lot.'⁶⁷⁹ It is estimated that at the height of the dragnet some 26,000 Europeans out of 70,000 in Britain served a period of internment, including more than 4,000 Italians⁶⁸⁰. In October 1940 the British Government circularized the Dominions with a pamphlet on Fifth Column Activities on the risks exemplified by the European experience of German subversion.⁶⁸¹ Protest by educated opinion was immediate. Three critical books were published before the end of the year: The Internment of Aliens by Lafitte, Anderson's Prisoners by Hughes, and 100,000,000 Allies-If We Choose by 'Scipio'.⁶⁸² The Australian Richard Latham of the Refugees Section of the Foreign Office,

the son of Chief Justice Sir John Greig Latham who had been Attorney General under Bruce and succeeded him as Leader of the Opposition, conducted a guerrilla bureaucratic war against MI5, the source of adverse internment assessments, describing it in July 1940 as incompetent to assess evidence, lacking in political background, stupid, poorly organized, unreliable and obsessively secretive.⁶⁸³ Since some detainees began to be released as of July 1940, with dramatic results by 1942, this libertarian battle of ideas must be seen as having registered some success.⁶⁸⁴ But just as war crises had brought internment with them in Britain, so in Australia, drawing on the British model, were the peaks of internment, affecting above all Italian Australians, to coincide with the 'great fears' of June 1940 and December 1941.

As in Britain, so internment in Australia had begun circumspectly in 1939,⁶⁸⁵ and became more extensive as the war situation worsened in Europe and the Pacific. The Aliens Registration Bill was debated in the House of Representatives in May and June 1939. During the Second Reading debate on the Bill, Martens argued against some of its provisions. Reporting his experience as a Sugar Coast representative, he noted the children of naturalised aliens were becoming fluent English speaking Australians. At outbreak of hostilities on 1939 the Minister of Defence put the Act into effect. *All* aliens were to report to local police. In a peculiarly Australian paroxysm of duplication 'to be sure to be sure', hoteliers were obliged to maintain a checklist of alien patrons. Official permission was required for aliens to change residence, on pain of internment in default.⁶⁸⁶ Although the Bill was brought in as a war precautions measure, honourable members debated it as if it were peacetime immigration legislation, discussing the place of the alien in Australian society, indicating the state of denial regarding the forthcoming war even as preparations were made for it. Other measures were also taken which contributed to determining the context of wartime aliens control. Under the National Security Act 1939-40, two sets of National Security Regulations were introduced, one general, the other specific to aliens control. Statutory Rule Number 87 of 1939, Regulation 26 made general provision for detention without trial. National Security (Aliens Control) Statutory Rule Number 88 of 1939, Regulation 20 applied specifically to enemy aliens.⁶⁸⁷ It was under this legislation that Fantin registered as an alien at Edmonton

police station 7 October 1939. On 25 November he gave notice of change of address to Edith [sic: actually Edol] Street Geelong, the home of lifelong friend Gaetano Panizzon.⁶⁸⁸ In November 1940 Cairns police confirmed to the Brisbane CIB that as an unnaturalised alien Fantin had given notice as per the Act in 1939 of his transfer south at the close of the cane crushing season, as had been his custom 'in past years', 'to Victoria to follow his trade as a Loom worker in the woollen mills'. He had not return to North Queensland for the 1940 cane crushing season.⁶⁸⁹ The other major pillar of security arrangements was the organisation of a security service itself to carry out the necessary political surveillance. Before the formation within the Attorney General's Department of the Security Service in 1941 internal security was a matter for the dual custody of the Attorney's Commonwealth Investigation Branch and Military Intelligence. After the formation of the Security Service, the Army retained sole responsibility for internment until the reorganization of the Security Service in April 1942,⁶⁹⁰ and even then the Army retained custody of internees.

The situation as it affected the Italian community in June 1940 with Mussolini's opportunistic intervention in the war has been sketched by Cresciani. The criteria of aliens control were worked out on a descending scale from more to less discriminating, with the former attracting the most severe preventive countermeasure of internment. Category A included persons suspected of espionage, members of the Italian armed forces and communist or fascist organizations or the mafia. Given the Nazi-Soviet pact, the situation of communists in this list was not entirely a matter of conventional thinking. Category B included civil servants and others whose employment in the transportation and communications industries gave them a presumptive opportunity for sabotage. Community leaders constituted Category C, while Category D embraced the able bodied of military age.⁶⁹¹ Luciulli, a consular official at Melbourne, considered that initially at least the Australian authorities were discriminating in the application of these criteria,

not having interned all Italians or even a great number of them, but only some of the leading elements, such as the Secretary of the Fascio, the editor of the Italian newspaper, the officers of some Italian associations and some others. All in all, in the consular district, some hundred persons.⁶⁹²

Luciulli however was speaking of the Victorian case, where internment was at its most restrained, apparently due to the influence of Archbishop Mannix.⁶⁹³ June 1940 elsewhere in the federation brought a wave of internment based according to both Cresciani and Hasluck indiscriminately upon mere nationality, which in turn led to a wave of protest both in the Italian and wider community, resulting in November 1940 in the establishment of Aliens Tribunals to hear applications for release. At that date internments of Italian subjects had fallen from 1,901 in August 1940 [of whom 1,044 were from West Australia, where internment was evidently less than discriminating on the whole] to 1,544, plus 182 naturalised British subjects of Italian origin.⁶⁹⁴ Fantin, not being a Western Australian Italian, and because of longstanding doubts about his personal and political identity, was not caught up in the initial wave of internment of Italians, although he did register as a suspect at that time.⁶⁹⁵ Not until those doubts were superseded by panic in Northern Command after Pearl Harbour during Evatt's absence overseas was Fantin caught up in the enlarged regional dragnet in North Queensland.

In March 1940 the Townsville Consulate had reported the political divergence between Luigi Francesco and Francesco Giovanni Fantin:

The former `does not undertake any subversive activities, quite the contrary, and especially after the Ethiopian conflict, he has not failed to express laudible nationalistic sentiments.

Meanwhile his brother Francesco Fantin continues in his propaganda subversive of or contrary to the Regime, without attracting much following. He has no fixed address; some months of the year he resides in this State, where he works as a cane cutter, only to

go off to Geelong, in the State of Victoria, where it seems he is an employee in a saw mill.⁷

This political divergence between the two eldest brothers Fantin was confirmed on 4 November of that year, after the entry of Italy into the war in June, when the AMF Northern Command Intelligence Section General Staff at Cairns reported that

Chico Fantin is reported ...to have actively spread Communist propaganda among the sugar workers in North Queensland ...His brother Luigi was a member of the Armando Diaz Club and because of their differing political views the two brothers did not get on.⁶⁹⁶

The distinction between the two brothers was insisted upon by the same office in much the same terms a fortnight later, adding a warning, destined to go substantially unheeded, that the police on whom Security skeptically relied had confounded the two eldest brothers Fantin. This perception exercised the mind of the Intelligence Office at Cairns until September 1941, when the confusion of their politics came to embarrass preparations to take action against a man profiled by the police on 10 November 1940 and after his death as a cunning anarchist, fascist, communist chameleon disguising deep anti-British sympathies.⁶⁹⁷ This assessment was to prove so persuasive that its classic statement deserves to be quoted in full:

Fantin is a particularly cunning and crafty type of Italian who has engaged in anti-British propaganda under various guises. He has been listed as an Anarchist, a Fascist, and a follower and teacher of Communistic doctrines. He has a bitter hatred of

⁷ It seems the consulate here mistook the Geelong Federal 'Wool' Mill at Onkaparinga for a 'wood' mill. See AMF Northern Command IO Cairns – ISGS 4 November 1940

England and Englishmen and is definitely opposed to Democracy. Fantin has been in Australia since 1924 but has not at any time made application for naturalization.

It was the tragedy of Francesco Fantin that in his case there were specific political contradictions in the bosom of his family which gave a semblance of substance to these absurdities. This concept of 'interchangeably' fascist and communist foreigners has been localized by Saunders to the Innisfail police, who applied it to more than one person.⁶⁹⁸ It reiterated the ideology of the Bruce era which had rejected heterodoxy as alien. It is a systemic fact that the educational standard of the Queensland police of the day was low, primary education being the norm.⁶⁹⁹ The internment of Francesco Fantin was to some extent a battle between some intelligence officers on the one hand and the police and on the other, in which the former made the necessary distinctions of philosophy and identity between the brothers Fantin only to have them trumped at other levels in the chain of information and command. This appalling piece of police and intelligence work prevailed despite clear indications that there were three brothers Fantin, one apolitical and two holding opposing political views. This was not an altogether rare occurrence in the Italian community of the day. A similar disagreement divided the Antico brothers, for example.⁷⁰⁰ As prefaced above, in late November 1940 the Intelligence Office Cairns stipulated the facts

Francesco FANTIN: The information I have received goes to show that this person is definitely a Communist and that when he was last in this district would without any encouragement attempt to convert the people with whom he associated to Communism.

It is considered that the Police have confused him with his brother Luigi FANTIN...Luigi FANTIN was a foundation member of the "Armando Diaz" Club and as such is to be considered a Fascist.⁷⁰¹

Armando Diaz was the general who had taken over command from Cadorna after Caporetto, won a remedial victory against weakened Hapsburg forces in 1918, and one of the military triumvirate together with General Pecori Giraldi who requested Vittorio Emanuele III not to order the Army into action against the fascist March on Rome in October 1922. Diaz was a symbol of the support of the Army along with the monarchy for 'the national Regime', as Fascism liked to style its hegemony. Shaneen Fantin recalls family tradition that the speeches Luigi Fantin delivered to the Club were written by his wife, Giuseppina Saccardo. However that may be, these activities unwittingly contributed to the profile of a nationalist brother Fantin, which was ultimately to condemn Francesco to internment and an untimely death.

Further evidence of the standing of Francesco Fantin was to accumulate when the Australian authorities were to become interested in the brothers Fantin after Italy entered World War II. As early as November 1939 the Brisbane CIB identified 'Franck Fantin, Edmonton' as a 'Leader of Anarchist Party'.⁷⁰² The following month Constable Kelly of the Edmonton Station tendered to the Cairns Inspector of Police a profile of Fantin based on local knowledge from the point of view of the politically disinterested, which paid him a backhanded compliment as a worker which if given an attentive reading might have stood Fantin in good stead.

I have interviewed several Italians, and ascertained that Frank Fantin was very fond of reading, and also that he often spoke of Anarchy to his fellow countrymen, but as far as I

can ascertain he has no followers of the Anarchist movement in this District. They also informed me that Fantin is carried away by the Anarchist ideals, from reading this class of literature, but they do not take him seriously, and look on him as a man of weak intellect. In fact he is considered a joke among his countrymen and cane cutters when speaking of the anarchist question. From inquiries made...I also ascertained that he is a good honest worker who is quite rational when not speaking of Anarchy.⁷⁰³

Three years later Security Service again confirmed Fantin's political standing. In July 1942 the Security Service reported to its Director General in Canberra and to the Deputy Director of Security for Queensland re Anarchism in Australia that as such

There is [no]...organised movement in existence in Australia, but rather groups of Anarchists are engaged in spreading the doctrine of Anarchism among the workers, apparently not with much success. The main centres of Anarchism seem to be North Queensland (Edmonton and Mareeba) and Griffith NSW. Those who are known to be Anarchists are probably all Italians. Certain individuals such as FRANCESCO FANTIN, internee, seem to be looked up to as leaders.

It is interesting to note that Menghetti associates Francesco Fantin with Mareeba as a zone of activity.⁷⁰⁴ Certainly the Mareeba Zone Committee of the Communist Party made representations concerning his death.⁷⁰⁵ Of his family connection with Edmonton we already know. This same document named Isidor Bertazzon as another anarchist, yet identified Valentino Ciotti and Francesco Carmagnola, founders with Fantin of the Matteotti Club, as mere 'anarchist associates.'⁷⁰⁶ We should not place excessive faith in the comprehension of Australian officialdom of relatively unhierarchical anarchist networks. Nevertheless it is noteworthy that

these contemporary observers found nothing strange in thinking of Fantin, *passé* Nursey–Bray, as senior to Carmagnola. Most probably all these individuals are best thought of as peers, senior activists pre-eminent amongst their comrades by dint of meritorious and sustained effort. How so ever that may be, one correspondent of Fantin, Silvano Zampieri, wrote to him, in the words of the Security Service ‘as to a superior’, ‘that you before anyone are worthy of carrying on our very clear doctrine of liberty.’⁷⁰⁷ An image of the respect in which Fantin was held by his peers can be seen as Document 50 in Cresciani’s Migrants or Mates: Italian Life in Australia where he is pictured receiving a visitor. It looks very much as if Francesco Fantin was one of the pillars of anarchist activity in the Innisfail, Mareeba, Ingham and Cairns districts where he resided and worked for most of the interwar years, to say nothing of his involvement with the Matteotti Club at the other end of the Australian eastern seaboard.

Ultimately it was Fantin’s perseverance in the struggle for hearts and minds and the standing he had acquired in it which rendered him a target of homicidal fascist antagonism once he was interned. Fantin was not, as Nursey-Bray insinuates, an accidental victim opportunistically lionised to make martyrological capital by his peers.⁷⁰⁸ Rather he was a man marked in the eyes of his enemies for merit acquired in the eyes of his friends, who thought of him with affectionate respect, and mourned his loss with personal grief and political outrage. His fate and reputation can thus only be understood against the background of his youth in Italy and two decades of anarchist activism in Australia, complicated by gathering war clouds in Australia.

One thing however is clear. Fantin was not primarily interned because of his anarchism as Nursey-Bray assumes. The file on Anarchism in Australia contained short lists of anarchists including Fantin, together with a note dated late 1941 which read

These persons are anti-Fascist and in small numbers. As police report is favourable and Security Service has been advised suggest [archiving] of file.

Another official emphatically added 'Concur!',⁷⁰⁹ It is clear indeed that some police and security officers did not share the prevailing paranoia about subversive politics. Detective Sergeants Boyle and Hird assessed several anarchist past subscribers to the Spanish Relief Fund in North Queensland as Empire loyalists (minimal security risks in other words) during 1940-41.⁷¹⁰ Although Fantin initially came to the attention of the Australian authorities as a 'subversive' Italian, who was 'doubly suspect',⁷¹¹ for his supposedly cunningly hybrid politics, real or dissimulated, in the final analysis, he was interned less for ideological reasons, of real but secondary importance though they were, than because of a snafu of mistaken identity with his nationalistic elder brother Luigi. Evidently naturalisation, if it provided no guarantee against internment, provided a measure of protection. Of the estimated 2,764 Italian aliens like Francesco and Alfonso Fantin resident in Queensland, 1631 were interned. Of the 5,559 naturalised Italians in the State like Luigi Fantin, 666 were detained.⁷¹² Internment had a disproportionate effect against the male labour force of the Italian community in North Queensland. Fully 1,888 of the 2705 resident enemy Italian aliens interned nationwide at this time were incarcerated on the orders of Australian Military Forces Northern Command.⁷¹³ In September 1942 the number of Italians interned peaked at 3,651.⁷¹⁴

The case of Francesco Fantin was typical in that 'despite a virulent and deep seated hostility towards radicals, the overriding consideration of the police was the national origins of Italians.'⁷¹⁵ As such Fantin was 'listed for internment under new scheme for aliens' by Northern Command Intelligence Corp on Australia Day 1942,⁷¹⁶ one of a wave of about six hundred North Queensland Italians to be arrested on general warrants in the wake of Pearl Harbour and

the fall of Singapore.⁷¹⁷ That he was not one of the group of North Queensland Italian communists and anarchists interned after the fall of France in June 1940⁷¹⁸ when Italy entered the war tends to confirm that his ideology was a subordinate factor in the motivation of his internment. This remains true even when it is remembered that Fantin initially came to the attention of Northern Command Intelligence in June 1940 as an industrially active communist, perhaps flagged by a local internment committee with a long memory regarding 'troublesome elements'.⁷¹⁹ It is a poignant facet of his tragedy that Fantin returned north to the tiresome tropics in late October 1940,⁷²⁰ back to the zone where he was considered a security risk, from Geelong North, where the Military Board was quite tranquil about him in May 1940, describing him as 'a quiet and honest type' who 'was endeavouring to obtain work in the Geelong district. He was not frequenting any place in Geelong other than going to the pictures at the weekends. Most of the week he spent at home.'⁷²¹ And yet even then he was not so quiet. Spartaco Panizzon has boyhood memories of Fantin as a fitness fanatic who thought nothing of bicycling into Melbourne for a political meeting.⁷²² Why exactly Fantin returned north is a mystery.

In the end, of the three brothers Fantin, both Francesco and Alfonso were interned, while Luigi, the brother who harboured the very 'anti-British' sentiments which so concerned the authorities, went free. Why did Fantin not apply for naturalisation? As an anarchist he may have objected to recognising any state, particularly the British monarchy. It is likely also that as an antifascist he harboured an ambition to return to Italy after the long expected fall of the regime. Had not the liberal socialist Carlo Roselli of 'Giustizia e Liberta', martyred with his brother Nello in France in June 1937, spoken for all antifascists when he said of the Brigata Garibaldi and antifascism, 'Today in Spain, tomorrow in Italy'?⁷²³ Furthermore had Fantin naturalised, he would have lost his Italian superannuation. We cannot be certain if an intent to return to Italy

was, together with anarchist reservations, among his reasons for not naturalising, but it does seem likely.

Menghetti has recorded the particulars of the North Queensland internees transit south into detention. The arrestees were kept in local lockups until the arrival of the south bound train which took them under police guard to Stuart Creek Jail near Townsville. Here they stayed until a sufficient number had been collected to fill an internee train. At night the detainees occupied the cells, by day they congregated in overcrowded exercise yards. The Stuart Creek facility was inadequate to the demands made upon it, washing and shaving had to be foregone, and their suitcases having been commandeered, they were forced to live for several days in the clothes in which they had been arrested. It was easy then for the ferociously racist Commissioner of Queensland Police CJ Carroll to describe them as 'the scum of the earth' on 20 March 1942 to a conference of Police Commissioners and Intelligence Sections of the Fighting Services in the course of an unsuccessful tirade in favour of deporting all persons of alien extraction from the Queensland coast.⁷²⁴ For Fantin the complication of incarceration with familiar antagonists were early manifest. Oral tradition has it that he was recognised as an activist and warned to watch his step on the southward journey from the tropics.⁷²⁵ After about a week the prisoners were marched under guard to Stuart Creek railway siding to board the 'internee special', its windows barred and doors sealed, bound for Gaythorne transit camp, outside Brisbane. Here they were bathed, dressed in red dyed army uniforms, accommodated in tents, well fed and processed. Some of the antifascists among them began collecting literature with the assistance of a communist soldier. The long trip from Gaythorne to South Australia was made with more comfort by passenger train with two guards per carriage.⁷²⁶

In early October 1942 the Honourable GW Martens, Member for the Sugar Coast constituency of Herbert, renewed his representations on the part of internees via the pages of the Herbert River Express. Most of the naturalised internees were known to him as members of the ALP, he said. Martens specifically noted that many internees were émigrés who had fled the dictatorship of Mussolini. Even more surprisingly, Martens was aware that many internees continued raising funds for the Australian war effort whilst in detention. As the Express went to press, Fantin was on the eve of being targeted by fascist antagonists in Loveday Camp 14A for just such activities.⁷²⁷

Part IV. Death in Custody.

‘Fascist Terror Ends in Murder’

North Queensland Guardian 19 February 1943

- Chapter 17: `The Exact Cause of Death’
- Chapter 18: `Avenge the Murder of Francesco Fantin’
- Chapter 19: Loveday at its worst
- Chapter 20: The military investigations.
- Chapter 21: Charles Jury & the Fantin affair
- Chapter 22: Enter Detective Sergeant Gill.
- Chapter 23: Medical witness & judicial process.
- Chapter 24: Was the autopsy report `doctored ?’
- Chapter 25: Assassination

#17: 'The exact cause of death'.

'There is something wrong tonight'

Degli Esposti – Fantin Loveday 16 November 1942⁷²⁸

On the evening of Monday, 16 November 1942, the anarchist activist Francesco Giovanni Fantin died as a result of head injuries received that afternoon in compound 14A of the Loveday Group of Internment Camps, near Barmera in the South Australian Riverland. Loveday was the principal place of wartime internment by the Commonwealth of "enemy aliens".⁷²⁹ About noon the next day,

the Senior Medical Officer reported to Commandant Administrative HQ Loveday that Fantin had not died from natural causes, but from a blow on the back of the head which had fractured the lower part of the skull... A Court of Inquiry into the cause of Fantin's death was accordingly instituted... and began to sit at about 1500 hours on the same date... Owing to results of inquiry... by Commandant...14A Internment Camp...statements that Fantin had been lately threatened with violence because of his antifascist opinions were investigated by examination of witnesses."⁷³⁰

So began a politically sensitive sequence of military, police, coronial and judicial inquiries, which culminated in the Supreme Court of South Australia on March 19 1943, when Justice Richards sentenced Giovanni Casotti, who had pleaded guilty to manslaughter, to two years imprisonment with hard labour, telling him that "the more serious charge of murder could have been laid against you.... and you may consider yourself very fortunate in not receiving a much heavier sentence".⁷³¹ Most who have concerned themselves with this case have considered that Casotti was indeed very lucky. Certainly the universal consensus of historical commentators who have pronounced themselves on the death of Fantin in the last quarter century has been that Fantin was murdered, not to say assassinated.⁷³² Nonetheless, in the absence of an historical demonstration as to how Fantin was killed, the accusation of murder against his assailant remains unproven. Until today an unsatisfactory air of mystery has hung over this unfortunate death in custody.

As Cresciani noted a generation ago, "we need to know the exact cause of the death of Fantin to clarify the subsequent conduct of the fascist internees and the military authorities.'⁷³³ Since then however neither Cresciani himself, nor Nursey Bray nor Bevege nor Venturini, to cite the principal commentators, have specified how Fantin died, preferring to approximately compare and contrast the antagonistic accounts of his death respectively given by friends of the victim and the assailant.⁷³⁴ This approach is by definition inconclusive. For the rest, mention has been made of the affair in studies dealing with internment, political heterodoxy, multiculturalism and Italian settlement in Australia. The authors who have recognised the historical significance of the death of Fantin in these connections include Cresciani, Martinuzzi O'Brien, Menghetti, Faber, Nursey-Bray, Bevege, Alcorso, O'Connor, Nagata, Bosworth and Venturini. These writers have established the Fantin affair as an historical event, in the sense made famous by Carr, of an occurrence deemed significant by a concurrence of historical opinion.⁷³⁵ It must be said that on the whole this generation of historical labour has made a worthy contribution to the Australian canon, and it must be allowed that only the principal of these commentators could have perhaps permitted themselves to delve more deeply into the episode within the economy of their inquiries. The point here is not that this body of work is invalid, but that it needs to be validated by correcting important oversights. Such consolidation by amendment is one of the normal processes of historical inquiry. Nor can immunity be afforded from constructive criticism of such oversights as the failure of Cresciani, Nursey-Bray, Bevege, Venturini and indeed myself, to justify our reflections on the judicial and administrative sequelae to the death of Fantin. What is needed is an adequate reconstruction of the events, answerable to the practical and historical tests of reasonable and logical doubt.⁷³⁶ We may add moreover that the matter warrants integration into labour history, given Fantin's biography and politics, and as an example of the "division of labour"⁷³⁷ which bedeviled the official handling of his death, as the authorities contended with radical suspicion of their conduct, suspicion which lingers to this day. Thus rather more is at stake than the mere particulars of a mid century homicide when debating the Fantin affair.

These particular historiographical concerns respecting the Fantin affair are inextricably linked to broader questions of historical significance. Francesco Fantin was a political activist. As his favourite cousin Mrs Gina Abram proudly remembered when interviewed almost a half-century after his death, 'he was an organiser'.⁷³⁸ As such he was to those who knew him a 'remarkable man'⁷³⁹, something of a personality. Political activists

may be defined as autonomous individuals who are politically inspired to act independently or collectively on their own account or on behalf of others. Some of us have been politically active. Many of us have encountered political activists in our different walks of life. Political activists such as Fantin are a recognisable anthropological subject, about whom little enough is known, despite their social importance, particularly to the working class.⁷⁴⁰

To emphasise Fantin's standing in the minds of his peers is not to seek to deny the modesty of his means and achievements. On the contrary he is an historiographically challenging and interesting figure precisely because he is a popular subject at the limits of historical visibility, about whom we have an atypical quantity of information because he was subject to political surveillance and his murder attracted multiple official investigations. As such the Fantin case is a valuable one, occurring as it does 'at the margins of history' as an example of what Gramsci called 'the history of the subaltern classes',⁷⁴¹ which we in the anglophone historical tradition call 'labour history' or 'history from below.'⁷⁴² Thus the Fantin case represents an opportunity for a multicultural marrying of these historiographical traditions. (Credit must be given here to Venturini for his use of Italian and British historical literature as background for his story of three émigrés, including Fantin) Of interest here are the seminal indications of Gramsci respecting the historical domination to which the working class is subjected, and the implications this has for historical practice.

The history of the subaltern classes is necessarily disaggregated and episodic... Subaltern classes suffer the initiative of dominant groups, even when they rebel and rise up... Every trace of autonomous initiative on the part of subaltern groups must therefore be of inestimable value to the integral historian. Thus it results that such a history can be treated of by monograph only, and every monograph will require a great accumulation of material often difficult to obtain.⁷⁴³

These reflections require some further circumstantiation. Fantin was a modest example of those whom Gramsci famously described as 'organic intellectuals'. Through such people, who may or may not be members of the traditional academic caste, cultural and political leadership is exercised in accordance with the socioeconomic needs of each given class.⁷⁴⁴ Fantin was not a great leader or a great thinker, and it is hardly likely that he would have emigrated to the antipodes if he had been. In that case a role would have been found for him in Europe, as was the case for the contemporary anarchist leader

Camillo Berneri.⁷⁴⁵ It was not the leadership of the antifascist parties which left Italy for Australia, but the proletarian rank and file and their activists, for commonly mixed political and economic motives.⁷⁴⁶ Fantin is a representative figure in this regard too, a textile worker who took ship in late 1924 seeking work, evading political and police persecution, not to mention fleeing a broken heart over a failed marriage.⁷⁴⁷ But Fantin's stature as an anarchist cadre has been wrongly and implausibly belittled in comparison with his friend and comrade Carmagnola, widely recognised as one of the chief Italian anarchists in Australia between the wars.⁷⁴⁸ It is true that Fantin does seem at times to have been one of life's second lieutenants, frequently appearing as an associate of a Carmagnola, a Danesi, a Panizzon. But all designations of rank in the anarchist subculture must be seen in perspective. Malatesta himself, the charismatic doyen of Italian anarchism, was neither a statesman nor a philosopher, lacking the effectiveness of a Cavour and the insight of a Gramsci.⁷⁴⁹ But by the late thirties if not before, according to Australian intelligence reports, Fantin was a recognised senior anarchist activist whom the police did not hesitate to call 'a leader of the Anarchist party.'⁷⁵⁰ At the very least Fantin was the kind of self motivated subaltern without whom a significant leader such as Malatesta would have had no following or funding and his ideas no diffusion.⁷⁵¹ Fantin was the kind of organiser, without whom the democratic tradition could have had no effect, without whom the working class could not have acquired a consciousness of its own needs and would have languished for lack of a political response to its living conditions. People such as Fantin performed an indispensable social function for their class. Thus Fantin represents a cadre which embodied political initiative amongst the Italian and international working class, which in his native locality expressed such remarkable individuals as Pietro Tresso, already an organiser in his youth and in his maturity an official of the Communist III International.⁷⁵² In the Australian context a towering figure such as Ben Chifley was for all his distinction but a primus inter pares of this milieu, as he had the wisdom never to forget.⁷⁵³ To despise investigating such a figure as Fantin would be to eschew labour history itself, not to mention turning one's back on the craft of history tout court and the ideal of democracy.

The history of political migration has an important role to play in this scenario, both substantively and methodologically as historians take up the challenge thrown down by the distinguished Italian historian Franco Ramella. As long ago as 1986 Ramella called for studies 'to lift the thick fog which surround these obscure men and women'

who have crossed oceans in great numbers in search of work and freedom. Ramella emphasised then the utility of the biographical method to investigate mass political emigration as a phenomenon intermediate between elite exile and economic migration, attention to which enforces recognition of the interrelation between all types of migration and the proletarian initiative which drives mass population transfers.⁷⁵⁴ Here too the figure of Francesco Fantin is pertinent, both because it is dramatic and because it is modest, and not without contemporary relevance.

#18: `Avenge the Murder of Francesco Fantin'

Homicide is of three kinds, justifiable, excusable and felonious. The first has no share of guilt, the second very little, but the third is the highest crime against the law of nature that man is capable of committing.

Blackstone⁷⁵⁵

On 30 December 1942 Tribune, the organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Australia, devoted its lead front page article to the death of Francesco Fantin. `ANTI-FASCIST MURDERED. Political Terrorism in SA' it proclaimed. Implicitly recapitulating the reasoning of `Scipio' in favour of waging a people's war against totalitarianism, it commented:

He is well known by the Italian community in Australia for his anti-fascist character...His death is a loss to the United Nations cause... This is a war of all freedom loving peoples. We cannot afford to lose the Francesco Fantins. They are our friends and allies...Political naivety becomes culpable when it leads to the murder of allies. [The] worst feature of this case is that Fantin pleaded with the camp commandant not to be placed in the same camp as fascists. This was ignored ...Dr Evatt must act. BRING THE ASSASSINS TO JUSTICE! SEPARATE OUR ALIEN ALLIES FROM FASCIST PRISONERS!

Clearly the CPA saw the death of Fantin as a conspiracy involving issues of national importance, and small as it was, the CPA was nonetheless after Operation Barbarossa an ally of the Labor government and its views counted for something, particularly with Evatt, who counted a communist like Vere Gordon Childe among his lifelong friends despite their differences of opinion.⁷⁵⁶

News of Fantin's death resonated particularly in his old North Queensland stamping grounds. On January 15 1943 the communist North Queensland Guardian announced that `Francesco Fantin, a passionate enemy of Fascism, has been murdered in a South Australian internment camp.' Along with campaigning for the segregation and release of interned antifascists, the article included details of Fantin's death.⁷⁵⁷ A few days before Constable Alfred Hughes had reported to the Security Service in Sydney, enclosing records of

interview with three ex-Loveday internees. In Hughes opinion 'the statements ... produced very little direct evidence' of the killing.⁷⁵⁸ But he did recognise that they did provide circumstantial evidence as to political conditions in the camps. On February 19 1943 the North Queensland Guardian returned to the fray, publishing a detailed account of Fantin's death and a strident critique of the South Australian Supreme Court trial of his assassin.⁷⁵⁹ By examining these documents a detailed account of the hunting down of Francesco Fantin can be built up.

In the January article, the North Queensland Guardian reported that 'Fantin was bludgeoned from behind as he stooped to drink from a tap, and then kicked to death'⁷⁶⁰. Thus within two months of Fantin's death the rumours which had immediately circulated within the camp as to the modus operandi of Fantin's killer were circulating as far away as North Queensland. It is likely that internees released from Loveday in the wake of official investigations were responsible for this. The Guardian went on to report that the homicidal assault was not without precedent, but followed upon political tension within the camp. It was alleged that official neglect had contributed to the tragedy:

Three months before his death, Fantin was beaten up by a Fascist, one Paternoster, and six others, because he courageously expressed anti-Fascist sentiments. Fantin pleaded with the Commandant of Camp 14A to be separated from the Fascists, but nothing was done.⁷⁶¹

Although it later emerged that Paternoster had in fact been punished for this assault upon Fantin, it was true that Fantin was not politically segregated from his antagonists in Compound 14A. Fantin himself had not asked to be removed to another compound,⁷⁶² as the fascists therein would have rendered this futile. In 1942 the military were sceptical of the political avowals of internees, and took the view that facilities did not in any case allow of much political segregation, which they remanded to the verification in view of release being painstakingly conducted by Security. This was the view Prime Minister Curtin on advice from Minister for the Army Forde expressed to his friend Bishop Burgmann as late as February 1943.⁷⁶³

Another fragment of the case was reported which once again demonstrates camp rumour circulating at a distance. A Fascist, Pretti, gave a written statement to the authorities when his brother-in-law, Paternoster, was arrested, as Pretti thought, for Fantin's murder.⁷⁶⁴ The politics of Pretti and his relationship to Paternoster were accurately reported, being

common knowledge about the Camp. It would be more accurate to say that Paternoster was rumoured to have been arrested for Fantin's murder, the authorities having in fact detained him on an unrelated matter to assist with their investigations. Furthermore it was stated that 'two fascist thugs called Pezzatto (sic) and Dr Piscitelli are alleged to be directly implicated in Fantin's murder.'⁷⁶⁵ That the Guardian could not correctly name the defendant indicted for the killing of Fantin suggests the limitations of its sources. This section of the article closed noting the Fascist employment of intimidation in the camp 'to conceal the culprits'.⁷⁶⁶

The January article also noted that there had been political violence 'in another South Australian camp'. The Guardian reported that 'Italian allies who have been collecting for the Sheepskins For Russia Fund have been beaten up by Fascists.'⁷⁶⁷ It appears the collection was made in Camp 14D, adjacent to 14A. There was no mention of any connection between these incidents and the murder of Fantin. Altogether this was a brief and disjointed account of the case, but one which had the merit of bringing the matter to public attention, however limited. But the keynote was just revenge, embodied in a report of a letter to Attorney General Evatt from a group of 'Australian-Italian citizens', calling for 'a full investigation' and demanding that 'he apply the most severe penalty to the culprit or culprits'.⁷⁶⁸ It is to be noted that the authors of the letter, clearly the same one mentioned in the Tribune article, were inclined to view the murder of Fantin as the result of a conspiracy. The remainder of the January article was devoted to campaigning for the political segregation and release of antifascists from internment.

All anti-Fascists must be separated from Fascists in the camps. This is the first demand to which Dr Evatt must attend without delay. No anti-Fascists should be in internment camps.⁷⁶⁹

The author was however inclined to give credit where credit was due so far as internment was concerned.

Since Labour came to office the internment of anti-Fascist Italians and others practically ceased. But that is not enough. Known anti-Fascists should be released.⁷⁷⁰

It was admitted that there might be doubt about the bona fides of internees in some cases. But there was no recognition that this had been a factor in the Fantin case, due to the error of

Northern Command in confounding the antagonistic politics of the two eldest Fantin brothers. The erroneous assumption of Fantin's comrades was that his radicalism was the cause of his internment.

It is true that official suspicion of his radicalism was a factor, though not the prime factor, in Fantin's continued internment. It was his supposed hostility to British interests which caused delay in his release. On 18 November 1942, two days after Fantin was killed, not having been apprised of the fact, Brigadier Simpson, the Director General of Security wrote to JC McFarlane, the Deputy Director of Security for Queensland, informing him that Fantin appeared to be an antifascist and asking for a report with a view to his release. Simpson noted 'I am not in possession of any details except those contained in your report indicating that he [Fantin] is anti-British in sentiments and sympathies.' This was an invitation to exonerate Fantin. McFarlane replied on 8 December conceding that Fantin was an antifascist but reiterating that anarchists as such were antidemocratic and ascribing to him once again his brother Luigi's remark that he would rather employ a Hindoo than a Britisher, and recommending that 'because of the conflicting evidence of this person's political beliefs but unanimity [of a single source!] regarding opposition to Democracy, I consider that a private representation from another person of Italian origin is not enough.' This was to discount Simpson's citation of Carmagnola, who was vouched for by Lt Col Wake in NSW. McFarlane concluded that Fantin should be restricted if released. Simpson replied on 16 December informing McFarlane of SA Lines of Communication Intelligence reports that Fantin had died a month previously 'in the Internment Camp' and that 'the District Coroner found that he died from injuries caused by an internee whom he found guilty of murder and he has committed him for trial.' Simpson concluded: 'No good purpose will be served by mentioning this matter further, but I would like to point out that these camp reports do show that there are some anti-Fascists interned.' This was a diplomatic order to McFarlane to stop talking nonsense and quit stalling the release program underway under Simpson and Evatt's authority, not as Nursey-Bray implies an invitation to participate in a conspiracy of silence to spare the Army's blushes.⁷⁷¹ This misinterpretation demonstrates how differently a primary document can read when it is read in context rather than taken out of sequence.

19: Loveday at its Worst

Due to the wicked work of false prophets we very nearly lost again the liberty, conquered for us by Martyrs and Heroes, whose ranks the false prophets wanted to make us forget, and sought to besmirch with their drivel. But notwithstanding the efforts of these thoughtless beasts our Victory shone...

Mario De Luca Loveday 28 October 1942⁷⁷²

On February 11 1943 the Deputy Director of Security for New South Wales forwarded to the Director General in Canberra a number of documents relative to the circumstances of the death of Francesco Fantin. Principal among these were three interviews with ex internees.⁷⁷³ These interviews were an outcome of the arrangements made by the Security Service to trace the origins of representations made to the Government by the Bishop Coadjutor of Sydney, the Right Reverend C. Venn Pilcher.⁷⁷⁴

The three ex internees interviewed were Valentino Ciotti, Giovanni Coletti and Giovanni Pattanaro. Constable Alfred Hughes, the investigator who took the interviews commented that 'in regard to the alleged Fantin murder, the statements of Pattanaro and Colletti have produced very little direct evidence and that of Ciotti, none'.⁷⁷⁵ Nevertheless, on the occasion of the Director General's visit to South Australia, his office advised the Deputy Director of Security for South Australia that 'the Director General may...wish to discuss certain aspects of internment camp administration after he has perused the statements by Ciotti, Colletti and Pattanaro'.⁷⁷⁶

Giovanni Pattanaro was interned at Loveday on 26 February 1942 and released on 20 December 1942, a month after Fantin was killed. Pattanaro testified to the antifascism of Fantin and Valentino Ciotti, with whom he had become close during his internment. His testimony added some detail to the account of the behaviour of Rossi, the first aid man who had attended Fantin, and the dubious attitude of Dr Piscitelli, who discounted the nature and extent of Fantin's injuries.⁷⁷⁷ Pattanaro further claimed to have spoken to Dr Muggia, the internee in charge of the camp hospital, and received an assurance that Fantin had been 'assassinated like Matteotti', together with a drastic evaluation of his injuries.⁷⁷⁸ All these particulars however, as Constable Hughes rightly noted, added nothing to the case against

Fantin's killer, despite his having tended the dying Fantin.

Pattannaro gave news of attempts to intimidate potential witnesses, but was at his most detailed in the account he gave of the exercise of Fascist influence before the murder of Fantin.

Before Fantin's death, between 300 to 400 Fascists met in the Mess room after the papers were delivered to discuss the day's war news. They sang Fascist songs in particular 'Giovinezza' and hailed the Duce and gave the Fascist salute. Dr Piscitelli frequented these meetings and on the occasion of the commemoration of the March on Rome, he conducted the meeting and addressed those present. After Fantin's death these meetings were stopped by the Military Authorities.⁷⁷⁹

Valentino Ciotti, a Matteotti Club veteran interned between 26 February and 17 July 1942, corroborated the Pattannaro account of assiduous Fascist cultivation of the mass of internees.

The Fascists used to meet in the mess room and discuss the war news when the papers arrived at about 7pm... and the educated ones would read the paper to the masses. Even if there was a reverse for the Axis forces, it would be read as though there had been a victory for them. The Fascists were against Britain and her allies and did all they could to spread propaganda to assist Japan, Germany and Italy. When the Japanese submarines came into Sydney Harbour they spread the propaganda that the Harbour Bridge had collapsed and that Sydney was finished. The more prominent of the Fascists used to get around the camp and say that on one occasion the Japs were in Brisbane, another that they were in Townsville, another time in Perth.⁷⁸⁰

Ciotti described how he and Fantin among others sought to oppose resistance to the Fascist push.

To counteract this some of the anti-Fascists endeavoured to give the true facts of the news and to get sympathy amongst the internees for Britain and her allies. Fantin and myself were most active in this direction. We as well as the other anti-Fascists

incurred bitter enmities of the Fascists because of our actions....I was present at one time when a Fascist named Cazzolino battered Fantin with his fists for talking anti-Fascist and I am quite sure that Fantin was murdered for upholding Britain and her allies against the Axis.⁷⁸¹

Giovanni Colletti was another unnaturalised Italian interned at Loveday in January 1942 and released in late December of the same year. He too confirmed that the Fascist internees held regular propaganda meetings in the camp.

Every night the Fascists held a meeting in the dining room of the camp. I have heard them saying, as I passed by the window, 'Victory in this war will be for the Fascists'. I have heard them calling out 'Il Duce', and seen them giving the Fascist salute. ...These Fascist meetings were held about 7pm. each night when the newspapers arrived.⁷⁸²

Although Colletti did not witness the killing, he was one of the last people to see Fantin alive.

I was playing bowls and Fantin came down to where I was standing and asked me to have a drink. It was about 6pm. or 6.30pm. and a very hot day. I told Fantin that I wanted to see a game of bowls finished and he said 'I am going to have a drink', and walked away. About 5 minutes later I saw him being taken away on a stretcher.⁷⁸³

It should be noted that Colletti's evidence corroborates that of an anonymous informant of the North Queensland Guardian. That Colletti had been anxious for Fantin's safety on that fatal afternoon emerges from the second, fuller account of the killing published by the North Queensland Guardian 19 February 1942. In this second account given by an anonymous internee, Fantin was invited to keep company with a group of anti-Fascists walking together for mutual protection against the Fascists.

About 6 o'clock three of us went for a walk round the camp, keeping together for protection. After going about 60 yards, we met Fantin, who was on his own. One of us said 'Fantin, come with us, we are going to keep strolling, but pick up something with which to defend yourself, because we have every reason to believe that the

fascists intend killing us.'

Fantin replied;

`I just passed Dr Piscitelli and Maria [sic] De Luca. As I passed them De Luca said to Piscitelli "That ----- must be killed."

The informant, apparently one of the trio who invited Fantin to accompany them, continued;

We again asked Fantin to come with us, but he replied that he would go and watch a game of bowls for a while as he did not think that they would attempt to kill him while it was still daylight, and that he would go into his hut before night fell. Fantin was in a very nervous state. We again implored him to walk with us, but to no avail.⁷⁸⁴

Clearly the Guardian account corroborated the Colletti statement as to Fantin's movements on the afternoon of his death. Nonetheless, being anonymous, it was useless for legal purposes. But in addition the Guardian recounted the activities of the Fascists on that fateful afternoon. It related how `a number of internees took up a collection to assist the `Sheepskins for Russia' Appeal.⁷⁸⁵ This drive was a popular registered War Charity, the brainchild of Lady Jessie Street. It funded donation of sheepskins to soldiers of the Red Army for winter uniforms.⁷⁸⁶ News of collection for this fund amongst internees fired immediate Fascist antagonism in Camp 14A.

`At 4pm. on 16th November a copy of the newspaper, the Adelaide Advertiser, containing a letter which explained the results of this collection, was brought into the camp. A Fascist named De Luca read the letter and interpreted it to a large number of internees among whom Emmanuel Cazzulini, Paternostro [sic], Marchetti, and two who had just arrived from Western Australia were very prominent. Paternostro then addressed the crowd saying `Those engaged in anti-fascist activity in this camp must be got rid of.' One in the crowd asked `Who are the men who must be got rid of?' Paternostro replied, `The four flying foxes that hang around the camp every night.' By this remark he referred to F. Fantin, Mario Cazzulino, R. Degli Esposti and V. Lavagna.⁷⁸⁷

The labelling of the 'four flying foxes' was a derogatory indication of those named as vermin to be extinguished. It was based on the knowledge that his hearers knew exactly the identity and group behaviour of the men targeted, who were already keeping company for reasons including the pleasure of like mindedness and mutual assistance, counsel and safety. Why of those marked out in this way was Fantin attacked that afternoon? It is possible that chance may have had a hand in the matter, in so far as Fantin was the only one of the group to find himself alone and unprotected by any potential witnesses. But it is likely that there was more to it than that. Fantin had been assaulted in August and again since the arrival of the Western Australians in Camp 14A only a fortnight before his death. He was thus foremost in the minds of the Fascists for his resistance to them. In any case it is likely that his movements, and perhaps those of the other 'flying foxes', were watched on the afternoon in question, until a decision to strike at the solitary Fantin was confirmed. It is difficult to see otherwise how his antagonists would have known where he was. Certainly Casotti struck at a most opportune time and place, and this suggests planning and coordination. Little wonder that the North Queensland Guardian concluded that

from the above account it is clear that the murder of Fantin was premeditated; that the whole leadership of the fascist gang who were at that time in Camp 14A were accessories before the fact and quite a number of them are now accessories after the fact.⁷⁸⁸

These were the remarks of a trained legal mind, almost certainly Fred Paterson, the founder of The North Queensland Guardian and the only communist lawyer on the Sugar Coast.

These reports afford insight into the multiple contextual factors which converged in the last quarter of 1942 to heighten the tension in the battle for the hearts and minds of the uncommitted which fascists and antifascists were waging in the compound. Indeed the situation rapidly swung out of control of the Australian custodians of the Loveday complex. The catalytic role played by news of the 'Sheepskins' for Russia' campaign has already been mentioned. In this connection it needs to be remembered that there were Italian units on the Russian Front, soon to undergo their own 'retreat from Moscow'. Russian successes in the defence of Stalingrad were the subject of press reports in these very days. The arrival on 6 November in Compound 14A of 198 West Australian internees, most of whom had been interned since Italy's entry into the war and were of fascist persuasion, gave the

fascists the balance of power within Compound 14A.⁷⁸⁹ In addition the Battle of El Alamein had only recently been fought. Italian and Australian units both participated at El Alamein, although they did not directly confront one another, and Montgomery's victory was readily understood as the prelude to the 8th Army's invasion of Italy. Precisely at this time on 13 November Fantin wrote his last letter rejoicing that 'during the present weeks the news is splendid on all fronts.'⁷⁹⁰ Conversely the rage in fascist hearts can be imagined. Indeed the very issue of The Mail of 14 November which carried news of the 'Sheepskins' collection reported on its front page news of the 8th Army's pursuit of the defeated Rommel into Libya and Stalin's cautious assessment of El Alamein. Alongside this was a Swiss report of 'ITALIAN ALARM' wherein Colasanti, a Roman fascist official, ordered party leaders to 'proceed with "merciless severity" against defeatists and spreaders of alarmist rumours.' This incitement held good for the fascist push at Loveday.

A related factor which heightened tension in Compound 14A in late 1942 as mentioned above by Pattanaro was the anniversary of the March on Rome, one of the principal festivities of the fascist calendar, which fell on 28 October. We have the text of two of the addresses delivered on that occasion, transcribed by Loveday intelligence officer Charles Jury, who had his finger on the pulse of the feverish condition developing in the compound. They are worth summarising as a measure of the fascist passions they were intended to excite. One of the two speeches given of which we have record was given by G Chiarera. Entitled '28 Ottobre: La Rinascita Italiana' it described the anniversary of the fascist coup as 'a date so dear, having such immense significance in the contemporary and future history of our Fatherland...the date of the renaissance of our Fatherland'...

Casting a glance at the history antecedent to 28 October, we see that in Italy numerous mindless elements drunk with anti-national doctrines sought to inflict maximum damage to essential State services, thus causing the disorganisation of civil society and forcing the disruption of production, transport, finance, and what is more in the life of a nation, the spiritual patrimony of the nation itself. The March on Rome, the culminating phase of the battles fought in the cities and countryside of Italy,...fundamentally reconstituted...the Italian State [which became] due to the DUCE the forge of the renewed spirit of national sacrifice. All for the State – and the State for All. This gives a simple but fundamental idea of the new social order...based on class cooperation in the national interest.

Chierera went on to praise how the regime had generated 'a dynamic and progressive improvement in the rhythms of Italian social life', confronting domestic issues and preparing for 'the future war which, even back then, could be clearly distinguished', funding the draining of wetlands, electrification and building the *autostrade* 'without recourse to foreign Jewish loans' concluding

I am sure everyone of you will do his duty, cooperating in keeping the faith that our Saviour Mussolini has sowed in our hearts, maintaining our gaze upon the glorious future of our race... We have a sacred obligation... to always act dutifully as true fascists... VIVA IL FASCISMO!!! VIVA L'ITALIA!!!⁷⁹¹

It was in execution of this 'sacred obligation' that Francesco Fantin was killed three weeks later.

The second and longer discourse given that day was made by Mario De Luca. It also sought to historically recapitulate the rise of fascism from its primordial days 'prior to the late Great War, when the opportune historical moment matured for our country... a very long war which cost us 650,000 fallen and almost all the national patrimony.' Citing nationalist 'educators' such as D'Annunzio, Corridoni, and of course 'Himself, The DUCE...our Chief', De Luca rehearsed the fascist myth of the socialist stab in the back, before reciting a virtually complete honour role of the alpine 'milestones of the via crucis of our infantry.' As to Caporetto he recalled with contempt the antimilitarism of the Red Biennium and noted that others too had had their Gallipoli's and disasters on the Western Front. Then onward De Luca pressed to review the 'mutilated Victory' which Italian nationalists saw as having dishonoured Italian sacrifices in the war with the Hapsburg empire, complete with recrimination against Nitti for expelling D'Annunzio from Fiume, retained by Italy thanks to 'il DUCE and Fascism.' On and on he tongue-lashed 'the wicked work of false prophets' who had disparaged the war, and lauded 'the faithful, far seeing few who gathered in Piazza San Sepolcro to lay the foundations for the new way of life', a movement more than a party, open 'to all worthy of calling themselves Italians.' It could not be called an antiproletarian scab party because it attracted mass participation. It was rather a movement of those mindful of their Mother and Fatherland 'especially us who have lived far away for so many years.'

God, Fatherland and Family were the religion of Rome eternal and Catholic.

It was HE who restored religious instruction in the schools, it was HE who restored the Crucifix to the classroom and the tribunals. Let it be called mysticism also the religion of the ideal, of giving everything for a cause, sacrifice and fresh, living, pulsating force. The reds cursed that which for us is religion, that is to say patriotism, but the spirit defeated this base masonic muscovite materialism.

De Luca also exalted Mussolini as the man foretold by Crispi who had resolved the dispute between Church and State 'with machiavellian mind', a phrase denoting to his audience not chicanery but politic wisdom, 'to the ill concealed fury of the masonic-jews...'

The regime was further lauded for exalting the family and fecundity, in contrast with 'other States in decline' where mortality exceeded births. Then De Luca made a quantum leap to appeal to the sentiments of his fellow expatriates. 'This is why this evening we are such Dear Comrades, we are and we will be of Italian blood which has created wealth and prosperity in this far away continent.' De Luca linked this with the memory of the Crispi, whom fascists considered a precursor, whose dream of a place in the sun under the shadow of the tricolour was 'nearly a reality', such that 'tomorrow instead of exerting ourselves for the foreigner that hates us and envies us because we are hard workers, we will perform prodigiously for a piece of land of our own without the displeasure of our children learning a language which is not that of the Father.'

De Luca then returned to the praise of fascism itself, which, he reminded his audience, had soon come into conflict on the streets and piazzas with 'the red organisations' and catholic associations 'which were popular only in name.'⁸ This became a nationalist hymn to apolitical class collaboration, one of the keynotes of fascism.

Intransigence with all parties was the leaven of our success because partisan factions were not tolerated...there was only a union amongst true Italians...The Tuscan miners of Mount Amiata raised the tricolour instead of the red rag and this was the beginning of our syndicalism of class collaboration instead of class struggle.

In this connection De Luca made mention of a post Great War protest which he considered

⁸ The 'popolari' or 'populists' here disparaged were the catholic party.

anti-national.

A general strike was instigated in Italy because two German reds, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, had been killed by German veterans. An affair that had nothing to do with us was a pretext for the reds to strike for a solidarity that had no *raison d'etre*...there was the occupation of the factories which proved such a defeat for the false prophets that it left them stunned. In summary the reds saw the tide coming nearer and submerging them and so in August 1922 they fabricated the Legalitarian general strike to force the government to disarm the Fascists alone and give the Reds a few more years of life...

De Luca then proceeded to recapitulate various points he had made at length, concluding with three cheers, one for each of the Axis powers: VIVA L'ITALIA!
VIVA LA GERMANIA! VIVA IL GIAPPONE!⁷⁹²

Together these formal discourses go to prove that not all Italian internees were innocent admirers of Mussolini's 'achievements' in making the trains run on time, draining the Pontine marshes and so on, as one of the fascist minority, Francesco Ianello, would have posterity believe.⁷⁹³ Internment was largely but not completely indiscriminate. The dragnet did haul in a small number of convinced fascists, well indoctrinated in fascist ideology and history, who were capable of organising themselves and exerting influence and leadership. This is why there was a fascist push in Loveday Compound 14A, which numbered amongst its ranks leaders, lieutenants, orator ideologues and stand over men, each with his own function to perform. No mention was made by Chiarera and De Luca in their inflammatory speeches of Fantin or his fellow anti-fascists in the Compound. Any direct reference would have been impolitic and unnecessary. In condemning 'false prophets' and exhorting those assembled to keep the faith and act like fascists, fanning the fires of ancient loyalties and resentments, Chiarera and De Luca were accessories before the fact in the death of Fantin. De Luca was released under restriction despite his known fascist convictions in 1944 in consideration of the plight of his Australian wife and child. Captain Sexton, who took his unsworn statement on 10 February 1944 noted 'it is obvious from his past history that he was in some small way associated with the Fantin murder.' In fact all those suspected of involvement in the assassination of Fantin who were not prosecuted like the executioner Casotti served long internments, far from escaping scot free.

#20: The military investigations.

As far as news of the Camp goes on the whole it is the same. The bulk of this Italian people is always opportunist and full of exaggeration according to the news in different communiqués that the newspaper brings us. They [would] do all they can to use violence towards us, if they were not subjected to the fear of the military command.

Rodrigo Meneghetti Internment Camp 9 22 September 1941⁷⁹⁴

We know from Security and internee sources that Major Richardson, Commandant of Camp 14A, swiftly detained fascist hard man Giuseppe Paternoster on the afternoon of the fatal assault of Fantin on suspicion of involvement, opportunistically putting into effect a disciplinary sentence in abeyance in respect of another admitted infraction.⁷⁹⁵ Paternoster was suspected by the military of at least one prior politically motivated assault on Fantin in August 1942, and Major Richardson had every reason to suspect that Paternoster might be in some way involved in this latest incident. There is however no evidence that the military ever settled on the conviction that Paternoster was on this occasion their prime suspect. The arrest of Paternoster is primarily significant in that it demonstrates the timeliness and effectiveness of the military response to the disturbance in Camp 14A on 16 November 1942. This astute and energetic intervention produced consternation and discord amongst the fascist internees, leading in short order to a confession of assault upon Fantin.

For the arrest of Paternoster generated rumours that the stand-over man would be hung for murder. These rumours played on the mind of Augusto Pretti, brother-in-law to Paternoster.⁷⁹⁶ An agitated Pretti informed Internee Camp Leader Dr Francesco Piscitelli of his intention to inform the Australian military that he was privy to an incriminating confession on the part of Giovanni Casotti. Thus Pretti became involved almost as soon as Fantin was struck down about 6.30pm. Late in the afternoon of November 16, Pretti had been receiving treatment at the Camp 14A Regimental Aid Post from interned apprentice pharmacist Alexander Charles Rossi when an excited Casotti appeared, asking after Dr Piscitelli and saying that he had knocked a man down.⁷⁹⁷ Antifascist internees swiftly formed and broadcast the view that Dr Piscitelli had suppressed this evidence by persuading Pretti, distressed by news of his brother-in-law's arrest, that he needed a calmate. Thereafter Pretti

"went silly for three days, to the extent of trying to commit suicide."⁷⁹⁸ It is known that Pretti did attempt suicide prior to the opening of the Inquest at Loveday on November 26,⁷⁹⁹ where he attributed the disjointed quality of the evidence he tendered to memory lapses associated with an illness for which he had been hospitalised.⁸⁰⁰

Piscitelli, as the chief fascist in the camp, certainly had a prima facie motive for such malpractice. There is good reason to believe however that Loveday senior Medical Officer Major DW Whitehead was right when he attributed Pretti's suicidal behaviour to 'temporary insanity' rather than medication, because in due course he diagnosed Pretti with manic depressive psychosis, which involves emotional lability particularly under stress and suicidal tendencies. Moreover Major Shepherd as medical superintendent of the Barmera Base Hospital testified that there were no medications at Loveday 'which would have the effect of rendering a person insane, at all, or at any time.'⁸⁰¹ When Pretti gave two statements to military Intelligence and the Coronial Inquiry on 26 November, the statements he attributed to Casotti involved admission of assault only, and afforded no incriminating reference to employment of a weapon or homicidal intent.⁸⁰² This must have been very disappointing to the police, because Pretti had offered to bear witness as to the exact specifications of the weapon with which Casotti was rumoured to have attacked Fantin.⁸⁰³ Nonetheless the importance of the early decision of Pretti to break ranks and collaborate with the Australian authorities must not be underestimated, for it alerted Piscitelli and associates that Casotti was liable to identification as a suspect.

The situation facing Piscitelli as Camp leader was a delicate one, as it developed over the evening of 16 November and the morning of 17 November. Paternoster was known to the military as a turbulent and violent fascist who habitually associated with like minded internees. Casotti was liable to be accused of murder by Pretti, anxious to create an alibi for his relative Paternoster. It was clearly not in the interest of men who risked being charged with homicidal conspiracy to have two confederates detained for questioning, either of whom might incriminate the other or third parties. If the actual assailant was willing to anticipate a denunciation by Pretti or others by 'cooperating' with the military and 'confessing' an impulsive over reaction to a provocation, his associates would be simultaneously disincriminated and enabled to bear witness for him, to the mutual advantage of all concerned. As a conspiracy to murder attracted capital punishment, Casotti and his associates

had a clear motive for perjury, for they were all parties to the political antagonism suspected of having motivated the planning and execution of the crime.

Something very like this solution emerged before the AMF Court of Inquiry which sat on the afternoon of 17 November, civil police attending. (Cresciani is thus simply wrong when he states that 'the military opened an inquiry only ten days after the incident': the inquiry which opened on 26 November was the Coronal Inquest, and it followed the earlier and expeditious military Inquiry.⁸⁰⁴) Lines of defence and inquiry anticipated one another as Piscitelli, Paternoster and other fascist internees were subjected to intense, protracted and well informed questioning. The Court particularly scrutinised the reaction of witnesses on the afternoon of the previous day to the news that antifascist internees had contributed to the "Sheepskins For Russia" war charity. This led to a senior fascist, Francesco Ianello, volunteering a statement that Casotti, whose name had not been previously mentioned to the Court, had approached him with a view to speaking to the Camp Leader, who was the recognised intermediary for internee representations to the military. It was then that Casotti was brought forward and confessed to assault, claiming he had, in the presence of witnesses, impulsively responded to personal and political provocation.⁸⁰⁵ Thus the death of Fantin was represented as the unintended consequence of a shove in response to verbal abuse which resulted in an accidental head injury due to an unforeseeable collision with a nearby tap stand. Therefore an assessment of the characters of Francesco Ianello and Dr Piscitelli is decisive to the interpretation of the presentation of Casotti to the Military Court of Inquiry.

In a profile of his dossier dated 11 October 1943, Ianello was described as 'a staunch fascist' who 'was much involved in the disturbances at Loveday which resulted in the death of the internee Fantin.' Francesco Ianello came to Australia as an infant and as such was an Italian born graduate of Fremantle Boys School, which earned him the characterisation of 'an educated type' in an era where secondary schooling was not general. When interned he had a small library of half a dozen booklets of fascist doctrine and history. He was also described by one observer as 'ambitious with not much brains', which would account for his impolitic tendency to proclaim his fascism when interned. When informed on 22 July 1941 that he had been naturalised on his father's account as a youth, the headstrong Ianello had asserted 'that he had no intention of appealing his internment as he considered it would be the act of a traitor'. Only towards the end of a long internment, owing to a long record of fascist activism in the Camps in

which he had been held and particularly to his involvement in the death of Fantin did Ianello dissimulate his fascism as youthful bravado and a psychological reaction to teasing from his Australian born brothers, who at the time of his internment were both serving with the AMF. Ianello was described by Major Owen, his custodian in Western Australia, as 'a clever and unscrupulous man, who has great power over his fellow countrymen.'⁸⁰⁶ At the time of the killing of Fantin, the West Australian contingent had been in Loveday Camp 14A for precisely ten days. Ianello was a leader of the West Australians, and as such the indispensable link man between the young Westralian Casotti and the Queenslander Piscitelli and his strong arm man Paternoster.

Dr Piscitelli was described by Captain CF Sexton of the Security Service in an intelligence report of June 1944 as 'a person whose release should never have been countenanced' whom 'Queensland had always submitted...was one of their most dangerous men...' Sexton laid great weight on the evidence of Major Archie Dick, who as the Commandant of Internment Camp 9 and subsequently Second in Command of the Loveday Group had known Piscitelli since his arrival at the complex. Dick's statement deserves citation at length, as it profile's Piscitelli's cunning and in particular his role in the opportunistic presentation of Casotti to the Military Court of Inquiry.

Piscitelli arrived at Loveday Internment Group (No.9) in June, 1941. I was Camp Commandant during his internment there and was instrumental in getting him transferred to 14D as a medical orderly, mainly to break a clique of trouble-making Fascists of which he was one of the leading members. While at No. 9 Piscitelli was one of the prime movers in all moves to terrorize internees from working in gardening and other projects. He always works behind the scenes and was far too clever to lay himself open for disciplinary action under Internment Camp regulations. The clique to which he belonged used pimps and thugs to threaten...internees offering to work outside the Compound, and this...caused unrest, squabbling, and fighting among the various sections of internees. Although Piscitelli was transferred to 14A as a medical orderly, he very soon hoodwinked the Compound Commandant there and was appointed Camp Leader. He immediately became very friendly with internee PATERNOSTER, who had a bad record. Although the two were poles apart in the social scale, the result of this association culminated in the murder of Fantin. The writer was a member of the

Court of Enquiry into Fantin's death, and it was very evident from his demeanour that Piscitelli knew more of the circumstances surrounding Fantin's death than he would admit, and it was only when it was made known that the Court intended to sit until the matter was cleared up that Piscitelli as Camp Leader made any effort to produce evidence of any value. The Group Commandant was not in accord with the appointment of Piscitelli as Camp Leader at 14A, and at a later date 14A Camp Commandant had occasion to remove him from the position.

It should be added that one internee known to trusted Intelligence Sergeant C Sciberas described Paternoster to him as 'a ring leader and bodyguard of Piscitelli', involved with 'Dr Piscitelli and his Black Shirt gang' in coercing internees who would have otherwise been willing to collaborate with the Australian authorities by participating in work parties. It is also clear from Major Dick's testimony that he did not share the confidence in Piscitelli as a gentleman exhibited by Camp Commandant Richardson of 14A, who was 'of opinion' Piscitelli 'lost support as Leader following the killing of Fantin, both Fascists and anti-Fascists deserting him...because of Piscitelli's efforts to locate the killer, without unduly complicating himself with either the authorities or either party in the Compound'. At any rate it appears that Piscitelli made early private representations to Major Richardson, prior to Ianello's statement, for which Richardson was grateful, commenting that 'the fact remains Piscitelli was actually the first to give the name of the killer to Camp Commandant.'⁸⁰⁷ If the truth were known to Richardson, blinded by class sympathy with Piscitelli, he might have realised that the antifascist party in the Camp never had any faith in the good doctor, whilst the fascists merely failed to understand how politic was his handing over of Casotti.

In May 1944 Orlando Alcorso, an internee of bourgeois Jewish origins,⁸⁰⁸ offered what Sexton considered corroborative evidence of the suspicion of Piscitelli's association with Paternoster, and his participation in the Fantin murder.

I met Piscitelli in Hay...I met him again when he became Camp Leader of 14A Compound Loveday. There the Camp was completely controlled by the Fascists. He looked after Paternoster. They bought Fantin into hospital when I was there. Piscitelli was also there. I told him that at last he had done what he wanted to do. I thought he knew that Fantin had been killed, and I said it was his fault, that as

Camp Leader he should have stopped that. He knew that Fantin had been threatened several times. I said he was just as guilty as the man who actually killed Fantin.

It is highly unlikely that Sexton and the military authorities generally would have been so pro-active in collecting information about the killing of Fantin after the legal proceedings were closed if they were engaged in a cover up.

Having established a prima facie case that the death of Fantin was the result of some kind of assault, the responsibility for further verification of the circumstances of his death passed from the military custodians of Camp 14A. Thereafter the matter was in the province of the civil police with whom the Loveday Command were under orders to cooperate fully.⁸⁰⁹ In establishing the nature of the injuries sustained by Fantin, arresting Paternoster, convening a Military Court of Inquiry, and indicating to the police the identity and political motivation of a confessed assailant, all within 24 hours of a fatal assault, the military authorities at Loveday had achieved as much as can be reasonably expected of them. Clearly, suggestions that the military sought to suppress evidence that the death of Fantin was not accidental cannot be applied generically to the Loveday Command. Certainly the suspicions of philofascism made out by some antifascist detainees in the adjoining Camp 14D against Major Richardson, Commandant of compound 14A, would appear to have been overstated. If Richardson was as Major Dick alleged, Piscitelli's dupe, it was in function of common class origins and a certain generic authoritarianism, not a political conspiracy. Any residual suspicions that the case was downplayed must be made out with reference to other, more senior local officers or higher echelons in the national chain of command.

The preliminary investigations instigated by Commandant Richardson within Camp 14A and the subsequent military Inquiry both sought from the outset to verify reports that Fantin had been assassinated. The assassination hypothesis was moreover always favoured by Lieutenant Jury, in charge of the Intelligence unit attached to Loveday.⁸¹⁰ Indeed at the highest level the Commonwealth Security Service never endorsed the view that Fantin had died accidentally.⁸¹¹ Even if it is conceded that a dismissive view of the case may have had some currency amongst key officers of the Loveday garrison, it does not appear to have materially inhibited the police investigation, which immediately followed upon the Casotti confession. Thus the weight of evidence suggests that police investigations were from the

first independently conducted with the benefit of unstinting and appropriate cooperation on the part of most if not all military officers at Loveday. Indeed the police detailed to investigate the case did so with an alacrity and professionalism, which would have discouraged any attempt to unduly influence them.

The other major development of the military Court of Inquiry was the anticipation by Medical Officer Captain Luke Everard Verco of the findings as to Fantin's injuries and their causes which he would present to the coronial Inquest a little over a week later, and the anticipation by the military Court of Inquiry of the coroner's confused findings on that basis. The issues raised by Dr Verco and examined at Inquest are discussed below. Here it is sufficient to note that the Report of the military Court was that Fantin had been injured at around 1700 hours on 16 November 1942 in Loveday Compound 14A and subsequently died of cerebral haemorrhage. These injuries were stated to have been caused 'by a forceful blow to the back of the head with a hard round...or padded object.' This finding was immediately directly contradicted by

the Court's opinion on the evidence...that FANTIN was pushed backwards by Internee Giovanni CASOTTI No 12157 of 14A Internment Camp, and fell backwards striking his head on a curved part of the water tap which is there or on a rounded loose stone that may have been there (there being some in the vicinity when the Court viewed the site.) Inquiry failed to elicit any evidence of his being struck with any padded object (such as a baton) which was first suspected.

This account of events relied on the Medical Evidence submitted to the Court by Captain Verco and Casotti's 'confession' of an accident allegedly provoked by abuse from Fantin. The military Court of Inquiry thus ominously foreshadowed the miscarriage of justice which was to come in the case.

#21: Charles Jury & the Fantin Affair

Diary...of FANTIN Francesco...Police have been supplied with a copy of the translation.

Lt CR Jury

Immediately after the Military Court of Inquiry rose, intelligence officer Lieutenant Charles Riscbieth Jury made good his initial notification of November 17th of the affair to his superior Major Martin in Adelaide and dispatched a digest of the evidence. Jury confined his summary 'to matters which appeared to be of interest from an Intelligence point of view', adding that he had thought it 'advisable to report this evidence in some detail owing to the light it throws on political conditions in No. 14 A I/C Compound.' Clearly there were things going on which Jury thought he ought to make known to his superiors. This was an evaluation in which a cool professional assessment and the personal inclinations deriving from Jury's background happily coincided. Taken together this evidence undercuts contemporary and subsequent conspiracy theories that military intelligence at Loveday played a role in covering up the murder of Francesco Fantin. It will be seen that Jury was not the man to have participated in such a shameful charade. It is necessary then to make out a detailed profile of Charles Jury and highlight his conduct in the immediate aftermath of Fantin's death.

The essentials of this background are to be found in a paper by Jury's literary biographer, Barbara Wall⁸¹². Charles Riscbieth Jury was the son of George Arthur Jury, who with the benefit of secondary education and night school had risen from humble origins via employment as a clerk with G&R Wills in 1873 to a position as an accountant and a partnership in the firm in 1885. In 1890 he married Elizabeth Riscbieth, daughter of a prosperous German family⁸¹³, one of whom had been a former manager and partner in the firm. Charles was born to George and Elizabeth in 1893.

Charles was initiated in the classics by Reverend WA Moore at Glenelg Grammar School in keeping with the pedagogy of Arnold, at a time when the glory of Roman civilisation was very much kept as a model of mandarin culture before the youth of the Empire. From a very early age he wrote poetry, and loved the freedom of Adelaide's extensive beaches and hills. By the time the pubescent Jury came to further

his studies at St Peter's College, it was increasingly Greek civilisation which engaged his attention. Jury appreciated the literary virtues of the King James Version, and although not conventionally religious later believed he had had a religious experience and was no atheist. Nonetheless he was drawn towards the hedonistic hellenistic aesthetic which Walter Pater was at this time imparting to Oscar Wilde. Contemporaneously he would have become aware of his own homosexuality as he acquired a reputation as a scholar and poet at St Peter's, where he was Head Prefect in 1913.

Headmaster Canon Girdlestone then recommended him as a commoner to Magdalene College Oxford. In July he set sail for England, and went up to Oxford in October. When the Great War broke out he was underage but immediately sought his mother's permission to enlist, which she refused. Notwithstanding this he joined the Oxford & Bucks Light Infantry as a Lieutenant. It is likely that he saw the British Empire as the champion of the liberal humanism in which he had been educated. It is a choice all the more meaningful when it is recalled that he was of German descent on his mother's side. In spring 1915 he was severely wounded in the leg by a grenade at Ypres. Rejected by the Royal Flying Corp in January 1916, he returned to Oxford for the summer term, where he received the news of the death in action on the Somme of his younger brother George⁸¹⁴. After discovering a dislike for the philosophical curriculum of the Greats syllabus, Jury read English and received a First in June 1918. He took his MA in 1923. By this time he had made a return visit to Adelaide, and his father had settled a private income upon him, enabling him to devote himself to a poetic vocation.

In October 1920 Jury travelled to Italy with Miss Mae Kelsey, a linguist friend of his Devonshire relations. He may have been aware of contemporary social upheaval in Italy. He sailed for Australia from Naples in February 1921 to be with his ailing mother. His mother had accepted an approach from the University to endow a chair in English literature in the name of his invalid father. It was offered to Jury who refused it, preferring to return to Italy, where he spent five years at Taormina in Sicily, a resort frequented amongst others by monied homosexuals who enjoyed the climate and a certain tolerance. There Jury wrote verse drama and poetry including an *Encomium of Adelaide* published by OUP at his expense to good reviews in 1929 under the title Love & the Virgins. He then spent a month in Greece visiting classical sites before returning in July to Australia upon the death of his mother.

Back in Adelaide he tutored in English at St Marks College and taught in the Department of English before again declining his father's chair. He renewed his Italian connection in the household of a Dr Biaggini. In 1934 he returned to Europe, noting that the situation there after the accession of Hitler to the Reichschancellory was 'politically profoundly depressing'. He travelled extensively in England, Scotland, Wales, Sicily and Greece, writing an *Ode to Adelaide* transfigured as a Greek polis for the city's centenary in 1936. Throughout this period he worked on his magnum opus, *Icarius*, a verse tragedy on the dilemma of the love that dare not speak its name. It was printed in Adelaide in 1941, a definitive edition being issued in 1955. Jury returned to Australia upon completion of this work in December 1938. He arrived home an accomplished amateur gentleman of letters, one of the best educated and widely travelled citizens of Adelaide. In gramscian terms he was a traditional intellectual, who identified more closely with the historical succession of 'dead poets' who shared his literary vocation than with the successful philistine contemporaries in commerce and industry who were his socioeconomic peers⁸¹⁵.

When war broke out in September 1939 his loyalties were what they had been in his youth, but his cosmopolitanism proved an embarrassment to him. His offer to enlist with the War Office was met by a request for references from persons who had known him continuously for four years, which the peripatetic Jury could not provide. He joined the Volunteer Defence Corp, and was posted from there to intelligence duties where his linguistic and intellectual skills could be best utilised. It was thus that he came to be at Loveday in November 1942. There he wrote five documents bearing upon the Fantin affair. The first was the above mentioned intelligence digest on the proceedings of the Military Court of Inquiry into the death of Fantin. The second was a brief evaluation of the diary written by Fantin in his last days. The third was a translation of that diary itself. The fourth and fifth documents were the two fascist speeches cited above, delivered in the run up to the execution of Fantin. He also countersigned a translation of the denunciation of Casotti by Augusto Pretti.⁸¹⁶ Clearly Jury took the case to heart and sought to promote its positive resolution with his superiors.

In accordance with literary and administrative practice, Jury prefaced the Fantin diary with an introductory note, in the form of an appreciation of its context, giving it a functional intelligence focus. Thus Jury's evaluation has both literary and

political characteristics varying from the empathetic to the detached. Jury began by correctly identifying the genre of the text as 'rather a book of meditations than a diary proper'. The tone of these 'Thoughts & Memories' as Fantin had termed them was reflective and heartfelt. They constitute a fluent emotional recollection rather than a piecemeal daybook of minute personal psychological perceptions, sensations, happenings and doings. Jury considered the diary a 'moving' relic of 'Fantin himself and his ideas, or rather his feelings', a caveat which tells us less about Fantin than it does about Jury, aesthete and intellectual, who sought objective poise rather than emotional immediacy in his own writing.

In introducing these subtle observations, Jury very punctually noted that the diary contained 'no information regarding the Compound which is not already known'. As it was a long document, he did not attach it to his weekly intelligence report of December 8th, but noted that a copy had been supplied to the police, and that copies would be forwarded to his superiors on request. It was an option that was to be taken up by the Queensland Branch of the Security Service. Another literary feature linking the translation mentioned in Jury's report of the 18th with the evaluation of ten days later was the quality of the translation of the diary, which if a little literal in passages nonetheless preserved the poetic qualities of Fantin's emotive prose.⁸¹⁷ This is especially noteworthy in the translation of the poem, *Verses of the mendicant life* in which Fantin lamented the misfortunes of the indigent under fascist rule and by extension his own peripatetic existence in exile. Jury was aware that the testamentary character of the diary as a whole and certain indications therein suggested that 'Fantin suspected or felt that he would not leave the Compound alive.' He considered that the document clearly showed that Fantin was not a communist, which shows that Jury was alive to basic distinctions in the leftist politics of his day, although perhaps a little uninformed about the varieties of communism. Unknown to Jury, Fantin was an anarchist who read a little Marx and participated in United Front politics with communists including solidarity initiatives in favour of the Soviet Union despite knowing what had transpired at Kronstadt.⁸¹⁸ Jury was on surer ground in emphasising Fantin's 'passionate hatred of fascism and all its works', an empathetic turn of phrase. This suggests that his liberal humanism found Jury in sympathy with the dead man, notwithstanding the fact that he found his committed tone alien and a little messianic: Fantin, he said, regarded himself 'as something of a prophet'..Jury's homosexuality may also have been a factor here, in so far as the fascist mercantilist emphasis on breeding soldiers for the nation implied that homosexuality was

subversive. Certainly the affectation of virility and vitality which was an important part of the fascist culture of violence was hostile to homosexuals and inimical to many of them.

Jury was recruited from amongst the tertiary educated bourgeoisie, like many another wartime intelligence officer. He demonstrated yet again that military intelligence was not always an oxymoron, at least under the peculiar conditions of a wartime consensus which had grown to embrace the conservative, the apolitical and the radical socialist left in a common antifascist cause. Jury certainly seems to have understood the situation in which Fantin had been placed during his internment. It seems likely that his knowledge of Italy, the Italians, their tongue and the partisan heat of their politics gave him the insight into divisions in the Compound which was not vouchsafed to Lieutenant Colonel Dean and other officers under his command at Loveday such as Major Richardson, Camp Commandant of Compound 14A.

Indeed it is significant that Jury made his report to Major Martin of Military Intelligence in Adelaide. Even if this were a routine channel of communication, which it well may have been, Jury may have been seeking to circumvent the Loveday command to get a more sympathetic hearing for the issues raised by Fantin's death. At the very least Lieutenant Jury was not participating in a cover up of the political significance of the death of Fantin. Rather he was ensuring that information about it was being reported through appropriate channels to higher authority.

The text of the translated Fantin diary entitled 'Thoughts & Memories' is headed 'TRANSLATION/CRJ.', which establishes Jury as its author. Fantin's style is declamatory. He sets forth for the world a testament to the meaning of his life, which evokes his origins and the cardinal values of the political commitment which was at the core of his being, never more so than when under threat in his last days. This he did with good rhetorical effect, suggesting some incipient talent as a writer. The preamble for example employs the device of incomplete sentences, which refer the reader to the following sentence for completion of the sense, where the effect is sustained: a most effective mode of introduction of the reader into the text. Fantin began by setting the mood at the time of writing as an internee, a tone given by the despondency he felt at sundown.

In this life of roaming through the world in search of a piece of bread less bitter, of a little liberty. In these long months of my internment... In the evening hours when the sun disappears, when the earth veiled in a tenuous shadow already dozes quiet and melancholy, I feel in my heart a great sadness.

This rhetorical effect may have been a device embodied in the original Italian in a longer sentence, reflecting a stream of consciousness modeled on speech. This feature may perhaps have been accentuated by Jury's translation strategy of crafting shorter English sentences integral to the sense of the period as a whole. In a translator's note Jury commented that Fantin 'appears not to have been very literate, and the spelling and grammar are in places incorrect.' Apart from the fact that Jury was capable of misspelling himself [see below] Jury may have been misled by his own polished mandarin level literary competency to miss the point here. There may have been a certain mismatch of temperament here between the erudite translator and the activist author he found idiosyncratic. Jury seems at any rate to have overlooked the fact that Fantin was able to express himself very well with only a primary school education. Certainly Jury was able to produce an English text of discrete literary merit from Fantin's Italian, and it would be wrong to impute all the final product entirely to the undoubtedly skilful translator. Some at least of its sense and style must have derived from the author.

For that matter there were points where Jury's translation, doubtless executed under pressure of other commitments and without much time for reflection and polishing, appears faulty. Indeed the translation reads like a good first draft, as such necessarily imperfect. There are points for example when Jury attaches the Italian article to the English noun [*l'azzurro* is literalistically mistranslated as 'the blue' rather than 'blue.'] Here and there adjective and noun do not agree as to number. Parentheses indicate where I have been moved to adapt Jury's translation, for example where it is literal and unidiomatic, or where his syntax and word or clause order seem faulty. To do otherwise would tend to make Fantin sound clumsier than he really was.

Having set the scene so effectively in these somber tones, Fantin shifted it by contrast to the sunlit sylvan panorama of his youth, all gentle breezes and wildflowers.

This was the idyllic side of his native Schio district. Having spoken of the present and the past, his thoughts turned to the future of his dreams, and thus again by contrast to the bitter reality of dictatorship, war and internment amongst misguided antagonists. This return to the present evokes another return to the past, this time by association with the hardship of 'that adolescence of mine, an infancy without games, grown up among the clash of arms in that little industrial city', remembering 'the pain of seeing all the slaughter of that war. Then the end, and one thought it was forever, of Prussian militarism.'

The peace that followed is recalled by Fantin as a springtime of youth and love and liberty, a time of fused personal and political aspirations, of hedonistic and aesthetic satisfaction, when he felt that his country was young and revolutionary. This is a brief evocation in effect of the Red Biennium, the years from 1919-20 when the socialist left asserted itself in Italy. It serves to emphasise both the agapism of Fantin's anarchism and the affinity of the emotional aspirations of the Red Biennium with those of 'the summer of love' and the revolutionary aspirations of youth internationally at the height of the Long Boom. In both cases popular consciousness was shaped by the historical context of traditional religiosity simultaneously with the influence of secular political doctrines. Once again the vista is vivid, sunlit, warm, caressing, its keynote the 'kiss of a young woman'. 'They were days when [blue] seemed bluer, [green] greener'; here we have an example of metonymy, referring to the heavens and to nature, and as such to the world. But in the recollection of the companionship of those days there is a foretaste of the reversal those aspirations suffered all too soon, for Fantin remembers his friends dispersed through the highways and byways of the world [*per i sentieri del mondo.*] Here he pauses to pay the first of two tributes to his mother, at whose hands he received the core values which inspired his youth. The inheritance of his youth was one to which he felt his pen hardly did justice.

[How many dreams in common with my good mother in those twenty years of mine, twenty years prior to these poor lines of mine.] How many hopes [in those winter evenings around the family hearth] for a just society where bread may be [plentiful for all], where the brotherhood of nations may not be an empty word.[But it was all over too soon], and too many showed themselves too slow to understand this great idea of love.

This note of contrast sets the scene for Fantin's denunciation of the rise of fascism, seen as the violation of all that was decent in the world in which he grew up. In his mind the virtues of his parents were the virtues of the common people, and these had been trampled on and treated with contempt. Repression at home had lead inevitably to chauvinism abroad.

The [wickedness], the [ambition] for dominion, the acts of violence against the poor people, against those who for the good of others gave everything without asking anything for themselves. Too late is understood... the evil [done by] fascism, [death squads] of a hundred armed men against one [individual], [decimating] our native land, a step mother who denies bread and liberty to her children, [a decimation continued in the countryside of other friendly peoples.] How many huge herds of corpses today are stretched under the light shelter of the red earth? And what if all these dead were no more than a first installment of...universal destruction ? They go on to kill and be killed.

This raised for Fantin the question of the nature of fascism, which after a few heartfelt phrases of execration gave place to a lucid conceptualisation of it as a throwback or relapse in the historical process. Like the contemporary liberal christian humanist Collingwood, Fantin thought of fascism as barbarism. Fantin had clearly been influenced by the healthy historicism of the Italian socialist movement. Like Marx he looked on human fulfillment as the goal of history to be achieved through struggle. His anarchism was not altogether abstract, and antifascism accordingly appeared to him as a chapter in the secular saga of the fight for human betterment.

When one says fascism one says horror, its crimes are known. Its infamies do not allow of attenuation. It is a tyranny which tries, not without success in many parts of the world, to annul the civilised conquests..attained during centuries of [struggle] and..progress in order to push back the human race into a state of shameful barbarism. [And if today is like an endless night yet there are still many men of good conscience who demand in thought and deed the full satisfaction of human needs, and a life lived

for its own sake in peace, in the enlargement of all its powers and joy.]
And do not forget that the most mild and lawful progress has been gained
over long centuries of struggle. For every step that humanity has advanced
there have been necessary torrents of tears and blood, hecatombs of
victims sacrificed for the happiness of future generations.

It followed that resistance to oppression was a matter of underground endurance,
nurturing in obscurity the promise of healthy new life through the winter of oppression
and its discontents. This process Fantin compared to the germination of a seed. This was
a metaphor which had enjoyed some currency in the Italian anarchist diaspora in
Australia. One of the series of anarchist newspapers published in Italian in Melbourne by
Isidoro Bertazzon for the Matteotti Club between the wars had been entitled Germinal
[The Seed 1929]⁸¹⁹. And Fantin found philosophical comfort in a metaphor which
suggested that life was on the side of progress and would ultimately prevail.

Only then with..good seed, [the] harvest of good healthy brains and
generous hearts, shall we have good germination. Even though the good
seed [may] have to..remain for long, long winters hidden under the clods.
[And since life will always go on, let us not seek to drown altogether in a
sea of mud.] Before the bitter reality of [everyday life / *ogni giorno*],
before this deep darkness, let us try to stand up for the light and for the
truth.

Here Fantin broke off, to return with a note emphasising the identity of
agapism and equity in his thinking, and the comfort he drew from the past for dreams of
the future with which to withstand the trials of the present.

Libertarian antifascist I have always recognised in love the greatest good
in life, the greatest thing in this world, the noblest purpose of existence,
the summit of joy and felicity that may be reached by human beings.
Thirsting for justice, susceptible to good, instead of the company of men I
have rejoiced in time past and in the present in that of my dreams. They
were always kind companions to me, and I could not imagine music

sweeter than theirs.

Fantin terminated this long meditation here, resuming with a note on the theme of personal despondency and exile, dictatorship and internment, merging in 'the monotony of the sad time that is passing' before settling on a reverie 'to all the dead companions [and] to all those buried alive' under fascism. Particularly recalled were Isidoro Bertazzon, the anarchist editor who had died in a tragic road accident, and Pietro Giacosa, a comrade who had died in late 1941. Of him Fantin wrote 'not today alone but every day I remember you.' Fantin may have been speaking here also of Bertazzon and 'all the dead comrades'.

To this note was appended a poem dedicated to 'the (all too numerous / *troppi*) mendicants [in the streets] of fascist Italy. In the poem, a beggar asks why he was not crushed or taught 'to work for the good of all'. Sheltered 'from the winds and..scourges', the dying beggar would have become a useful ant rather than a useless worm, loving the fellows he now curses for their neglect. It is not clear if this was a poem Fantin had collected or his own work. In any case it is a modest if didactic and polemical piece which confirms that Fantin had in him a glimmer of literary sensibility.

This poem was ruled off and followed by a message to supporters beyond the barbed wire concerning the underground struggle for hearts and minds of detainees which antifascist internees were waging within Loveday. In a group effort they were making common cause with their comrades outside. Clearly Fantin was concerned that the contribution to the antifascist struggle of those interned might go unnoticed. It was a confirmation for Jury of political conditions in Compound 14A.

To those outside. To let them know that in this Internment Camp there are living friends, [workers] who make common cause with them. [Comrades] who have years of struggle [behind them] for liberty, for justice, who have the same goal, and are cheered by their victories. And pensively they continue to talk of all the peoples who in pain suffer the fascist tyranny.

This message to the outside world was ruled off, but immediately followed by an impassioned statement making implicit reference to the physical intimidation which

Fantin had suffered, in which he committed himself to continuing by word of mouth the uphill political struggle within the Compound, where the antifascists were outnumbered, particularly after the advent of the Western Australians.

If I have spoken evil, show what I have said that is evil; but if I have spoken well, why do you strike me? But today he who speaks with reason is squeezed by the throat by the baseness of the majority. Ignorance, insufficiency of light in [their] brains. Well then increment must be given to healthy propaganda to cure [the] many [evils] of this social body, for the fulfilment of justice upon this earth.

This declaration of commitment to political struggle was succeeded by a reflection on the struggle for existence that was proletarian life from which it arose. Fantin saw human existence as he had experienced it as a life cycle of emotional and intellectual deprivation in which the generations were forced to exploit one another. This somber account of the life of the working poor reinforced his earlier remarks on his short childhood and early participation in the work force.

Does it seem a fine thing to you when man does nothing else all his life but eat? In the meantime he begets children and at first he rejoices, but as soon as they begin to eat much he gets angry and shouts at them; grow up more quickly, gluttons, it is time you started to work! And he would like of his own children to make [beasts] of burden for himself, but they instead work for their own stomachs, and the song begins again. The soul never cries out with joy, never has an idea that makes the heart exult.

The society which exploited the working poor in this way was unjust. Property was theft, and labour was extorted by force complemented by ideological coercion. But the well disposed would persevere against adversity, and even thrive on it.

Some live like beggars imploring everything. The others like thieves, taking everything for themselves. An infinity of laws of rapine have been given, they have put armed men over the others, saying to them; defend our laws, they are useful, they promise that we will suck human blood!

First they squeeze a man on the outside, and when one does not follow them, they fill him up with many things that chain his soul. But with good will [one keeps] going. It will happen as with the rain, every drop swells a seed.

This almost religious vision of life as suffering relieved by higher aspirations was developed in a second tribute to his mother, at whose hands Fantin was cognisant of having received the core values which had given meaning to his life. This is an important example of how anarchism sought to convert the essence of millennial popular religiosity into a secular doctrine of political struggle with mass appeal. [Note that Orwell speaking from contemporary experience in Spain noted that anarchism ‘undoubtedly has a religious tinge.’ In this he agreed with Borkenau, whom he admired, that ‘the anarchists are a half religious Utopian movement’. Brennan also discusses at length the ‘strongly idealistic and moral-religious character’ of Spanish anarchism]⁸²⁰ This meditation on secular redemption from suffering naturally concluded for Fantin in the wish for an Italian revolution to overthrow fascism, which he could not know was already brewing in the form of the Resistance as he wrote.

And dear mother you remember that still a youth I began to look for the truth where it is at home, and [found] it in that great ideal of human redemption. From that day human pain has become my daily bread, with [faith only] in love, in liberty, in respect for human integrity. Hoping that one day the Italian people will sweep away as leaves of autumn all that clique of fascist tyrants.

The final section of Fantin’s diary referred to the two assaults upon him of 15 August and 7 November. Fantin again referred to the history of fascist violence in terms of which he understood these assaults, and the stimulus received ‘to persevere in the good propaganda for defence of civil rights.’ There was another extended reference to his mother and her values. This suggests that Fantin’s assailants had made good their aggression with the customary reflections on his parentage. This is significant in terms of the dubious allegations that they were later to make to the effect that Fantin had been provocative in just these same terms.⁸²¹ It sounds very much like they were projecting into

the mouth of Fantin on the day of his death the kind of stereotypical abuse they had directed at him previously.

Remembering. The aggression of 15 August, hours of the evening with the purpose of strangling me. It will remain among many other violences suffered from the fascists...And if dear mother these street ruffians have offended you without ever having known you. From the heart of this your son who weeps they have fetched torture. From this heart of mine so [sorely] tried will be born new longings, stronger love, stronger the gratitude for how much you have done that I might grow up with all your care and maternal caresses.

This outpouring in response to aggression was followed by a number of testamentary remarks. These are specifically associated with the incident of 7 November, regarding which some details are given. They were made 'seeing that the acts of violence continue', and addressed to his political associates and family.

To the comrades Panizzon, Ciotti, Carmagnola [et al]...yesterday 7 November I received more blows. Why? Because [they saw me laugh without any baseness.] For the rest I was glad, one day I [will] explain why. In short having among these Italians many enemies.

As Jury noted Fantin asked his comrades to remember that he might have to leave the Internment Camp via the cemetery. Clearly Fantin was preparing to face death if it came to that. He thus proceeded to ask his brothers to act as his executors, asking them if possible to 'give me some money, the fruit of my long work' on the family property. He called for this fund to be divided into four shares, two of which were to go to his sisters and their families in Italy in recognition of 'the care they have given my dear parents.' The other two shares were to be divided between political charities, namely the libertarian press and the campaign pro political victims of fascism for which he had worked. These were the people and causes which had been closest to his heart. Lastly he wanted forty pounds taken out of his bank book and divided between the Red Cross and the Cairns General Hospital for the care he had received there in 1929.

The diary of Francesco Fantin shows us a man reaching into his soul to find the resources with which to respond to intimidation. He found the strength to do so in the love with which his people had raised him and taught him to value the cardinal aspirations of life. The intimidation of Fantin placed him before a difficult choice. Should he forswear himself and everything which had given his life meaning by adopting a low profile? Or should he rather hold his head up high, carry on the fight for what he believed in, and manage the risk that this would involve? Fantin chose the latter course, aware that its lower psychological cost might involve him in paying the ultimate price. Nonetheless he can hardly have expected that within a fortnight of writing those last lines to his comrades and his brothers, he would be dead. Such things beggar comprehension.

Fantin was neither an intellectual in the professional sense nor an intellectual nonentity. He was an ordinary working class man who had ideas, as ordinary working class people not uncommonly do. He put thought into his life, and was orientated by it. The description which best describes the function of organiser and intellectual leader which he performed is the Gramscian concept of the organic intellectual who performs the duties of leadership appropriate to his class, such as a political activist or trade union leader amongst the working class. Fantin's diary shows him working through his intellectual motivation under the most extreme conditions. To suggest, as has been suggested, that Fantin is beneath historical consideration because he was no great theatrical revolutionary commandant or ideologue is to fallaciously require that the junior officers of the democratic movement are nothing because they are not everything. But where would the Italian antifascist diaspora in Australia have been without modest but recognized leaders such as Fantin? Failure to recognize this is to resurrect by the back door Carlyle's elitist great man theory of history. It is to suppose an unrealistic and undemocratic gulf between ordinary human intelligence and intellectual specialisation.

In 1942 Charles Jury was a liberal humanist serving his civilisation in the King's uniform in the antipodes. The documents he drew up regarding the death of Francesco Fantin demonstrate that Intelligence at Loveday was not a party to any official conspiracy to cover up the significance of the death of Fantin. This evidence undermines the allegation to the contrary made at the time by an antifascist correspondent in Compound 14D, adjacent to 14A where Fantin was interned and attacked.

Jury did all he could as a junior officer, and then let the matter rest. In referring the matter to the attention of his superiors, he did both his moral and military duty effectively and circumspectly. What his exact motives were we can only surmise, but a distaste for fascism, not to say murder, seems likely to have informed his actions. What he thought of later developments in the affair we don't know. Without his endeavors our understanding of the Fantin affair would be poorer, and with it our understanding of the history of democratic participation in Australia. Without his translation of Fantin's diary, which was subsequently lost, a prime document of Fantin's voice would have been gone unknown and unheard. It was made available to the police investigating Fantin's murder, for as we have seen, some passages referred to material evidence of previous assaults on Fantin, whilst others established his political character and thus contributed to defining the motive of his murder. Without his transcription of the speeches delivered to fire Fantin's antagonists, we would not have such a complete picture of their inspiration to murder.

#22: Enter Detective Sergeant Gill.

The detective, instead of relying on confessions or the testimony of eyewitnesses, uses every known device of historical method in solving what is strictly an historical problem.

Collingwood⁸²²

Early in 1943, the news that Justice Richards had accepted a guilty plea to a charge of manslaughter began to filter through to comrades of Fantin resident on the eastern seaboard. Scandalised, they drew on the infrastructure of the Communist Party and the legal expertise of Fred Paterson. So guided they began collecting evidence to sustain a prosecution for premeditated murder and conspiracy, determined "to have all the culprits, who are quite as guilty as the assassin, hanged". Thus wrote comrade Saffin to Matteotti Club veteran Tommaso Saviani in Sydney, updating him on inquiries in Queensland, and in particular, on the results of his discussions with Comrade Mario Cazzulino, recently released from Loveday Compound 14A. Saffin reported that

as far as Cazzulino knew the police...are very interested in the case, and he says that during the time he was in camp after the deed to the time he left there were two or three Detectives investigating and looking for particulars every day.⁸²³

This favourable contemporary assessment of the police effort is very much borne out by a report dated 23 November 1942 to Inspector Sheridan of the Adelaide office of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch. Signed by a Detective Sergeant Gill, it gives an account of his inquiries and the laying of a homicide charge against Giovanni Casotti.⁸²⁴ This hitherto uncommented document is basic to evaluation of the police inquiries that initiated the judicial proceedings, which subsequently disappointed the comrades of Fantin. Sergeant Gill began by specifying to Sheridan that he had on November 18th 'under your instructions... proceeded to Barmera, for the purpose of making inquiries regarding the death of an Italian Internee, in the Internment Camp, at Loveday.' Upon arriving at Barmera to take charge of the investigation, Sergeant Gill was met by Detective Flint and Sergeant Marr, who briefed him. From them he learnt that Major Richardson, the commandant of Camp 14A, had been informed on the 16th "at about 6.30pm that Francesco Fantin...Internee, had been

seriously injured". Taken for treatment to the Barmera Base Hospital, Fantin had died about 10.25pm the same day. By the time Loveday Administrative HQ received an autopsy report about noon the next day, confirming that "a fracture of the base of the skull" was involved, "inquiries had been made as to how he could have received such serious head injuries".⁸²⁵

Thus it was that Detective Sergeant William (Bill) Gill took charge of the investigation which Detective Constable David Flint had been conducting with the assistance of a Police Sergeant Marr and a Constable Semmler into the death of an internee at the Loveday Group of Internment Camps. Much had transpired by the time Flint handed over to Gill. The Senior Medical Officer at Loveday began by reporting that Fantin had not died of natural causes but as a result of a blow to the back of the head which had fractured the base of the skull. Thereafter the police had been notified and a Military Court of Inquiry had been convened. A number of internees suspected of involvement in the matter were examined in the presence of police, who likewise heard the opinion of the junior Military Medical Officer who had conducted the autopsy and reported that the injuries might have been accidentally sustained. The Court of Inquiry had moreover identified an assailant, Giovanni Casotti. Detective Constable Flint had subsequently taken a statement from Casotti, who had alleged that he had accidentally injured Fantin, and charged him with murder. Flint had evidently done well amidst these conflicting indications to lay the appropriate charge, but the task of proving it was well and truly before the senior officer from Adelaide.

Detective Sergeant Gill as his rank suggests was already a long serving officer of some distinction by this time. Born at Casterton Victoria into the Protestant ascendancy in 1894, he had joined the SA Police in 1917 at the age of 23, having previously worked as a labourer. He was six foot tall. Even more than today the police then represented a career path for bright working class lads analogous to nursing for bright working class lasses: a chance for socioeconomic advancement. Gill worked the Port Adelaide beat in uniform until late 1920, when he was allocated to plain clothes duties there. He was promoted Detective Constable 2nd Grade in 1923, serving a long apprenticeship until he took his First Grade exam in 1939. In April 1942 he took the exam for Detective Sergeant First Grade, and was promoted to that rank in October. As he drove to Renmark his Sergeant's stripes were, so to speak, but freshly stitched. Nonetheless in the course of his career he had received a special or honourable mention

almost every year since 1921, receiving multiple citations in 1928, 1929 and 1941. His astuteness and indefatigability earned him the nickname 'Tracker'⁸²⁶ Clearly it was an accomplished officer who Inspector Sheridan dispatched to the Riverland to take charge of a case which required deft and confident management of relations between the civil and military powers.

Casotti's 'confession', which Gill thought mendacious, could not be set aside on the basis of a mere police opinion. Testimony had to be secured if possible from bystanders at the scene of the fatal disturbance who had seen and heard particulars demonstrating the intent, means and manner of execution of the assault upon Fantin. Thus from the first Sergeant Gill directed his inquiries to identifying and debriefing witnesses to the fatal incident which had occurred at the tap stand in Loveday Internment Compound 14A at twilight on November 16 1942. His investigation focussed upon the independent and mutually corroborative testimony of two men who had promptly intervened at the scene of the disturbance, their attention attracted by violent uproar. Both Quirino Martin and Ettore Emoli credibly claimed to have noticed complementary particulars crucial to interpretation of the injuries sustained by Fantin and the means and manner of their infliction.

Martin stated that he saw Casotti kicking the deceased when he was on the ground, and that when he went over to where they were, there was a piece of wood near the tap on the ground. He later saw this same piece of wood near an hut, and later it was missing and has not been seen since. He later saw a cap hanging on the post that supported the tap.

Gill deftly emphasised the juncture at which the evidence of Emoli corroborated that of Martin.

The important part of Emoli's evidence is that he saw Casotti about to strike the deceased when he was on the ground, that he and others took Casotti away, and that he picked the cap out of the tub and hung it on the post.

The matter of the cap found floating in the tap-stand tub was of the utmost importance, because autopsy had established that there was 'not very much damage done to the skin on the back of the deceased's head'. Gill held that the evidence of Emoli suggested

that Fantin 'was wearing the cap when drinking from the tap. This to some extent would protect the skin, and the cap in all probability would fall off his head into the tub where it was found by Emoli, who picked it out and hung it on the post'. In the hope of recovering this 'very valuable exhibit in the case', Gill had one extensive search for it followed up by a second, in an effort to secure material evidence for his deductions as to 'the most likely way the injuries were inflicted'.⁸²⁷ What Gill had done was to link the evidence of Martin and Emoli regarding Fantin's cap in such a way as to reconcile reports of the use of a blunt instrument (sighted after the event by Martin) with the findings at autopsy of sever cranial injury and minimal superficial traumata. There were also further circumstantial considerations which tended to corroborate this account. The blunt instrument or 'manganello' was the typical weapon of the fascist rank and file. Camp rumour moreover had it that the weapon Casotti had employed had been a sturdy length of jarrah. This information was hearsay, and capable of fabrication by anyone who cared for Fantin and knew that Casotti was a West Australian woodcutter. Nonetheless it was entirely plausible, and was taken into account by Sergeant Gill.⁸²⁸

Gill had brought together all the seminal facts, including political motivation, to reconstruct the modus operandi of an execution. It was a very canny piece of practical police work, and deserves recognition to this day as the only convincing account of how Francesco Giovanni Fantin was assassinated. That it is a contemporary account, formulated on the spot by a trained and experienced investigator, working in the context of a factionalised penal community prey to terror and fear, only adds to his achievement and its credibility. For our historical purposes, Sergeant Gill's reasoning, formulated without the luxury of a credible confession or the testimony of eyewitnesses, is compelling, and cannot reasonably be doubted as the standard account of how Fantin was executed. For in such a situation, as Collingwood noted 'the detective... uses every known device of historical method, in solving what is strictly an historical problem', the problem, as old as Herodotus, of 'what happened.'⁸²⁹

But on the brink of success Sergeant Gill was checked by frustration. Given the reluctance of witnesses to come forward, the burden of proof weighed heavily against the plausibility of his compellingly logical casework. Having established with considerable acumen a strong prima facie case of murder, Gill was obliged to report that 'evidence could not be obtained in the camp to substantiate it'. How it must have pained him to have to type that single, simple sentence! Keen however to persevere, Gill reported that 'there is a strong

possibility that further evidence will be obtained, before the inquest which will substantiate... or throw some further light on the matter'.⁸³⁰ Indeed, within a matter of days, Pretti was to make a tantalising statement to Military Intelligence, specifying the dimensions of the instrument with which Casotti was alleged to have attacked Fantin.⁸³¹ But once upon the witness stand at the Coronial Inquest Pretti was obliged to concede that he had not been on the scene, had observed nothing, and was merely reporting hearsay.⁸³² Martin and Emoli by contrast tellingly recounted their evidence before the Coroner. Neither claimed moreover to have seen the fatal blow being struck, or to have seen the weapon or Fantin's cap being removed from the scene, reservations which underlined their credibility. They were not supplementing their evidence with suppositions, howsoever reasonable. They had testified exactly what they had seen and heard.

How are we to evaluate a man like Gill? Ours is a world weary age. Especially in these days of more insidious security threats requiring more vigilant and discriminating intelligence surveillance, the community rightly insists on policing which respects the law as well as enforces it. As we face a more dangerous future, in which liberty will be threatened not only by its open enemies but also by its self declared friends, it is reassuring to know that the notion of the honest copper is not entirely a figment of uncritical and authoritarian imaginations. The Australia of 1942 was an ethnocentric country. The authorities and the people panicked at a time of genuine national peril and resorted to the unnecessary, unjust and counterproductive policy of preventive internment of enemy aliens to meet an internal security threat more apparent than real. It was in reality a modest threat, which should have been policed in a more discriminating manner and with minimal recourse to incarceration. This was recognized officially at the outset, but perspective was lost during the 'great fears' of defeat and invasion in 1940 and 1942, when waves of Italian Australians from Western Australia and Queensland were respectively detained. It was the cointernment of these very different communities in Loveday Internment Camp 14A which rapidly led in the context of escalating wartime political tension to the assassination of Francesco Fantin. The victim's friends naturally blamed the authorities and placed the worst construction upon their disposition.

But the evidence shows that Detective Sergeant Gill was put on the case for his known ability and integrity, and that he conducted the investigation in a

determined manner and without fear or favour. Far from covering up the political motive of the killing he emphasised it. Moreover he resisted suggestions that the victim's death might have been accidentally caused, because his experience told him that this was a preposterous account of the victim's extensive cerebral injuries. He clearly was not persuaded by argument to the contrary of which he was aware from Captain LE Verco, an inexperienced exponent of one of Adelaide's most illustrious medical clans. If he suspected that Verco may have been influenced by an embarrassed Loveday Commandant Lt Col ET Dean or any other military officer, Gill did not commit any such concern to paper. He simply declined to be influenced and relied upon and received the cooperation from the military power to which he was entitled as an officer of the civil power pursuing a criminal investigation.

Gill persisted with his inquiries as much as he could where a lesser officer might have been discouraged, emphasising in his report to Inspector Sheridan that the Coronial Inquest might uncover further evidence. This was notwithstanding the fact that he knew the killer and his associates had tampered with the evidence to the point that it might not be possible to produce proof beyond reasonable doubt of facts which were nonetheless demonstrated to Gill's professional satisfaction by every indication. But Gill was too experienced a policeman to be taken in by himself. He knew that one of the damndest things about theories is that they may explain the facts and still be wrong, and that courts accordingly require proof beyond reasonable doubt of charges laid by the authorities against the accused. Accordingly he warned his superiors of the risk represented by the determination of the suspect to stick to his story in the face of an indictment for a capital offence. Gill did all that could have been asked of him in a case which frustrated everyone concerned with it. As it was his hopes of the Coronial Inquest were disappointed, the Coroner charging Casotti with murder but admitting that the fatal injuries might have been unintentionally inflicted. This added a further layer of ambiguity and contradiction to that associated with Dr Verco's medical report. The insight Gill developed into this case where others failed fully justified his promotion to Detective Sergeant, confirming his track record of acumen and professionalism. It is entirely in keeping with this profile that Gill was to retire in 1955 with the rank of Inspector First Class. He defies certain fictive conventions whereby the police are always hand in glove with corrupt authorities, foolish foils to the amateur or private intellectual gentleperson.

But to appreciate his merit fully, Gill's findings need to be seen in the context of the whole fraught affair. When Attorney General Evatt accepted advice that the death of Francesco Fantin was being properly investigated, the integrity of Bill Gill gave the lie to the understandable suspicions to the contrary of some of the political comrades of Fantin. These associates of the victim were in the dark and disturbed at the trend of judicial developments. Being anarchists and communists in the main, they were politically predisposed to entertain doubts about the integrity and probity of public authority, which they did not think properly constituted or distinguished by its record. These skeptics included the well respected Director of the Northfield Infectious Diseases Hospital, the communist Dr Alan Finger. Finger was concerned at the decision by the archconservative Crown Prosecutor RR (later Sir Roderick) Chamberlain to accept the killer's mendacious plea of guilt of manslaughter. Clearly Finger was not privy to Gill's report as to the limitations of the evidence, which the Prosecutor was bound to take very seriously into account and keep confidential.

Chamberlain's enthusiasm for his work was legendary in Adelaide legal circles. In accepting Casotti's plea in his own defence, Chamberlain would not have been moved to intrude upon the province of the jury and extend to the defendant the benefit of the doubt. His motivation would have been tactical, with a view to making the accused assume the maximum responsibility that could safely have been debited to him. At trial Chamberlain made it clear that he would not have accepted Casotti's plea and would have made more of the original Verco medical report had he been in possession of evidence brought to light by further investigations provoked by Finger's allegations. These he had initially discounted, not without reason, as unsubstantiated. To this extent Chamberlain tacitly admitted that he had underestimated the seriousness of the matter, and that Finger had been essentially right to insist that there was more to the matter than met the eye, even if his allegations of military impropriety and collusion with their fascist charges had been factually incorrect. This was almost certainly the only time in his career that Chamberlain publicly admitted that he might have erred, a fact not without comic significance in South Australian legal history.

Chamberlain's career was to end in controversy a generation later over his role as Solicitor General in the Stuart case.⁸³³ An argument could be made that the Red was the better man, but in this case the Tory was right, and the allegations of official impropriety

which the concerned associates of Finger forwarded to Evatt were as misguided as they were well intentioned. Justice delayed is justice denied, and the defendant had a right to have a charge heard against him in real time during the 1942 December Sessions of the Supreme Court of SA. As the last week of the 1942 legal calendar expired, Chamberlain weighed the risk which Gill had advised that Casotti might be found not guilty as charged for want of proof if a prosecution for murder was persisted with. Hamstrung by Verco's report that Fantin's injuries might have been accidentally received, Chamberlain abided by the precautionary principle and accepted Casotti's admission of a minimum of guilt, which afforded a guarantee of a bare minimum of justice.

It is a well known fact that justice and law are not always the same thing. In the matter of Rex versus Casotti a sentence of two years hard labour was handed down by Mr Justice Richards, who made it plain that he did not credit the witnesses for the defence. By the standards of the day it was a light sentence, comparable with a contemporary penalty handed down for serial burglary.⁸³⁴ But the Prosecution, having accepted Casotti's manslaughter plea, found itself in no position to renege in view of new evidence, and poorly placed to persuade the bench to accept its earnest representations for a heavy sentence. The last word on the case was had by Evatt's Director General of Security, Brigadier (later Justice) William Ballantyne Simpson. Simpson was a legally educated soldier who had served as Deputy Judge Advocate General with the 2nd AIF in the Middle East before accepting his posting with the Commonwealth's Attorney General's Department. Commenting confidentially on the Fantin case after his elevation to the bench, he said that he had always been of the view that the Fantin affair was a case of murder plain and simple. It should be remembered as such and as a sobering chapter in the history of the administration of justice in South Australia. Indeed the Director of the Army's Department of POWs & Internees Col McCahon effectively endorsed Simpson's view by recording his disappointment at the judicial sequel to their joint efforts to furnish the Crown with evidence for a murder conviction.⁸³⁵

Due process is not always an effective guarantee of justice. Its observance in this case is nonetheless a measure of the fact that there was no high level official interference with the course of justice. This is an important consideration not only because of contemporary suspicions, but also recent commentators have too enthusiastically sought to extort too much from a congenial if suggestive bare minimum

of evidence. It may be conceded that there may have been more political management of the affair than was strictly necessary or desirable. But political intervention was precisely what Fantin's associates had wanted. And one can understand the temptation in the middle of a war to leave so sensitive and unsatisfying a saga well alone after all the proper processes had been exhausted to such problematic and joyless effect. There was no evidence of impropriety or negligence in the police or judicial investigations, and to that extent no systemic issues of public importance about the administration of justice were raised by the case. The risk was accordingly high that nothing further would have been clarified beyond what Gill's sustained inquiries had established and had been supplemented, as we shall see, by further investigations in late January 1943.

Thus whilst the Fantin case arguably warranted even further investigation, the case for it was not strong. Whilst Evatt and Simpson knew that there was something amiss with the Fantin case, they did not know what it was anymore than Gill, Chamberlain, McCahon or any other of the military officers who cooperated with the police. Thus Evatt and Simpson did not do anything wrong in ignoring the call made by the communist lawyer Fred Paterson for the case to be investigated more fully. This is so even if it is recognised that Paterson was quite right on the evidence of assassination he presented that the acceptance of Casotti's contentions by the Prosecution and Justice Richards was counterintuitive not to say disturbing. Nonetheless the motivation for further investigation at best would simply have been that there was an apparently genuine belief as yet unsubstantiated in some political quarters that there had been a miscarriage of justice.

Thus further inquiries were liable to culminate in a nil result at the price of antagonising the military old school whose cooperation was needed to fight the war and wind down their pet policy of preventive internment. It appears that the temptation of discretion was too great for Evatt, who offered the old guard a minimum of political protection from public humiliation provided they cooperated and delivered him from the embarrassment of a policy he had inherited most unwillingly from the Menzies regime. It has been conventional since the Cold War Petrov Commission to underestimate Evatt as a politician as if he were some temperamental egg head from central casting. In fact it is known that Evatt was a tactically astute administrator, as flexible about means as he was determined about ends.⁸³⁶ On this occasion he deftly used

the death of Francesco Fantin to strengthen his hand and finesse Deputy Prime Minister Forde and the Department of the Army. He thus secured an enlightened and by no means guaranteed political outcome in the national interest and in advance of public opinion, (for mass release of Italian internees by any process other than case by case review would have been unpopular at this stage of the war) cutting the populist media completely out of the picture and retaining control of the issue through official channels. There was a real measure of rough justice in this in that Fantin's murder was used to bury the policy that had buried him. It was hardly a satisfactory outcome, but in the real world, such a measure of justice is sometimes the best that can be delivered.

The achievement of Bill Gill in the Fantin case was as remarkable as it was typical of the man. He did the best that could be done under the circumstances. It is noteworthy that in the ethnocentric Australia of his day, Bill Gill investigated the killing of a detainee of the Commonwealth of foreign extraction without a trace of political or ethnic prejudice. We assume that he was a man of his times, not so much enlightened as simply focussed on his work to the exclusion of irrelevancies. Nonetheless his is an achievement not to be taken for granted today, half a century later, when we like to consider ourselves more civilised. Moreover with the assistance of officers Flint, Marr and Semmler, negotiating military sensitivities and working through interpreters, he established the facts of the case in a matter of days, applying real and legitimate pressure to the culprits. He soon knew more than he could prove, but if he was not able to prove homicidal conspiracy, it was not his fault. As it was, he was little short of proving the guilt of the executioner. The Fantin affair indeed satisfies all the conventions of hard boiled detective fiction and film noir, right down to the figure of the honourable investigator undertaking the thankless task of establishing the truth of a homicide as a social tragedy. For being all these things in the Fantin case, if he had achieved nothing else in his distinguished career, Bill Gill deserves to be recognised as a figure of historical significance and a decent Australian. It is not surprising that his reputation has survived him, and that he is affectionately remembered and respected by colleagues who served with him as a bit of a character. For all its faults, the Australia of 1942 was an Australia in which, however fallible some of his colleagues may have been at times, there were also policemen like Bill 'Tracker' Gill.

#23: Medical Witness & Judicial Process.

History...is a science, but a science of a special kind. It is a science whose business is to study events not accessible to our observation, and to study these events inferentially, arguing to them from something else which is accessible to our observation, and which the historian calls 'evidence' for the events in which he is interested.

Collingwood⁸³⁷

Military protocol naturally accorded a pivotal role to appropriate professional expertise in dealing with injury to prisoners. Thus the Medical Officer attached to the 33rd Garrison Battalion guarding Loveday Compound 14A was soon on the scene after receiving a report that an internee had been seriously injured by another. He was Captain Luke Everard Verco, scion of an eminent Adelaide family with distinguished evangelical, commercial, scientific and medical traditions.⁸³⁸ He found that Fantin was 'obviously suffering from a cerebro-vascular accident' with a probable fatal prognosis, and had him 'immediately transferred to Barmera Base Hospital.' Dr Verco noted 'a small bruise on back of head', but cancelled this concrete observation in favour of the more cautious evaluation that there were 'no obvious signs of external violence.'⁸³⁹ Notwithstanding this curious re-assessment, Camp Commandant Richardson was of the view that 'no doubt exists as to cause of injury'. In any case Richardson assembled a Military Court of Inquiry the following day.⁸⁴⁰ Having conducted an autopsy under the supervision of Major DW Shepherd at the Barmera Base Hospital Mortuary on 17 November 1942 with the assistance of a Sergeant AW Whitehead, who discovered 'a very severe bruise...on the lower portion of the back of the head',⁸⁴¹ Captain Verco reported that 'the cause of...death may have been a fall in which Fantin's head, with the weight of the body behind it, struck the rounded part of the top of the tap.' Questioned by the Military Court of Inquiry, Dr Verco remarkably conceded that 'it was possible, but not probable, that a blow on the tap as above described had been the cause of death'.⁸⁴²

Dr Verco based his emphasis on this improbable possibility on the lack of lacerations which he considered any instrument with an edge would have caused, entertaining every suggestion that Fantin may have collided with or been struck by a rounded and massive

object. As such his assessment relied heavily on the belief that a blunt instrument would not have been truly blunt, but edged and accordingly liable to lacerate. Thus Dr Verco's report clearly comforted the contention of Casotti that the death of Fantin had been accidental. It is certain, at any rate, that the police were aware of the autopsy report, and that they took their initial bearings from the transcripts of the Military Court of Inquiry, Sergeant Gill having been 'furnished with a copy of the...proceedings' which 'he..used..as a basis for his preparation of..depositions for the Coroner'.⁸⁴³ The report made by Gill to Inspector Sheridan on the eve of the Coronial Inquest demonstrates, indeed, that the police successfully sought, in the course of their pursuit of proof that Casotti had murdered Fantin, to elicit compelling circumstantial evidence implicitly contradicting the evaluation advanced by Captain Verco.

Thus Coroner Appleton JP, a well respected local carpenter with no legal training⁸⁴⁴, found himself hearing implicitly conflictual testimony at Loveday on 26 November 1942. Medical opinion upon autopsy was of course pivotal for the Inquest into the death of Fantin, and Captain Verco stood by the submission queried by the Military Court of Inquiry. His expert witness was offset by the eye witness of Martin and Emoli, who suggested that a tweed cap worn by Fantin accounted for the lack of superficial traumata of assault with a blunt weapon. Despite having publicly conceded the improbability of accidental injury, Dr Verco again emphasised that 'the injuries...could have been caused by the deceased being pushed violently backwards and falling on the back of his head on a hard object....'⁸⁴⁵ Dr Verco discounted the probability that these severe head injuries were the result of a deliberately aimed and leveraged blow, insisting that the absence of external injuries indicated accidental injury as the likeliest cause of death. Replying to a perplexed Coroner, Dr Verco was emphatic; 'I still think that if the deceased had been hit over the head with a piece of wood there would have been more damage to the skin...if it was a square piece of wood with a sharp edge'.⁸⁴⁶ When the senior Military Legal Officer at Loveday, Major Von Bertouch, seconded the Coroner, Captain Verco remained resolutely doubtful. At most he conceded that 'if the deceased had been wearing a cap over the back of his head at the time, then from the nature of the bruise, I would say that of the three hypotheses a square piece of wood or building material would be equal in value to the other two' theories⁸⁴⁷ [that Fantin had been fatally injured by a kick or in a fall.] He was equally inconclusive in admitting to the police that a cap would have protected the scalp in any event, and that the basal as opposed to occipital fracturing of the skull suggested that contact with the ground in the vicinity of the tap was no less unlikely a cause of the injuries sustained than a collision with

the tap itself.⁸⁴⁸ The coronial transcript records in fact that Dr Verco reluctantly testified under sustained probing from the Coroner, military legal counsel and the police. Indeed the young medico doggedly limited his deductions to the incontrovertible and unavoidable observation 'that great force was necessary to cause' the fracture of the skull inflicted by the fatal blow,⁸⁴⁹ a finding on which Crown Prosecutor Chamberlain was to ultimately rely.

In declining to prefer any of the competing hypotheses, other than by giving 'least weight' to the account found most probable by other investigators, Dr Verco powerfully influenced Coroner Appleton. Clearly the Coroner had the medical evidence in mind when he found indefinitely that 'the deceased came by his death from... a blow on the back of the head... received when he was either violently pushed or knocked down by Giovanni Casotti...who I find guilty of murder.'⁸⁵⁰ This contradictory finding expressed suspicion of the assailant, at the expense of lending credence to his defensive 'admissions' motivated by concern to avoid capital punishment. Appleton's ambiguity as to the modus operandi of the killing left the intentions and responsibility of the assailant moot, in a case where the police were embarrassed by a lack of proof. Nonetheless Casotti was sent for trial on a charge of murder,⁸⁵¹ which heightened the expectations of the victim's friends.⁸⁵²

It is thus surprising that the role played by medical evidence in aggravating the burden of proof in this case has gone unremarked. This is especially so given the fact that the original accusation by Stein of the adjacent Compound 14D that the authorities were trying to make it appear as if Fantin had died accidentally involved allegations that alternative medical evidence from an interned doctor was being suppressed. This was in fact not the case. In any event the equivocal evidence of Dr Verco seriously embarrassed the case against Casotti, already prejudiced by the intimidation of witnesses to the killing by associates of the assailant. Intimidation alone might have achieved the objectives of Casotti and associates and perverted the course of justice. But Dr Verco was reluctant to countenance the police view that Fantin's cranial injuries had been inflicted by a blunt instrument. This made it very difficult to attribute this modus operandi to the assailant as the police had done on the basis of these traumata and the convergent circumstantial evidence that such an instrument had been seen at the crime scene.

In effect the Coroner, powerfully influenced by Dr Verco, handed the Crown Prosecutor to whom the indictment was forwarded a difficult choice between an uncertain

prosecution for murder or acceptance of a dubious 'confession' to manslaughter. In such a circumstance the Crown Prosecutor had to weigh the possibility of an acquittal resulting from an inadequately proven prosecution for murder (as advised by the police) against the certainty of conviction based on a dubious plea of guilty to manslaughter, where the Crown could at least argue for a stiff sentence. Moreover the Crown could not decide at its leisure on these matters, or request time for further investigation on the mere hope that something new and more incriminating might turn up. It had to bring a charge to the next Session of the Supreme Court and respond to the plea Casotti had made. And so it was that in reply to a charge of homicide an uncontested plea of guilty of manslaughter was duly submitted in defence of Casotti by Mr R.F. Newman at the December Sessions of the Supreme Court of South Australia before Puisne Justice Richards, a distinguished judge [KC and Doctor of Law, London] nearing retirement and something of a celebrity.⁸⁵³ Newman dutifully exploited the failure of the Inquest to find a cause of death in any way at odds with the statement made by Casotti to Detective Flint, which was duly read to the Court. This tale was then represented as demonstrating that 'this is a case of technical manslaughter. Whether the push was hard or slight matters very little. What happened to cause this... unfortunate death is...that...a tap with its support happened to be where the deceased fell'.⁸⁵⁴ Mr Newman certainly represented his client most effectively. Thus the implications of the medical evidence tendered by Dr Verco to the Coronial Inquest at Loveday in late November 1942 had determined the broad outlines of the case against Casotti by Christmas of that year, in terms as favourable to him as possible.

In the new year of 1943 the Fantin affair, which had arisen within the secluded confines of the internment regime, became public. It continued to evolve primarily around matters of evidence and indictment, with all parties being aware of the political sensitivity of what was agreed to be, when all was said and done, a matter of the administration of justice. But if the ambiguity of the Verco testimony obliged the judicial system to adapt, it obliges us to think. Like all historians, we do not have the luxury of merely uncritically reporting our sources. Not only must we verify them, we must also think through their implications.⁸⁵⁵ We have seen that Dr Verco consistently sought to favour interpretations that were no more than possible over the more probable hypotheses favoured by experienced investigators on the basis of the victim's severe head injuries. What does the evidence allow, not to say compel us to infer, about this ambiguity? The impression created by Dr Verco's evidence is of a mind torn between distasteful probabilities and attractive improbabilities. Was this division a

product of subjective or objective forces? Was the young doctor disturbed by his task, perhaps by evangelical or humanitarian concerns about capital punishment, such as might have been traditional in his family or indeed natural for any young physician? Certainly for a young man just two years out of medical school⁸⁵⁶, the prospect of conducting an autopsy in a case of fatal assault, liable to issue in indictment for a capital crime, must have seemed at least a little daunting.

But the truth is that beyond the uncertain evidence of his report, we do not know what Dr Verco felt about the matter, except in one crucial particular. Approached in early 1985 to discuss his evidence at Inquest, Dr Verco seemed embarrassed and declined my request for an interview. But realising that I would be persisting with my examination of the case, he told me:

‘You must remember one thing. I was not a free agent.’⁸⁵⁷

#24: Was the autopsy report to the coroner 'doctored' ?

Long training tends to make a man more expert in execution, but such expertness is apt to be gained at the expense of fertility of ideas, originality and elasticity.⁸⁵⁸

Liddell Hart

It would seem unlikely that Dr Verco would have reported such a strong sense of inhibition if he was merely referring to the fact that he wore the King's uniform at the time. There is no reason to believe that this institutional context as such would necessarily have conditioned the medical evidence he placed before the Coroner. For some reason Dr Verco was unusually sensitive to his military duty at that time, and subsequently wished it to be understood that the views he expressed at Inquest were not an unalloyed product of professional, hippocratic and scientific integrity. The likelihood is that Dr Verco's sense of military subordination had been heightened by a reminder of his junior position from a superior officer. Leverage could have been exerted by emphasising that an honourable discharge at the end of the war was a material factor in the young man's future professional prospects. It could have been emphasised that Dr Verco would have been ill advised to 'overinterpret' the evidence, that the death of Fantin 'could' have been an accident.

Who might have been interested to have done such a thing? The suggestion has been made that high officialdom was interested to have Casotti charged with manslaughter, with a view to sparring the army the embarrassment of admitting that a political murder had occurred in military custody. But there is no evidence of orders to preventively discipline Dr Verco having passed down the political and military chain of command to Loveday. It may be suggested that such orders may have been discretely verbal, but here we are in the realms of pure suspicion, and the fact is that documentation was the ruling practice of the day: at Loveday even confidential phone calls were typed up!⁸⁵⁹ The silence of the evidence on this score is crucial. For a moment's reflection on the basic dynamics of judicial proceedings in cases of death in suspicious circumstances suggests that sanitisation of a death in custody would be most readily effected by discrete and timely local pressure on the construction placed on key medical evidence. Thus it is the local, not the national, context which Dr Verco has reminded us to examine.

At Loveday Dr Verco had two kinds of military superior, medical and administrative. It is to be doubted that his medical superiors, identified with the traditions of their profession and owing as much to its prestige as to their military rank, would have been a party to the adulteration of medical evidence to a civil tribunal. In fact we know that one of the three senior medical officers at Loveday was of the view that Fantin was murdered as the result of a conspiracy. Dr DW Shepherd, a Major of the Australian Army Medical Corp during the war and a career military medical officer, remembered the case when contacted in 1985 and offered the view that 'they really got away with it.'⁸⁶⁰ He is hardly likely to have applied pressure to Dr Verco to say otherwise.

We have seen that the administrative command of Camp14A fell to Major Richardson, who showed no embarrassment in conducting the military investigations into the death of Fantin. At the very least he went through the motions and did his duty. He did show a touching gratitude to Dr Piscitelli for bringing forward Casotti, which attracted some adverse comment. His colleague Major Dick, Commandant of Camp 9 who had had dealings as such with Piscitelli did not share Richardson's good opinion of a man he thought duplicitous, and protested Richardson's recommendation that Dr Piscitelli be released. Richardson's partiality for Piscitelli was known to the antifascist internees of the adjacent Camp 14D, who thought it a sign of collusion between the fascist leadership and the Australian military authorities. But then they thought their own internment was a product of some such sympathy between authoritarians. It is more likely that the officer and the interned doctor grew to like one another as they worked together to keep order in the camp, recognising one another as gentlemen in the process. There is reason to believe that Dick was more astute in his evaluation of Dr Piscitelli than Richardson, but this hardly proves that it was Richardson who influenced Dr Verco. Had he done so, he would have had to look over his shoulder in fear of discovery by his commanding officer, Colonel Dean. This is an unlikely scenario.

The case with Lieutenant Colonel Dean, commanding the Loveday complex as a whole, is however significantly different. Lieutenant Colonel Dean was one of the generation of Great War veterans upon whom the responsibility for running the internment camps had been devolved at the beginning of the war.⁸⁶¹ Dean was the descendant of a family which had been involved in the pastoral industry since the settlement of South Australia. His father had founded the family's formal military traditions, and both father and son had served as

senior officers in the Great War. The Colonel had proved himself a brave and capable artillery officer under fire, and a good organiser. After the war he had managed his property, 'Karinya' in the Barossa Ranges near Maculta with military spit and polish. Considered too old for active service overseas in the Middle East, he was seasoned, experienced in command and well able to manage a military establishment. He had served the army loyally since youth as his father had done before him. His daughter recalls that he did things by the book.⁸⁶² It was for these attributes of reliability that he was made Commandant of the Loveday internment complex. By no means a fool or a rogue, he was not however to distinguish himself at Loveday for original thinking. He accepted at face value the Army's doctrine that internees and prisoners were best managed along ethnic lines, in accordance with their supposed psychological propensities. He had no experience of dealing with Italians, and was not aware of the political divisions amongst them.⁸⁶³

Loveday was very much Colonel Dean's creation, and he was proud of it. Too proud, indeed, to allow any mention of the death of Fantin to be made in the official History of Loveday 1940-46 published after the war in tribute to the work of the garrison.⁸⁶⁴ Bevege too notices this omission, commenting that 'Fantin's death was undoubtedly an embarrassment to the camp administration.' She further notes that on 6 January 1943 the unit charged with guarding Camp 14A, the 33rd Garrison Battalion was dissolved, with Lt. Col. Dean resuming direct control of all camps in the Loveday complex.⁸⁶⁵ This rearrangement may have been coincidental, but it would appear that there was a security review at Loveday after the death of Fantin. There was moreover one key respect in which Loveday had been run in accordance with Lt Col Dean's views which had directly contributed to the death of Fantin. To the end of the war Dean remained convinced that the appropriate manner of detention of his charges was in national groups segregated along 'racial' lines.⁸⁶⁶ Despite a succession of incidents involving Jewish and antifascist internees including Fantin and fascist co-nationals, which eventually resulted in intelligence reports of political factionalism in the camps, political segregation was never introduced at Loveday. This was despite the precedent established after outbreaks of factional violence in the internment camp at Hay, where political segregation had been introduced on the recommendation of the Commandant in February 1941.⁸⁶⁷

Did then Lt Col Dean feel uneasy and insecure in the days immediately following the death of Fantin? Did he take a view of the case which was at once serious and embarrassed?

Was he moved to have a quiet word with young Lieutenant Verco, employing all his prestige as a decorated senior officer, a veteran, and a landed gentleman grazier? Did he remind Dr Verco of his duty to do nothing as an officer that might adversely reflect on the establishment with which Dean was so personally identified? We shall probably never know if such a covert individual initiative took place. But given the ambiguity of Dr Verco's evidence to the Coroner, the force of his reminder to us that he felt constrained in giving it, and the weight of circumstantial evidence, we cannot dismiss this unproven hypothesis of a local abuse of authority, and must accordingly entertain it. As Collingwood reported, historians are obliged to read the implications of their evidence, in so doing going beyond the verified matter of fact of their sources to infer the complex reality of which these relics are indications.⁸⁶⁸

To say that Casotti's account is not credible, as the police did, is to imply that the analogous account of accidental death by Dr Verco was also not credible. This is why the autopsy was not mentioned by Detective Sergeant Gill. Gill felt confident in setting the autopsy report aside defacto on his own experience of head injuries. To directly challenge it however would have been to pit the educational credentials and social standing of a copper against that of a doctor from a prominent medical dynasty. Gill was far too streetwise to be caught doing that. The scant regard Gill paid to Verco's findings was remarkable in a case of death in suspicious circumstances. This silence is akin to that of the watchdog in The Hound of the Baskervilles which did not bark. Whatever suspicions Gill had about the circumstances in which the autopsy had been carried out, he did not commit them to paper or otherwise air them publicly. What he did do was make out the alternative thesis of assassination with determination.

In the police brief prepared for the Crown Prosecutor charging Casotti with murder there is an alternative medical opinion by Dr Adriano Muggia, to whom was delegated charge of the Camp hospital at Loveday. On duty when the dying Fantin was brought in, Muggia asked Piscitelli and two others what had happened, but all claimed ignorance. Dr Muggia then began his examination.

I found the respiration of the deceased, at that time, was very poor, and [he] was making a gurgling noise in his throat. I examined the pupils of his eyes and found that they were dilated, and that there was no reaction to the light. The deceased was then unconscious. I then felt around the back of the base of the skull and I found that there

was some swelling there low down on the occipital bone, but the skin was not broken...From the examination that I made I formed the opinion that the injuries from which the deceased was suffering was caused by a violent blow on the back of the head...I would say that the instrument used to strike the deceased was something that did not have any jagged or uneven surfaces...I have heard that the deceased was at the tap in No 14A compound getting a drink of water when he fainted, and in falling struck his head on the tap or the post supporting the tap. In my opinion the injuries from which he was suffering were not inflicted in this way.

Although Crown Prosecutor Chamberlain did not tender Dr Muggia's opinion in evidence to the Supreme Court, it would have comforted him in his submission that medical evidence was that 'Fantin had an extensive fracture at the base of the skull, indicating the application of great violence.'⁸⁶⁹ That the police submitted Muggia's opinion as a statement in their brief to Chamberlain suggests that they were trying to circumvent Dr Verco's opinion as to the cause of injury.

#25: Assassination

Whoever commits an offence against another through any “assassin” or through his servant or a vassal is to be punished, both he and the man committing the offence.

Brevi Populi, Spoleto 1296⁸⁷⁰

With the publication in 2007 of Never Give In, VG Venturini has performed the estimable service to Australian historiography of placing on the public record the bulk of Australian official documentation on the death of FG Fantin discussed in this thesis. He has however offered comparatively little commentary, excepting the official handling of the affair, and, like the pioneering Cresciani, not to mention Bevege & Nursey-Bray, he has stopped short of offering a more than probabilistic hypothesis that Fantin was murdered. Having sifted the evidence minutely, we are now in a position to understand how the assassination of Francesco Giovanni Fantin was encompassed, and to adventure a definitive account of the assassination Detective Sergeant Gill was not in a position to prove.

We have seen that a battle for the hearts and minds of the relatively apolitical majority of internees was being waged between the committed fascist and antifascist minorities in the Loveday Camps. By November 1942 the tide of global battle was turning against the previously victorious Axis powers, and the news from North Africa and the Russian front was encouraging the antifascists and bringing political tension at Loveday to a head. Into this context arrived a large number of nationalistic Western Australians Italians who had been hegemonised by fascists since they were interned when Italy entered the war. One contingent arrived on 6 November in Camp 14A singing the fascist vitalistic battle hymn ‘Giovinezza’ [Youth]. This contingent soon mingled with the fascist element in 14A, and ‘swore to silence the antifascists of North Queensland’⁸⁷¹, the activists of ‘the Red North’ interned after Pearl Harbour. Thus the scene was set for a clash between the major cohorts of preventive internees, brought together from opposite ends of the continent. Fantin was seen to laugh at the West Australian’s bravado, and was immediately assaulted by Paternoster on 7 November. He was dissuaded from reporting the incident to the Australian authorities, but recorded it in his diary as portentous. Within a fortnight he was dead, assassinated because

of his prominence as an activist, `chosen as the first victim, perhaps because they knew that he was one of the most tenacious lovers of liberty.’⁸⁷²

Lieutenant Jury reported to his superior Major Martin the evidence to the military Court of Inquiry of Roberto Degli Esposti, a friend and political collaborator of Fantin.

On 16 November 42 had overheard a man on the other side of the partition which divides a sleeping hut into two parts reading an extract from the Mail concerning the contributions made by antifascist internees in SA to the `Sheepskins for Russia’ fund. The man said `Fancy an Italian doing this!’ Paternoster had said `We’ll kill them!’ Degli Esposti had recognised the voice of Q8538 DE LUCA Mario among the internees present at the reading. De Luca had agreed with Paternoster. A man from WA was also present.

The transcript of the Supreme Court trial of Casotti in March 1943 contains a statement by Stefano Zampatti which corroborates Degli Esposti’s account in a manner demonstrating that Fantin was held responsible by these fascists for the placement of the anonymous fundraising notice in The Mail and The News. In fact the funds were raised by Ernst Stein in the adjacent camp 14D, but the rage of the fascist push in 14A was in the absence of precise information indiscriminating and focussed on their pre-eminent antagonist, Fantin. Although Zampatti’s evidence was not tendered at the trial, we must take it into account at this juncture.

On the 16th November 1942, at about 3.30pm, I was in my Hut, No 13...Just after the paper had arrived I was lying down on my bed and I then heard Giuseppe Paternoster, Manuele Cassolini [sic] and Franchia Ianelli [sic] talking on the other side of the partition. I heard Cassolini read something out of the paper. It was about sending aid and sheepskins to Russia. I then heard Paternoster say `Who put that in the paper?’ Cassolini replied `Who you think? Fantin.’ Giuseppe Paternoster then said `The English have got the right to call us `dagoes’ because see what the Italian man do. Cassolini said `This Fantin should be killed.’ Paternoster said `He already stinks of death’. At that time the door of the Hut opened...I then heard De Luca enter. I knew him because of his voice. I heard him say as soon as he entered `Have you seen The News?’ Paternoster said `Oh yes...’ De Luca said `All the Anti-fascist should be killed one by one.’⁸⁷³

At the AMF Court of Inquiry under pressure of an examination lasting for over an hour, Giuseppe Paternoster confirmed the presence of the ideologue Mario De Luca, identified the West Australian present as Francesco Ianello, and admitted the further participation in the discussion of Manuele Cazzulino. All were residents of Hut 13. He maintained that Ianello was the only one of those present who had not explicitly declared that 'the internees in question should be killed.'⁸⁷⁴ When called Ianello 'after much questioning admitted reading the passage from The Mail in Hut 13' but denied hearing 'any talk of killing'. Jury offered the editorial excuse for him that he was 'not perfectly acquainted with the Italian language',⁸⁷⁵ although as we have seen he had a small collection of booklets in Italian, and the AMF transcript shows that he admitted that he did speak Italian.⁸⁷⁶

From the Proceedings of the AMF Court of Inquiry further key details can be elicited from the evidence given by Degli Esposti. He reported knowing Fantin, and having found him nearby Hut 13. He called him over and said 'the other side of the hut they are trying to form a conspiracy, there is Paternoster and De Luca, Cazzulino (Manuele) and others. Fantin then said...'De Luca wants to strike [*colpire*, hit or 'whack'] me.'...Mario Cazzulino and Silvio Lavanio [sic] were with me...I said 'Come with us because there is something wrong tonight...' Before they left to take a walk around the camp Fantin had said 'They won't hit me in the daylight.' Degli Esposti added, forgetting to speak in the past tense as if Fantin were not dead, 'Fantin is very timid and was trembling. He also said 'I am going into my hut to go to sleep.''

Next Degli Esposti stated that 'while we were going around the Compound we met Dr Piscitelli and Paternoster. As we met them Paternoster and Piscitelli separated and went in different directions. Dr Piscitelli appeared to wish to ignore us.' This evidence links Piscitelli with the conference in Hut 13. The stratagem of parting company with Paternoster suggests the importance that Piscitelli attached to not being seen conferring with his hit man. What had Piscitelli said to him? This in the absence of direct evidence we must infer. Piscitelli appreciated that both he and Paternoster would be immediately suspect if Fantin were assaulted. Paternoster had twice previously assaulted Fantin, and Fantin had blamed Piscitelli to his face.⁸⁷⁷ Piscitelli would thus have advised Paternoster not to execute the killing himself, but to find an executioner who had no precedents of aggression towards Fantin. It would have taken little imagination to perceive that Francesco Ianello would be in the perfect position to designate a likely lad from amongst the recently arrived West Australians. At this

point Dr Piscitelli probably approved the targeting of Fantin and gave technical advice as to the placement of the killing blow in the region of the occipital prominence. All this would have taken only a minute or two.

In his evidence to the AMF Court of Inquiry Ianello reported meeting Paternoster, Cazzolini, and Cappelluti, whom he described as 'fishermen friends of mine'. Such they may have been, but they did not discuss fishing. 'The talk was about speaking to Dr Piscitelli about the article that was in the paper concerning Sheepskins for Russia...I was asked to be present by my West Australian people because I was a group leader...During the day when that article came up as I usually do I read to the Internees different articles in the paper. This article I made a point of reading to them and explaining...I read this in Hut No 18. There are only Western Australians there...I remember I did read the cutting in question in Hut 13.' Here we see Ianello exercise the leadership role over his Westralian countrymen of which Major Owen had written, exerting his influence in this episode of the battle for hearts and minds which Ciotti, Colletti and Pattanaro were to report to Constable Hughes. Ianello's cunning lies about not having heard anyone talk of killing in Hut 13 were intended to exculpate himself and his associates, but were directly contradicted by the admissions of Paternoster. So much for Ianello's confession as to his behaviour prior to the fatal assault on Fantin. Finally Ianello rehearsed the bringing forward of the executioner Casotti after the event, inventing stilted speeches for himself and the young man, but admitting in the process that their first recourse had been as per protocol to Camp Leader Piscitelli, who had then referred the matter on to Australian officialdom in the Compound office, as Camp Commandant Richardson later gratefully recalled.

Before I came in here a boy from Western Australia came to see me wanting to present himself to the Doctor about the FANTIN affair...He said 'Frank, I want to see the Doctor and tell him about this affair.' I said 'That is the right thing to do'

At all times Ianello gave himself a procedural alibi, claiming for example what may have been partly true, that his representations to Piscitelli on the fatal afternoon were mainly about uniting his West Australian charges and segregating them from 'the red shirts'. He thought De Luca's fellow ideologue Chiarera had been involved in these representations, which was just as well for him, because Paternoster had already affirmed as much. Thus before the evening meal at 5.30pm all the elements of the fascist conspiracy to kill Fantin had

conferred under the leadership of Dr Piscitelli. De Luca and Chiarera represented ideological commitment. Ianello organised the participation of Casotti, a young woodcutter armed with a length of jarrah two by two, popularly known as ironwood and native like him to Western Australia.⁸⁷⁸ The short club known in Italian as a *manganello*, was one of the traditional fascist weapons, cheap, readily available and effective.

After dinner these men fanned out with their associates to track Fantin's movements. Around 6.30 on this hot spring day Fantin approached the water fountain where he took his last drink. Casotti moved into position between the adjacent huts 4 and 5. When ready he emerged from cover and walked towards Fantin, his weapon grasped by its nether end, probably concealing it inside his forearm. No witness who came forward remembered seeing the weapon in his hand. As he neared his victim he slipped his grip and allowed the *manganello* to slide into position as he placed his feet to deliver a blow, aimed as Dr Piscitelli had advised, low down on the back of the skull in the region of the occipital prominence where the skull and the spine interlock. Fantin rose to meet him, aware someone was approaching behind him. At that very moment, semi-erect, he was hit by a tremendous blow. His skull cracked, and the report was heard metres away on the steps of the nearby huts by Domenico Franchini and Agostino Pozzi, both of whom gave evidence to this effect at the trial conducted in the Supreme Court of SA in March 1943. Franchini testified that he saw the weapon drop from Casotti's hand.⁸⁷⁹ Pozzi also reported seeing it at the scene of the crime.⁸⁸⁰ Both men testified that they had seen Fantin wearing a beret. To questioning from Mr Newman for Casotti and the bench intended to test if they were motivated by political sympathy for the victim and antagonism towards the defendant, they both denied being communists, and Giuseppe Petrilli, who claimed Casotti had boasted to him of felling Fantin with a weapon, added 'I am a stranger in a strange land, and I don't want to know anything about politics.'

Casotti and his witnesses, Antonio Tassone, Michele Leonardi and Dante Quilici rehearsed various versions of his story of provocation and accident. In his sentencing remarks His Honour Justice Richards dismissed their evidence as contradictory and suspiciously belated, whilst negotiating the procedural obstacles before him. He accepted the evidence of Franchini and Pozzi, observing that the fact that they did not claim to have seen more than they had seen strengthened their claim to have heard a violent blow struck, which he assessed as intended to punish. He gave Casotti however the benefit of the doubt as to the employment

of a weapon and other aggravants. This was undoubtedly because he had felt obliged to do so when Casotti's manslaughter plea had been accepted in December, and to do otherwise would have laid open grounds of defence appeal that no one had seen a weapon employed. He sentenced Casotti to two years hard labour,⁸⁸¹ a penalty which was itself an added incentive to the defence to accept the outcome of the proceedings, and reflected the constraints imposed by the prior acceptance of a plea of guilty of manslaughter.

We however, whilst respecting His Honour's legal judgement, are entitled having thoroughly reviewed the direct and circumstantial evidence to consider the police finding that Fantin was assassinated with a jarrah *manganello* as a result of a fascist conspiracy to be proven beyond reasonable doubt. It is noteworthy that in the early 1990s, three of Casotti's Loveday partisans 'admitted' that he 'threw a piece of wood' at Fantin, which together with Casotti's own reported confessions that he employed a blunt instrument, is a damning admission.⁸⁸²

`A Man has been Killed':

the Outcry over the Death in Custody of Francesco Fantin.

Confinement together of men of different...outlook is contrary to the Geneva Convention

Bishop Pilcher August 1942

- #26: Enter Bishop Venn Pilcher
- #27: The Venn Pilcher Correspondence
- #28: The Outcry Broadens
- #29: The Army Position
- #30: Justice & Security
- #31: Col McCahon Visits Adelaide
- #32: `Considerable Correspondence'
- #33: Evatt, the Fantin Affair, & the Rule of Law
- #34: Conclusion: Credibility & Critiques

#26: Enter Bishop Venn Pilcher

Fantin was well known in the canefields for his antifascist views.

Il Risveglio 30 November 1944

Public concern with the lack of political segregation in Australian internment camps preceded the murder of Francesco Fantin. In August 1942 the Anglican Bishop Coadjutor of Sydney, Charles Venn Pilcher, a staunch campaigner on the plight of interned refugees,⁸⁸³ wrote to the Minister for the Army, Frank Forde.

Information has come to me ... that in Camp 14D at Loveday, where Jews and Nazis are confined together, frequent fights are taking place between the two parties. There seems to be some apprehension that if this is not stopped it may go on until life is lost.

The bishop had written to the minister before 'pleading that Jews and Nazis should not be confined together.' He quoted legal opinion 'that such confinement together of men of different race and outlook is contrary to the Geneva Convention to which Australia has put her signature. I do hope you will be able to take action in this matter.'⁸⁸⁴

Forde replied at the end of the month 'to inform you that arrangements are already in hand for the early removal of the Jews at Loveday to a camp which recently became available...'⁸⁸⁵ This issue was handled as a matter of racial segregation. The case of political antagonism amongst Italian internees presented greater difficulties, both as to facilities and as to verification of the political avowals of internees. The military response was to await completion of a Security review of all cases in view of a mass release of Italians, which would ease pressure on facilities and enable political segregation of those remaining in custody. Meanwhile the Fantin affair exploded in November 1942, as comrades of Fantin and other interested parties expressed concern at the conditions which had resulted in his death.

A measure of this is the resumption of the correspondence between the Bishop and the Minister for the Army. Early in December 1942 the Bishop wrote again to Forde, reminding him of his letter of August.

What I then warned you as possible has now actually happened. A man has been killed and many others wounded in one of these Camps, where people of different political persuasion have been confined together. I think, in the present case, that Fascists murdered an anti-Fascist, and, I believe, that this happened in the Camp where there has been already so much trouble - Loveday 14D.

The Bishop expressed perplexity that measures had been taken to separate refugees from nazis `while Fascists and anti-Fascists have also been left together in the same Camp.... I am quite aware of the technicalities urged by the Military on behalf of their action, but in the face of these frequent woundings and now of murder, these technicalities are revealed at their true value'. The letter concluded `The Hon Justice Davidson is writing to Dr Evatt on the same matter. I am taking the liberty of sending copies of this letter to His Excellency the Governor General, to the Prime Minister and the Minister for External Affairs'⁸⁸⁶

#27: The Venn Pilcher Correspondence

The position...appears to me to require urgent remedial action

Curtin December 1942

The Bishop's letter galvanised the Government. Prime Minister Curtin wrote to Forde that 'if the position is as represented by the Reverend Venn Pilcher, it appears to me to require urgent remedial action. I should be glad if you would have the matter examined and favour me with early advice.'⁸⁸⁷ Dr Evatt's Private Secretary wrote that 'Dr Evatt has received several letters regarding serious disturbances at the Loveday Internment Camp. The Minister for the Army is familiar with the problem, and of previous representations that Nazi and anti-Nazi inmates should be separated. I should be glad if you could advise me as soon as possible what the present position is, and whether the two groups are to be interned separately'.⁸⁸⁸ On December 18 Forde acknowledged to Bishop Pilcher belated receipt of his letter, and assured him that 'I will be in Melbourne tomorrow when I will personally discuss the subject ... with the appropriate military authorities.'⁸⁸⁹

On January 1 1943 Bishop Pilcher wrote again to the Prime Minister and the Minister for the Army regarding 'the murder in the Internment Camp at Loveday', 'enclosing two tragically interesting documents'.⁸⁹⁰ One was the translation of a letter from Fantin to a friend, written days before his murder. The other was a purported 'account of the happenings in the Camp at the time of the murder and immediately afterwards, written by a man who was an eye witness of at least some of the events which he describes.'⁸⁹¹ Both the recipient of the letter and the author of the document asked to remain anonymous for fear of fascist vendetta.

In the letter to a friend Fantin wrote

During the present weeks the news is splendid on all fronts. You can hardly imagine how happy this makes me, only I have to tell you that even this joy I have to keep secretly in my heart. I have but a few friends with whom I can communicate. Here I have many enemies around me. When I hear them talking against the Australian people and all who are fighting fascism, you will understand the reaction of my feelings. At times tears fall from my eyes, and in so doing, give me a feeling of relief. Sometimes I feel deeply downhearted, a feeling I have never experienced during the previous years of my

life. It is not because I am enclosed in this camp, for towards the Australian people, I have no bitter feeling, rather, I feel affectionately towards them. It is against these fascists and all Italians who have lost their sense of reasoning, whom I despise and feel a sense of hatred. I have not yet heard of my appeal. I am willing to go to work and on my word of honour, donate all wages to the Red Cross. In other words I would like to use all my physical strength to help the Australian people to victory.⁸⁹²

Clearly Fantin felt an exalted sense of participation in the global struggle in course. It is noteworthy that he did not conceive the war as a British imperial crusade, but rather felt a sense of commitment to 'the Australian people'. Internment did not occasion a sense of resentment in him towards the host community which had detained him, but rather towards the ideological antagonists of his community of origin, with whom internment brought him into renewed proximity. Even so, he was endeavouring not to be provocative, keeping his joy at the progress of the war a secret.

The other attachment to the Bishop's letter was a document entitled WHAT GOES ON IN INTERNMENT CAMPS. It began by characterising the murder victim as 'a well known Italian anti-fascist'. That Fantin may indeed have been known to the author, is suggested in that Fantin's name was spelt correctly. The killer by contrast was a stranger misapprehended through third parties: his name was mangled as 'Pezzotto', perhaps an amalgam of 'Paternoster' and 'Casotti'. The modus operandi of the killing was approximately rehearsed, and specified to have occurred 'in view of many witnesses.' Fascist intimidation of witnesses was cited as 'the reason for several days delay in finding the real murderer.'⁸⁹³ There had in fact been no such delay.

The killer was said to have reported to Dr Piscitelli, the Camp Leader, saying in Italian in front of witnesses 'I've just finished that tuberculotic Veneto', an expression which has an idiomatic ring to it.⁸⁹⁴ The incident was said to have given rise to an altercation between Dr Piscitelli and another internee and colleague, Dr Muggia. Piscitelli allegedly pretended that Fantin was suffering from heat stress, afterwards that his injuries were old or accidental. To this Dr Muggia is said to have replied 'What are you saying Dr? You can see it was murder.' Dr Piscitelli was alleged to have participated in discouraging witnesses from giving evidence.⁸⁹⁵

The document went on to rehearse the prehistory of assaults upon Fantin, 'for no reason at all other than his anti-fascist sentiments', and the failure of the camp authorities to take

preventative measures. The litany of lament was extended to other camps, 'for instance in the adjoining camp No. 14D a group of anti-fascists were entangled in a brawl with fascists because they had collected a sum of money for Sheepskins for Russia.'⁸⁹⁶

This bitterness of the fascists is caused by the good news on all fronts of the Allies and any joy shown by the anti-fascist is a good enough reason for them to be assaulted. When complaints were brought to the authorities by anti-fascists, they failed to understand the true nature of them. Will the authorities ever realise the absurdity of mixing the Italian anti-fascists with the fascists ?⁸⁹⁷

The significance of the Bishop's letter and attachments lay in the circulation of certain evidence and allegations at the highest levels of government. The modus operandi of Fantin's killer was boldly stated, and his confession of murder reported. The availability of witnesses to the deed was also suggested. The killing itself 'under the nose of the military authorities'⁸⁹⁸ was described as the outcome of the co-internment of fascist and anti-fascist internees. The document suggested some lines of inquiry for the criminal investigation into Fantin's death, which were in fact followed up. But it was itself inadmissible as evidence because it consisted of hearsay. The Bishop was mistaken in thinking that the document was written by an eye witness, although it did integrate the evidence of witnesses close to the scene of the crime.

#28: The Outcry Broadens

As regards Francesco Fantin, I feel gravely disturbed about this man's death...

Simpson January 1943

Among the letters received by Attorney General Evatt was one from the Adelaide Political Rights Committee. The Committee was the legal front of the South Australian Branch of the banned Communist Party of Australia. The letter regarded matters relating to the death of Fantin 'on 15th November last'. This was the first in a number of minor material inaccuracies in the document: Fantin in fact died on November 16 1942. It enclosed a letter from an internee of Camp 14D, adjacent to Camp 14A where Fantin died. It expressed concern at the arraignment of Giovanni Casotti on a charge of manslaughter, after a District Coroner had committed him for trial on a charge of murder. In this connection the author, Mrs Joan Finger, Secretary to the Committee and wife of the respected physician Dr Alan Finger, a pioneer of social medicine and father of venerealology in South Australia,⁸⁹⁹ made very serious allegations.

We believe there has been interference with the course of justice. We know that the military authorities made determined efforts to present the case as an accident,...⁹⁰⁰

But instead of offering evidence as to the guilt of Casotti of murder, Mrs Finger proceeded to express concern at larger issues. These included the internment of anti-fascists, their co-internment with fascists, and the alleged cover-up of military maladministration at Loveday.⁹⁰¹ The letter closed by asking that anti-fascist internees should be segregated pending release upon verification of their bona fides. It was further requested that two communist officials, namely Dr Finger and Mr Alf Watt, should be authorised to conduct investigations at Loveday, 'without military intelligence officers being present.'⁹⁰² This was a request Evatt was hardly likely to accept. No such interviews were in fact authorised.

Indeed there is no trace yet discovered of a reply to Mrs Finger. There is however a minute, written the day after the visit of Col McCahon to Adelaide on January 14-15 1943, regarding discussions held with the Army's Director of POWs & Internees. At those discussions 'concern was expressed at leakage of information from the camps.'

This was an evident reference to the letter attached to Mrs Finger's and another document entitled 'What Goes On in Internment Camps'. The minute recommended surveillance of the correspondence of those persons who had forwarded these documents to the government as enclosures. Those nominated for surveillance were Bishops Pilcher and Burgmann, and Waterside Workers Federation Secretary Jim Healy. The 'Political Rights Committee mail' it was added 'is no doubt watched.'

The enclosed letter, dated November 30 1942, was from Ernst Stein, an internee in Camp 14D, to Alf Watt, Chair of the South Australian Political Rights Committee.⁹⁰³ It began by correctly citing the site of the murder as compound 14A. It continued by mentioning the previous assaults on 'Fantini'[sic] involving Paternoster, commenting that 'although the assaults were dealt [with] by Camp Commandant Maj. Richardson, Paternoster was not punished nor was anything done to protect 'Fantini' [sic] from further assaults.' The military, stung by this allegation, made subsequent inquiries on this score, and ascertained that Paternoster had been subjected to unspecified punishment at the time.⁹⁰⁴ Nevertheless the Stein letter drew rather a long bow on this count, and opined that the inaction, relative or absolute, of the military, was due to 'the fact that the Commandant of 14A has fascist sympathies, (as) he is well known for his friendly attitude towards the fascist Camp leader.'⁹⁰⁵ That the latter statement was true does not of course prove the former.

The Stein letter proceeded by reporting the political motive and modus operandi of the killer.

The actual murder was committed by an Italian fascist who had been in the camp about two weeks and had most probably never seen Fantini before he killed him, which in itself is definite proof that this is a political murder. Fantini was hit with a blunt instrument while he was drinking water and had a fracture at the base of the skull. He died without recovering consciousness.⁹⁰⁶

These details were accurate, although the persistent failure to correctly spell Fantin's name argues to the second hand nature of at least some of the information.

At this point the Stein letter concerned itself with 'one of our doctors, an Italian antifascist, Dr. Muggia' who was allegedly 'willing to testify before any Court that Fantin was murdered.' 'Dr. Muggia's willingness to testify' was supposedly 'important as we have reason to believe that the Authorities are trying to make it appear as if Fantini had died from other causes. They have also circulated rumours to the effect that Fantini was quarrelsome and generally a bad character'.⁹⁰⁷ These rumours are more likely to have had a fascist rather than an official source. Again, efforts to attribute Fantin's death to accidental causes smack of Casotti's defence, and the misinformation attributed to Dr Piscitelli. However, some echo of Dr Verco's testimony to the Military Court of Inquiry and the Coronial Inquest held in the Camp, and their findings, may have leaked out in these days and given cause for distrust and disquiet amongst Fantin's friends.

The author then digressed into a long diatribe against the military authorities and the government concerning the political conditions of internment, which he maintained had contributed to Fantin's death to such an extent that the Curtin government ought to be held responsible for it.

Who is to be blamed for this cowardly crime ? The man himself because he would not bury his principles ? Of course not. Nobody but the Military Authorities can be blamed; the Authorities who through their criminal negligence and ignorance put a few antifascists amongst hundreds of Nazis and fascists Any letter[s] we write to the Minister for war are ignored. These then are the people to be blamed for the crime together with the Labour Government which in spite of all its talk of freedom keeps anti-fascists interned.⁹⁰⁸

Security Service duly raised with the government the author's attribution of political responsibility to the government. After reciting incidents of fascist intimidation of antifascists regarding collection for the 'Sheepskins for Russia Fund' in Camp 14D (in which Stein had been the prime mover)⁹⁰⁹ and at Fantin's funeral, of which he claimed the military authorities were 'well aware', Stein returned to the Fantin case proper.

We think that the case of Fantini should be made public property, that his murderer whose name we cannot ascertain, should be tried in a Civil Court, and witnesses called from this camp....⁹¹⁰

These passages were the measure of misapprehension amongst Fantin's erstwhile comrades. Stein in Camp 14D was so far from the events in nearby 14A that he did not know Fantin's correct name, and was ignorant outright of the name of his killer a fortnight after the event. Moreover Stein was unaware that the Coronial Inquest into Fantin's death, which had sat at Loveday a few days before he wrote his letter *was* a civil court, which had heard witnesses from Camp 14A and remanded Fantin's confessed assailant, Giovanni Casotti, on a charge of murder. The police too had by this time made strenuous efforts to bring forward witnesses from Camp 14A, but were frustrated by the same climate of intimidation of which Stein complained. There were no witnesses to the killing of Fantin in Camp 14D, and the police were well apprised of camp rumour. Much of what Stein clamoured for was being granted in the ordinary course of events.

The emerging problem with communist representations on the Fantin affair was that they tended to be passionate rather than pragmatic, and did not propose practical courses for a just conclusion to the legal proceedings. Moreover the larger issue of internment was addressed in such a way as to obscure the legal issue. In so far as the two issues were related, they needed to be disentangled and addressed coolly. This Joan Finger and Stein, and the author of 'What Goes On In Internment Camps' failed to do.

For example, the request that anti-fascist internees be segregated pending review of their cases with a view to release was pertinent to the subtraction of witnesses in the Fantin case from intimidation, and encompassed all the objectives of its proponents as to the larger issues of internment. On the other hand the demand for an inquisition into military maladministration advanced the conduct of the Fantin case not at all, but rather overburdened it with dubious concerns. Likewise the accusations of perversion of the course of justice and fascist sympathies on the part of the military generated more heat than light. Any fears of official malfeasance would have been better couched in more temperate language. The focus needed to be kept on evidence regarding the killing of Fantin.

Further to the 'several letters' received by Dr Evatt on the Fantin affair was a note from 'Big Jim' Healy of the Waterside Workers' Federation, a communist and one of the most respected union officials in the country.⁹¹¹

Further to my interview with you this morning re the death of Francesco Fantini in an internment in South Australia on the 15th November 1942 [sic], as promised I have attached herewith some of the facts concerning this matter forwarded to me from South Australia. I feel sure that upon investigation these facts will be well substantiated and establish adequate grounds for an enquiry into the administration of internment camps in South Australia.⁹¹²

Healy's repetitions of errors in the Stein letter confirm his source of information as the South Australian Political Rights Committee, as does his emphasis on the need for an inquiry into the management of internment in South Australia.

It is, indeed, hardly surprising that Healy would have taken information through communist channels. Healy's provision of further information to Evatt suggests an emerging dialogue with the Attorney General. That Evatt referred these papers to the Director General of Security confirms this.⁹¹³ On New Year's Day 1943 Simpson wrote candidly to Healy requesting names he might recommend for release from internment, noting 'as regards Francesco Fantin I feel gravely disturbed about this man's death...I had already investigated his case.' In earnest of his good faith, Simpson advised Healy of the release of Fantin's Loveday colleague, Roberto Degli Esposti.⁹¹⁴ Encouraged, and furnished with new details, Healy recommended to Simpson in February the antifascist internees Baldovin, Tardiani, Mina, Lavagna, Manassero, Avalli, Campanaro and Cazzulino,⁹¹⁵ all of whom were released. Mario Cazzulino and V Lavagna were two of 'the four flying foxes' together with Roberto Degli Esposti and Fantin who were close associates in late 1942 in Camp 14A.⁹¹⁶

More evidence of the expanding compass of representation concerning the Fantin affair comes from a letter of Tommaso Saviane to Bishop Burgmann of Goulburn, dated 26 December 1942. Bishop Burgmann was a well known Anglican social critic in his day,⁹¹⁷ and Saviane asked his help because he had reason to expect receiving it.

We, the Italian anti-fascists and believers in progress of mankind, having heard of you through the Press of various organizations and of your progressive beliefs of the betterment of all mankind, are asking you to bring before the proper authorities the case of the murder of Francesco Fantin, committed by the criminal hand of fascism in the Internment Camp N.14A, 4th Military District, South Australia on the 16th November,

1942. We also ask you to use all that is in your power to seek the separation of all anti-fascist fighters from the fascists in the various Internment Camps in this country.⁹¹⁸

This was a more focussed representation. The letter went on to rehearse Fantin's plea for segregation within Loveday, adding that 'he was very well-known by the Italian community in this country for his anti-fascist character and hatred of Mussolini and his regime.' Saviane further offered to supply the Bishop or the authorities with the 'names and addresses of... other anti-fascist internees', but no mention was made to their bearing witness in the Fantin case. In conclusion Saviane advised that a similar appeal had been sent to Dr Evatt.⁹¹⁹ In effect Saviane placed his emphasis on the segregation of anti-fascist internees, not on the conduct of the Fantin case.

It was hardly surprising then that Bishop Burgmann did the same when he came to write a pithy letter to the Prime Minister on December 30 1942, emphasising the fascist predisposition to violence towards antagonists:

My dear Prime Minister,

If the enclosed is true, as it seems to be, it is obviously important. If we intern anti-fascists with fascists, we must expect murder.⁹²⁰

#29: The Army Position

There was no organised disturbance connected with this incident

Forde January 1943

After conferring with the military high command, Minister Forde replied to Bishop Pilcher, setting him straight on the situation in the internment camps.

With further reference to your letter of 9th December, 1942, concerning internees at Loveday, South Australia, from inquiries I have made it would appear that the position there has not been accurately made known to you. The death of an Italian internee occurred not in Camp 14D, but in Camp 14A. As to the incident which resulted in the death, I am unable to comment, since one internee is held on a charge of manslaughter, and the matter is therefore sub judice. I am advised, however, that the circumstances of the incident are such as might have arisen amongst any group of Italians, particularly at the present stage of the war.⁹²¹

There is no escaping the racist connotations of the suggestion that the killing was the result of the natural fractiousness of Italians. This passage was certainly a low point in the official response to the Fantin affair. Nonetheless it is more an indication of the limitations of Forde and his Department than a reflection of the policy stance of Curtin and Evatt. Reference to 'the present stage of the war' moreover, rather gave the game away regarding political antagonism amongst Italians as the fascist regime tottered under the impact of military defeat, and political dissension emerged from two decades of totalitarianism. As he developed his argument, Forde merely involved himself more deeply in its tortuous logic.

The Minister for the Army went on to justify the treatment of internees in accordance with the spirit of the Geneva Convention, (the letter of which did not apply to detainees.) He then came to the issue of segregation of internees from the military point of view.

The military authorities charged with the custody of internees are faced with many difficult problems, not the least of which is a satisfactory segregation of types. Internees, like any other people who are obliged to live in community, are apt to develop individual

mutual dislikes, and to resolve themselves into cliques. Although this is a common phenomenon of human behaviour, due to temperamental and various other causes, the situation is often represented as being political. Another complicating factor is that political sympathies amongst internees are liable to fluctuate, perhaps quite sincerely, according to the war situation and other circumstances.⁹²²

The Minister then, under military advice, sought to explain away the political disturbances at Loveday as a matter of individual and group psychology, which the army was valiantly dealing with by grouping internees according to national 'type'. Altogether Minister Forde had succeeded in denying that there was a political problem at Loveday. He had swallowed the Army line holus bolus. This is reminiscent of the criticism of Forde current in Evatt's entourage, that he would believe anything told him by an officer.⁹²³

On January 6 1943 Forde wrote to Evatt

with further reference to your letter of 14 Dec. 42 regarding the question of segregation of internees at Loveday Internment Group, I desire to inform you that there have been no serious disturbances at this or any other Internment Group. As a result of the death of an internee at Camp 14A Loveday a fellow internee has been committed for trial on a charge of manslaughter, but I am advised that there was no organised disturbance connected with this incident.⁹²⁴

This maladroit rationalisation of the Fantin affair begged the question as to whether the killing of the anarchist activist was not a 'serious...organised disturbance' in itself. Conspiracies are after all inherently organised. For Evatt's information and in further defence of his departmental line, Forde enclosed copy of his letter to Bishop Pilcher, adding on the subject of segregation that

the chief problem with segregation arises mainly in connection with incompatible minorities in local internees' camps who consider that they should be recognised as anti-Nazi or anti-Fascist. There is no evidence available to my department to warrant such recognition, but it is anticipated that those whose claims are genuine will be released from internment as the result of the review of all local internees now being conducted by Security Service. When this action by Security Service is completed segregation

problems should be eased. In the meantime segregation is effected to the fullest extent that factors of security and availability of accommodation will permit.⁹²⁵

This letter, and the attached copy of the letter to Bishop Pilcher, presented Evatt with a political problem on the one hand and its solution on the other. The problem was the alliance between Forde and his department, to which the Deputy Prime Minister was subordinate, and their complete unwillingness to recognise the political problem of internment of antifascists. The solution lay in the Army and the Minister's recognition of the role of the Security Service in resolving the matter by reviewing the cases of all internees. This transferred the solution out of the hands of Forde and the Army into those of Evatt and his Security Service. Thus a potential clash at Cabinet level was avoided. This reflected the division of responsibility as between internment and custody which had come into play with the foundation of the Security Service in 1942. The Army was defending its conduct of detention in terms of a structural fait accompli engineered by Evatt. Evatt and Simpson were winding down a regime inherited principally from mass internments instigated by Western and Northern Commands of Western Australian Italians and North Queenslanders in June 1940 and the summer of 1941-2 respectively.

Both the Army and the Security Service were embarrassed by the death of Fantin, but for different reasons: the Army because it remained wedded to the policy of preventive internment, the Security Service because it had embodied disavowal of the policy since the Service's inception. Evatt and his Security Service were thus willing to spare the Army's blushes, but only at the price of dismantling its preferred policy. As such the Fantin affair involved sustained bureaucratic skirmishing between the Security Service and the Army. The hypothesis of antifascist internees in 14D who identified with the martyred Fantin that the Security Service and the Intelligence Corp were involved in a monolithic apologetic mind set gained its tincture of truth from the behaviour of local and national elements of the military hierarchy. Nonetheless it was wrong, because the Security Service and Lieutenant Jury of the Intelligence Corp both placed evidence of the conspiracy to murder Fantin before the police, as indeed did the Military Court of Inquiry.

#30: Justice & Security

Each Internment Camp has attached to it an Officer and some N.C.O.s of the Intelligence Corp

Simpson January 1943

On 5 January 1943 the Director General of Security, Brigadier Simpson, wrote to the Director of Military Intelligence on the subject of 'Anti-Fascist In Internment Camps', forwarding for his information copies of correspondence addressed to the Attorney General in connection with the death of Francesco Fantin.⁹²⁶ He also enclosed an extract from a letter addressed by a fascist internee, L.Weste, to the Swiss Consul, Protecting Power for Axis interests in Australia. The December 1942 letter complained of the proximity of 'loyal Italians and Germans' to 'a group of communists, Jews, half-Jews and others'. Weste referred to the death of Fantin in the adjoining camp as a result of these tensions, and threatened that 'unless the Authorities act promptly and separate us from pro-Russian Sheepskin-collectors and similar provocateurs there will be hell let loose here very soon.'⁹²⁷

The enclosure of this extract with his letter by the Director General was a clear indication that the political situation in the camps was critical. Simpson noted that the Attorney General had already been in touch with the Minister for the Army and 'asked that consideration be given to the question of separating known Fascists and Anti-Fascists.' The Director General concluded

Since I took over the responsibilities of Director General of Security it has been the policy to closely investigate all cases in which it has been represented that the internee is an anti-Fascist with a view to arranging release for suitable employment wherever possible. You will appreciate, however, that this process must necessarily be slow as each case coming under notice can be dealt with only after the fullest enquiries have been made.⁹²⁸

The Director General was quietly acting, in effect, as commissar for the gradual and secure release of antifascists from internment.

On 8 January 1943 Simpson drafted a note to Evatt explaining that 'Mr Forde's letter of the 6th January has been referred by Dr Burton [Evatt's private secretary] to me in relation to the last paragraph.'⁹²⁹ Simpson was referring to Forde's remarks to Evatt concerning the supposed lack of evidence of an antifascist minority in the camps. Simpson commented:

The paragraph is not completely accurate. Each internment camp has attached to it an Officer and some N.C.O.'s of the Intelligence Corps and I frequently get reports from them, generally, it is true, in answer to requests, stating that some named individual appears to be anti-Fascist or pro-Fascist 'as he is noticed to only associate with the' for example 'anti-Fascist group'.⁹³⁰

Simpson went on to comment on matters of segregation and release.

Nevertheless it is quite true that Army is doing its best to segregate the sheep from the goats and are very helpful when I ask for the movements of a particular individual. My action in releasing anti-Fascist...elements will, however, take a very considerable time as each case has to be considered separately. I think to date I have released somewhere between 800 and 1,000 internees.⁹³¹

On 7 January 1943 Minister Forde wrote again to Bishop Pilcher, acknowledging receipt of his correspondence of January 1, and informing him that he had 'arranged for Major-General Stantke, the Adjutant-General, and Col McCahon, who is in charge of Internees, to call at my office...to discuss the subject matter of your letter with me.'⁹³²

The Adjutant-General duly attended and prepared a memorandum for the Director General of Security and a draft letter of reply to Bishop Pilcher for Forde. These showed a heightened concern for security issues in the Fantin affair. Referring to the enclosures with Bishop Pilcher's letter of 1 January, particularly 'What Goes On In Internment Camps', Stantke noted to Simpson

The question of how this type of information has been permitted to leave Internment Camps is a matter for grave concern It would appear that all manner of allegations concerning Fantin's death are being widely circulated in some quarters despite the fact that the matter is sub judice.⁹³³

In a handwritten note to a third party Stantke further remarked

I am most concerned with the aspects of underground communication from internment camps as indicated in the correspondence and refer the matter as relating to Censorship and Intelligence.⁹³⁴

In conclusion the Adjutant General referred to Security's timetable for the release of Italians from internment.

As to the segregation problem referred to in your memo to D.P.W & I. I was interested to learn that you expect to release for employment 1500 to 2000 local Italian internees during the next 3 months. Doubtless when this is done our segregation problems will be greatly eased. In the meantime you will appreciate that we cannot attempt any classification of internees, in anticipation of your decision on their individual cases.⁹³⁵

Clearly Security Service was in practice dissolving the issue of the Italian anti-fascists in a wider settlement of Italian internment more generally.

In a covering note to the draft reply to Bishop Pilcher, Stantke promoted his concerns with security in terms of the requirements of justice.

I regard it as most important that Bishop Pilcher should in the interests of justice immediately disclose the source of his information. I will have the allegations in the statement 'What Goes On In Internment Camps' investigated and have referred to the CGS and the Director General of Security the aspects which relate to leakage and traffic in information concerning alleged happenings in the camps. At first sight it appears that the material is being prepared or circulated through Communist channels.⁹³⁶

The Adjutant General was of course quite right about 'communist channels'. Stantke concluded by repeating to Forde Simpson's schedule for the release of Italians from internment, commenting 'When this is done, it is anticipated that most of the "doubtful" internees who are one of the causes of segregation troubles will have been released.'⁹³⁷ At the price of being designated problematic, the situation of the Italian antifascists was headed for resolution.

The draft letter to Bishop Pilcher 'with further reference to your letter of 1st January 1943 and two enclosures concerning the deceased internee Fantin' was submitted to Forde on 9 January 9. It began

I desire to advise that Fantin's letter to his friend and the statements that he was an anti-Fascist contained in the document headed 'What Goes On In Internment Camps' are essentially matters for consideration by Security Service which under the control of Dr Evatt is responsible for the continuation or otherwise of the internment of persons normally resident in Australia. I am however informed that a review of the grounds of internment of many local internees is being conducted by the Security Service and when completed should ease existing problems of segregation particularly amongst the Italians. In the meantime, my Department cannot of course attempt any classification of internees in anticipation of the decisions likely to be given concerning their release or otherwise.⁹³⁸

Thus Minister Forde was able at last to give Bishop Pilcher some comfort concerning the prospects of interned Italian antifascists.

Proceeding to address security issues, Forde turned to the text of 'What Goes On In Internment Camps.'

In the second document abovementioned, I note that the author of it ascribes the death of Fantin to murder, and indicates that he possesses knowledge that should certainly be brought out as evidence at the forthcoming trial...I appreciate your comment concerning the source of your information; but I am sure that you will accept it as the duty of all persons, and especially of myself as a Minister of the Crown, to subordinate all other considerations to the interests of justice. The fact that a charge of manslaughter is associated with this matter makes it imperative that everyone possessing vital evidence be called as a witness at the trial, otherwise it may afterwards be represented that a miscarriage of justice has ensued despite the fact that persons in authority had been informed of certain alleged facts such as those contained in the document. Although I regret having to make this request, I must ask that you inform me urgently of the name of the person who furnished you with a copy of the document entitled 'What Goes On In

Internment Camps' in order that the author of it may be traced and the appropriate legal authorities in South Australia may be informed of the allegations contained therein.⁹³⁹

It is not necessary to believe that Stantke was indifferent to the considerations of justice which bulked so large in the ministerial reply he drafted. But it is true that he made no mention of the security concerns which figured so largely in his desire for the information requested from the Bishop.

On 13 January 1943 Bishop Pilcher replied to Minister Forde, supplying the name of Mrs T Saviane as that of 'the person who gave me the documents' forwarded to the government. When the Bishop asked Mrs Saviane if she would supply the name of the author of the documents, she said she would rather not expose him to Fascist persecution. Nevertheless the Bishop gathered from her that the information was not passed out of camp by letter, but had been given by a man who was released from the Camp after the murder of Fantin.⁹⁴⁰ This may have allayed in part military concern about traffic in information from the camp. In any case in a matter of days Security Service had made arrangements to interview Mrs Saviane.⁹⁴¹

#31: Col McCahon Visits Adelaide

Mr Chamberlain...advised that on 22nd December 42 the accused internee CASSOTTI had pleaded guilty to a charge of Manslaughter, that he had been remanded for sentence, and that this afternoon (14 January 43) a further remand had been granted on the suggestion...by Army representatives that further evidence might be obtained.

McCahon January 1943

On 14 January 1943 Lieutenant-Colonel McCahon, Director of the Army's Department of Prisoners of War and Internees, visited Adelaide to discuss the Fantin affair with local officials. His reference was `to representations on this subject recently made to the Minister ... by Bishop Pilcher and also to the attached set of documents received from the Director General of Security'. Among these latter papers were the representations made to Dr Evatt by the Adelaide Political Rights Committee. McCahon `interviewed the Deputy Director of Security (Mr Kirkman) in the presence of representatives of "G" and "A" Branches of HQ, SA Lines of Communication Area and Group Commandant and Group Legal Officer Loveday.' Sets of documents were handed out among others to Group Commandant Loveday `for inquiry as to whether and how any such information was transmitted or smuggled from the Internment Camps and to whom it was addressed.'

The focus of the discussions, then, was initially on security. Kirkman `stated that he would endeavour to trace the recipients of documents alleged to have been sent out of the Internment Camps.⁹⁴² Further

He stated that the Mrs Joan Finger, Dr Finger and Mr Watt referred to in the correspondence were all well known communists and that they appeared to be exploiting the situation with a view to securing the release of certain communists interned in South Australia and who are included in the group of internees they describe as Anti-Fascist. Mr Kirkman further stated ... that Security Service is not at present reviewing the grounds of internment of these communists.⁹⁴³

This rather jaundiced view was not however inaccurate as far as it went. Certainly the emphasis of the Political Rights Committee's interest in the Fantin case was on the release of antifascists.

The remark upon the status of communist cases was true, however, only relatively speaking, since Security was reviewing the cases of all internees.

The discussion then shifted focus to canvass the legal and political aspects of the Fantin case. McCahon reported to Kirkman the Adjutant General's concern that the position of the Army in relation to the trial was being impugned by rumour. At this point the South Australian Crown Prosecutor, Mr Chamberlain, was invited to join the discussion. He expressed himself fully satisfied with the participation of the Army in the case. 'He stated that if justified he could still abandon the charge of Manslaughter and have the internee Casotti tried for murder.' During the discussion McCahon pointed out that the Army might be represented as having influenced the police insofar as it had made available to them the proceedings of the Military Court of Enquiry. This might have been thought far fetched but Chamberlain agreed, and proposed to independently investigate the claims made in the documents being circulated by sending a detective to make further enquiries at Loveday. Preliminary arrangements were then made for the protection of such witnesses as might be brought forth from the internment camps. Enquiries were made as to the allegations being circulated concerning the August 1942 assault upon Fantin, and it was established that this had not gone unpunished and that Fantin had not requested removal at that time to another camp. This begged the question of whether he had requested segregation or protection *within* the camp. Lastly McCahon asked Kirkman 'whether...the forthcoming anticipated release of local Italian internees from Loveday would result in any genuine Anti-Fascists being released?' Kirkman was of the opinion that it would, 'and that the investigating Tribunal would proceed to Loveday at an early date as the internees are required for AWC work.' McCahon concluded that 'it therefore appears that the segregation position at Loveday should be greatly improved as the result of action being taken by Security Service to review the grounds of internment of many local Italians.'⁹⁴⁴ Within days McCahon wrote to Simpson 'I believe that the position is now adequately safeguarded.'⁹⁴⁵ He was quite unperturbed that a charge of murder might be resuscitated against Casotti.

#32: 'Considerable Correspondence'

This man...was a well known anti-fascist...

Clovelly Branch State Labor Party January 1943

Nevertheless both up and down the chain of command concern with security remained active. On January 16 1943 the HQ of the SA Lines of Communication issued a memorandum regarding official correspondence received concerning Fantin. The memo featured the note of the Adjutant General regarding 'underground communication'. It also invited comment on a rider Joan Finger had placed on the Stein letter: 'this letter has not been censored'.⁹⁴⁶

On 21 January 1943 the Adjutant General again wrote to Simpson 'concerning correspondence from Bishop Pilcher'. Stantke was particularly concerned with a letter from the Bishop dated 13 January, designated 'document (3)'. Stantke wrote

I suggest that in order to prevent unnecessary disclosure of information appropriate advice on document (3) be forwarded by you to your Deputy Director in Adelaide for communication to the SA Crown Prosecutor.⁹⁴⁷

Nevertheless, concern with the requirements of justice went hand in hand with concern for the requirements of security, for Stantke added

Doubtless your Deputy will note the names of any internees agreeing to give evidence against CASOTTI in order that the question of their possible release can be considered by your Service.⁹⁴⁸

The ongoing definition of the official position regarding the Fantin affair also continued. On 20 January 1943 Simpson wrote to the Secretary of the Attorney General's Department regarding Bishop Burgmann's letter to the Prime Minister. The letter began with reference to Tommaso Saviane's letter to Bishop Burgmann.

The matters mentioned in the letter from Mr T Saviane to Bishop Burgmann have been the subject of considerable correspondence between Security Service, the Attorney

General and the Department for the Army. The last mentioned Department is responsible for the administration of internment camps and it is understood that segregation of Fascists and anti-Fascists is effected to the fullest extent that interests of security and availability of accommodation will permit. As regards the death of Francesco Fantin, the Minister for the Army has advised that a fellow internee has been committed for trial on a charge of manslaughter, following a Coroner's inquest. I wish to add that whenever it has been brought to the notice of Security Service that an internee is an anti-Fascist, action is taken to determine whether the man concerned could be released and employed on national work, but it will be appreciated that, for security reasons, there must be a full investigation into each case. Already a number of releases have been effected on this basis.⁹⁴⁹

This version of the official view was true as far as it went, but it did not satisfy comrades of Fantin in at least two respects. Firstly, they were unlikely to accept that the Army was effecting political segregation in internment camps to the greatest extent possible; and secondly they were discontented that Fantin's killer was being tried on a charge of manslaughter.

At this time the Government began to receive a new flow of representations upon the Fantin affair. On 21 January 1943 Dr Evatt was wired by Miss Laura Gapp, Honorary Secretary of the Civic Rights Defence League. She urged 'FULL INVESTIGATION CASE FRANCESCO GANTIN' [sic]... She added significantly 'WOULD BE PREPARED TENDER CERTAIN MATERIAL EVIDENCE'.⁹⁵⁰ Evatt replied the same day, noting that 'the administration of internment camps is a matter for the Minister for the Army, and he will be responsible for investigation into this incident. I am referring your telegram to him for his information.'⁹⁵¹ On February 3 1943 Forde wrote to Gapp 'that the matter is being fully investigated by the State Crown Law Authorities, South Australia, to whom ... your telegram will be communicated.'⁹⁵² It would appear that in the event Ms Gapp was unable to provide any information Crown Prosecutor Chamberlain could use.

On 11 January 1943 Bishop Pilcher had made representations on a matter related to the Fantin affair, namely the situation of refugees in Loveday Camp 14D. The matter was discussed on behalf of the Adjutant General on 21 January 1943, in reply to a minute from the Secretary of the Department for the Army drafted on 18 January 1943. It offered an enlightening perspective on the recent history of segregation in one camp. It was advised that

when the mass internment of Italians took place in Queensland it was necessary to use most of the accommodation in this camp (which holds 1,000) for Italians. The minority held in the camp consists mainly of approx. 170 local and overseas Germans. These internees, amongst whom are those named by Bishop Pilcher, represent a group of incompatibles including communists and others who have always been troublesome since their internment. They are not a homogenous group but comprise a number of different factions.⁹⁵³

The mass internment of Queensland Italians had then, flooded Camp 14D, closing down opportunities for the segregation of minorities. A similar phenomenon occurred in 1942 when Camp 14A was opened to receive Queensland Italians. For the 'incompatibles' of 14D a similar resolution of their situation was envisaged as for the local Italians: Security review with a view to release to 'national work'. It was envisaged that pressure on facilities for segregation would be correspondingly eased.⁹⁵⁴ On 30 January Minister Forde replied to the Bishop in these terms, and echoing military skepticism as to the refugees professions of antifascism.⁹⁵⁵

On 25 January 1943 the Clovelly Branch of the State Labor Party despatched to Prime Minister Curtin a resolution concerning the Fantin affair.

That immediate action be taken to bring to justice the Fascist murderers of Francisco Fantini [sic]. This man, who was a well known anti-fascist, should never have been placed with known fascists. We further urge the Government to take action to release all anti-fascists from internment camps as soon as possible...⁹⁵⁶

Apart from the erroneous citation of Fantin's name, this was a well framed representation focussed on bringing his assassins to justice. It is to be noted that the Clovelly Branch of Lang Labor were of the view that Fantin's killer had not acted alone, emphasised his status as 'a well known antifascist', and addressed the issue of the release of other antifascists as a subsidiary matter without recrimination.

On 26 January 1943 the Director General of Security wrote to the Adjutant General enclosing 'copy of a report by the Deputy-Director of Security, Sydney.' What survives of this report is the 'Copy of Investigator's Report' whose subject was 'Death of Internee Francesco Fantin - origin of documents handed by Mrs Saviane to Bishop Pilcher'. This report was the

product of the Adjutant General's anxiety about 'underground communication' from Loveday and the subsequent arrangements made by Security to interview Mrs Saviane, the Bishop's informant.

The report began by discussing the letter sent to Valentino Ciotti by Fantin shortly before his death. The original Italian document was seen, verifying the translation used by Bishop Pilcher. The letter had been opened by the Censor, and had been 'sent through the usual channels'. All legitimate security concerns were allayed on this score, and the bona fides of the transmission of information to the Bishop verified.

The report continued regarding 'the document headed "What Goes On in Internment Camps."'

This document, according to Mrs Saviane, is one which she and her husband compiled from information gleaned, particularly from Victoria. In this regard it may be stated that Mrs Saviane's husband was at one time a member of the Matteotti anti-Fascist League in Victoria, and it is from members of this League in Victoria that the Savianes received some of their information. Some, however, was received from an Italian named Pattanaro who resides at Wetherill Park, Fairfield N.S. Wales, and who was recently interned in the same camp as the late internee Francesco Fantin. He wiped the blood from the mouth of Fantin after the alleged assault.

The investigators' report concluded 'the inquiry was conducted with the utmost discretion and Mrs Saviane in her anxiety to have the alleged murderer of Fantin exposed is not aware of the exact import of our inquiry.'⁹⁵⁷ While this was the end of the authorities' pursuit of the information trail leading from Loveday to Bishop Pilcher, it was not the end of inquiries into connections of the Savianes who might provide information on the Fantin case.

Meanwhile on February 4 1943 the South Bulli Miners' Lodge (membership 468) conveyed to Prime Minister Curtin

That we...view with deep concern the killing of the Italian anti-fascist Francesco Fantin and we urgently request that you institute a full inquiry into the manner of his death.

Further we consider that known and proved anti-fascists , irrespective of their nationality, should not be interned with the criminal fascist element.⁹⁵⁸

This too was a well focussed submission. Curtin replied that he would `give consideration to your requests and advise you later.'⁹⁵⁹

Next to enter the lists was the Lismore Branch of the ALP, a district with a significant Italian community, who wrote to Forde on 11 February 1943.

This Branch is perturbed at the way in which anti-fascist aliens are interned with fascists. This Branch considers that the Government should take steps to safeguard those aliens of anti-fascist views by releasing them when possible and by interning them in separate camps when release is considered impracticable.

An analogous letter was sent by the Branch to the Prime Minister.⁹⁶⁰ Within a few days Forde replied to the Branch Secretary, that `I should be glad if you would kindly assure the members of your Branch that their views have been noted, and will be given every consideration.'⁹⁶¹

The same day, the Private Secretary to the Minister for the Army requested Departmental attention to the cases of certain refugees held in Loveday Camp 14D, on account of representations made to Forde by Bishop Pilcher.⁹⁶² The issue, in the person of the good Bishop, continued to dog the Minister.

How complicated the correspondence was becoming appears from the heading of a memorandum from the Secretary of the Department for the Army, FR Sinclair, to the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department. It regarded `your memorandum of 9 Feb. 1943 concerning copy of a memorandum dated 25 Jan.`43 from the Attorney General's Department..forwarded under cover of your minute of 26 Jan.`43'. It reminded the Prime Minister's Department

that the circumstances surrounding the death of internee FRANCESCO FANTIN ... are being fully investigated by Security Service and by the Crown Prosecutor of South Australia...[adding that]in view of representations from various sources, a detective was again sent to Loveday in an endeavour to obtain additional evidence.'

The memorandum went on to explain that 'although segregation is effected primarily according to nationalities, it is the policy of my department to adjust such segregations within the limits of security and the camps available.' Sinclair reiterated the official view that the political avowals of internees were unreliable: 'Such claims are often entirely at variance with the history of an internee.' He looked, as had the Army for some time, to Security's review of cases with a view to release as resolving segregation issues and the problem of 'genuine anti-Fascists.'⁹⁶³

Further representations on the Fantin affair were received from the canefields by the Government as February wore on. On 15 February 1943 the Cairns District Committee of the Amalgamated Engineering Union wrote to WJ Riordan MHR. Riordan referred a copy of the communication to Forde on 24 February.⁹⁶⁴

The members of this branch of the Union direct me to place before you a request that you do all in your power to rectify the position existing in internment camps, where Anti-Fascists are interned with Fascists. Reports from reliable sources show that in addition to being imprisoned with Fascist enemies, they are subjected to brutal attacks from the Fascists, and in one instance an Anti-Fascist was murdered. We feel that these people, whose sympathies are with the Allied cause in this War, should be released and allowed to direct their efforts with ours, towards the defeat of the common enemy. Failing their release, they should at least be protected from these murderous attacks on their lives.⁹⁶⁵

Forde wrote to Riordan on 1 March 1943, asking him to assure the Union 'that the views of its members have been noted, and will be given every consideration.'⁹⁶⁶

On 16 February 1943 the NSW Branch of the Transport Workers' Union wrote to the Prime Minister, requesting him

to take immediate steps to have separated Anti-Fascists at present in Internment Camps from other Pro-Fascist internees, in order that there will not be a similar occurrence to that which occurred recently in South Australia where a known Non-Fascist was murdered by Fascist internees after requesting the authorities to separate him from a callous bunch who eventually did him to death. We also request the Government to hold a full enquiry into the occurrence above referred to.⁹⁶⁷

Again, this was a well focussed and authoritative representation, in which the death of Fantin was represented as being a conspiracy against 'a known Non-Fascist', with a view to segregating the internee factions preventing any recurrence of violence. The opinions of the TWU were not lightly ignored under wartime conditions.

On February 24 1943 Forde wrote to Curtin concerning the representations of the Lismore ALP. It was an advice so standardised as to be almost a form letter. Security Service and the SA Crown Prosecutor were fully investigating the Fantin case; segregation of internees was primarily national but adjusted in accordance with security and available facilities; the political avowals of internees were often at variance with their history; Security review of internees' cases would release any genuine antifascists and ease the pressure on facilities for segregation.⁹⁶⁸ Clearly Curtin accepted the advice received from Forde. On the same day the Prime Minister wrote an almost identical letter to Bishop Pilcher. Curtin added 'for your personal and confidential information I would advise that a detective was sent specially to Loveday, South Australia, in an endeavour to obtain additional evidence.'⁹⁶⁹ He did not say, and was probably unaware, that this endeavour had been at least partially successful.

The flow of representations to the Government continued. On 27 February the Essendon ALP addressed themselves to Forde 'in regard to the recent death of an Italian internee in NSW (sic).' We know that some information regarding the death of Fantin had flowed through the old Melbourne Matteotti club network. Despite the error of place, the case as it emerged was clearly that of Fantin. The Branch expressed itself

extremely perturbed to hear that this particular individual had a long record of anti-sympathetic expression in Australia to the cause of the German and Italian Fascists and yet was interned in the same compound as active enemies of his own race.

It suggests that a public and open inquiry should be held into all the circumstances of this incident. It also recommends that consistent with public safety rigorous investigation into any other persons who might reasonably be released for forestry and other seasonal works should be made.⁹⁷⁰

Again Fantin's record of political activism was stressed as the factor motivating his assailants, and practical measures suggested which were in fact in keeping with official thinking. On 10

March 1943 Forde advised `the Branch that their comments have been noted and will receive full consideration.⁹⁷¹

As late as 25 March 1943, a few days after the sentencing of Casotti, the influential ALP Barrier District Assembly wrote to Forde from Broken Hill, seat of a significant Italian community, conveying a recent resolution

That the Federal Government be urged to segregate known Fascists from anti-Fascists in internment camps.

It was explained that `the above arises from recent reports that, at a camp in South Australia, an anti-Fascist was murdered by an individual who was a known Fascist.⁹⁷² At the end of the month Forde assured the Assembly members `that the fullest consideration will be given to their views.⁹⁷³

The Fantin affair arose from the mobilisation of Fantin's comrades and the responses of the military and police and the associated civilian officials. Particularly influential was Tommaso Saviane, who roused the veterans of the Matteotti Club to stimulate Bishops Pilcher and Burgmann. Bishop Pilcher in particular was tireless in his efforts to obtain a satisfactory response from the Curtin ministry. Bishop Burgmann was so well connected with the government that his few lines on the subject were inordinately influential. The efforts of Fred Paterson to collect evidence were also timely and astutely focussed.

The quality of the representations filed by Saviane and the Adelaide Political Rights Committee was variable. But there is no denying that without their stimulus the government would have rested on the laurels of due process. Why would it not? The government was right to point out that the military, police and judicial authorities were making proper inquiries into the Fantin case. As it was, the government was provoked to activate the Security Service to second the efforts of the SA Crown Prosecutor. This was partly as a result of security concerns, but it was not without effective good intentions regarding the securing of witnesses against Fantin's killer. Altogether the government handled the Fantin affair for the serious matter that it was, and the case received the political attention which the dead man's associates demanded. Curtin's initial note to Forde was urgent, Evatt was in favour of political

segregation in the camps, and the defensive Forde at his most unsatisfactory was at least tolerably businesslike.

On the historical issue of political segregation, the official position was unsatisfactory in principle but acceptable in practice. Antifascists were earmarked for release, but there was no admission by the military that there had been a problem or that a problem might to some degree remain *ad interim*. The crisis which had arisen at Loveday was explained away as an isolated incident rather than 'an organised disturbance', in terms of a psychology of types articulated in national categories, diversified by individual and social peculiarities devoid of political significance. Nonetheless a practical solution was found which effectively cut through these generalisations, absolving the military from responsibility whilst placating critics of preventive internment amongst the clergy and the labour movement. The security review of internee's individual cases in accordance with more lenient criteria was effectively a pre-fabricated solution, developed before the Fantin affair exploded. The death of Fantin did however see the wind up of preventive internment expedited, as Cresciani has reported.⁹⁷⁴

So far as public involvement in the Fantin affair was concerned, this was almost exclusively on the part of the labour movement, with, as we have seen, some support from civil rights activists and Christian fellow travellers, with the press taking notice of the legal proceedings. These representations were in the main opportune interventions in the Fantin case. Certainly public protest was not, as Nursey-Bray implies, a response to the outcome of the legal proceedings,⁹⁷⁵ but rather preceded them. The Fantin affair, as embodied in the representations received by government, forced it to take a running review of policy which accelerated developments in course. It is doubtful if the bereaved comrades of Fantin could have achieved more with their limited means.

#33: Evatt, the Fantin Affair, & the Rule of Law

It was three or four of them were always going to argue the point with the fascists. We warned them not to go but they persisted... They hit him on the head and killed him. There were witnesses but nobody got the real story.'

Giuseppe Zammarchi ⁹⁷⁶

Back in January 1943 the North Queensland Guardian had voiced its frustration with official proceedings in the Fantin case.

Questions that need an immediate answer are:-

Why have not the murderers already been brought to book ?

Why are anti-fascists interned with Fascists ?

Why did not the camp commandant remove Fantin when he made that request ?⁹⁷⁷

To the first two questions there was in fact a ready answer: proceedings were at the time underway for manslaughter against Fantin's confessed assailant, Giovanni Casotti. It might have been added that difficulties in the case prohibited a prosecution for murder, let alone conspiracy. The last two questions were answerable with reference to the difficulties in political identification and segregation of internees, particularly at a time when all cases were under review. Not surprisingly however the Guardian returned to the issue in February, reporting that 'Giovanni Peggotti [sic] pleaded guilty before Mr Justice Richards to the killing of Francesco Fantin .. Peggotti is a known Fascist.' By this time dissatisfaction had grown to alarm.

A feature of the hearing is the inexplicable attitude of the Court to the accused and discrepancies in the evidence....The remarks of the Judge are amazing and alarming.

"I have known worst cases of manslaughter...It is obviously a case of a man who receives an insult with perhaps a little political heat about it, and gives the insulter a push, which knocks him over. Unfortunately he knocked his head on something and dies. I agree that there are many worse cases of manslaughter .."⁹⁷⁸

The Guardian's alarm is readily understood. Removed from the scene of the

legal proceedings, it was not aware of what had transpired. In the absence of witnesses to the execution of Fantin with a blunt instrument, the defence contention of accidental death had passed uncontested before the Military Court of Inquiry, the Coroner and the Supreme Court. The outcome was as shocking to Fantin's comrades as it was procedurally unsurprising. The Guardian was not quite confined however to railing at Dr Evatt for justice. It claimed to be privy to witnesses.

Persons directly interested in the Fantin case allege that at least two witnesses to the murder declare that statements used at the trial are untrue. These saw the Fascist murderer strike Fantin with a knot of wood and then stamp on his body. One actually attended the victim.⁹⁷⁹

This canny reference to the issue of witnesses was not accidental. For the founding editor of the Guardian was none other than Fred Paterson, the communist attorney. Indeed the astuteness of the February article throughout betrays legal acumen. And for all his campaigning against the judicial conduct of the case, Paterson, who had been industrious in attempting to organise witnesses, knew that the central problem of the case was the problem of 'discrepancies in the evidence.' The police, Fantin's comrades and the courts were all frustrated by the fact that no-one had come forward to say that they had seen Casotti assault Fantin with a blunt instrument, despite the fact that all the circumstantial evidence indicated this. Moreover, circumstantial evidence is rarely unequivocal, and was not so in this case in virtue of the medical report at autopsy. Only so much could be wrung out of the mute facts of Fantin's injuries, and no more.

But the difficulties of proof do not alter the facts. Given the fascist record of violence, the prospects of the historical consensus that Fantin was murdered being borne out by an eventual sounding of the evidence were always good. But the fact remains that Casotti was convicted in a court of law of the lesser crime of manslaughter. Historians can only call into question the findings of the courts if they adopt a higher critical standard than the contemporary practical test of proof beyond reasonable doubt.⁹⁸⁰ And the fact is that to date commentators on the Fantin affair have relied rather too casually on the inadequate test of the balance of probabilities. One moreover, Associate Professor Paul Nursey-Bray, has long theorised a high level official conspiracy to pervert the course of justice, involving Commonwealth Attorney General Evatt, his Security Service, the State Crown Prosecutor

and the Bench of the Supreme Court of South Australia.⁹⁸¹ This would have required the Crown Prosecutor to betray his duty, not to mention overcoming his strong dislike of Evatt.⁹⁸² Such an enormity is improbable but not impossible. It needs however to be assessed on the basis of evidence, lest by failure to properly weigh our sources, as Collingwood warned, our proceedings lose all logical credibility.⁹⁸³

Let us summarise what our scrutiny of the evidence has shown. What we have done is demonstrate that the military and police investigations carried out on the spot were expeditiously and effectively conducted. Both the military and the police were perfectly well aware of the political motivation of the killing, and investigated the death of Fantin as a homicide. They did not deviate from their duty out of any false sense of embarrassment. Accordingly there is no evidence that these investigations were impeded by political interference of any kind. The major impediments to the investigation were the assailant's 'determined effort... to justify his actions', the comfort lent to him by Dr Verco's medical opinion, and, in the view of the police, the intimidation of witnesses by Cassotti's fascist associates. It is likely that these confederates also secreted away the murder weapon and that other key item of material evidence, Fantin's cap. The police were firmly of the belief that the severity of the victim's head injuries as verified by autopsy indicated that Fantin had been assaulted with a blunt instrument. But the military medical officer who performed the autopsy refused to confirm this probable hypothesis, favouring the theory that the injuries 'could' have been caused accidentally. This doubtful opinion influenced both the military Court of Inquiry and the coroner to bring in the contradictory finding that Fantin had been murdered by possibly accidental means. This meant that the coroner's finding of murder was undermined by being founded on the attribution of a *modus operandi* appropriate to manslaughter. Rather than being crystal clear, as Venturini alleges, the coroner's finding was therefore as clear as mud.⁹⁸⁴ It is little wonder then that Crown Prosecutor Chamberlain decided not to rely on the equivocal not to say compromising medical evidence of Dr Verco and exercised his prerogative to accept the assailant's plea of guilty to manslaughter. This he did on the advice of the police regarding their failure to secure proof positive from eyewitnesses or any other source.

Chamberlain's decision was in fact essentially a matter of discretion made in the ordinary exercise of his office. The charge against Casotti was altered to manslaughter and then persevered with as such for legal reasons as Chamberlain later stated in court,⁹⁸⁵ not

primarily because, as Nursey-Bray alleges 'the Government, the Army and the... Security Service'⁹⁸⁶ wanted to cover up the tension in the internment camps which a murder charge might have implied. As we have seen, the alleged parties to this high conspiracy were not in agreement. The truth is that the Government in the person of Evatt, backed by Curtin, outmanoeuvred the Army's rearguard action over the death of Fantin. The conspiracy theory is moreover chronologically defective. Chamberlain made his decision quite early in the judicial process, in late December 1942, as comrades of Fantin complained to Evatt, alleging that the hearing of the lesser charge had been brought forward 'to forestall attempts to probe it further.' This they conceived to be evidence of 'the efforts of the military authorities to present the case as an accident.'⁹⁸⁷ As we have seen, far from acceding to official pressure, Chamberlain *offered* a possible reinstatement of the charge of murder on January 14 1943, and the Army officers present responded not by covering up the matter but rather by arranging with the Crown Prosecutor for further investigations at Loveday. On February 6 Kirkman informed Simpson that Chamberlain was satisfied that the fresh evidence collected could sustain an upgraded charge, but was considering the legal issues this would raise.⁹⁸⁸ By the end of the month, Chamberlain had discussed with the Security Service (and Simpson with Evatt) his conviction that he lacked legal grounds to upgrade the charge against Casotti to the original indictment of murder.⁹⁸⁹ Thus the influence exerted by Evatt's Security Service, probably in the form of discrete inquiries given its lack of jurisdiction in the matter, encountered a Crown Prosecutor whose mind was already demonstrably exercised by legal problems. This is the proper response to Venturini's query as to what happened to the charge against Casotti in February 1943.⁹⁹⁰ Nonetheless these accusations of Nursey-Bray et al raise the question: If there was no high official conspiracy in the Fantin case, was there a subterranean local one?

We have seen that with the exception of Captain Verco, and possibly of Lt Col Dean, the military at Loveday had been involved in no such group effort. In any case the abuse of office hypothesised above on the part of Colonel Dean was to the detriment of Dr Verco as much as anyone else, and so cannot be considered a conspiracy. Certainly Lieutenant Jury of the Intelligence Corp energetically strove to bring evidence of conspiracy to murder to light. Moreover the scheduling of the case was in accordance with the rights of the accused to a speedy trial, and reflected the ordinary pressure to discharge the cause list of the December Sessions of the Supreme Court. The belief of the 'Fingers' that the judicial process had been brought forward probably represented a lack of legal experience: They simply did not realise

that a *hearing of the charge* was imminent pending the pleasure of the Court and that it could have such decisive implications for the *subsequent* trial months hence, as they had been advised. In addition, the Crown Prosecutor as much as stated in open court when the case against Casotti duly came to trial in March 1943 that had the original medical evidence been more forthright, the Crown would have made more of it, and opposed the plea of manslaughter. Of course Chamberlain stressed the fresh evidence come to hand, not the ambiguity of the medical testimony reluctantly admitting that a severe blow had been inflicted, on which the Crown Prosecutor relied concerning Fantin's head injuries in contesting the defence plea for clemency. The fresh evidence had indeed altered Chamberlain's opinion as to the possibility of relying on the accurate reportage of cranial injury in Dr Verco's otherwise equivocal testimony.⁹⁹¹ But it must be emphasised that these further police inquiries had been officially instigated. They had come about as a result of the visit to Adelaide in mid January 1943 of the Director of the Army's Dept of POWs & Internees, Col. McCahon. He had been concerned to see that the case was conducted in a manner beyond reproach in view of the accusations which had begun to circulate.⁹⁹² These concerns, howsoever motivated to safeguarded the Army and its reputation for fair dealing, issued in genuine and effective measures to secure and protect witnesses against Casotti. These witnesses actually gave evidence at his trial.⁹⁹³

Much has been made by Nursey-Bray of the fact that Evatt intervened in the case during the intervening period, in late February 1943. By that time however it is clear that Evatt was not at all interested in the issue of the charge Casotti would have to face. That issue had been dealt with to his satisfaction. The fresh evidence secured at Loveday at the Army's instigation had moved Chamberlain in early February to consider rejecting Casotti's manslaughter plea and restore the charge of murder against him.⁹⁹⁴ But from the beginning Chamberlain feared that to do so might place his prosecution in a false legal position. By the end of the month Chamberlain had decided that he could not be seen to have accepted a plea of guilty of manslaughter from a defendant charged with murder only to refurbish the original charge.⁹⁹⁵ This might have been grounds for an appeal that the defendant had been entrapped into conceding guilt on a lesser charge with a view to subsequently compromising him on the original one. To plead guilty to a charge of manslaughter might after all tend improperly to make a man look guilty of murder. As throughout this case, the conduct by the Crown Prosecutor was motivated by appropriate legal considerations. Overhanging the whole prosecution was the horrible risk that Casotti might be found not guilty if charged with

murder for lack of proof. This was what made his mendacious `confession' to manslaughter so attractive to the prosecution, particularly given the securing of further evidence with which to argue for a stiff sentence, not official interest from Canberra.

Cynics may consider that such a comportment was merely an able cover for deference to political considerations behind the scenes. To address the suspicions which have been raised by Nursey-Bray and endorsed by Bevege and Venturini in this regard, we must scrutinise more closely the correspondence to which we have alluded, which passed between the Adelaide and Canberra offices of the Security Service respecting this case, and the dealings with the Crown Prosecutor reported therein. There was nothing necessarily improper in Chamberlain having such dealings with the military, who as we have seen, had assisted the police and were cooperating with the Crown to secure evidence. Nonetheless when Kirkman, the Deputy Director of Security for South Australia wrote in early February 1943 to his Director, Brigadier Simpson, in Canberra, concerning the fact that Casotti might yet be charged with murder, he did not restrict himself to reporting the fact. Kirkman went on to offer the political opinion that `it is felt that the new charge might involve difficult questions for the Minister to answer'.⁹⁹⁶ It is possible that Kirkman may have shared this view with Chamberlain, but he does not report this, and there is no hint of deference to such concerns in Chamberlain's conduct of the case. As to the Minister, we do not know to what degree if any Evatt shared Kirkman's concerns on his behalf. A direct reply on this score does not figure in the papers which have come to light to date on the Fantin affair.⁹⁹⁷ Nonetheless Nursey-Bray is certainly right that some further communication must have passed between Kirkman and Simpson during February, because when Simpson wrote to Kirkman towards the end of the month he had already been apprised of `the State Crown Law view that Fantin's murderer could not be charged with Murder, as he had already been indicted and pleaded guilty to Manslaughter.'⁹⁹⁸ Probably Simpson had discussed the case with Kirkman in person while he was in Adelaide in the third week of February 1943.⁹⁹⁹

Nursey-Bray is certainly wrong however in mocking Simpson's description of Casotti as a `murderer' as a slip of the tongue, an error that speaks volumes regarding the degree of ideological preconception involved in his view that the authorities were bent on concealing the fact that Fantin had been assassinated.¹⁰⁰⁰ When Simpson wrote after his retirement from the Security Service that the Fantin case was one of `plain, unadulterated murder',¹⁰⁰¹ he was not being inadvertent, but speaking plainly on a difficult matter. With

few exceptions the officials who were caught up in the Fantin affair appear to have adopted the law abiding view that their personal professional interests and the prestige of the institutions they served were best protected by propriety. The fact that Simpson alerted Kirkman that he had informed Evatt that 'we had discussed this matter with the Crown Prosecutor'¹⁰⁰² hardly proves that undue political influence was exercised. The same phrase would more naturally refer in context to a discussion of the procedural fait accompli which had been taking shape since the whole issue of amending the charge had been raised by the fresh evidence secured by the police in January at military instigation. The exact character of the discussion is moot, and probably will never be known. This second reading has however at least the virtue of being consistent with the understanding of Col. McCahon, who wrote to Simpson shortly after Casotti was sentenced:

It appears that the charge of murder was not sustained despite the assistance given by both our Departments to the SA Crown Law Authorities in connection with the collection of the evidence.¹⁰⁰³

It must moreover be emphasised that when Simpson wrote to Kirkman to report Evatt's concerns about the political sensitivity of the case, the matter of the charge was no longer an issue, as Nursey-Bray, Bevege and Venturini would have it. What then was Evatt concerned about? It is clear from the text of this same letter that Evatt was 'particularly anxious that, when the hearing takes place, it should not be such as to offer unnecessary criticism of the Army's management of internment camps.'¹⁰⁰⁴ What exactly was Evatt talking about? Who did Evatt think might offer such commentary in the course of proceedings? What business of Evatt's was it that any comment was made, and what power did he have to affect matters? What did any of this have to do with the charge to be laid against Giovanni Casotti?

Let us address these questions seriatim. The Deputy Director of Security had spoken without delay to the Crown Prosecutor as he had been requested to do. They did not further discuss the charge against Casotti, which was a settled matter. What Simpson asked Kirkman to address was the possibility of the Judge hearing the case *passing remarks in sentencing*. The Crown Prosecutor had the local knowledge to be reassuring, since he did not 'consider that the particular trial judge is likely to offer any comment on the aspect you mention', a view which the Deputy Director was able to confirm 'from my personal knowledge of the

Judge'. Nonetheless the Crown Prosecutor undertook to have a quiet word with His Honour Justice Richards.¹⁰⁰⁵ In effect after Simpson's mid February visit to Adelaide, Evatt was not concerned with the charge as such at all, but only the 'aspect' of its political implications. He was merely concerned that the bench not embarrass the Army 'unnecessarily' and explicitly. He seems to have been quite reconciled to the Army wearing any unavoidable implicit opprobrium such as might emerge between the lines of press reports on the legal proceedings. Evatt had no power to press his concerns upon the court, which as a state tribunal was utterly outside his jurisdiction as Commonwealth Attorney General. This is why the back channel of the Deputy Director's good offices with the Crown Prosecutor as Deputy Master of the Rolls of the Supreme Court was adopted.

Purists might prefer that such influence had never been brought to bear. This is however an unworldly view. Evatt was a democrat fully committed to winning a war against fascism. He was not about to see the courts become a forum for views which might detract from the credibility and effectiveness of an instrumentality that was vital for his war aims. If the Army was fallible he was willing to protect its prestige, and make it beholden to him in the process as he wound down the regime of preventive internment. Evatt with all his faults was not quite the high brow naif he is sometimes made out to be. But nor was he a devious hypocrite, using his high office to alter an indictment and pervert the course of justice. Evatt acted properly in this matter within his commission as a Minister of the Commonwealth for legitimate political ends. As such he was in the best, Italian sense of the word, a true Machiavellian, that is to say, a politic statesman.

If any public official contributed to the 'burying' of Fantin, in the literal and metaphorically political sense, it was not Evatt but Lt Colonel Dean, a veteran who loved what labour combined with land could do. Dean managed Loveday as he managed 'Karinya, his Moculta property, as a show piece, and Loveday became under his command the most productive economic unit in the Army. If he had been less concerned with producing vegetables and read more intelligence reports, he would have had a better idea of what was really going on in his camp. Fantin might even have survived internment. In that sense, the Colonel may have unwittingly contributed to the death of Fantin. Once he had Fantin's death in custody before him, Dean seems to have panicked. A man awarded the DSO for his coolness in command under fire, he was also a creature of the military hierarchy who had been saddled with the poisoned chalice of local authority over internment arrangements.¹⁰⁰⁶

He can have expected little support from his superiors under the circumstances, and appears to have acted in the twilight of his career out of social terror. He deserves our sympathy as well as our condemnation for a fault which secretly blighted a distinguished career, perverting the course of justice and causing pain thereby to others, Fantin's comrades in particular.

One last shadow hangs over the official handling of the case, on which Cresciani and Venturini lay great emphasis,¹⁰⁰⁷ and this is the allegation that racism played a key part in the decision to proceed with the charge of manslaughter against Casotti. It is true that on March 2 1943 Kirkman reporting to Simpson attributed to Chamberlain the view that the manslaughter charge would have to be persisted with 'on account of the majority of witnesses being aliens'.¹⁰⁰⁸ Nonetheless it is clear from the context described above that this unfortunate consideration, adumbrated very late in the proceedings, was merely one among many. It smacks indeed of a rationalisation of dubious significance as belated as it was regrettable. In any case Kirkman's attribution of this view to Chamberlain is undermined to the extent that the prosecutor did in fact rely in court as we have seen on alien witnesses examined through translators, notwithstanding the problematic reception such a necessity may have occasioned.

The main responsibility for the miscarriage of justice which occurred in *R. v. Casotti* lies not with the Australian authorities, but with the Italian fascists who plotted the assassination, executed it, and then spirited away material evidence before intimidating witnesses and successfully perjuring themselves. No amount of cultural criticism can upgrade to primary status the purely secondary responsibility of the Australian authorities. The Fantin affair was not so much a legal travesty as a social tragedy which brought no joy to anyone concerned.

#34: Conclusion: Credibility & Critiques.

A hundred witnesses. Not one talked. All making a phone call at the time they hit him...none of us like to think it's like that but it happens all the time that way. No witnesses. No crime. No justice.

Aulich The River's End p245

We have pursued the Fantin affair as an historical case of methodological interest. Since Herodotus historiography has been constituted, like the other sciences, by research into the nature and logic of human affairs. This study is the investigation of an investigation into a murder. It is detailed, even gruesome, because any decent reconstruction of a murder must be, especially when complicated by miscarriage of justice and allegations of political scandal. Naturally it reads like a detective story. This is a deliberate literary and methodological feature. The original 'histories' of Herodotus were, let it never be forgotten, literally 'researches' or investigations. The historiographer Collingwood argued indeed that detective fiction embodied the essentials of historical awareness, and expressed a modern renaissance of classical inspiration¹⁰⁰⁹. In this respect these researches have deliberately pursued a balance between verification and interpretation which supercedes the trendy inclination for the latter which characterised the late twentieth century revolt against positivistic fallacy and the uncritical primacy of the fact.

The Fantin affair which emerges from this scrutiny is infinitely more textured and interesting than the associated conspiracy theory which has passed in recent years for criticism of the state and Labor in government. The Australia of 1942 was certainly ethnocentric and suspicious of political diversity. Fantin would never have been interned otherwise. But his death does not show its institutions, though fallible, to have been corrupt. Quite the contrary. The killing of Francesco Fantin was not dismissed by those who counted as an insignificant episode in some sort of spaghetti stand-off. Although Minister for the Army Forde did disgrace himself by doing just that, this is less an expression of government policy than of the limitations of a minister thought by the Evatt circle to be a prisoner of his departmental officials.¹⁰¹⁰ Indeed Forde's foolish opinion was arguably a measure of the limits of that Minister's influence in the inner councils of the Curtin government, at least in so far as internment policy was concerned, which by late 1942 was firmly in Evatt's hands.

Forde's defensively apologetic views seem moreover to have been current only in the upper echelons of his own Department. They do not appear to have been passed down the chain of command to the officers who dealt directly with the Fantin case at Loveday. Men on the spot like Lieutenant Jury and Detective Sergeant 'Tracker' Gill displayed humanity and integrity, investigating the killing without fear or favour. Perhaps they were animated by now dated concepts of British justice. But in any case they applied them as if they were universal values, as Evatt was later to do in fighting Menzies' assault on civil liberties.¹⁰¹¹ In as much as elements of chauvinism were involved in the Fantin case, so also were some of the first whispers of what developed into multiculturalism and a greater social and political pluralism more generally.

Murder is always socially significant. In the case of the killing of Francesco Fantin, it had moreover a political and historical dimension. This inquiry thus explicitly endorses the implicit compliment paid the memory of Fantin by a pioneering generation of social historians. It would accordingly be ironic if we as citizens of a more diverse, multicultural society were, as Nursey-Bray as has done, to minimise the stature of Fantin and the significance of his murder. Nursey-Bray identifies the significance of Fantin's death in 'political myth', to wit the supposed need of his comrades to make of him a heroic martyr to justify their cause.¹⁰¹² Thus Nursey Bray effectively vindicates Casotti's perjury in making of Fantin an accidental victim, a 'reluctant hero...who did not want to continue to confront fascism' when in fact it was his determination 'to give increment' to his propaganda efforts that angered his murderers. Nursey-Bray then goes on to add insult to injury by arguing that the death of Fantin was exploited by his comrades to give a mythological prestige to their politics.¹⁰¹³ In fact Fantin was recognised by his peers and the police as 'a leader of the Anarchist party'¹⁰¹⁴. We ought not therefore to accept this invitation to trouble the theorising of Henry Tudor about 'political myths' to understand the outcry over the death of Francesco Fantin.

Some conceptual clarification is therefore in order. Fantin was a martyr in both the canonical and metaphorical senses of the word, a person who died not seeking death but consciously bearing witness to a creed in the face of it. As we have seen, Fantin took every reasonable effort he could to provide for his own safety, short of ceasing to tell his fellow internees the truth about fascism. It is in this sense that Italians still speak on occasion of political 'martyrs', and they mean nothing mythological by it. Two examples spring to mind,

suggesting how broad the modern category has become, both of them homosexuals who died apparently as a result of homophobic violence, and certainly in suspicious circumstances: the Italian poet and cineast Pier Paolo Pasolini and the English academic and Adelaide law lecturer Dr George Duncan. The lives and deaths of both men are regularly publicly commemorated by the progressive and homosexual communities to this day, another feature of the modern concept of martyrdom. Such a usage was known in Fantin's day to fascists and antifascists alike.

In the wake of Fantin's death his comrades implied indeed that he had transcended the apotheosis of Christ, which was at once a frame of reference and a superseded paradigm. A card published by a memorial committee of Italian antifascists of Australia featured a photograph of the young Fantin above the subtext CHRIST WAS NOT VANQUISHED ON THE CROSS, [HE] WHO DIES FOR LIBERTY IS IMMORTAL. Fantin was a much-loved comrade of notable significance in his milieu in his day. His assassination and the subsequent miscarriage of justice wounded them in their affections and aspirations. It was for these perfectly concrete, natural and normal reasons that his peers proclaimed that the death of Francesco Fantin 'burns in our hearts'. Accordingly they celebrated his lifetime of commitment and final self sacrifice for the cause.¹⁰¹⁵ The death of this humble activist, one of the comparatively few individuals in Australian history to be forced to pay for his political convictions with his life, involved national policy issues of continuing historical significance, and the reputation of one of the most distinguished Australians of any era. It deserves accordingly to be examined with care and respect.

In conclusion, we must dismiss Nursey-Bray's superficial dissent from the 1944 assessment of the Australian Security Service that Fantin 'was murdered as the result of a long and carefully planned campaign against him which was initiated in Rome as early as 1927.' Nursey-Bray admits that Fantin was the subject of constant surveillance from 1927, not noting that this was precisely the point, going on to compound his error by twice affirming that the Security assessment was wrong because 'there is no evidence that this involved any intention to murder him'.¹⁰¹⁶ There was of course no futurological 'intent' to murder Fantin in 1942 dated Rome 1927, but to note this is to make a fallacious argument of perfection. There were no such plans to murder Berneri or the Rosselli brothers either, but beginning with a campaign of surveillance which the fascist police state was carefully organised to conduct and maintain for years if necessary

they too were murdered when circumstances matured. When Mussolini invaded France in June 1940, the Consular network in Australia, which was the infrastructure of that surveillance together with the branches of the Fasci Overseas constituted as part and parcel of the regime after the seizure of power, were proscribed. Well might it be asked then how the death of Fantin was encompassed at all?

The answer is that the assassination of Francesco Fantin was encompassed by Italo-Australian elements of the regime left behind when its institutional structure in Australia was uprooted. This is the important truth which Nursey-Bray superciliously glosses over in his rush to be wiser than the spooks. We have argued above, the master mind of the assassination of Fantin was Dr Piscitelli, the North Queensland medical businessman who orchestrated its timing and execution. Francesco Ianello was the organizer of the necessary support functions of surveillance and the recruiter of the executioner Bruno Casotti. These were but the principal elements concerned. But the assassination of Fantin and Berneri and the Rosselli brothers would have been inconceivable if not for the foregoing organisation and surveillance which preceded the completion of the necessary conspiracy in each case, howsoever autonomously they were put into effect by force of circumstances. Piscitelli, Ianello and Casotti et al acted independently of Rome, but it was to Rome that they owed their schooling in terrorism. In this sense, the assessment of the origins of the plot to kill Fantin had antecedents going back to before 1927, to the foundation of the fascist movement as a terroristic plethora of death squads with aspirations to chauvinist grandeur at the service of the liberal capitalist status quo ante in Milan in 1919.¹⁰¹⁷ Fantin was, as his comrades proclaimed, a classical victim of fascism, fallen in the farthest flung reaches of the antifascist diaspora, even as a new dawn of democracy was in the offing, just as Wilfred Owen had died a generation before in the last days of 'the war to end all wars' which had fathered fascism in Fantin's tumultuous youth. Francesco Giovanni Fantin is thus fully entitled to be numbered as one of the martyrs of the Italian resistance to fascism, in which he participated in adolescence and maturity on two continents, in his own small way like Garibaldi a 'hero of two worlds'. He is at least as significant a figure as his countyman and fellow activist Raffaele Carboni, historian of the Eureka Stockade, recently accorded the honour of a biography.

The sequelae of the Fantin affair endured into the next decade. In June 1944 Tommaso Saviane wrote to Marco Tardiani concerning the campaign 'for the defence of our

martyr.' 'I see little possibility of reopening the case', he told his Brisbane correspondent 'but if we all work together sensibly in expounding the case, there is the possibility to repatriate the assassin to Italy.'¹⁰¹⁸ On 5 February 1947 Il Risveglio reported 'The Assassin of Fantin deported'. Disappointed in their brightest hopes of justice, the patience and tenacity of Fantin's friends was rewarded with the achievement of a secondary objective. In February 1949 the London Consulate asked Miss Elena Rubeo, an Adelaide woman who had served as an intermediary in the past, to collect official particulars of Casotti's conviction.¹⁰¹⁹ Perhaps Casotti was attempting to rescind his deportation and return to his family in Western Australia. In any event, the CIB was still corresponding on the matter in August 1954.¹⁰²⁰