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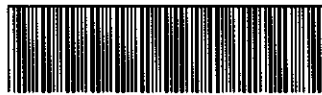
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**State coercion and worker solidarity in Italy (1915-1918):
the moral and political content of social unrest**

by

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Introduction

In dealing with the political aspects of popular protest and working class unrest, I feel it is essential, at the outset, to look at the question of whether or not there was a real risk of revolution in Italy during the war. Or, rather, whether the Italian ruling class actually feared such a possibility. The answer to the second question is without a doubt affirmative. Political observers were extremely sensitive to the developments in Russia, and were convinced of the similarities between that nation and Italy. From the spring of 1917 onwards the fear of revolution never left the ruling class. It was an old fear, which the Italian bourgeoisie shared with that of other European countries, but it was rendered more acute in Italy by her economic and social set up and the political instability which had characterised the struggles between the various political groups during the nation's initial phase of industrialisation - the first decade of the century, dominated by the leading figure of Giovanni Giolitti. This fear, which at times reached levels of sheer panic, was particularly strong in the autumn of 1917, when to the worker and peasant protests which had shaken the country in the preceding months, was added military collapse. For Italy the disaster at Caporetto marked a turning point in the history of the war and also, to a certain extent, in that of the Italian ruling class. It was this event which led the bourgeoisie to heal its internal divisions and launch a new programme of intervention and organisation in social control.

I wish therefore to begin with a glance at this "fear" of revolution which held the entire ruling class in its grip, and, conversely, at the people's expectations of revolution. I will then go on to examine the specific nature of the Italian situation in terms of the socio-economic structures and the forms of political organisation when Italy entered the war. This will be followed by an analysis of state intervention policies for social control, that is to say, the programme for the recomposition of the whole of society - a programme which was to work along quite traditional lines, firmly based upon the repressive legislation adopted when public order was at risk, and upon the new strategies of intervention in the areas of production and labour, put into practice through the institute of Industrial Mobilisation (MI). The close relationship between agriculture and industry in Italy makes it impossible to study worker unrest without considering the events taking place in rural areas. I will therefore attempt to identify the motives behind the social protests in the country and the cities and follow its progress before going on to examine the workers' attitudes in more detail. Lastly I will deal with some aspects of the psychological changes which occurred in Italy during the final year of the war.

The Great Fear

"(Our need) is but one - limit invasion prepare resistance - don't see or think about anything else - consider all of us instruments of this need - use us - in my mental state of pain and distress I have only pure emotions - sacrifice us all if necessary but succeed - excuse unusual form of ministerial telegram but we are in revolutionary phase and must act energetically - take all responsibilities we will follow you - but do not return without definition of complete military programme and Allied project - may His Majesty see dangers of uncertainty and postponement - may he too use all his means - Italy must be saved even through our own total sacrifice".¹

After the retreat at Caporetto the then Minister of the Treasury, F.S. Nitti, sent this coded telegram to the Prime Minister, Orlando (in the war zone where he had gone after a meeting with the allies at Rapallo), to communicate his distress and his personal conviction that the military disaster had already set off a "revolutionary phase". This preoccupation had taken over the Italian ruling class some time before. The fear that in Italy, as in Russia, a revolutionary experience could occur had been spreading through the political world since the spring of that year, following the February revolution. Initially, however, the governing class had had no clear vision of the nature of this danger. Indeed, for the first few weeks, the February revolution was interpreted as a "pro-war" revolution, that is, in favour of more intransigent military conduct. Consequently the government's (and indeed the monarchy's) fears were directed towards those in Italy who appeared to aspire directly to such a ambitions, that is to say the most extreme interventionists, whether revolutionary (Mussolini) or democratic (Bissolati), linked to certain sectors of the Supreme Command, and in particular to Cadorna, whose had recently developed extremely close relations with Bissolati. This interpretation meant that the Crown in particular, and others of the governing class, feared a revolution which would bring a republic to power, as had happened in Russia. In the spring this fear had become extremely powerful, but it gradually diminished as news from Russia started to indicate that the revolution and the fall of the Tzar had not favoured a military revival or resolved the problems of internal order, thus also weakening the interventionist, intransigent front in Italy.²

As knowledge of the social disturbances in Russia, and of the increasing power of the Bolsheviks reached Italian observers, and as, contemporaneously, the Italian countryside and cities became theatres for ever increasing unrest, the main fear became that of peace: a separate peace imposed by the internal conditions of revolt and shortage of supplies. A form of peace then, that was not victorious, but which would have confirmed Italian political inferiority in the international context and, on the domestic front, the defeat of the political currents which had wanted the war. In this second phase, when revolution was linked with peace, the fear was essentially that of the political victory of the pacifist adversaries whose return to strength was still believed (or at least was stated publicly) to be tied to the growth of the pacifist movement within the country. In this period (summer 1917 - a period which saw the workers' struggles intensify) some interventionist elements developed a project for a military coup. This possibility - the actual consistency of which is still very unclear - was, however, abandoned for a variety of reasons, mainly because of the obvious risks involved

at a moment when social protest in the country had reached its peak (again the experience of Kornilov's failed attempt served as a lesson). On 19th June Bissolati, who had abandoned his previous rebellious leanings, confided to the director of the Tribuna, O. Malagodi, "If we do not proceed cautiously, a catastrophe could ensue. If the madmen of war come out into the streets, compromising the organs of the Law, what happened in Russia could happen here; the revolution for the war would be followed by the second wave, the surge towards peace which would overwhelm everything. At a time like the present we must not play with the crowd, not even that organised into clubs or parties".³

Even into October the prospects of a military coup had not been totally eliminated. As Giolitti was to observe to Malagodi, referring to the hypothesis of a military government: "I will not say, and I do not want to believe that that was how things were; but it is true that throughout Italy it was believed to be so".⁴ On the eve of Caporetto the political crisis passed with the formation of the Orlando government, but the fears of the possibility of insurrection remained. Previously, during the summer months, the problem of supplies and the possibility of a revolution born out of hunger had seriously worried political leaders. "Whether or not the war ends - wrote Nitti to Sonnino, the Foreign Minister, on 23rd July - hunger and revolution are threatening us". A few days later, using Russia as an example, he warned Boselli, the Prime Minister, that if food and coal supplies were not to arrive, hundreds of thousands of workers would be made redundant and revolution could break out from one moment to the next.⁵

After the Turin insurrection in August, set off by the bread shortage, and despite severe police measures applied in regions where social tension was at its most acute, fears also intensified with the reports which prefects and military authorities with responsibility for surveillance in factories sent from the principal cities, all indicating the possibility of a simultaneous general workers' strike, while the fears of revolts against rationing and of military collapse persisted. It is not difficult to appreciate that news of the rout at Caporetto, and the interpretation of this episode as a military strike - advanced by Bissolati, who had gone to the front in person and was therefore considered credible, and which anyway coincided with the famous Supreme Command bulletin - gave rise to the idea that there existed a plan for total insurrection linking the front with the areas behind the lines (moreover, the enemy had for some time been convinced that revolution was imminent in Italy). The "great fear" did not only have the ruling politicians in its grip: it had also taken over the Crown and the officers fighting at the front.⁶

The concern for the future of the nation continued into December and the first weeks of 1918. "No matter the direction events take, we must anticipate troubled, almost revolutionary times... Any province could be a base for revolutionary ferment; none is unimportant" noted Nitti, in reference to doubts on the efficiency of some prefects.⁷ In a cabinet meeting on 10th January all those present agreed on the exceptional gravity of the situation, and on the home front's limited capacity for resistance given that many cities had essential provisions which would not last for more than a week.⁸

At the end of February, thanks to allied support, the food situation started to improve. The fears, however, remained; now the political class feared the country's reaction to the failure

of a military offensive. On April 23rd Nitti wrote the following words to Orlando, "If it doesn't succeed, we will be facing ruin and revolution".⁷ The greatest danger of revolution, however, during the final year of the war, was considered to be the relationship which might develop between workers and soldiers (as the October revolution had shown), under the direction of the intransigent wing of the Socialist party.¹⁰ Although the victorious outcome of the conflict appeared to succeed in averting immediate danger, the fear of revolution would now remain with the ruling class, and was to be a basic element in favouring the subsequent victory of the reactionary fascist line.

But what was really in the minds of the population throughout these years? There is an enormous amount of evidence to suggest that in every region of Italy, in the cities and in the country, people's reaction to the sacrifices and hardships of war was to appeal for peace and to hope for revolution. This phenomenon, recorded in continuous progression beginning in the spring of 1917, was greatly intensified in the autumn when news of the insurrection in Turin, kept hidden from the newspapers yet spread throughout Italy and exaggerated by word of mouth, led the population to believe that in some areas the revolution had already taken place. In Sicily there was the rumour that various cities on the mainland had already rebelled; the people of Emilia were convinced that revolt had spread through Romagna and northern Italy, and so on. Already on 11th September 1917 the prefect of Reggio Emilia was able to report that "they talk about the revolution as if it were something that could happen from one minute to the next".¹¹

After Caporetto the hope of revolution and, at the same time, of peace dominated the Italians' thinking. There was the general conviction that the war would be over at Christmas. But disappointment did not cloud their hope: for the whole of 1918 "false news" of peace and of revolution spread throughout the country. In the long wait for the end of the war these hopes often became tinged with millenarianism. Peace and the consolidation of the revolution in Russia turned hope into certainty; it was these sentiments that guided the unrest of the two post-war years - the so-called "biennio rosso".

But did the economic and social situation as it was, really justify the apprehensions which came "from above", and the hopes which instead came "from below"? It is difficult to provide a definitive answer to such a question. However I feel that at this point, it would be useful to take a brief look at the principal socio-structural conditions of the country, at the imbalances which had characterized its evolution throughout the previous decades and which were to be accentuated by the war.

Aspects of the social and economic structure.

As is well known, industrial take-off in Italy took place with a notable delay with respect to other principal European countries. The start of a process of industrialisation had begun in reality only at the turn of the century. It was a process which showed all the typical hallmarks of the late comer; the decisive intervention and prolonged support of industry by the state, the formation of industrial concentrations in protected industry and in particular in the areas of the iron, steel, and metal industries, the rise of mixed banks as financiers, the ac-

centuation of dualism between geographical areas, and the 'scissors movement' between agricultural and industrial sectors. The transformation towards industry took place almost exclusively in the north of the peninsula, with the exception of certain iron and steel, and shipbuilding industries in Tuscany, at Terni, and in Naples, and a number of small manufacturing companies scattered prevalently in the zones surrounding urban centres, the great majority being again in the north of Italy. Until the First World War Italian industrial development was limited both quantitatively and qualitatively. Both in terms of GNP and number of workers employed, agriculture remained the dominant sector, while in industry foodstuffs and textiles predominated. Certain sizeable industrial complexes did exist, particularly among the protected industries; but the industrial network was made up in the main of small or very small industries, which used family labour, either on a seasonal or a domestic basis; at the outbreak of the war almost 80% of companies made no use of mechanical motors and employed between 2 and 5 people; the highest percentage (13%) was of firms with 6-10 workers.¹² Yet despite the formation of an industrial base, Italy was not able to reduce the distance which separated her from the levels of production of more advanced industrial countries, in relation to which her economic dependence became even more accentuated, both from the point of view of finance, but also from that of industry, because of the imports - not only of raw materials, but of partially finished and finished goods.

Because of the war, the industrial structure made a great leap forward to the advantage of the more modern and dynamic sectors (which remained, however, below the average European level). But because of the speed with which growth took place, and because of the manner in which it was realised, development reproduced certain of the original unbalances and reinforced the characteristics of disorder, improvisation, and shortsightedness which had marked it from the beginning. I shall come back to these points. Here I want simply to mention the fact that, from a social point of view, the chaotic and frenetic expansion of the wartime period produced profound lacerations in the social fabric. It is enough to note, for example, that the population of Milan increased from 654,000 to 703,000, that of Turin from 456,000 to 525,000, that of Genoa from 295,000 to 378,000, and that certain firms increased their workforce by as much as twenty times (the Ansaldo group went from 6,000 in 1916 to 111,000 in 1918, for example). And if certain groups expanded excessively, many others developed from nothing, or transformed their works very quickly (in Naples a furniture factory adapted its machinery and began to produce aeroplanes!).¹³

To the confusion produced by the disturbances of war were added, therefore, those problems derived from the transformation of an economy still prevalently agricultural into a modern industrial economy. This level of disturbance and change was probably much higher than in other countries, and played a decisive part in bringing about popular rebellion. In a society where the social and political tissue was very much more fragile than in the older industrialised countries of Europe, an event of such enormous and traumatic significance as the war produced reactions and repercussions which were very much deeper than elsewhere. The war was not only an enormous sacrifice of lives and materials; for the population of Italy it was often a radical transformation of the mode of life and the way of thinking as well.

As far as agriculture is concerned, some progress had been

made during the years of industrial take-off; but this was almost exclusively confined to the Central-Northern areas, and particularly the zones run along advanced capitalist lines in the Po Valley. In Southern Italy, the situation of economic and social stagnation had tended to consolidate in such a way as to become structural. The protection that the state had given to the cereal products of the extensive land estates of the South in the 1880's, and which had continued into the period of industrialization, had had only negative effects on investment and technical modernization processes in rural areas. The dualistic choices made by the Italian state and, in more general terms, the low productivity of a large part of the peninsula - where development was based more on labour than on modernization - meant that, though Italy was basically still an agricultural nation, production did not meet demand and the country was thus obliged to import a large part of essential consumable goods, like wheat, from abroad. This situation, which in peace time had already reached serious proportions, was aggravated by the war, and in certain moments - for example at the end of 1917, after Caporetto, and before allied supplies began to arrive - became truly dramatic. From a social point of view, limited agricultural production made the nation increasingly susceptible to severe food shortages and thus to popular uprisings: these dualistic choices brought endemic misery to the Southern part of the Italian peninsula, which the people expressed in frequent and spontaneous rebellion, and which was in turn heavily repressed by the State.

To return to the dynamics of industrial development, the Italian take-off was characterized by heavy and prolonged dependence on state protected industry, not only regarding the award of contracts, but also the support and salvage operations provided by the state after the failure of risky financial and productive expansion projects. Safe under state protection, Italian industry tended to neglect productive reinvestment, leading to poor technical and organisational levels, which were made up for through intensive utilization of the workforce whose wages could be kept down as the demand for work always exceeded the number of jobs available. Despite the fact that in G. Giolitti's reformist programme, increases in worker salaries were forwarded as a form of compensation for the maintenance of industry's privileges, the abundance of the workforce permitted industries to maintain low wages except for specialized workers - at that time rare and therefore valuable - necessary to the technologically advanced sectors, for example the mechanical industry (where however, due to the highly organic composition of the sector, wage increases had little impact and where the widespread use of piece-work meant that pay rises were compensated with an intensification in the rate of work). In exchange for conceding wage increases, industry wanted to maintain complete control over the organisation of labour, and absolute freedom of movement regarding any normative problems, for example, freedom in taking on workers, making them redundant without notice, discipline at work etc.¹⁴

Low wage levels, long working hours and harsh work rhythms, the relative absence of social legislation, the unemployment figures - these were all elements which weighed heavily on the condition of the workers, and in moments of economic crisis they could soon reach intolerable levels. The Giolittian system of balances only managed to succeed in the first phase of take-off; it could not stand up to the subsequent crises. With the advent of unbending attitudes among the factory owners and the risks of redundancy, the workers' claims, after an initial period in which

disturbances kept, to a large extent, to purely economic problems, began to extend to normative problems, particularly those of worker control over discipline, of employment and dismissal (along with those of regulations, work rates etc.). Through these claims, the various categories of workers succeeded in finding common points of interest and action. Among the metal workers who obviously represented the focal point of the pre-war struggles, despite moments in which there was no form of communication between the skilled workers and the mass of unqualified workers, some clearly defined elements of homogeneity and unity had developed by the end of the Giolittian period, elements which were determined both by job insecurity and by the difficulties inside and outside the factory which were common to all.

In Italy the years immediately before the outbreak of the war were characterized by great social tension. While the entrepreneurs were shifting to increasingly rigid positions, and attempting to subdue worker resistance with long lock-outs, inter-company agreements not to take on dismissed workers, or to block salaries etc., worker demands were being directed increasingly along normative and political lines. The 1912 and 1913 metal-mechanic workers' disturbances, directed by sector unions (besides the socialist union, FIOM, the anarchist union, USI (Unione sindacale italiana), had established a following particularly among steel workers and miners), demonstrated that there existed a mature working class, ready to fight at length for unitary objectives (a collective contract), for the admission of the unions in the factories, for the control of employment, strike discipline etc. The worker conquests certainly did not please the entrepreneurial world, which was never to forgive Giolitti for not using force to block the strikes. For some time the main industrial groups had been pressurising the government to abandon its neutral policy regarding labour struggles and to activate a decisive policy of coercive control of the situation. Though they did not succeed in obtaining such a change in policy from Giolitti, they were to succeed with the war government with the added bonus, at least for the first period of conflict, of the exclusion of the unions from negotiations. Even if the effects of the 1913 crisis brought about a certain withdrawal of the workers, the tension within the nation, fuelled by the worsening economic situation, continued to grow. The first months of 1914 were marked by a series of general strikes culminating in "Red Week", the longest and most far reaching popular uprising of the Giolittian period, sparked off by the killings of three workers at an anti-militarist assembly, which gradually spread through Romagna and the Marches. It underlined the fact that the disturbances could no longer be contained within the factory, but were extending to the entire population.

The Italians had nurtured sentiments of distrust and hostility towards the state since the moment of Unification; the regime to which, since its birth, the unified state had subjected the masses, and the subsequent modernization processes, had made it impossible for any collective sense of belonging, or of national identity to develop. Though municipal cohesion and, in the large cities, identification with the local quarter was extremely strong, and though there also existed a form of popular interregional solidarity (with respect to emigrants, for example), the popular classes did not identify with either the State or its leaders. In certain areas, where socialist influence had been stronger, this concept of separateness had given rise to the formation of a political conscience making the Socialist Party, and

in some areas, the anarchists, the only possible point of reference. This was the case in the Po Valley, which saw the most intense agricultural labourers' struggles, and in the main cities of the Centre - North where the worker movement was developing. It is well-known that the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) was the only party (together with the Serbians) of the Second International to declare itself against the war and against its own country's intervention. The unions, though in rather ambiguous terms, also took up the same position. In actual fact the policy "not to adhere, not to sabotage" adopted by the PSI, and the unions' policy of cooperation, cast doubt on the anti-interventionist vocation of Italian socialists. Nevertheless the formal condemnation it had voiced greatly influenced national public spirit, and created a fundamental difference between the situation in Italy and that of the Western allies. The population remained convinced that the war could have been avoided, and during the war years they continued to see the PSI as the idealized focal point of an opposition which the regime was trying to silence in every possible manner without ever quite succeeding. The existence of an organisation, no matter how precarious it became under the restrictive and repressive norms, meant that, at a local level, a small front of militants managed to survive and introduce the principles of peace and revolution among the population.

It was with the person of Salandra, who succeeded Giolitti in March 1914, that the union was realised between the forces of southern agrarian conservatism (of which Salandra was the principal exponent) and the new industrial interests. It was an alliance which required that government policy should take a new direction, in the sense of restoring social order and renewing the old hierarchies which had been disturbed in the disorders of the recent years by the entry of the popular classes on to the national scene.

The war accentuated characteristics and tendencies which were present in pre-war society, and also brought into play new mechanisms in social and political relationships. For the entrepreneurs, both old and new, attitudes which had been their hallmark in previous years were strengthened; the request for the maximum of support from the State, the total exploitation of labour, strong resistance to wage concessions and opposition to demands for labour legislation, the tendency to wish to exclude the unions in order to be able to carry out negotiations directly with the workers. These positions were fully satisfied in the first phase of the war, when - in the conviction that the conflict would be relatively short - the government adopted a political programme based essentially on coercive measures, both in society at large and within the factories. In the second phase of the war, starting approximately in the last months of 1916, the government - faced with the continuation of the war and the appearance of clear signs of public discontent (shown in 1917 and 1918 in unrest in both town and countryside) - favoured a policy which, while it continued to crush dissent with extremely harsh preventative and repressive measures, nonetheless allowed room for some degree of meditation in the economic demands of workers and also envisaged a higher level of welfare provisions for the population. As government changed its position, so the pattern of unrest was also modified; the violent rebellion of 1917 was replaced, in the last year of the war, by a greater discipline in conflict within the factory and a less impulsive protest in the country at large.

Government measures for social control.

The passage from neutrality to the decision to intervene in the war on 24th May 1915 was determined by a series of interwoven motives: economic (the risk of international isolation which would interrupt all financial and commercial relations and lead to recession, the obvious advantages for industrial sectors linked to war production, etc); political (the opportunity to ratify the defeat of Giolittian politics and to reshape socialist power); and social (the opportunity to forcefully interrupt labour disputes and to reconstruct the by-now compromised social order through new relationships based on a hierarchical system). It is difficult to say which was the predominant motive, and nor is this the place to attempt such a discussion. Given the atmosphere of social tension which had preceded the war, the hope of creating a newly structured nation, as had already happened in other belligerent countries in August 1914, can certainly be considered one of the determining factors in the Salandra Government's decision to enter the war despite the opposition in Parliament, where Giolittians and Socialists held the majority. Only a war, with a phase of compulsory peace on the labour front and the militarization of society would permit the hierarchical reorganisation of class relations; only a war, with the extension of power into both the social sphere and that of the most detailed daily activities and mental attitudes of the population - in other words, an all encompassing control of every single aspect of an individual's existence - would allow a process of complete integration to take place.¹³

Government policy followed two main lines: the measures directed at reshaping the whole society, which included the passage of the coercive norms discussed later on in this paper, and specific economic and social measures in the field of production, activated through the new institute for Industrial Mobilisation.

As far as the special legislation is concerned, the principal objective at first was that of controlling the Giolittian and socialist opposition, and forestalling any possible popular demonstration of protest; given the situation in which Italy had entered the war, without the consensus of the country or the majority in parliament, a certain harshness in the measures was to be expected. But as the war went on the repressive legislation took on the characteristics of persecution and terrorism. This accentuation of authoritarianism occurred immediately following the wide-scale working class unrest of the summer of 1917, and increased further after Caporetto. As one legal commentator wrote "an obsessive delirium took hold of legislators and judges; under the pressure of an exaggerated and unjustified idea of salus publica rage rather than right prevailed in the administration of justice."¹⁴

Wartime legislation was almost completely removed from the control of parliament, the activity of which was extremely low in Italy during the war - equalling the unenviable records of Turkey and Austria - given that all legislative authority in matters of defence, public order, and the economy was placed in the hands of the executive. Using its powers, the government passed a series of regulations based on the legislation of the state of seige applied at the end of the nineteenth century, which had the effect of restricting, indeed, virtually abolishing, all civil liberties, including the right of opinion. The decree which forbade all public assemblies and private meetings, if the number of participants and the scope of the meeting was clearly not private,

permitted the repression of demonstrations in the countryside (punished very severely, with prison sentences of several months and fines running to hundreds of lire - extremely heavy for peasants who usually had no monetary income), of all strikes (for which the MI was provided with more specific measures), and of political meetings. It was also permitted to search and close political associations, and powers were provided for internment for reasons of security and for house arrest. Another decree allowed for heavy punishment (up to six months imprisonment, fines up to 1000 lire, i.e. an average low-to-middle yearly income) for people who spread news "not conformant with the truth".¹⁷ This measure was further tightened after the summer of 1917 when a decree 'against defeatism' allowed courts to inflict terms of imprisonment of up to 10 years and fines of up to 10,000 lire for anyone who committed, or instigated the commission of, an act which could 'lower public morale and lessen the resistance of the country'. The terminology was so vague and all-embracing that it was possible to persecute anyone suspected of defeatist ideas, even if not expressed, thus giving considerable room for private vendettas.¹⁸

If these measures concerned all citizens, special laws were applied to certain zones - the 'war zones' - and to certain categories among the population, in particular workers employed in industries controlled by the MI.

The war zones were at first border areas (but also certain provinces thought to be of strategic importance, like Mantova and Cremona in Lombardy, Ferrara, Piacenza, Modena, Bologna in Emilia, etc.), but after the summer of 1917 and after Caporetto came to include - often not for military reasons but for motives of public order - most of the north of Italy where industry was concentrated. In these zones military power was absolute, in the sense that the law was subject to military regulations and applied by military judges and courts, who used the military penal code. It is hardly necessary to state that in these provinces the powers of repression were enormously reinforced.

Lastly the MI. This new body, which formed part of the Arms and Munition under-secretariat (later Ministry), allowed state institutional intervention within the realms of production and labour relations. In the sphere of production the state took on the tasks of regulating the purchase of raw materials and their subsequent distribution, controlling international exchanges and payments and promoting the expansion of various sectors of production (using financial concessions, authorisation for subcontracting, the selling of raw materials at political prices, and, above all, the award of contracts). The state had become practically the only client on the market, and as an incentive to stimulate production it was willing to purchase at exorbitant prices, fixing the quantities required in advance and anticipating up to 80% of the bill under the generalized accounts regulations. Furthermore, the Italian government, unlike the other allied governments, carried out no checks on the technical and financial workings of the companies; thus public administration knew nothing about any product's effective cost. This represented the traditional policy of economic intervention, begun at the moment of industrial take-off, but here it was carried to extreme by the pressures of the nation's abnormal requirements.¹⁹

Within the sphere of labour relations, state intervention was instead totally innovative (though some theoretical and practical suggestions of what was to come had begun to develop in the period leading up to the war)²⁰ Intervention was based on the

principle of the militarization of the working class employed in those factories declared as auxiliary, or manufacturers of materials contributing to the war effort, and on the compulsory arbitration of labour disputes, but with no form of governmental intervention in the sphere of the organisation of labour. It responded to the demands for coercive intervention that Italian industry had made to an unresponsive state in the final years of Giolittian power.²¹

MI regulations were fundamentally based on three principles: compulsory work; the abolition of the right to strike (replaced by arbitration); and disciplinary regulations enforced by the armed forces within the factories, and punishable under the military penal code. From the moment Italy entered the war, workers were forbidden to hand in their notice or take time off work, for even very brief periods. Such actions were treated as desertion (as is well known, in other belligerent countries similar norms were only introduced in the second phase of the war). Italian workers were thus prevented from taking advantage of a previously unheard-of situation, where the jobs on offer exceeded the demand. The fact that it was impossible to hand in one's notice prevented workers from moving into better paid jobs, thus freezing wage levels.

Management of the MI was completely in the hands of the military. It was directed by an army officer, General Alfredo Dallolio, and made up of a Central Committee and several Regional Committees (CC and CR) presided over by military personnel. In the initial phase of conflict, the MI was a dependent of the War Ministry, while the officers responsible for disciplinary surveillance in the factories answered to military Division Command. From the summer of 1917, however, the undersecretariat for Arms and Munitions became a Ministry in itself (with Dallolio as Minister), and the MI took over responsibility for disciplinary control, so though this aspect remained in military hands, it was no longer tied to Division Command. In this second phase (marked by these modifications, but which had in actual fact begun earlier, during 1916) the most innovative MI activities, linked to negotiation with trade unions and the increasing introduction of controls affecting companies began to be put into effect. I shall return to this aspect later.

Arbitration was carried out by the regional committees (where industrialists and worker representatives - though the latter were only nominated on company recommendation - sat alongside the military committee members) when the opposing parties in a dispute did not succeed in reaching a direct agreement; at a later hearing, the dispute could be sent to the Central Committee, whose sentence was beyond appeal. CR action was heavily influenced by local economic and political interests. It therefore differed from place to place, and often from dispute to dispute. CC behaviour was more uniform, but up until mid-1917 it excluded trade union participation. As the regulations which had led to the formation of the MI did not envisage state interference in the organisation of labour, arbitration was only supposed to apply to economic problems, concerned with wage levels and structure, reduced incomes due to fines, overtime etc. Instead, none of the labour disputes dealt purely with wages; the problems that the CC and the CR had to face outside the economic field concerned factory working conditions and above all, the disciplinary system.²²

It was in fact through the disciplinary set-up that the most rigid control over labour was achieved; and it was this same set-

up which provoked the strongest worker reactions, and led the unions to demand the elimination of the MI after the war. Military officers were personally responsible for ensuring that disciplinary rules were respected in the factories. The rules were based on a specific set of regulations which provided for punishment - ranging from fines to referral to military criminal courts - for all forms of worker offences, from slowness (considered "idleness") and late arrival, to refusal to obey, "undisciplined behaviour", "defeatist and unpatriotic activity" and unjustified absences etc. Some of these rules were normal in Italian factories, which had always been particularly strict; others originated from the military penal code; still others, for example those passed in November 1916 restricting absences of over 24 hours and placing internal technical factory hierarchy on the same level as military hierarchy (so that any form of insubordination shown towards a superior was punishable under the military penal code) were born out of the specific conditions of the moment.²³

It is impossible to make quantitative assessment of the repressive measures that were adopted as there is no statistical data available on this subject (nor would it be very useful in terms of an analysis of the reactions they stimulated, as it was frequently the punishment of work companions and not personal individual punishment which provoked disturbances). Nevertheless such measures were undoubtedly widespread and very severe, at least as long as disciplinary control remained in the hands of military command (i.e. until July 1917). Imprisonment for a few days' absence, being sent to the front for minor incidents (or in cases of suspected union activity) were frequent occurrences. It was also normal practice to send workers who didn't meet the required rates of production to the front on the official pretext of "health reasons". Fining, however, was the most common form of punishment, often with very heavy fines inflicted for the most inconsequential offences. This was a system which caused no halt in production and, instead of the money being channelled into a redundancy and sickness fund, as was prescribed by law, it often found its way back into the hands of the companies. The means of repression adopted differed from place to place. The surveillance officer alone (with company management approval) was responsible for deciding the levels of repression and the forms it should take. But it was the arbitrary decisions and the unjustified or unfair reasoning behind the repression that made it even more fearsome (and loathsome). To give an example, it was common practice to fine skilled workers for jobs that came out badly, even when this was due to the poor quality of the raw materials, or to send workers to prison for arriving late, fine or imprison them for not showing respect or for arguing with colleagues etc.

Due to the complete regimentation of the workers in this first phase of the war, the companies in the relevant sectors of industry were free to dictate methods of payment, time-tables, work pace etc. Using the pretext of the overriding necessity to keep up production, working conditions reached much worse levels than in other belligerent nations (this was also due to weaknesses in the trade unions, as will be discussed later). Overtime became compulsory, the special norms for night shifts or work on holidays were abolished, shifts reached lengths of up to 16 hours; substantial increases in piece-work rates meant that the working pace intensified; work was performed at forced rhythms, often in makeshift and invariably crowded workshops, which only very rarely provided any form of safety precautions (this is demonstrated by the huge increase in the number of accidents at

work and by reports of the tragic accidents which occurred in the factories).²⁴ Wages rose slightly in some of the factories under MI control, as part of a policy encouraged by Dallolio who urged the industrialists to, "concede of your own free will, before you are forced to", and to direct the mood of discontent on to an economic and not disciplinary or political plane. Inflation soon eroded the gains made by the pay rises (the lira lost 80% of its value, but was even weaker when compared with the cost of essential goods) and they very rarely managed to overtake the increasing cost of living. The rises were awarded as part of high-living cost allowances or tied to production levels (thus giving an excuse to further increase work rhythms), but never as part of a basic wage. Besides, many companies - especially the steel industry, safe under government protection - did not respect the decrees requiring pay rises to be put into effect (the mechanical industries, on the other hand, particularly in Turin, proved much more willing to make certain concessions). Medium and small companies and, in general, those which were not under MI control, also resisted the introduction of any economic concessions. In the war zone, where the MI had no (or very little) power, the situation was even more serious. Here there were no challenges to the factory owners' decisions.

The intensive exploitation of labour was the major factor behind Italy's increased production. As Italian industry continued to follow the policies it had adopted when it first took off, it experienced none of the organisational or technological processes of modernization which the other countries at war had been able to put into effect during the war years. Paradoxically, the war halted the process of rationalisation; in the firm belief that the conflict was not to last long temporary measures were adopted, based predominantly on the breakdown of working processes into elementary stages which could utilize the old machinery. This obviously implied increased physical exertion for the worker and eliminated the need for work qualifications or skills.²⁵

In the first phase of the war, the arbitral system excluded the participation of any union representatives. It was only in the second phase, from mid-1916 onwards, that FIOM representatives and some collective bodies could take part and, from July 1917, were absorbed into the CC. For a considerable length of time, however, the hard line, aimed at excluding representative organisations, triumphed.

The turning point within the MI was mainly determined by the situation developing within the country. The coercive norms no longer succeeded in preventing disturbances among the workers, their discontent was expressed in the growing numbers of episodes of insubordination and the increase in absences at work. Meanwhile, as noted above, the disciplinary norms were revised to become even more severe in November 1916. In this period, Dallolio urged the disciplinary bodies to avoid giving out collective punishments. It was feared that this could spark off even more far reaching disturbances (as indeed often happened), which would be harmful to production, but also, at that point in the war, to the maintenance of the internal front. Dallolio wanted to limit the savage exploitation which was occurring in many factories and was the cause of numerous worker protests, and soften the rigorous disciplinary practices which provided another cause for rebellion. State interest in fact differed from the interests of the industrialists: the latter's main objective was the maximum exploitation of the labour force, while the state was also concerned with the effect that working conditions could have on public

order. Through imposed discipline the industrialists often aimed to achieve the complete subordination of the worker and re-establish the unquestionable authority of the entrepreneur, rather than improve production efficiency.

The MI's programmes put into effect in 1916-1917 followed the example of what was taking place in other European countries and aimed to introduce more attentive state control of factory life (with hygiene/sanitary inspections, safety regulations, insurance programmes etc.), and, at the same time, render working conditions in the different sections and factories as uniform as possible, in order to resolve, at least in part, the existing chaotic and improvised situation and eliminate the most obvious cases of abuse. Disciplinary control was removed from Division Command jurisdiction in response to the need to eliminate excesses in repression and the arbitrary power, and consequently different stances, of the various Commands. This withdrawal of power was also a reflection of the split within the military hierarchy itself, which reached its most critical point in the summer of 1917, over the best strategy to adopt in the face of the threat of insurrection, and was a division which saw Dallolio taking up a much more flexible position than that of Supreme Command. In following this political line, which had also been adopted by Giolitti, Dallolio intended to isolate economic demands and satisfy them as far as possible, while remaining totally intransigent with regard to political expressions. He remained absolutely firm on the second of these points, urging that even workers who were only suspected of being political militants be sent to the front, and advising that the areas of greatest tension become officially recognized war zones.

Though government intervention and control was extremely limited, indeed much less than was normal in other countries, and despite the fact that the main objective of most of the innovations introduced was to improve production (or, as in the case of the decision to accept union representation, to calm fears over how to maintain social peace), the state's reform activity was not welcomed by most of industry's representatives, and from 1917 onwards a slow but continuous process to undermine Dallolio's power, accompanied by criticisms of the MI, began.²⁷ At that moment, and later, when the risks presented by the "biennio rosso" brought demands for more decisive state intervention, most of the industrial world did not in fact want mediation, but the type of military administration which had been attempted in the first part of the war.

The conflict between Dallolio, the industrialists and Supreme Command (the stances adopted by the latter two groups often coincided) was echoed by public opinion, due to a campaign launched by certain organs of the press against the working class. This moral crusade - which used the traditional tools of denigration, for example illustrating workers' alcohol consumption and the time they spent in bars after work, their relaxed moral behaviour, and their habit of showing off expensive clothes etc. - came under criticism from Dallolio, who, on more than one occasion, went as far as to describe the extremely difficult factory working conditions to both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. He also denied that the workers received the "wonderful salaries" that this defamatory campaign claimed, and proved that earnings were below the levels of price increases or, at the very least, paid out for the utmost exertion at work.

Orlando, Minister for the Interior and Prime Minister from October 1917, was also against the policy of pure repression pro-

posed by Supreme Command and the most extreme interventionist political groups. His policy of mediation, aimed at maintaining relations with the Socialist Party, even seeking dialogue and cooperation with the reformist wing (parallel to what Dallolio had tried to achieve with the unions), was halted after the Turin insurrection and, above all, after the collapse at Caporetto. Threatened with military, social and political catastrophe the intransigent tendency won over, bringing a total rupture of relations with the opposition. Socialist leaders, and grass-root militants were imprisoned and sent to internment, and the widespread application of special legislation stifled every form of popular dissent. At the same time, however, the government also launched a policy which was more sensitive to the problem of consensus. It included a series of new welfare measures (increased subsidies and leave, exemption from military service for the agricultural population, the introduction of insurance schemes for service-men, improvement in the distribution of essential goods etc.) and a ceaseless propaganda programme which, as will be seen later, had an unquestionable effect on the middle classes, but probably also had results in rural areas, as the parts directed at the peasant population were based on the promise of future compensation for sacrifices made during the war, compensation which would come in the form of "equal" land distribution. This was the aspiration of the entire peasant population, including the agricultural day-labourers, as the subsequent success of programmes founded on the concept of individual private property were to prove.

The nation at war. Peasant and rationing protests.

The political situation in Italy at the moment when the decision to intervene in the war was taken was very different from that of the other nations which had entered the war almost a year before. The contrasts between the interventionists and the neutralists made it universally clear that there were no pressing internal motives for Italy to take part in the conflict. If the neutralism of the political leading class, which had dominated the country in the previous decade, had made its impression on the middle classes in particular, then the Italian Socialist Party's opposition to the war provided a point of reference for the working classes and a part of the peasant population; catholic pacifism also had its effect, but it was above all the traditional hostility and mistrust conditioning most of the popular classes' attitude towards the State that prevented any of the mass demonstrations of loyalty that were witnessed in other nations. As the Caporetto Inquiry Commission was to point out after the war, most of the nation had not wanted the war, but had suffered it.²⁰

Despite all this, at the moment of the decision to intervene, no great peace demonstrations were held: the special legislation passed only days before entering the war and the obvious prejudice of the police in favour of the interventionist demonstrators and against the pacifists, in fact led the socialist organisations to give up their attempts at protest. Only in Turin - the only city where there was a high concentration of industry - was a general strike announced, and tens of thousands of demonstrators confronted the police, with the death of one person; but the arrest of some demonstrators and prominent socialists,

the military occupation of worker headquarters and the threat to declare a "state of war" in the areas where demonstrations were held, succeeded in blocking the protests. In actual fact very few people had been able to foresee how long the war was going to last: almost everyone was convinced that it would be over very quickly. Furthermore the state of economic and psychological uncertainty in which the nation was floundering meant that a decision of some sort was desired: when it came it had an almost liberating effect.

In the first months of war, protest was linked predominantly to the departure of the young men called to arms. But this phenomenon, which at first was most intense - with entire communities rising up, shops shutting, strikes etc - faded as the months passed. In assessing this first phase of relative social peace, another contributing factor should also be remembered: during the months preceding entry into the war many economic sectors were facing a period of depression - with the effect, in social terms, of aggravating the already serious problem of worker unemployment. The recovery of production which came with the war, led to an almost immediate broadening in the employment market. The possibility of employment succeeded, in the cities first of all, in soothing the material and moral tragedy brought about when the head of the family left for the front. At the same time a series of legislative provisions in rural areas (the extension of contracts up to three months after the conflict was over, the freezing of rents etc.), the increased profitability of produce due to inflation, the good agricultural year, and the community solidarity which, through the help afforded by neighbours, made up for the absence of the men who had been called up: all these conditions contributed to the fact that the first phase of the war passed without significant demonstrations of protest.

However, in Italy as in all the belligerent countries the situation changed drastically in the period starting in autumn/winter 1916. Demonstrations of a certain size had been held throughout the year, particularly in the South, but also in some Central areas (especially in Tuscany) and in the North (Milan, around Mantova and Piacenza). In the South the demonstrations took on the appearance of real uprisings, usually occurring after chance gatherings for the departure of soldiers, for the payment of subsidies or for government requisition of agricultural products. The demonstrations were usually started by women, and subsequently involved the entire community. They often became extremely violent - the demonstrators took out their anger on public buildings, and often on the homes of wealthy private citizens, or those renowned for their pro-war opinions - and tormented the South while the war lasted, diminishing only in the final year. With time they lost their essentially punitive nature: the revolt was no longer aimed at re-establishing the violated norms of co-existence, but attempted, though as yet without any clear method, to set up a new order, built on the foundations of the new hierarchies which had come with the war and which were, therefore, linked to the sacrifices suffered: moral hierarchies, which inevitably contrasted with the existing social order, as was emphasised by the spontaneous phenomenon of occupation of uncultivated land, which began during the war years in some areas of Lazio and spread in the post-war to much of the South.

The peasant disturbances of the Centre-North were of a much sharper political nature. Here the organisational network of the PSI was much more incisive, and the trade union tradition much stronger. Also, the productive structures in certain areas of

central and northern Italy were based on small or very small enterprises, often positioned on the outskirts of urban centres or in rural areas, and using prevalently casual peasant-worker labour, or putting out work. This structure was reinforced during the war; hundreds of new, small workshops sprang up, independently, or tied to other larger factories which gave out contracts by tender. This situation produced close links between factory work and agricultural work. During the war much of the rural labour force was attracted to factory work in the cities. This was, however, considered temporary work and did not always mean that the worker changed his residence: as is demonstrated by the increase in absence from factory work in peak periods of agricultural work, many new workers still lived in the country (or at least maintained their families there). These characteristics, typical of an industrial structure still not detached from agriculture, permitted a significant exchange of experiences between workers and peasants. Consequently, in certain areas the atavistic resentment between the countryside and the town was attenuated. Thus in Lombardy, Piedmont, Liguria, Tuscany, and Emilia, country and town found themselves united in protest against the war in disturbances which, as was the case in the areas around Asti and Biella in Piedmont, and in the area north of Milan in Lombardy, lasted for days on end (the protest broke out in a certain place and, after police intervention, moved on to a neighbouring town). These too were quite violent episodes and thus stirred deep emotions in public opinion which, especially after the huge and lengthy disturbances in Milan shortly after the February revolution in Russia, which reached as far as the city's peripheral areas, posed the real problem of the possibility of a popular revolution in Italy for the first time in the war period. In this period citizen revolts in the central-northern areas of the peninsula were numerous, some reaching levels of violence equal to those in the South with public transport set on fire, shops looted, and buildings damaged, barricades and confrontations with the police.²⁷

What were the reasons behind the protests in the country and in the cities? The fact that their occurrence intensified in the period starting in the winter of 1916/1917 suggests the living conditions of the people as the most prominent cause. Naturally the shift in behaviour was not sudden: the situation had been changing gradually as the end of the war drew further away (the military failure of spring 1916 linked to the Strafexpedition, as well as causing thousands of "useless" deaths, made it obvious to everyone that the war was not going to be over briefly). But it was during the winter of 1916-1917 that living conditions became extremely hard to bear. The problems, which Italy shared with the other belligerent nations, but which were accentuated in Italy, were to a large extent tied to political choices of the past which had not been modified during the war, and whose effects were considerably aggravated by the conditions of that moment: Italy's heavy dependency on food supplies from abroad; the decision to favour inflationary decisions in order to make up for State spending; and lastly the inability to organise an efficient distribution system of foodstuffs and welfare.

Inflation, which in 1916 had already forced the cost of living up by 50% and was rapidly rising, had drastically reduced living conditions: salaries could not keep up with price rises; wages had undergone only slight changes, forcing the fixed-income middle classes into extremely difficult conditions. Soldiers' families were often reduced to hunger due to subsidies which could

not even guarantee the basic needs of almost always numerous families. Above all, from that winter onwards, shortages of primary consumer goods began, starting with bread. This situation was not, however, uniform throughout the nation; the norms on the movement of foodstuffs and on official prices had created much confusion resulting in greatly reduced availability of products in certain areas (in some cases, reaching the point of total absence), and excesses of the same products in other neighbouring areas (and often leading to their material deterioration).³⁰

There was a huge difference between the large cities on the one hand and towns, villages and rural areas on the other. In the cities poverty and hunger reached dramatic levels, whereas in agricultural areas survival, at least, was guaranteed. The overriding problem in the rural areas was above all the lack of manpower. "The daily sacrifices in many small towns and villages - stated the report by a Public Security inspector sent to Sicily - consists, more than anything else, of the absence of the sons, the husbands... To this is added the intense regret that, for a lack of strong working bodies, their own land, the land to which, from father to son they are tied with every fibre of their existence, must remain abandoned and neglected".³¹ In the cities suffering was not only caused by the lack of primary foodstuffs, but also by other acute problems connected to the perpetual price rises, the lack of housing (in some large cities crowding reached levels of 6-7 people in one room), of heating fuel (the cold led to increased rates of disease contraction, particularly in the number of cases of tuberculosis, and at the same time heavy increases in alcohol consumption, also brought about by the lack of calorific intake from other food sources) and of welfare assistance (as the Caporetto Inquiry Commission pointed out, "the work of social assistance, though encouraged and subsidised by the State, always remained dependent on local and individual initiative", and therefore differed from place to place.³² The state of living conditions in the cities was not only demonstrated by the extremely low individual calorific intake, but also by the infant mortality rates, the highest of all the European nations at war.³³

Consumption decreased drastically especially in the urban centres where the population had increased greatly due to the immigration towards industry. The system for bread and flour distribution, set out under government norms, was often based on 1911 census figures, with no consideration of the population increases. In such areas, the problems of the city were magnified: official prices were often not respected, relief came less frequently and social assistance rarely came into effect.³⁴ The psychological insecurity tied to the new social situation added to the material hardships. It was no coincidence that these quarters saw the most serious popular revolts of the entire war period, that of Milan mentioned previously and that of Turin in August 1917.

The spark which ignited the urban revolts was almost always the problem of food rationing. This carried with it both material and moral implications. The spectre of hunger evoked ancient fears of famine, which re-emerged among the poor in moments of crisis, and immediately stimulated movements of rebellion. As has already been pointed out the scarcity of primary essential goods was tied to the inefficiency of distribution networks: after interminable queues, people would discover that supplies had run out. This drama, however, existed almost exclusively for the poor: anyone with financial possibilities could resolve these

difficulties in a number of ways (black market, buying up ration cards etc.). In an attempt to deal with this inequality the government firstly placed limits on the consumption of luxury goods, and subsequently introduced official rationing of primary essential goods; but the regulations were, for the most part, easy to get round.³⁶

The gap which existed between the wealthy and the poor was therefore widened by the war. For the former it led to a situation of over abundance bordering on the superfluous, for the latter to a question of basic subsistence. The differences did not stop at the problem of food: they penetrated entire ways of life and, above all, ways of death.

In the cities the wealthy appeared to continue their old way of life with their servants, luxuries and social engagements. Theatrical shows, charity recitals, and other public entertainment continued during the war, indeed, they became more frequent - as if forming a collective challenge to the horrors of war and death -, until they met with the stricter regulations introduced after Caporetto. The prosperity of the newly rich members of the population, the "sharks", the war profiteers, was even more obvious. The Inquiry Commission of Caporetto affirmed that when compared with the "quick, often immense fortunes accumulated by industrialists, traders and agents, thanks to advantageous war contracts", the poor people's existence became increasingly miserable each day, with back-breaking work, the long, wearing and often useless search for food, the diseases, and solitude. "The gay and care-free life of the big city" - concluded the Commission -, "and the neglect of combattant soldiers' families" gave the impression of "one Italy which was fighting a war and one which was enjoying itself".³⁷

It soon became common opinion - and it was never possible to totally deny it - that it was simple for the wealthy to avoid conscription to the front by posing as workers in factories or as officials in the civil service, or if actually conscripted, by managing to sit the fighting out in the rear lines. The idea that the war was not one single destiny, just as dreadful for everyone, and that the suffering and death was certainly not distributed equally, made rapid progress among those living in the cities.

The mood was no different in the rural areas. Here, as mentioned previously, living conditions were, on the whole, less dramatic than in the cities, though they were by no means easy. But the fact that the majority of the men called up came from the countryside - or to be more precise, from the poorest rural classes - served to underline the injustice and stirred feelings of rebellion against the privileges enjoyed by the "squires". One last factor which nourished the resentment felt toward the State and the war "profiteers" were the requisitions which were carried out more in the manner of plundering forays.³⁸

Thus as the war continued, popular protest began to take the form of an accusation against the prevailing social and political system. If the hatred felt towards the "profiteers", the "hoarders" and the "speculators", exploded during the revolts with the plundering of food warehouses and damage wrought to the "squires' " houses, then the resentment and aggression now felt towards the State and its representatives was even more intense. As those of the time admitted, the inefficiency, the favouritism, the prejudices, the abuses perpetrated against the consumer and an "accumulation of unnecessary suffering pushed even the calmest characters to exasperation".³⁹ Thus the idea that the people

had the right to re-establish the norms of a wounded justice through rebellion and revolt grew in the minds of the population; the Russian revolution provided the real-life example.

To conclude, the motives behind popular protest must be sought out both in objective elements, living conditions which had reached limits of endurance, and in subjective ("moral") elements, which were closely interwoven with the former. Deprivation became intolerable when people began to feel that it was unnecessary, and above all unequally dealt out. The rapid and profound transformation of habitual ways of life, tied to the complete upheaval of what had been daily practice provoked both by the war and the transformations of the socio-economic fabric, also contributed to render the situation more tense. Changes which at other moments in history would have taken place over decades, had taken place in Italy in the space of just over three years. The precariousness of these new social situations could only lead to an increase in emotional instability, and consequently magnified reactions to real or assumed violations of the laws of co-existence.

The reasons for working class unrest.

As the government had intended, the declaration of war, the application of special legislation throughout the country and military norms in the factories hit the working class and its representative bodies, and set off a long phase of disorientation. The norms were in fact also used as a preventative measure: on the basis of them, young socialist clubs and anarchist associations were disbanded; many local militant socialists, union leaders and worker representatives were sent to the front, to internment camps in Sardinia or, in some cases, imprisoned. The regime of Industrial Mobilisation went into operation in the autumn of 1915 and its regulations spread to cover an ever increasing number of companies, working on the principle that companies where protest and worker unrest were developing were placed under the control of the Institute. A symptomatic case was that of Ansaldo in Genova, which passed under Industrial Mobilisation control after worker disturbances pushed the company owners, the Perrone family, into placing pressure on government exponents.⁴⁰ The special legislation hit the experienced workers in particular - those who had led the first pre-war struggles. As they were indispensable to the company they had often been exempted from military service, and therefore, from a normative point of view, were in a more vulnerable position than other skilled workers. In general, the war and conscription took the youngest, often most dynamic and active workers away from the factories.

As regards discipline, the working class found that the trade unions were not an effective means of confronting the excesses and repression. The metalworkers' trade union, FIOM, gained official recognition - firstly in 1916 from a commission for piecework regulation and then in 1917 from the Industrial Mobilisation's Central Committee⁴¹ - by reducing its objectives to the resolution of exclusively economic disputes; as it stated in its defence at the end of the war, the choice was forced upon it by the need to temper, in some way, the injustice and the most intolerable excesses within the factories; in actual fact, in certain areas, Turin for example, where the company owners were more willing to make wage concessions, the high number of disputes re-

solved through arbitration and the low number of strikes indicates that FIOM's action was effective. The desire to remain in line with official PSI and CGdL opposition to the war rendered FIOM's collaboration with the arbitration bodies ambiguous, limiting the efficacy of the contribution the union could make. At the same time, the union's collaboration induced a certain diffidence among the workers. Nevertheless, it was perhaps this split personality and above all the fact that, in the final year of the war, the union succeeded in establishing some of the most advanced negotiating platforms in that sector, that made FIOM numerically an extremely powerful organisation at the end of the conflict. In fact, in the very last months of the war enrolments multiplied. The conditions of exceptional exploitation and coercion of the last year convinced many of the new working class to enrol in the union, and, in fact, these new members pushed FIOM towards less corporative positions, which took into account the interests of the entire working class, such as the struggle for the eight hour day, for minimum wage levels, and against unemployment.⁴²

The anarchist organisation, USI, provided workers with better defence in the field of labour organisation. This association was active above all among miners and steel and metalworkers; it led bitter struggles among the Ligurian metalworkers and the Milanese foundry workers, in the steelworks at Terni and Piombino, among the miners of San Giovanni Valdarno and Castelnuovo dei Sabbioni; but due to its structure, more closely linked to the local Camera del lavoro than to the national federation, and to the repression suffered by their representatives, particularly in 1918, the USI could not provide a stable point of reference. The new forms of worker representation were, instead, the internal commissions, spontaneously formed bodies which were also directed at the new intake of workers. The government preferred them to the unions, as did the company owners, for they were temporary and limited to the single factories and their relative disputes, (but, as is well known, they quickly became permanent organs of worker self-government and a means for expressing the most advanced demands of control of management and of labour organisation).⁴³

Finally, the workers could not expect much support from the PSI, which was floundering in a crisis provoked by the collapse of the Second International, by the fact that one of its most prestigious leaders, B. Mussolini, had gone over to the other side, by its isolation within the new political line up, and by the split between the two tendencies: the reformists who adopted a policy based upon national solidarity and the intransigent group which remained firm in its opposition. Socialist members of Parliament were involved in action against the excesses of the special legislation and the disciplinary norms, but in practical terms the irregular, infrequent calling of Parliament rendered their actions only relatively effective. New, leftist, currents, which were forming in some urban areas - particularly Naples and Turin - had an unquestionable influence on the course of the disturbances. They were able to direct the protests towards political objectives, and help bring to maturity an awareness that the struggle against power in the factory, had to become a struggle for power both within and outside the factory. In these instances the activity was usually carried out by single militants, or sometimes by certain Camera del lavoro (whose actions were almost always interrupted by police intervention). Though operating without any central organisation or directives, the individual

militants and a socialist inspired solidarity network were responsible for activity providing pacifist propaganda on a national scale, and for the task of re-establishing organisational structures within the factories, of rebuilding relations between different departments, different job categories, and between the groups of new workers and the established workers.⁴⁴

The vast growth of production structures - which Italy experienced more than other countries due to the poverty of the industrial apparatus she started off with - led to a complete upheaval of the labour force composition. It opened the way to a flood of inexperienced workers, mainly peasants and, from late 1916 onwards, women.⁴⁵ Generally speaking, during the first phase of the war, there was no feeling of solidarity and mutual comprehension between the workers who came from the pre-war experience and the new working class. The former felt hostile towards the newcomers who represented a threat to their professionalism and their continued existence in the factory, the latter were distrustful and isolated. They found they received no support, not only for their demands, but also in cases of punishment or dismissal.

In actual fact, the reasons for the initial discontent and disquiet were different. While the objectives of the professional workers were linked to labour organisation, and therefore to the exploitation which had increased due to the war, the protests of the new working class were mainly connected to the punishments they received for errors caused by their inexperience (fines, dismissal), or to their low wages (justified by their lack of qualifications). On the other hand, as they had come to the factories from more laborious jobs (e.g. the construction industry), or work with no fixed timetable (e.g. agricultural work), the new workers did not protest against the stepping up of work rhythms, or the lengthening of the working day, both of which were points of contention for the professional workers. As they could make no comparisons, they did not complain of the dangers of the work, nor the lack of hygiene etc. They were often forced to work for personal reasons, as was the case for most of the female labour force, and thus, besides making a maximum physical effort (which rewarded them with increased piece-work rates), they were also willing to accept low pay, therefore creating a general wage squeeze. It was certainly no coincidence that women were to prove to be the hardest fighters. In general the knowledge that factory work was only temporary initially led the new labour force to accept levels of exploitation which the professional workers considered materially and morally totally unacceptable.⁴⁶

This difference in attitude towards work rendered impossible the creation of a homogeneous group from the old and the new working classes during the initial period of the war. This factor had its effect on the phenomenon of conflictuality, in that throughout 1916, apart from some unitary protests, which took place in areas where the composition of the working class had not undergone great change (such as in the Ligurian steel works), most of the industrial conflicts were very short, and limited to a restricted number of workers, almost invariably young apprentices and women. The number of established workers present among the strikers was very low. Given that they were more vulnerable to punishment, they were much more likely to use the arbitration system to resolve their cases. As the economist, Riccardo Bachi, wrote in his annual report after the war began, "There has been a total absence of the great worker struggles, the strikes motivated by principle or tendency, the great movements of consensus

and the conflict inspired by solidarity which have characterised recent years"; and again, in 1916, "though the worker's daily life has been lived more intensely than last year, it is still unable to promote vast disturbances directed at general and not immediate ends".⁴⁷

In 1915 and 1916 most of the disturbances involved the textile industry, for the most part outside MI control, with a decline in the involvement of metalworkers, though strikes did continue also in this sector: as Bachi reported, "despite rigorous disciplinary regulations and measures to prevent disturbances, the strikes continued, even in auxiliary plants and within other factories also controlled by the state".⁴⁸ The mechanisms introduced by the MI were slow to get off the ground. And even after the militarization of the factories, the arbitration system did not succeed in completely eliminating the strikes. This was because, especially in the initial phase of the war, those taking their cases to arbitration were almost exclusively the established worker groups, while the new intake continued to react with spontaneous striking, and also because the penalties for striking did not always have a deterrent effect, not even upon established soldier workers, who in many areas represented over half of the workers, so there was no real way of hitting them.⁴⁹

Despite these limits, which were to become even clearer in 1917 and 1918 when worker uprisings multiplied, the institutionalisation of controversies through arbitral bodies, and the coercive system adopted and subsequently made more severe at the end of 1916, succeeded in slowing down worker protest and redirecting it into more easily controllable channels. There is no doubt that during the war, worker conflictuality diminished substantially and changed its nature, with an emphasis on economic disputes, the fragmentation of its demands, briefer protests and the reduced participation of the metalworking sectors.

There are, however, two main reasons which make it impossible to make a quantitative evaluation of the reduction in industrial disturbances and compare the Italian data with that of other European countries: firstly the fact that official statistics are not reliable enough; secondly, and on a more general scale, the fact that the incidence and nature of strikes cannot be used to measure the discomforts and social tension in a period of war. The most obvious case is that of Turin, a city where the level of strikes was below that in other industrial centres (while the number of disputes resolved through MI was higher), and where, in the summer of 1917 the famous worker insurrection broke out.

Let us look at the first point, leaving consideration of the second until we reach the description of the 1917 disturbances. It should be pointed out briefly that the official list of strikes excludes a priori any protests of a political nature. Nevertheless, it is possible to deduce from a comparison with the data revealed in military authority and prefects' reports that the use of the term "political" was sufficiently broad and arbitrary to include an infinite number of disputes, and even some very significant ones, for example, those over work on holidays, or for collective contracts. Furthermore, the statistics do not record the short-lived strikes, nor the worker protests which developed during negotiations of a dispute put to MI arbitration. Thus, quantitative data can only provide us with elements which are merely indicative of tendencies.⁵⁰

For 1915 and 1916, however we have an official source, the monthly "Bollettino dell'Ufficio del Lavoro", which gave certain incomplete data on the reasons behind the disturbances. We can

deduce from this source that, as the months passed, strikes for economic motives increased, connected, in particular, to the increased cost of living, and the reduction in piece-work rates decided upon by the factory owners. In factory sections where established workers still prevailed, solidarity strikes were still frequent in 1915, especially for non-economic reasons (fines, conscription, dismissal for political/union motives etc.). However, because the factory owners reacted extremely severely to the solidarity strikes, they became less frequent in 1916 (though they then picked up in the following two years).

During the first few months of the war there are still records of collective struggles among the metalworkers, especially in areas with strong union organisation (protests in Milan, Liguria, Brescia); then, as time went on, protests occurring sector by sector became more and more frequent, until they became the norm. Later this tendency was again inverted: experience led the workers to seek an internal agreement, as only collective protests fought to the bitter end, closely bound to the union organisation of that sector or that area, was likely to produce any results. At the end of 1916 there are already records of links between the male and female workforce.

Another official source, the fortnightly "Bollettino dell'Ufficio del Lavoro", which in January and February 1917 still gave some information on the content of the protests (but which hardly mentions the metalworking sector, which was almost totally under the control of MI), tells us that at the beginning of the year the strikes were already taking on a much more compact form; that they occurred not only for pay problems, but also for fines, unjustified reduction in rates, and later on for dismissal as a punishment. In 1917, as we can read in police and MI reports, the workers protest underwent great changes in its nature: in auxiliary factories unitary struggles became the norm, determined by the arbitral mechanism which required the presentation of a petition containing collective demands. This can be considered one of the most significant aspects of modernization inspired by the MI.⁵¹

But above all, it was the continuation of the war, the common suffering and deprivation which instilled widespread sentiments of solidarity among the various sections of the working class. When in the face of conditions which hit all workers indiscriminately - severe discipline, the dangers at work, exhaustion due to the work pace, hunger, unfair treatment etc. - the distinctions between the duties carried out within the factory were relegated to second place.

Solidarity was expressed in continual and increasingly intense disturbances, where non-economic motives were given more and more space.⁵² Because of the huge price increases, most of the disturbances centred around remuneration problems;⁵³ often, however, together with the demands for wage increases came attacks on wage structures, on how piece-work was calculated, on minimum wages etc.:⁵⁴ all elements which serve to show how the economic struggle tended to be extended inevitably to questions concerning the organisation of labour. There are however, as I have already mentioned, other reasons which make it difficult, particularly in a period of war, to distinguish between economic and political unrest.

Some of the reasons are common to all European countries: the situation the war had imposed on factories and on society as a whole, with the limitations on individual and collective liberties and the worsening working and living conditions, stirred re-

volt against the government and entrepreneurs everywhere. As the sacrifices grew, even in countries where workers had strongly supported the war, e.g. Great Britain, there was a rekindling of an awareness of the dichotomy between "them" and "us", the difference between those forced to suffer the effects of the war and those who appeared to be immune. The workers' indignation and anger was therefore born of the conviction that certain rules of "fair play", which had been guaranteed at the beginning of the conflict, had now been broken. It was not so much economic factors, therefore, which pushed the working class to reject the social pact as the feeling that an unjust violation of the norms of co-existence had been committed.⁵³

Though these reactions can be observed to a greater or lesser extent in all the belligerent nations, they stood out in Italy where the working class had never shared in patriotic sentiments, and where coercion was certainly more severe. By emphasizing the mechanisms of exploitation and injustice, the war accentuated the processes which were already in progress, making of extreme relevance demands that went beyond the economic and dealt with the work pace, wage structures etc., and above all helping the push towards solidarity to re-emerge.

It was the regime of exceptional measures of coercion which stimulated the collective rebellion and gave rise to a reconstruction of the groups and sections making up the working class. The reaction against the authoritarianism and the loss of professional and personal dignity within the factory became linked with the protest against exploitation, which in turn served to further stimulate the former. Protest often started because of the fines, and was directed against the foreman, who regulated the piece-work timing and therefore imposed the fines; in these cases disciplinary and economic elements were closely interwoven. At other times, a protest, which had started over pay problems, spread to other sections, sometimes, after the punishment of the first group of protesters, spreading to reach throughout the whole factory (such episodes of solidarity were most frequent when punishment was linked to non-economic factors, such as dismissal or being sent to the front for political or union reasons etc.). Often the disturbance ended up on the streets, where it joined up with the peoples protest. The relationship between factory and outside reality, between exploitation and living conditions, between hunger and injustice grew closer every day. In one way it could be said that the moral element, sharpened and stirred by the war, formed the trait d'union between economic protest and political unrest, thus leaving its mark on the entire revolt - anti-authoritarian and pointed towards new social justice - of the war years.

Certain norms of the disciplinary legislation, passed at the end of 1916 when worker ferment was beginning to cause some apprehension, served to render working conditions in the factories particularly loathsome and contributed towards the renewed feelings of unity and solidarity which developed between the established workers and the new intake of workers (mainly women). These norms concerned the punishment as if for desertion of absences lasting more than 24 hours, and the introduction of an industrial hierarchy parallel to a military hierarchy. The former regulation regarded any absence from work no matter how brief, whether for health reasons, family motives or originating in the desire not to leave agricultural work unattended at certain times of the year. This applied, above all, to the new workers, peasants and women, unused to the pace of the factory, and forced

them to work in moments which, under any common rules of coexistence, should not have been taken away from the sphere of individual liberty (this included work in the fields, which for a still fundamentally rural population, was a necessity with its own moral value). The norm also ran into one of the most sacred rights of the skilled labour force: the freedom to leave work at certain times, for example, to attend the funeral of work colleagues who had died in accidents at work (deaths which were much more frequent during the war, and were often caused by accidents unconnected to the capabilities and professionalism of the workers). This regulation, therefore, interfered deeply at a personal level, offending individual emotions and disregarding the class solidarity which was so strongly entrenched among the established working class. The second norm referred to put both personal dignity, independence and professionalism at risk: it became highly dangerous to respond to offences or insults (there were numerous cases of workers being sent to the front as a punishment for their "undisciplined" behaviour, for violent verbal reactions when their wages were not paid etc.); but worst of all, the established working class was obliged to undergo forms of control which were more typical of the pre-industrial tradition, and to see their own professionalism ignored and humiliated by often incompetent foremen, new to the factory (sometimes "shirkers") or who had been transferred from other sections. The order to carry out certain jobs, if obeyed, could well lead to dramatic consequences; if not obeyed, could lead to imprisonment or the trenches.²⁶

It is, however, necessary to make a distinction between the motives which led the established working class to rebellion, and those influencing the new, mostly female, workers. The established working class reacted to a situation which it felt to be unfair and offensive in that it violated certain rights felt to be an integral part of their various trades, and also some of the rules linked to tradition and a reciprocal respect of the "fair play" previously established. At this point the historical memory of the class as a whole was a determining factor, with its past of recent and not so recent conquests, now all a part of the baggage of professionalism. Another element to be considered were the protests against the organisation of labour, which in Italy were based more upon an increase in the piece-work rates, than upon rationalisation, thus stripping professional ability of any value, and thus (as in actual fact sometimes occurred) paying the specialist workers lower wages than the newly arrived workers. The demands for pay increases were further stimulated by the increasing cost of living, and therefore tied to the claims for a "fair" evaluation of the whole question, especially in relation to the vast profits the industrialists were making, and the enormous increases in effort required. These are all elements which served to link economic factors to factors concerning professional ethics and the general morality of social co-existence. On occasion the workers' demands for pay rises were explicitly linked to a reaffirmation of their own identity, the "satisfaction of their own self-respect", the reaffirmation of a working culture within which any upheaval was unacceptable. Even the choice of a certain form of piece-work often derived from the fact that at least it offered an opportunity to organise work rhythms independently.²⁷ Lastly the strikes held during the arbitration negotiations were often related to the fact that the resulting resolutions were often delayed for no reason, or were not respected by the factory owners.

The motives behind the reactions of the new working class share some of the same characteristics - at least as far as regards the increasing cost of living, the relationship between wages and profits, and the levels of piece-work remuneration. But there were also differences which, particularly for the female workforce, were mainly determined by events outside the factory. The fact that the women usually had to cope with organising family life and everyday provisions at home, made them exceptionally sensitive to the disfunctions in the distribution of foodstuffs; women workers often stood in long queues only to find that there were no more supplies in the shops. Besides the shortages of food for themselves and their families, these inefficiencies often meant that they arrived late for work and were consequently fined. This series of imposed difficulties often became intolerable and provoked demonstrations outside the factories, which began to attract growing numbers of workers who were not actually directly involved. The shortage of foodstuffs was a factor upon which a broad base of solidarity was easily built up. It was not always pure hunger which sparked off the protest, but the fact that, when faced with physical effort which had increased substantially, access to sufficient nutrition was considered an undeniable material and moral right. It must also not be forgotten that, though remaining well below average consumption figures in the rest of Europe, certain groups of Italian workers had seen their life-styles improve in the pre-war years and this also made any sacrifices in terms of food consumption more unacceptable psychologically. So even when it was food that was in question, the protest still began with a "moral" revolt.

The uprising in Turin was sparked off by bread shortages, but the situation within the factories was already very tense due to disciplinary action which led to women and boys being sent to prison for minor episodes, which rendered it impossible to have a even half a day off for sickness or mourning. Wages were higher in Turin than elsewhere because the owners of the mechanical industries were more inclined to concede in negotiations: this is another factor which points to the fact that economic causes were not behind the rebellion.²⁶ The severe unrest in Milan was, instead, sparked off by rice shortages; in this case the previous reasons for the tension should be sought in the rapid changes which daily habits had been forced to undergo, and in the aforementioned conditions of inferiority and social disadvantage which prevailed in the peripheral areas of Milan. A few weeks later, writing about the the popular uprising, Francesco Coletti, the illustrious demographic expert, observed, "nothing is more offensive than injustice, whether real or imagined, in the distribution of suffering. It is clear that one new element, no matter how insignificant, is enough... This time the new element was the lack of rice, a food which is customary and liked by most of the people of Lombardy. All the anger that had been accumulating then poured through the crevice that the rice had opened".²⁷

The August insurrection in Turin and the spring disturbances in Milan were, considering the extent and length of the former and the determination and political level of the latter, the most prominent episodes of the war period. Both were strongly influenced by events in Russia - the revolution in February, and the growing power of the Soviet, as the Italian visit of the Russian delegates had made clear. To a certain extent the two episodes marked the beginning of the disturbances and their conclusion (after the uprising in Turin with its bloody end, the whole country was plunged into a phase of repression). Yet in the interve-

ning months between May and August every reasonable sized factory was engaged with labour disputes, protests and strikes, some of which were unitary and lasted for a considerable length of time.

The areas most involved in the unrest were always Lombardy (strikes of Milanese foundry, metal and engineering workers), Piedmont (Biella textile workers, Turin engineering and railway workers), Tuscany (miners in Sesto San Giovanni, iron and steel workers in Piombino and Livorno, textile workers in Prato, mechanical workers in Florence, etc.), Campania (iron and steel, and other metal workers in Naples), and above all Liguria, where there was the most prolonged labour unrest of the whole of the war. It involved all iron, steel, metal, and engineering workers in a struggle for a single contract ('memoriale unico') for the whole category, and culminated in the summer of 1917 in what was virtually a general strike of the sector, following the arrest of 30 workers including the secretary of the union. All the sources on strikes (reports of prefects and military authorities, bulletins, etc.) testify to continuing and increasingly numerous examples of solidarity between old and new working class, between men and women, brought about above all by unjust disciplinary measures, or by the withdrawal of military exemptions from workers who had been involved in strikes (this was the case in the unified protest of iron and steel workers in Terni, or of the violent unrest of all metal and engineering workers in Naples - bloodily repressed), or were union militants (the general strike of Biella textile workers, the strike of iron, steel and engineering workers at Livorno, which created unrest in the whole city, the virtual general strike in Liguria mentioned above, etc.). In general it can be said that solidarity during the war in the metal and engineering sector was strongest among workers in the areas of heavy iron, steel, and metal production, not so much because of the composition of the working class, as because of the behaviour of the entrepreneurs in heavy industry, certainly much more inflexible than their counterparts in mechanical and engineering works in respect of concessions and labour organisation.⁶⁰

Under conditions of total coercion imposed by factory discipline, with the consequent reduction of the worker to a mere cog in a mechanical process, solidarity took on the symbolic significance of the reaffirmation of the unity and identity of a class. Strikes became an act of liberation, a challenge and the retrieval of individual autonomy. In an extremely brief period of time, the measures introduced produced the opposite effect to what had been intended: the new all-encompassing disciplinary power, which was meant to exercise its power over both the physical entity of the worker - forcing him or her to exert to unheard of degrees - and his or her "moral" behaviour inside and outside the factory (where the special legislation continued the repression in force at work), was an essential element in bringing about the fusion of working groups which were otherwise heterogenous, and in providing a fundamental incentive to worker claims for the control over their own work, and over the running of the company itself. It was these two objectives which, from the final year of the war onwards, returned to being the primary goals of the metalworkers' struggles.

The reactions to Caporetto

The military disaster at Caporetto marked the most critical moment of the nation's political and social crisis - a crisis which was projected both "from above" and "from below". Though there had actually been no desire among the soldiers to abandon their posts and it soon became clear that the collapse had been caused by military miscalculations, the confusion within the army to some extent took on the appearance of a collective surrender. As the post-war Inquiry Commission on Caporetto was to reveal, the soldiers' state of exhaustion and low morale - which had already found its expression in numerous examples of insubordination and desertion - had long since changed to an active yearning for peace and for life. In a letter written by a soldier put on trial we can read that, at the front, "all they talk about are their rights and what is owed to them".⁶¹ Officers reported to the Commission that during the dispersal of the army, there reigned an atmosphere reminiscent of a "country festival"; people almost seemed glad to be leaving, "as if they had found the solution to a difficult problem... it was as if the soldiers felt that the war was over". This rejoicing was accompanied by slogans proclaiming social revenge: "for all you bourgeoisie the war is over... we fought it for the rich who wanted all the peasants dead", or, in the words of a patriotic song, "Goodbye my darling, goodbye, I'm off to make the peace" (*Addio mia bella addio - la pace la faccio io*).⁶² Meanwhile the conviction that the war was truly over had spread through the population. As has already been mentioned, the distorted news of the insurrection in Turin had led people to believe that the uprising "demanding peace" had already broken out in certain areas of the country. The news of the October revolution - which the propagandists made no secret of, hoping, this time, to use it as a deterrent - encouraged the popular masses to see Caporetto as an analogous episode. Hope in the outbreak of revolution - with its still confused image and various interpretations, but always with that ultimate promise of greater justice - joined with the hope that the Germans and Austrians would soon come to occupy the cities, bringing with them better systems of government and bread for the people. Countless reports and testimonies from that period confirm that these sentiments were common to every region from the Veneto to the South. As far as the working class is concerned, there was certainly no surge of patriotism which could compare in the slightest with that in other European countries, France for example, at the enemy invasion. The military disaster provoked upheaval in the factories both because many workers had relatives at the front and, in more general terms, because in the face of the deaths of so many contemporaries, exemption from military service afflicted many workers with a sense of guilt. Despite the fact that cases of entire factories offering patriotic support were emphasised, the impression remains that, on the whole, such support was not given freely. In this period there are countless episodes of imprisonment and heavy fines for workers who declared themselves against the war; furthermore the patriotic declarations were always signed by the factory owners or managers in the name of the workers or by the rare interventionist Camera del lavoro.⁶³ It is obvious, however, that while the crisis from below was in progress, no practical force capable of rendering it operational existed. The Socialist Party was unable to find any positive solution to the violent campaign organised against it by the most extreme interventionist forces, which in perhaps the most acute

period of political and institutional crisis since Unification managed to position all the political ruling groups around an authoritarian line of policy, which in turn, in order to succeed, needed to ensure that the PSI was pushed to the margins of political life and totally 'demonised'.

Caporetto therefore marked the critical point of collapse "from above", resulting in serious accusations against Supreme Command and doubts about the monarchy itself. Yet the trauma provoked by the enemy invasion, which almost coincided with the October revolution in Russia, stimulated the classes in power to action. From 1918 onwards, they launched a series of programmes intended to reorganise the structure of the State and ensure the realisation of social control. It has already been noted that in this period there was, on the one hand, an increase in the measures of repression and, on the other, an attempt to set in motion a process of modernization in terms of State social intervention through a series of provisions aimed at the population and through a more systematic use of the arbitration processes employed by the MI. This recovery of central power was accompanied by intense patriotic revival among the middle classes, who expressed their support for resistance through the establishment of numerous associations aimed at spreading propaganda and providing practical assistance. This crusading spirit did not however remain immune from obsessive tones and tendencies to persecute. Shocked at the idea of a foreign invasion which could wipe out all the moral and territorial conquests of the Risorgimento (it was feared that the enemy would reach Milan), that moment in history which had provided the foundations for an Italian national and cultural identity, most of the middle-bourgeois classes adopted that interpretation of events which placed the responsibility for the disaster on "internal enemies". On the one hand this flood of patriotism did push private individuals to intensify their solidarity activities and the moral and material assistance they provided, but, on the other, it soon became tinged with fanaticism and led to "witch-hunts" for those who, whether for ideological motives or because of the conditions of hardship were careless enough to express publicly aspirations which did not fall into line with the "total" patriotism required to prevail throughout the country. After Caporetto a form of collective hysteria led many to suspect neighbours, passers-by, drinking companions or fellow-train passengers of treason. Anonymous letters and reports of defeatist activity, which often also contained elements of private vendetta, piled up in the authorities' offices.⁶⁴

In this new cultural and political climate, the popular and worker protests underwent some changes. With the declaration that almost all of Northern Italy was now officially a "war zone", it became impossible to hold mass demonstrations like those which had united country and city in the previous year. In this region there were also changes in the factories. In those which did not come under the MI, the military command had absolute power; and auxiliary works should formally have also been placed under the same jurisdiction and no longer under that of the Regional Committees. In practice, a series of decrees and circulars permitted the MI to maintain its control over the situation. It is easy to understand, given the circumstances, how the influence of the institute had grown, and how the working class now found itself increasingly under the power of its jurisdiction. Because of the increasing importance gained by the trade unions within the MI many of the most significant labour disputes were directed by

FIOM. Many workers joined the union to ensure their protection, but also because it allowed them to reconstruct the solidarity and collective identity of which even the new workers now felt the need. This broadening of relations with the union structures, the objectives of control and management of production which reappeared in the disputes, official recognition of their own representative bodies - the internal commissions which had become permanent -, and the fact that disputes spread to involve entire categories with the demand for collective contracts, were all elements which demonstrated that the demands made in the final year of the war were closely connected to those of the pre-war period and had acquired the characteristics of modern conflictuality.

Among the mainly peasant population opposition to the war and the yearning for peace manifested itself in frequent examples of collective fantasy, through which popular imagination expressed its refusal to tolerate the war, its lack of faith in the authorities' actions and the tormented anticipation of a better future. In this period news was often distorted, not only reporting on revolution and peace, but also with descriptions of the sentiments the people nurtured towards the authorities. There were stories of state action taken to eliminate children and the weaker members of society in order to reduce consumption of vital provisions (there was even the rumour that babies were to be used to make salami), of the state taking over cattle, seized agricultural products and appropriating people's savings, etc.⁶⁵

Along with the sentiments of distrust and hostility towards the state, however, grew the expectations for the post-war period. Indeed the last year of the war was characterized by the millenaristic climate which prevailed in both popular hopes of exceptional events and the germination of plans for the future developed and promoted by all sorts of groups and associations. In this atmosphere of expectation both the programme of Wilson with its promises of restitution and universal salvation, and the actions promoted by Lenin (unlike the upper classes, popular mentality made no clear distinction between Wilson and Lenin: the messianic expectations involved both the great nations and their leaders) were seen as bringing prospects of a better future, a "new world" in which even the most incredible hopes and expectations would be realised. These hopes, fed by government propaganda which in 1918 placed no limits on the promises it made, and thus stimulated the most audacious expectations, and by the PSI's ever more firmly stated conviction that world revolution was by now inevitable, tended to become certainties and helped render the conditions of that moment more tolerable, but they also nurtured expectations of state intervention and compensation to the benefit of the population. In a sense the promises to recognise certain rights, made in the last year of the war, transformed people's mythical and abstract ideas of revolution into concrete fact, closely linked to the realisation of greater social justice. If state action during the war had provoked hostility and a growing aversion towards the intrusion of political power in areas of civil liberties and private life, it also rendered normal the concept of state support in a collective emergency. The role assumed by the state in the processes of economic and social transformation justified these expectations. On the one hand, there was the desire to limit state interference, on the other the wish to feel its support. Of course the expectations of the different classes differed greatly. Entrepreneurs and the ruling class wanted the state to abstain from the sphere of the organi-

sation of labour but to intervene in the areas of discipline and social regulation. The popular and working classes refused to recognise the state in its function as a repressive body, but expected it to intervene during the war for the recognition of the rights gained during the war. All these expectations, and the desire for self-assertion, which the war had formed within every class and social group could only ultimately result in violent collision.

The post-war period was to be characterized by demands which all classes and social groups presented to the state. Not only the peasants and workers, who, after fulfilling the duties imposed upon them during the war, now claimed the rights they had been promised, and threatened insurrection; but also the middle classes, who had started their first strikes in 1918 (office staff), now demanded recognition and pay rises. Other social classes to which the war had brought hardships (for example, large farmers) also demanded compensation. The industrialists, for their part, saw no reason why they should give up any of their privileges.

The war which had originated as a project for the re-composition of Italian society and the development of a single national conscience had had the opposite effect. Not only did anti-government and anti-institutional feeling spread and intensify (as revealed by both the insurrectional and subversive tendencies and the projects for direct democracy which flourished in these years), but there also resulted a sort of corporative social fragmentation of interests and demands which were impossible, in great measure, to reconcile.

NOTES

Given the time passed since my paper at the conference on "Strikes, Social Conflict, and World War I: Italy - France - Germany - Russia - Great Britain", Cortona, Italy, June 1986, many of the themes dealt with there have been further developed and have given rise to various publications which have been taken into account in the present essay. See, in particular, Giovanna Procacci, "Popular Protest and Labour Conflict in Italy 1915-1918", in Social History, vol. 14, n.1; and id., "Dalla rassegnazione alla rivolta: osservazioni sul comportamento popolare in Italia negli anni della prima guerra mondiale", in Ricerche storiche, 1989, I.

1) Archivio Centrale dello stato (ACS), Carte Orlando, sc. 72 (16 Nov. 1917).

2) Giovanna Procacci, "Gli interventisti di sinistra, la rivoluzione di febbraio e la politica interna italiana nel 1917", in Italia contemporanea, 1980, 138, pp. 50-83. Even the Vatican shared the concern of the politicians; as the Minister for the Colonies Ferdinando Martini noted on 15 April, "the Holy See is terrified: it is frightened that the revolution is about to break out (...) already the Vatican has given instructions to assemble all precious metals and sacred relics from the Roman churches in a single place.": F. Martini, Diario. 1914-1918, (G.De Rosa ed.), Milano 1966, p. 902.

3) O.Malagodi, Conversazioni della guerra. 1914-1919, (B.Vigezzi ed.), I, Milano-Napoli, 1960, p. 141.

4) *ibid.*, p. 238 (20 Dec.).

5) Letters of F.S.Nitti, Treasury Minister, of 23 July 1917 and 2 Aug. 1917 reproduced in A.Monticone, Nitti e la grande guerra (1914-1918), Milano 1961, pp. 371-82. Similar concerns were expressed by the Interior Minister, V.E.Orlando (see L.Albertini, Epistolario 1911-1921, II, La grande guerra, (O.Barié ed.), Milano 1968, p. 773), and by Salandra, Boselli, Sonnino (*ibid.*, pp. 771-2; Il Diario di Salandra, (G.B.Gifuni ed.), Milano 1969, p. 154). Only the Supreme Command maintained a "really unlimited optimism" in respect of the revolution - according to the words used years later by Orlando - with the result that the strategic plans of the Italians were not modified until the end of September: V.E.Orlando, Memorie 1915-1919, (R.Mosca ed.), Milano 1960, pp. 135 ss.

6) See L.Bissolati, Diario, Torino 1935, p. 97; A.Gatti, Caporetto. Dal diario di guerra inedito (maggio-dicembre 1917), (A.Monticone ed.), Bologna 1964, pp. 227 s., 239, 243 ss., 421 (Gatti was a colonel attached to the Chief of Staff as official historian of the Supreme Command). During the summer there had been the very serious episode involving the mutiny of a military unit, the Catanzaro brigade; for the episode see P.Melograni, Storia politica della grande guerra, 1915-1918, Bari 1969, pp. 300 ss.

7) ACS, Carte Nitti, f., 29, sf. 3.

8) Monticone, Nitti, *cit.*, pp. 173 ss.

9) Letter of Nitti to Orlando (Roma, 23 March 1918): ACS, Carte Orlando, sc. 72.

10) In the days following Caporetto, a circular was sent from the Ministry of the Interior to prefects about the news - obviously subsequently seen to be false - of the formation of international "red legions" which were to unite workers and peasants in order to "overthrow the ruling dynasties and destroy the authority of governments"; similar "false news" - a revolutionary general strike in all belligerent Europe, etc. - continued to arrive on the desks of officials in the Ministry of the Interior in the following months, together with the news - this time true - of joint demonstrations in the principal cities of Italy of workers and military personnel sent to the work in the factories: ACS, Ministero degli Interni, Direz. generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Affari Generali e Riservati, cat. A5G (A5G), 2.7.3; *ibid.* 2.7.9, 2.7.10; *ibid.* 27.17; ACS, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Gabinetto, Serie speciale, Prima Guerra Mondiale (PC), 25.I.p.g.

11) ACS, A5G, 81.162.1; *ibid.*, 67.128 (prefect of Syracuse); *ibid.*, 65.128.3 (pref. of Sondrio); *ibid.*, 67.128.54 (Ufficio Centrale d'Investigazione, Roma); on the issue see: Giovanna Procacci, "Aspetti della mentalità collettiva durante la guerra. L'Italia dopo Caporetto", in D.Leoni - C.Zadra (eds.), La Grande Guerra. Esperienza, memoria, immagini, Bologna 1986, pp. 278-81.

12) Firms with more than 100 employees constituted 0.65% (3.207), and those with more than 250 employees and more than 250 HP of motors formed 0.3%: V.Porri, L'evoluzione economica italiana nell'ultimo cinquantennio, in I cavalieri del lavoro 1901-1926, Roma 1926, p. 82. In absolute and percentage terms, the composition of the active population in the various sectors of production - as revealed by population censuses - is as follows (bearing in mind, however, that the population censuses considerably overestimate employment in industry because they include seasonal workers):

Active	1901	%	1911	%	1921	%
Agriculture	9,666,467	59.4	9,085,597	55.4	10,264,106	55.7
Industry	3,659,455	22.5	4,178,258	25.5	4,346,810	23.6
Services	2,946,604	18.1	3,138,395	19.1	3,820,307	20.7
Total	16,272,526	100.0	16,402,250	100.0	18,431,223	100.0

Source: O.Vitali, Aspetti dello sviluppo economico italiano alla luce della ricostruzione della popolazione attiva, Roma, 1970, pp. 328-31.

13) E.Paci, "Le trasformazioni e innovazioni nella struttura economica italiana", in Il trauma dell'intervento 1914-1919, Firenze 1968, p. 45; A.Caracciolo "La grande industria nella prima guerra mondiale", in A.Caracciolo (ed.), La formazione dell'Italia industriale, Bari 1969, pp. 198 ss.; for a general picture: L.Einaudi, La condotta economica e gli effetti sociali della guerra italiana, Bari-New Haven 1933, and G.Mori, Il capitalismo industriale in Italia, Roma 1977.

14) For a description of the internal dynamics of the working class in the years of industrial take-off in Turin, the most important industrial city at this time, see the recent work of S.Ortaggi, Torino e l'industria italiana nel primo 900, Torino 1988.

15) On the rise of an "omnipresent and omnipervasive" power in relation to the process of development of mass society, see Z.Bauman, Memories of class. The Pre-History and After-Life of Class, ch. III and passim.

16) F.D'Ottone, Pel diritto e per la giustizia, Fano 1919, p. 55.

17) Given that both military and civil judges were persistently encouraged by their superiors (the War Ministry, the Ministry of Justice) to hand out exemplary sentences, they did not take into account the fact that the news was false. (Thus, for example, the news vendors who were sentenced to three months imprisonment for having shouted exaggerated news in order to sell their papers; or the drunk who got six months for shouting 'Viva l'Austria'; or the man sentenced to two months for having publicly expressed doubts about the wisdom of declaring war on Germany). For many examples, often dramatic, sometimes grotesque, see ACS, Min.di Grazia e Giustizia, Direz. Gen. Affari Penali (G.G.), 128, 127E; ACS, A5G, 119; *ibid.*, 65-66-67.

18) Commenting on the decree, one of the greatest criminal lawyers of the time, V.Manzini, wrote, "With such criteria, which are worthy of the most tyrannical absolutist state, any kind of abuse, any kind of infamy becomes legitimate, as long as it is covered by the pretext of the war and patriotism": V.Manzini, La legislazione penale di guerra. raccolta completa e sistematica, Appendice, Torino 1918, pp. 197 s. Following the indications of the Minister of Justice - who, as he wrote to the Prime Minister, had always been careful to see that "repression should be immediate and salutary" - magistrates applied the special laws with severity: letter of 7.6.1918 in ACS, A5G, 3.70.20. On wartime legislation and its application see G.Neppe Modona, Sciopero, potere politico e magistratura, Bari 1969, pp. 197-213; Giovanna Procacci, "La legislazione repressiva e la sua applicazione", in Giovanna Procacci (ed.), Stato e classe operaia in Italia durante la prima guerra mondiale, Milano 1983, pp. 41-50.

19) Expansion was financed through foreign loans and the sale of government bonds, and through a huge increase in the monetary circulation. But in Italy the inflationary policy was not accompanied by a policy of direct taxation. See P.Frascani, Politica economica e finanza pubblica in Italia nel primo dopoguerra, 1918-1922, Napoli 1975; G.Falco, L'Italia e la politica finanziaria degli alleati 1914-1920, Pisa 1983. Big companies were induced to build new factories in order to safeguard their profits, because by investing profits in new works, they were no longer liable to laws regarding dividends and excessive wartime profits. On the abuses and illicit activities of the war, see the Relazione della commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta per le spese di guerra, 6 February 1923, Roma 1923 (Atti parlamentari, sess. 1921-23, Camera Deputati, Documenti, XXI), p.1, pp. 13-98, e passim. see also L.Segreto "Armi e munizioni. Lo sforzo bellico tra speculazione e progresso tecnico", in Italia contemporanea, 1982, June, pp. 35-66; A.CCarparelli, "Uomini8, idee, iniziative per

una politica di riconversione industriale in Italia, in Hertner-G.Mori (eds.), La transizione dall'economia di guerra all'economia di pace in Italia e in Germania dopo la prima guerra mondiale, Bologna 1983, pp. 237-47.

20) See B.Beeza, "Gli aspetti normativi delle relazioni industriali del periodo bellico (1915-1918)", in G.Procacci (ed.), Stato e classe operaia, cit., pp. 103 ss.

21) See L.Tomassini, "Mobilitazione industriale e classe operaia", *ibid.* (but see also the other essays in the volume, which analyse various aspects of the MI). For a detailed description of the working of the institute: V.Franchini, La mobilitazione industriale dell'Italia in guerra 1915-1918, Roma 1932.

22) On the disputes handled by the MI, see L.Tomassini, *below*; see also Id., "Intervento dello Stato e politica salariale durante la prima guerra mondiale: esperimenti e studi per la determinazione di una 'scala mobile' delle retribuzioni operaie", in Annali della Fondaz. G.Feltrinelli, Milano, 1982, pp. 87-183; Id., "Militari, industriali, operai durante la Grande Guerra: Il Comitato centrale di Mobilitazione industriale dalle origini alla costituzione del ministero per le Armi e Munizioni", in Studi e ricerche II (Firenze), 1983, pp. 431-503.

23) See, Neppi Modona, *op.cit.* pp. 197-213; Procacci, "La legislazione repressiva", *cit.*, pp. 51 ss. detailed information in [S.Interlandi], La sorveglianza disciplinare sul personale degli stabilimenti produttori di materiale bellico durante la grande guerra (1915-1918), Roma 1930.

24) On working conditions in the factories, see in particular: A.Camarda-S.Peli, L'altro esercito. La classe operaia durante la prima guerra mondiale, Milano 1980; B.Bianchi, "Salute e intervento pubblico nell'industria di guerra", in G.Procacci (ed.), Stato e classe operaia, *cit.*, pp. 138-162.

25) Circular of 19 July 1917: [S.Interlandi], La sorveglianza disciplinare, *cit.*, pp. 88 ss.

26) A.Camarda, "Salari, organizzazione e condizioni di lavoro", in G.Procacci (ed.), Stato e classe operaia, *cit.*; S.Musso, "Cottimo e razionalizzazione tra guerra e dopoguerra", *ibid.*, pp. 181-197.

27) On the difference between State and industry, see L.Tomassini, "Militari", *cit.*; Id., "Intervento dello Stato", *cit.*; L.Segreto, "Statalismo e antistatalismo nell'economia bellica", in P.Hertner-G.Mori (eds.), La transizione, *cit.*, pp. 301-334.

28) Dall'Isonzo al Piave. 24 ottobre - 9 novembre 1917. Relazione della Commissione d'inchiesta, II, le cause e le responsabilità degli avvenimenti, Roma 1919, p. 490.

29) For the unrest of 1915 and 1916 see the summary report of the Director General of P.S. of 29 Dec. 1916 in ACS, A5G, 4.7.42; for the following disturbances, summary accounts of the prefects are to be found in A5G, 81.162.1; *ibid.*, 81.162.4.2; ACS, PC, 19.6.5.29; The reports for the periods running from the end of

1916 to spring 1917 (A5G, 81.162.4.2) are published by R.De Felice, "Ordine pubblico e orientamento delle masse popolari italiane nella prima metà del 1917", in Rivista storica del socialismo, 1963, Sept.-Dec., pp. 467-504. On the Milan disturbances - which lasted for several days between the end of April and early May 1917, which involved the whole area of recent industrialisation to the North of Milan, and which had the women of rural areas and those employed in the factories as the main protagonists, see: A.Camarda-S.Peli, L'altro esercito, cit., pp. 90-97; R.Muci, "Produrre armi, domandare pace: le operaie milanesi durante la prima guerra mondiale", in Storia in Lombardia, 1985,3, pp. 62-67. In general, on the characteristics of peasant disturbances and food rationing protest: Procacci, "Dalla rassegnazione", cit.

30) On rationing policy and its consequences: R.Bachi, L'Italia economica nel 1917, Città di Castello-Milano-Roma-Napoli 1918, p. 267; Id., L'Italia economica nel 1918, ibid. 1919, pp. 272-78; Id., L'alimentazione e la politica annonaria in Italia, Bari 1926, pp. 93-114; Relazione della Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta, cit., pp. 453 ss.

31) Report of inspector of P.S. sent in Sicily (May 1918): ACS, A5G, 3.7.

32) Dall'Isonzo al Piave, cit. p. 419.

33) G.Mortara, La salute pubblica in Italia durante e dopo la guerra, Bari 1925, pp. 120, 143 ss., 177 ss., 214 ss., 273, 467 ss., 514 ss.; A.Pugliese, L'alimentazione popolare in provincia di Milano. Se e come si può migliorare, Milano 1920; A.Sassi, "Il caroviveri e la resistenza familiare durante la guerra", in Nuova antologia, 16 July 1918, pp. 172 ss.; G.Consonni-G.Tonon, "Casa e lavoro nell'area milanese. Dalla fine del '800 al fascismo", in Classe, 1977, 14, pp. 179 ss.

34) See report of inspector of P.S. in Tuscany (Sept. 1918): ACS, Ministero per le Armi e le Munizioni, Comitato Centrale di Mobilitazione Industriale (CCMI), b. 124; V.Giuffrida-G.Pietra, Provital. Gli approvvigionamenti alimentari durante la guerra, Padova 1936, pp. 263-69, 310; F.Coletti, "Zone grige nella popolazione di Milano", (1917), in Id., Studi sulla popolazione italiana in pace e in guerra, Bari 1923, pp. 46-52.

35) R.Bachi, L'Italia economica nel 1917, cit., pp. 269-70; Id., L'Italia economica nel 1918, cit., pp. 278 s.

26) Dall'Isonzo al Piave, cit., p. 420.

37) ibid., p. 415.

38) As the police chief in Padua noted, "Hatred is undoubtedly increased in rural areas by requisitions which are often effected with unjust criteria, so much so as to appear cruel. To hand over to the government straw which is needed in the stall, to give it at 12 lire a quintal and then to have to buy straw again from a private seller at 20 lire a quintal! To sell a cow to the government for 500 lire and then to have to buy another one for 700!", (25.5.17): quoted in F.Piva, Lotte contadine e origine del fascismo nel Veneto, Padova 1977, p. 39.

39) U. Ricci, La politica annonaria dell'Italia durante la guerra, Bari 1939, pp. 7 s.; but the first edition of the volume (1919) had the title: Il fallimento della politica annonaria (the failure of rationing). As the prefect of Bologna reported to the Ministry of the Interior on July 1919, the profits of traders in the province sometimes exceeded 100% in both manufactured goods and foodstuffs; State-run consumers' associations were of doubtful efficacy in combating this, given that in the small centres they were linked to the traders themselves.

40) ACS, PC, 19.18.1.11 (July-Sept. 1915).

41) see L. Tomassini, "Militari", cit. pp. 448 ss.

42) On the FIOM during the war: M. Antonioli-B. Bezza (eds.), La FIOM dalle origini al fascismo, Bari 1978, pp. 81-110; C. Cartiglia, "Problemi di storia del movimento sindacale. La FIOM 1914-1926", in Rivista di storia contemporanea, 1987, 4, pp. 491-500.

43) On the commissioni interne: S. Ortaggi, "Dalle commissioni interne ai consigli di fabbrica", in G. Procacci (ed.), Stato e classe operaia, cit., pp. 212-229. At the present (1988) there is no comprehensive study of the USI during the war years.

44) See S. Peli, "Composizione di classe e conflittualità. Alcune considerazioni a partire dal caso ligure", in G. Procacci (ed.), Stato e classe operaia, cit., pp. 240 ss.; on the workings of the Camera del lavoro: L. Tomassini, "Classe operaia e organizzazione sindacale durante la prima guerra mondiale": la Camera del lavoro di Firenze. 1915-1918", in Ricerche storiche, 1979, 2-3, pp. 259-374; P. Ferraris, Sviluppo e lotta di classe nel Biellese, Torino 1979 (on the attitudes of the local textile union between 1915 and 1918).

45) For example, in Brescia 95% of the new workers come from the countryside, and of those 88% were employed in metal and engineering industries: ACS, CCM, b.232. On the characteristics of the Brescian metal industries during the war (when employment increased five fold) see the essays of R. Chiarini, S. Peli, A. Camarda, in Aspetti della società bresciana tra le due guerre, in Annali della Fondazione L. Micheletti, 1985, I, pp. 3-180; A. Kelikan, Town and country under fascism. The transformation of Brescia 1915-1926, Oxford 1986. In more general terms, as far as women are concerned, the number employed in the auxiliary factories in the country as a whole increased from 23,000 in late 1915 to 198,000 at the end of the war (21.9% of the total workforce).

46) Women were less ready to see a lengthening of hours of work because of family obligations and because of the difficulty of finding food, which often meant having to queue for a long time; women and young people also resisted heavy work because their lower capacity to stand hard physical work meant they were more easily fined. On the fundamental role of women in demonstrations during the war, see, Camarda-Peli, op.cit.; Muci, op.cit.; Procacci, "Popular protest", cit., and Id., "Dalla rassegnazione", cit.

47) R. Bachi, L'Italia economica nel 1916, Torino 1917, p. 210.

48) *ibid.*

49) See Comando di divisione of Livorno (3 Oct. 1916) and pref. of Pisa (25 May 1916) concerning strikes in blast furnaces of Piombino: ACS, A5G, 52.108.22. Similar situations reported for Terni, Milan (foundry workers), Liguria.

50) The official statistical series is: Ministero dell'economia nazionale, I conflitti del lavoro in Italia nel decennio 1914-1923, Rome 1924. The decision not to register a large part of the disturbances reflected a clear political objective. (This is true for the war years, but very probably also for the moment of publication of the series in 1924, i.e. after the fascist take-over, given that - as is known - fascism aimed to stress the divisions and conflicts of the postwar period on the one hand, and on the other to portray the period of the war, of which the regime declared itself to be the successor, as a phase of total patriotic unity). This is suggested by the fact that the source from which the national series derived its information - the Bollettino dell'ufficio del lavoro - stopped publishing descriptions of disturbances at the end of 1916, and limited itself to publishing figures. For the ensuing period, any reconstruction of the pattern of disturbances can be made only on the basis of the figures - obviously very fragmentary - provided by the reports of prefects and the military.

51) See B. Bezza, Salario e cannoni. Tra la fabbrica e il fronte durante la grande guerra, Roma s.d., pp. 93 ss.

52) The tendencies which can be deduced from the national statistical series are of an increase in militance in the metal and engineering sector with respect to the previous year (longer lasting disturbances, with higher levels of participation). According to these figures, there were fewer strikes in 1917 (and even fewer in 1918), but the number of strikers increased, both in absolute terms and in respect of each strike, as did the length of strikes. Both these aspects are also true of 1918. In 1917 strikes and disturbances which concerned wages increased (but fell in 1918), as did those which concerned discipline and hours of work. These figures suggest a higher level of militance from 1917 onwards: see G. Procacci, "Repressione e dissenso nella prima guerra mondiale", in Studi storici, 1981, I, pp. 119-150, and Id., "Popular protest", *cit.*

53) The greater number of disputes arose from the 'pull' effect created by the concession of wage increases in certain workshops or factories; while the policy of permitting pay increases encouraged the channelling in disputes towards the arbitration mechanism, concessions to some workers stimulated others to make demands, thus increasing the overall level of disputes.

54) Struggles about piece-work rates occurred for two reasons; because, as already mentioned, industrialists always attempted to reduce the rates, and because the piece-work rate was usually calculated on the basis of minimum pay rates, which employers always refused to increase, drawing strength from a decree issued at the beginning of the war which blocked salaries for the duration of the conflict.

55) See, as far as Great Britain is concerned, the interesting

points made - following Thompson's well-known concept of "moral economy" - by A.J.Coles, "The Moral Economy of the Crowd: Some Twentieth-Century Food Riots", in Journal of British Studies, 1978, 18, pp. 157-76; B.Waites, "The Government of the Home Front and the "Moral Economy" of the Working Class", in P.H.Liddle (ed.) Home Fires and Foreign Fields, London. For the interpretation of social protest as reaction to the abuse of power, see B.Moore jr., Injustice. The social Basis of Obedience and Revolt, London 1978; on the relationship between rapid social transformation and popular revolt: C.Tilly, "Collective Violence in European Perspective", in H.D.Graham-T.R.Gurr (eds.), The History of Violence in America, New York 1970.

56) On the relationship between coercion and working class protest, see in particular Z.Bauman, op.cit., ch. III and passim, who links class recomposition during the nineteenth century to the imposition of a "total control" (and by analogy it is possible to apply this process to the war period).

57) A.Camarda, "Salari, organizzazione e condizione del lavoro", cit., p.177. There are many cases in which workers protested, not because there were concrete issues in play, but because certain innovations were considered to be a threat to the traditional organisation of time and of work. For example, this was the reason for the protest against the abolition of Sunday rest in the zone of Milan in 1917: A.Camarda-S.Peli, "'Mai di domenica'. La sospensione del riposo festivo durante la guerra", in Studi bre-sciani, 1984, 15 pp. 83 ss.

58) On the Turin insurrection: "Cronaca dei fatti di agosto", in Lo Stato operaio, 1927,6; in general on Turin during the war: P.Spriano, Torino operaia nella grande guerra, Torino 1960.

59) F. Coletti, op.cit., p. 51. Concerned about the effect bread rationing might have on the population, Salandra wrote to Boselli - his successor as prime Minister - on 14 November 1916 in the following terms: "In all of the Mezzogiorno and the islands, the peasants - for the most part landless and poverty-stricken - and the urban workers live on bread and flour "and nothing else"; where there is an "else" it is insignificant and doesn't count. But bread - as much as is necessary - is considered to be a natural right, to which no authority in the world may impose limits. If people should form the opinion that there is no bread because of the war, the war would be hated and cursed. (...) In this country you have to consider bread as important to the war effort as munitions.": Il diario di Salandra, cit., pp. 115-16, note.

60) Strikes of solidarity carried through 1918; they were increasingly frequent among steel and metal workers in Liguria, Milan, Piombino, Naples, Livorno etc.

61) Dall'Isonzo al Piave, cit., p. 479.

62) ibid., pp. 483-4.

63) See telegrams contained in ACS, PC, bb. 126, 127; the reports in ACS, A5G, 48.87; 42.87. Even the simple refusal to subscribe to the national loan on the part of worker could invite a prison sentence of several months.

64) Procacci, "Aspetti", cit., pp. 262-77.

65) The false reports of attempts to kill and of deaths (which spread very widely) were probably linked to the growing number of deaths for the Spanish flu. On this phenomenon, and on the changes in the popular mentality during the last phase of the war, see *ibid.*, pp. 285-86.

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