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‘WHITE BOLSHEVIKS’? THE CATHOLIC LEFT AND THE SOCIALISTS IN ITALY – 1919–1920*

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ABSTRACT. *During Italy’s ‘two red years’ (1919–20), left-wing catholics challenged the authority of the church and the landowners in large areas of northern Italy. Calling themselves the estremisti (the extremists), left catholic unions organized peasants and workers in land and farm occupations and encouraged a series of radical strikes. Left catholic leaders became national figures, in particular Guido Miglioli at Cremona and Romano Cocchi at Bergamo. This article examines these innovative struggles and their troubled relationship with the traditional socialist Italian left during this turbulent period. No alliances were formed between the estremisti and the ‘red’ unions until 1921–4, when fascism was already rampant and the revolutionary wave had already subsided. The article analyses why alliances were not built earlier, and why the socialists were so hostile towards the catholic left. Both the theory and the practice of the traditional left prevented any positive appraisal of the estremisti. In addition, there are detailed accounts of the extraordinary mass movements inspired by Cocchi and Miglioli in some of the richest and most staunchly catholic regions of northern Italy.*

The mixture between ‘Sanfedismo’ and bolshevism, between the extreme past and the extreme future (Claudio Treves’s description of the PPI).¹

Not even the Italian Popular Party can be the party of all classes
(G. Speranzini).²

The growth of a ‘white’ ‘left’ during the revolutionary years of 1919–21 marked a crucial development in the Italian catholic world. Within the newly-formed Italian Popular Party (*Partito Popolare Italiano* – PPI) the left took local control or were a significant minority in all the key areas of catholic organization in the North, namely the Veneto, Bergamo, Cremona and Brescia. In these regions, where the PPI won most of its votes,³ there were huge increases in the memberships of catholic associations and the corresponding ‘left’ presence within these leagues, mutual-aid societies, cooperatives and rural banks. In these ‘white areas’, catholic sub-culture was dominant and the left found great difficulty in establishing a foothold, especially in the

* I would like to thank Dr Paul Ginsborg for his help with this article.

¹ ‘Il discorso di Treves’, *Avanti!*, 31 Mar. 1920.

² ‘I secessionisti del PP’, *L’Italia*, 1 July 1919. Both *L’Italia* and *L’Eco di Bergamo* (see below) were newspapers which represented the centre-right of the *Partito Popolare*.

³ Veneto 35·8 per cent, Lombardy 30·2 per cent; G. Vecchio, *I cattolici milanesi e la politica. L’esperienza del Partito Popolare* (Milan, 1982), p. 85.

countryside. Centuries of assiduous work by local priests, catholic organizations and church-backed newspapers and cultural bodies had constructed a ‘catholic world’ of great strength and power. It was here that the catholic left challenged the traditional conservatism and ‘inter-classism’ of the church.

Calling themselves the *estremisti* (extremists), these groups occasionally supported ‘workers’ unity’ at the base with ‘red’ trade unions. Often their tactics and methods resembled those of the socialists (PSI) or the ‘red’ trade union federation (Cgdl). Indeed, in some areas catholic organizations were more militant than those of the ‘reds’ and entered into violent conflict with the landowners or textile bosses. Within the PPI the rise of the left signalled a crisis for one of the major bulwarks of catholic culture and the new party’s ideology – interclassism.

This article will examine in detail two major centres of *estremisti* activity in 1919–21 – Bergamo and Cremona – whilst making reference to the Veronese, often the nucleus of left–catholic activity in the *dopoguerra*. Guido Miglioli, the ‘white bolshevik’ was the leader of the catholic leagues in the Cremonese and the inspiration behind the catholic left.⁴ His tireless organization of the *salariati fissi* (or *obbligati*) in the dairies around Cremona, and his speeches at the first two PPI congresses (June 1919, Bologna, April 1920, Naples) provided the practical and theoretical foundation for the movement’s growth. Militants ‘trained’ with Miglioli at Cremona were key leaders elsewhere; Romano Cocchi at Bergamo, Giuseppe Speranzini in the Veronese. The strikes in the Cremonese were some of the most bitter and violent of the whole period, and their victories in 1920–1 can be counted amongst the most important and original of the *biennio rosso*. At Bergamo the challenge to the catholic ruling class posed by the growth and combativity of militant ‘white’ leagues split the christian world wide open. At Brescia left-catholics had a strong presence, and massive land strikes in the Veronese involved up to 150,000 ‘white’ workers.⁵

However, my task here is not to describe these events in detail or in isolation. My focus is on alliances, with the ‘reds’ and between social groups and classes. Thus, the problem of peasant unity remains at the centre of the analysis. Catholics, whether led by left or right, mainly organized middle peasants, or those rural workers with strong links to their place of work, the land. *Salariati fissi* (or *obbligati*), with their fixed yearly contracts and housing, were a classic example of this category. *Obbligati* were superficially a modern class, similar to the industrial proletariat. But strong traditional, and even feudal aspects of their lives remained, as did their isolation in scattered courtyard farms. *Obbligati* had the potential for modern class consciousness, but they were also deeply bound to the land. *Federterra* (the ‘red’ landworkers’ union) mem-

⁴ On Miglioli see *Leghe bianche e leghe rosse: l’esperienza unitaria di Guido Miglioli. Atti del Convegno tenuto a Cremona* (Rome, 1972); A. Zanibelli, *Miglioli–Grieco: dibattito sul contadino della val Padana* (Rome, 1975); *Annali della Biblioteca Statale e Libreria Civica di Cremona* (Cremona, 1985); and C. Bello, *Le avanguardie contadine cristiane nella valle del Po: da documenti inediti* (Rome, 1979).

⁵ For these events and an analysis of them see above all the article by G. Zalin, ‘Lotte contadine e leghe bianche nel Veronese: prime ricerche’ in S. Zaninelli, ed., *Il sindacalismo bianco tra guerra, dopoguerra e fascismo (1914–1926)* (Milan, 1982), pp. 599–628.

bership, on the other hand, was overwhelmingly based upon the more shifting agricultural classes – the day-labourers (*braccianti* and *avventizi*). As Miglioli put it in March 1920, ‘we tend to develop a strong sentiment of attachment to the land, the socialists tend to defend the waged-worker and the day-labourers for revolutionary ends and in homage to the principle of communism’ (*Il Popolo*, 13 March 1920).⁶

Any rural alliances had to overcome not only the historical ‘subjective’ political differences between socialists and catholics. There were also ‘objective’ fissures between the types of workers and peasants organized – differences which often remained hidden by the very fact of *catholic* and *socialist* organization. Even a complete absence of anticlericalism and anti-socialism would have left the problem of alliances still to be solved. It was not by chance that the catholic left, whilst remaining far less anti-socialist than the rest of the PPI, never expressed doubts about the desirability of the ‘end’ of small property. As Miglioli bluntly put it at Naples ‘we defend private property’.⁷ The importance of this point was increased by the failure of the *estremisti* to make significant inroads amongst the urban working class. At Milan, for example, the *estremisti* were conspicuous only by their absence amongst the numerous catholic unions in the city.⁸ Catholics at Bergamo did organize textile workers, but this was an industry linked organically to the rural world and which mainly employed peasant workers.

I

The ‘political theories’ held by the catholic left in this period are difficult to pin down. A general lack of sources and the very vagueness of the ideas of these agitators make the reconstruction of any unified theory an artificial task. ‘Demagogic’ was a term of abuse used frequently against the *estremisti*, but it does capture some of the texture of their style and mode of organizing. Most *estremisti* leaders were above all activists, and as a result ‘theory’ often changed with the swings of victory and defeat. It is from these shifting fragments that the main themes of the catholic left’s ideology must be reconstructed. In relation to the socialists the most important of these themes was the idea of ‘proletarian unity’. Its most coherent advocate was Giuseppe Speranzini.

Speranzini was a militant peasant-organizer in the Veronese, a pacifist and editor of the *estremisti* newspaper *Conquista Popolare*. During 1919–20 he returned time and again to the idea of workers’ unity – arguing for trade-union alliances outside of the political parties, a sort of catholic revolutionary syndicalism. Proletarian links were to be formed from below.⁹ Speranzini believed that alliances of this type would ‘naturally’ develop as catholic unions shifted

⁶ Now in C. Bello, ed., *L’Azione: antologia di scritti, 1905–1922* (Rome, 1967), p. 459.

⁷ Cited in Partito Socialista Italiano, *I popolari e la proprietà* (Milan, 1920), p. 11.

⁸ O. Motta, ‘Sindacalismo cristiano a Milano nel “Biennio Rosso”’, *Bollettino dell’Archivio per la storia del movimento sociale Cattolico in Italia* [hereafter *Bollettino*], xxvii (1992), 325 and passim.

⁹ Vecchio, *I cattolici*, p. 149. On Speranzini (1889–1976) see G. Acocella, ‘Sindacalismo cattolico e partito cristiano in uno scritto di Giuseppe Speranzini’, in Zaninelli, ed., *Il sindacalismo*, pp. 11–36.

leftwards under political and economic pressure, and therefore closer to the socialist organizations. Unions were also the basis of future society, a 'workers' state'. Trade unions in themselves were not anti-christian, and therefore alliances between them were possible. Thus, Speranzini argued for economic and *not* political unity, a theory flexible enough to allow anti-socialism to co-exist with a commitment to alliances with the 'red' unions.

Yet there were many problems with these tactics, and the first lies in their simplicity. Speranzini's plan glossed over the diverse origins and bases – material, cultural and ideological – of the catholic and socialist workers' movements, and this led to an over-estimation of alliance possibilities. Members of 'red' and 'white' unions did *not* (and could not) 'naturally' ally. A common basis for links would have to be built and continually reinforced. Speranzini's project seemed to overlook the very essence of the catholic union movement – and the classes in the countryside that it appealed to; hence the accusation of 'utopia' that has been applied to his ideas. Inter-union relations, even in areas dominated by the *estremisti*, remained fundamentally antagonistic in the period of class struggle that followed the First World War. Simple ideas of 'workers' unity' *did* apply to certain 'moments' of alliance, but the general picture was one of disunity, even in *estremisti* regions. Speranzini's theories only fused with reality in the defensive situation of 1922–4, when both 'white' and 'red' federations were under fascist attack.

It was therefore unsurprising that Speranzini's project made little impact on any of the three big union federations. For the 'reds', 'worker unity' implied merely that all workers should join the CGL or USI. 'Red' federations maintained a strong anticlerical line in the face of the left-led 'white' unions. These attitudes did not prevent sporadic episodes of catholic–socialist unity at a local level, for example, at Cremona and Bergamo. But these episodes remained isolated and unrepresentative of the national trend towards violent inter-union conflict.

Other contradictions plagued the catholic left. The *estremisti* gave priority to proletarian unity, yet remained within an interclass party. Catholic-left activists made interclassism a focal point of their attacks on the PPI leadership. This critique formed the basis for a second left–catholic alliance project – based this time in the political sphere. Its aim was to transform the PPI into a workers' party, which would promote radical reforms and expropriate land to distribute to the peasants. Miglioli's speech at the first PPI congress was the inspiration for these ideas and for the later formation of a separate party by the catholic left in late 1920.¹⁰ Most of the project remained unclear, but some aspects were explicit. At Bologna Miglioli called for the PPI to reflect what he saw as its base, to be a 'party of the christian proletariat'.¹¹ He made a direct attack on traditional catholic culture and on the interclass visions reflected in the original statutes of the party. According to the Cremonese leader, 'collaboration with fractions of the bourgeoisie' was 'impossible'.¹²

¹⁰ F. Malgeri, ed., *Gli atti dei Congressi del PPI* (Brescia, 1969), pp. 92–7. ¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 93.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 89.

Miglioli made two important assumptions in his Bologna speech: first, that the socialists would win the next election and take power. Given this presumed victory Miglioli advocated ‘popular’ alliances at a national level to promote reforms, and ‘land to the peasants’.¹³ Secondly, the deradicalization of the PSI in parliament would leave the ground free for the catholics to work amongst the proletariat on a radical and active platform. The *estremisti* could outflank the PSI. Hence the evocative cry ‘the extreme left is ours!’¹⁴ Yet, again, as with Speranzini’s tactical plans, Miglioli’s project was seriously flawed. In November 1919 the socialists did not win a majority, and the PPI’s reform proposals were the object of serious clashes between the PSI and ‘white’ deputies, not of unity. The socialists were not ‘integrated’ to any great extent, and the PPI right was strengthened by the election. Only Miglioli’s last prediction was correct. The economistic outlook of the CGL and its reluctance to sanction transformative strike action in the countryside did leave a space for the catholic left leagues and unions. In parts of Lombardy, the Veneto and Tuscany the struggles by the left PPI organizations in 1919–20 led to far more violent clashes with the employers than those involving the ‘reds’. Whilst the *Federterra* concentrated on economic control – over jobs and wages – the catholics called for ‘land’ and ‘self-management’. Their policies implied the virtual abolition of the landowners as did the famous slogan of the Cremonese movement, ‘the peasant [to be] no longer a worker, the landowner no longer the master’.¹⁵

The alliance theories outlined by the two leading figures of the catholic left in 1919–20 had little chance of success. They underestimated the realities of the situation in the country and the differences, ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’, that divided socialist and catholic forces. In addition the catholic left did not hide its anti-socialism, even if this differed from the more prejudicial attitudes of the right and centre of the PPI. Whilst the *estremisti* argued against the prioritization of anti-socialism within the party, they remained within the PPI, despite its interclass character, until they were forcibly expelled. Of course, *estremisti* were in an extremely difficult position in attacking the church’s authority, risking complete personal isolation and even ex-communication, Murri’s (an important left catholic active at the turn of the century) fate in 1909. At a strategic level the networks of catholic and church institutions were crucial to the survival and strength of the ‘white’ leagues, and so the *estremisti* were forced to play a double game both within and against the PPI. These problems and contradictions militated against any practical links with socialists and the CGL at a local level. The PPI leadership could not afford to lose the mass base which Miglioli and his followers had built up, but when the chance came to retake control of the party and the unions in 1920, Don Sturzo (the party leader) clamped down on the left and expelled both Speranzini and Cocchi. This latter event was another indication of the increasing hegemony of anti-socialism in the catholic party.

¹³ ‘We have to... present more courageous reforms, that otherwise will be exploited by the socialists and so we will have built a bridge towards the more intelligent elements of the socialist party’, Speranzini at Naples quoted in *ibid.* p. 189.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 92.

¹⁵ Cited in Bello, ed., *L’Azione*, p. 119.

In fact, the contribution of the catholic left to the problem of socialist–catholic alliances is best analysed in terms of their practice, not their theory. Miglioli and Speranzini were activists above all else. The two key zones for such an analysis were the strongholds of the *estremisti* in 1919–20, Bergamo and Cremona.

II

The ‘Cremonese’ was an agricultural region of key economic importance in Lombardy – particularly noted for milk production.¹⁶ Its political affiliations were split between socialist and catholic.¹⁷ The ‘reds’ organized the artisans and workers in Cremona itself and the peasantry on the *basso* plains. The catholics had more success around the Soresina and Castelleone – particularly amongst the *salariati fissi* in the huge dairy courtyard-farms (*cascine*) where modern capitalist production methods had been introduced alongside the old paternalistic traditions.

Cremona was one of the most pacifist areas in Italy throughout the First World War. Miglioli’s unions and the socialists carried out a militant campaign for peace in the region, and pacifism emerged as a natural basis for a series of short-term local alliances in early 1919.¹⁸ The agitation for an eight-hour day saw a ‘common struggle’.¹⁹ During the *carovita* riots catholics and socialists came together in mass action,²⁰ and Cremonese ‘white’ leagues supported the general strike of 20–21 July, against the wishes of the national CIL.²¹ In this short period, despite proclaimed mutual hostility, the masses of the two movements did ally and certainly there were not the violent incidents that had already broken out in other parts of Lombardy and Milan in early 1919.

Two separate events reversed this apparent softening of relations towards the middle and end of 1919. On the one hand the ‘white’ leagues began a bitter series of strikes. With few exceptions the ‘red’ unions remained ‘neutral’ throughout these disputes, or at least this was the official *Federterra* position. In practice the ability of the employers to rely on the work of the ‘red’ union membership allowed them to isolate the ‘white’ areas and amounted to a hostile decision by the local *Federterra*. The roots of this decision on ‘neutrality’

¹⁶ The 1921 census found that 60.2 per cent of the active population were involved in agriculture, 32.2 per cent in industry and 7.6 per cent in the tertiary sector. Of the first group 70 per cent were peasants (day-labourers or fixed-wage contract peasants) 13 per cent small rentiers and 11 per cent small proprietors. Figures from V. Duchi, ‘Socialisti e migliolini nel Cremonese fra ostilità e collaborazione (1918–1922)’, *Ricerche*, 1 (1983), 77.

¹⁷ On the origins on these movements see L. B. Liberati in E. Ongaro, ed., *Camera del lavoro e lotte nelle campagne cremonesi* (Milan, 1985), pp. 81–6, and S. Fusi, ‘Il Partito Popolare in Lombardia dalle origini alla marcia su Roma’, *Storia in Lombardia*, III (1984), 85–8 and 106.

¹⁸ According to the prefect of Milan ‘the agricultural masses of the Cremonese remained irreducibly against the war’, *Archivio Centrale dello Stato* (ACDS), *Pubblica Sicurezza* (P.S.) 1920, busta (b.) 83 Prefect-Min. Gab., teleg., esp., 812, 29 June 1919. See also M. Mazzucchetti, ‘L’estremismo bianco nel primo dopoguerra’, in A. Bendotti, ed., *Il movimento operaio e contadino bergamasco dall’Unità al secondo dopoguerra* (Bergamo, 1981), p. 94. The mayor of Cremona, elected in 1920, was a deserter and a socialist.

¹⁹ Duchi, ‘Socialisti e migliolini’, p. 80.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 39.

²¹ Miglioli, *L’Azione*, 19 July 1919.

lay in the different ends and social bases of the two federations. The *obbligati* in the 'white' federation were fighting to 'be no longer workers'. Catholic *salariati fissi* demanded control of the *cascine* and virtual self-management of the land and the machines they used. Their profound links to the land contrasted with the *braccianti* on the plain. Landless day-labourer aspirations tied in far more with the 'socialization of the land' policy in the irrigated zones controlled by the *Federterra*. In addition to these social differences, both created by and creators of socialist ideology, were the traditional hostilities between socialist and catholic. True, these contrasts appeared to have been less intense in areas dominated by 'left' catholic unions, but in fact the socialists reserved some of their fiercest criticism for the *Migliolini* of Cremona. Local landowners used the union split to their advantage and encouraged it through separate negotiations and agreements.

During the 1919 strikes Miglioli's unions were described by the socialists as 'a grotesque deformation of workers' trade unionism' as a phenomenon 'purely Cremonese'²² and as part of a PPI 'trick'.²³ The action of the catholics was branded as 'idiotic'.²⁴ One of the major points of attack was Miglioli's policy on private property. The Cremonese leader was accused of wanting to create 'many selfish small proprietors' and as favouring what *Avanti!* called 'the most anti-proletarian proposal imaginable'²⁵ – land to the peasants. All this was in the face of a violent and acrimonious dispute involving the catholic peasants. Troops occupied parts of Soresina and violent clashes took place. The agreement won by the catholic leagues sanctioned for the first time the cherished principle of self-management, albeit in a limited form. Only occasionally did the socialists admit the radicalism of the 'white' leagues in the Cremonese. Ernesto Caporali, on the whole a critic, described the base of Miglioli's movement as 'young people that from socialism accept not only the means of fight and the programme, but also the maximalist end',²⁶ which was a classic example of socialist wishful thinking in relation to the *estremisti*.

Increased tension between catholics and socialists was focused around the November general election. During the campaign socialists broke up a number of catholic meetings. The atmosphere of alliance of a few months earlier had disappeared and the catholics issued a clear threat, 'we want to be respected, if, however, the socialists or anyone else intend to adopt violent methods, we will also adopt them, whilst deploring violence. In the villages where we are the majority, no socialist will speak'.²⁷ 1919 had seen a number of moments of alliance between the left catholics and the 'red' unions at Cremona, and the beginnings of mutual tension. The social conflicts of 1920 were to take this tension towards the point of violence.

²² 'Nestore', 'Divagazioni Cremonesi', *Avanti!*, 30 May 1919.

²³ 'Il caso Miglioli', *Avanti!*, 23 June 1919.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ 'Il nuovo patto colonico nel Cremonese', *Avanti!*, 14 Aug. 1919. See also *La Difesa*, 15 Nov. 1919 where Miglioli was described as a 'liar' and a 'scab'.

²⁶ 'Lo sciopero Migliolino nel Soresinese; incidenti e conflitti', *Avanti!*, 16 June 1920.

²⁷ *L'Azione*, 19 Oct. 1919.

In June 1920 a hundred-day 'white' strike in Cremona sent shock waves across the whole country.²⁸ According to the local prefect, the *cascine* were 'no longer administrated and directed by the landowners but by councils of peasants that "come and go" without taking account of the employers'.²⁹ These *obbligati* were using the same methods as the workers of Turin in their battle for the control of the factories, but it was only after the defeat of the Cremonese movement that Gramsci and his colleagues took any interest in the 'dairy councils' of 1920-1. 'White' leagues claimed 'the direct and collective management of the land'.³⁰ Each dairy had its leaders chosen by the *obbligati*, who continued to milk and tend to the cows, and produce other goods.³¹ Such actions seem, with hindsight, very close to the aspirations of the socialists and *Federterra* towards collective ownership of the means of production and of the land. The strike and its outcome appeared to show a practical way of achieving such ends, which remained merely theoretical objectives for the *Federterra*. Importantly, the collective organization of the dairies in the Cremonese meant that small property was virtually impossible, and despite Miglioli's claims to be promoting the 'land to the peasants', such an end amongst his membership was not a realistic prospect.³² The 'Parma pact' which concluded the strike in June 1920 was an advance on that of 1919, and represented a victory for the 'white' leagues and their agitation. Yet, socialist reaction to this important dispute did not budge from their previous attitudes.

Local 'red' unions acted as they had in 1919, proclaiming themselves to be 'neutral'. According to the catholic daily *L'Italia* this amounted to 'socialist scabbing' and to a 'tight link between our red adversaries and the ruling class'.³³ The tense atmosphere in the 'occupied' catholic zones contrasted with 'tranquility' in the 'red' zones. Both sets of members kept to their respective areas and 'the one did not invade the sphere of the other'.³⁴ *Avanti!* praised the attitude of the local *Camera del Lavoro* and described the strike as an electoral manoeuvre by Miglioli. Catholic trade unionism had 'run its course' and the peasants were, the socialist daily wrote, 'flooding' into the red unions.³⁵

Federterra agitation, despite its revolutionary phraseology, concentrated on economic aims – wages and union rights. These ends, whilst strongly linked to

²⁸ The dispute began on 17 May 1920. See for example the fine reports in 'Lo sciopero nel Soresinese degenera in conflitti sanguinosi', *Il Secolo*, 14 June 1920. 10,000 peasants were involved over a wide area, 'Nuovi aspetti della lotta nell'attesa dell'accordo', *L'Italia*, 20 June 1920.

²⁹ Teleg. 5 June 1920 to Min. (ACdS, P.S. 1920, C. 1, b.83). The councils were elected in each *cascina* with one delegate and two vice-delegates, G. Mussio, 'Lo sciopero agricolo nel Soresinese', *L'Italia*, 16 June 1920.

³⁰ 'Manifesto dell'Unione del Lavoro di Cremona e Provincia' (June), ACdS, P.S. 1920, b.83.

³¹ 'Crumiraggio socialista: un episodio della lotta tra bianchi e rossi', *L'Italia*, 4 June 1920.

³² A point made at the time by U. Mondelli, 'La terra ai contadini', *Il Secolo*, 28 June 1920.

³³ 'Crumiraggio socialista'. According to the catholics the 'reds' had made a non-strike agreement with the employers. The only example of a *Federterra* strike (apart from the 24 hour protest) I have found was a short-lived dispute in April 1919, ACdS, P.S. 1920, b.83.

³⁴ G. Gioli, 'L'estremismo cattolico nel Cremonese' (2 articles) *Il Secolo*, 18 and 19 June 1920.

³⁵ E. Caporali, 'Lo sciopero migliolino nel Soresinese; incidenti e conflitti', *Avanti!*, 16 June 1920.

the *braccianti*-base, tied in far more with the logic of the employers than the expropriatory actions of the left catholics – who proclaimed social peace.³⁶ Contradictions such as these led to a situation of catholics on the barricades whilst the socialists continued to work. In Cremona at least, ‘the extreme left’ was ‘white’, as Miglioli had predicted at Bologna. Only once during the 100-day dispute did the two organizations act together. In June, during a clash with *carabinieri* a catholic organizer, Paulli, was killed. A twenty-four hour general strike was proclaimed to which the CdL adhered, calling for the ‘unity of all the workers to make the fight against bourgeois domination easier’.³⁷ Yet, apart from those twenty-four hours, as the prefect put it, Miglioli ‘did not find agreement [with] the local socialist party’.³⁸ *Avanti!* justified the strike by claiming that Paulli was a socialist sympathizer and had voted for the PSI at the last election. ‘Red’ hostility to Miglioli and the catholic left in general was unaffected by this small display of solidarity.³⁹

Much the same pattern was repeated in the face of the last great agitation of the Cremonese catholics in the *biennio rosso*, which began in October 1920.⁴⁰ There were further occupations of *cascine* by ‘dairy councils’, and attacks by police on dairies. Nonetheless, as Brezzi writes, the councils, ‘proceeded to the autumn sowing and planting of fruit’.⁴¹ Socialist-catholic tensions also intensified. A series of clashes between ‘red’ and ‘white’ sympathizers took place at public meetings.⁴² The links of early 1919 were by now a distant memory, and Miglioli was accused of fostering ‘illusions’ in his followers.⁴³ During the *biennio rosso* there was a progressive widening of the basic split between socialists and catholics in Cremona, and the presence there of the catholic left did not fundamentally alter local relations with the ‘red’ organizations.

1921 saw the final and most dramatic occupations. Continual agitation by the ‘white’ leagues led to the famous *Lodo Bianchi* (8 June 1921),⁴⁴ an agreement which granted almost complete self-management to the dairy workers and effectively signalled the end of landowner control in the

³⁶ *Avanti!* called the dairy councils a ‘parody of soviets’; E. Caporali, ‘Le mattare dell’on. Miglioli: la parodia dei soviet’, 9 June 1920.

³⁷ The whole manifesto can be found in Caporali, ‘La sciopero’. ‘Unity’ here of course implied unity *within* the CGL. See G. Mussio, ‘Lo sciopero’ and ‘Mentre si chiude lo sciopero’, *Il Secolo*, 21 June 1920.

³⁸ ACds, P.S. 1920, b.83, 5 May 1920, Pref. to Min.

³⁹ In *Avanti!* Leonetti described the Miglioli movement as ‘the most pernicious of the attempts to suffocate the generosity of the popular and peasant will’, ‘Il partito carabinieri dell’anima pololare’, 5 June 1920.

⁴⁰ This last dispute and the *Lodo Bianchi* have received much attention from scholars – see for example A. Zanibelli, *Le leghe bianche nel Cremonese (dal 1900 al Lodo Bianchi)* (Rome, 1961). In Oct. 1920 socialists and catholics had concluded separate agreements with the employers. The ‘white’ strikes lasted 10–18 Oct. 1920, with invasions on 11 Nov. 1920 and from 8 June to 10 Aug. 1921.

⁴¹ C. Brezzi, ‘Il sindacalismo cattolico: l’esperienza della CIL’ in *Storia del sindacato* (Venice, 1982), p. 142.

⁴² There were clashes on 16 Aug., 19 Sept., 20 Sept., 26 Sept., 10 and 18 Oct. 1920. Only on one occasion were the instigators the catholics, ACdS, P.S. 1920, b.83, ‘Incidenti fra sovversivi e popolari’.

⁴³ *La Difesa*, 4 Dec. 1920.

⁴⁴ F. Bogliari, ed., *Il movimento contadino in Italia. Dall’Unità al fascismo* (Turin, 1980), p. 321.

Soresinese.⁴⁵ Sturzo came to Cremona to salute the peasants' victory, keeping in contact with his rural base, but the *Lodo* was never applied as the fascists moved quickly in to restore the old contacts.⁴⁶

Left reaction to the catholic victory was universally negative. The local socialists and communists (the second biggest PCdI federation in Lombardy), who had remained 'neutral' during the strikes, attacked the *Lodo*. *L'Eco dei Comunisti* associated the pact with 'selfish... property and the conservation of bourgeois privilege' whilst recognizing the importance of the dairy councils.⁴⁷ *La Difesa* wrote again of 'illusions'.⁴⁸ Palmiro Togliatti called the pact 'conservative' and 'advantageous... for the ruling classes'.⁴⁹ In parliament Nino Mazzone expressed his hostility to the *Lodo* as 'profoundly conservative' and spoke of an abyss between 'red' and 'white' workers.⁵⁰ 'For this reason', Mazzone stated, 'I remain an enemy of the *Lodo Bianchi*.' Given this evidence it is impossible to accept Grieco's later assertion that 'the communists supported and defended him [Miglioli]... in a fight that affirmed for the first time, with the famous *Lodo Bianchi*, the capacity and the right of the rural waged-worker to land, to association of work and to a share in the management of the farm' (1954).⁵¹

True, Grieco had revised the original communist party position, but only in 1924, calling the *Lodo* 'certainly the most advanced conquest made in Italy by the agricultural workers'.⁵² At the time of the *Lodo*, an atmosphere of sectarianism against catholics and 'reformist' solutions on the left, and against Miglioli in particular, blinded the PSI and PCdI in confrontation with a major rural workers' victory. However, the nature of the catholic base and ideology of their struggle helped to 'provoke' this reaction. The charge of 'utopianism' over the timing of the *Lodo* may well have been correct. In no sense could the Cremonese landowners accept for long the limbo situation in which the pact left them. But the negative response of the whole left to what G. Manacorda has described as 'the unique notable attempt to introduce the social management of production in a zone of capitalist agriculture' was the last, and most crucial 'red' rejection of base-up alliances with the *estremisti* in the *dopoguerra*.⁵³

⁴⁵ The text is now in *ibid.* pp. 320–3. For the agitation see ACdS, P.S. 1921, b.66 and 'L'agitazione nel Cremonese e una lettera dell'on. Miglioli', *L'Italia*, 17 Feb. 1921.

⁴⁶ Sturzo also called for a 'tripling of production' and attacked 'class dictatorship' in his speech to the victorious peasants, 'Don Sturzo illustra ai contadini soresinesi il significato della loro vittoria', *Il Secolo*, 23 Aug. 1921.

⁴⁷ Cited in E. Macaluso, 'Bianchi e rossi dallo scontro all'alleanza' in *Rinascita*, 15 Nov. 1974, pp. 23–4 (an article strongly linked to the 'historic compromise' in the PCI).

⁴⁸ 'Illusioni', 4 Dec. 1920; see also E. Caporali, 'Popolari, fascisti, socialisti e il Lodo Bianchi', *Avanti!*, 4 Dec. 1921.

⁴⁹ 'La supremazia del Partito Popolare', *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 27 Aug. 1921.

⁵⁰ Zanibelli ed., *Miglioli–Grieco*, p. 347 (2 Dec. 1921).

⁵¹ 'Guido Miglioli e l'unità contadina', *Rinascita*, 24 July 1965, p. 22.

⁵² Report to the *Krestintern* (the 'Peasant International'), 21 Nov. 1924, in P. G. Zunino, *La questione Cattolica nella sinistra italiana (1919–1939)* (Bologna, 1975).

⁵³ Quoted in Bogliari ed., *Il movimento*, p. 320.

III

If someone refuses to obey, remove them immediately from their office
(Letter from the pope to the bishop of Bergamo, published in *L'Eco di Bergamo*).⁵⁴

We want the land, we want the factories! (Slogan of the Bergamo *Unione del Lavoro*, 1920–1).

The catholic *Ufficio del Lavoro* was formed in Bergamo in 1906 specifically to fight socialism. By 1919 it had over 50,000 members, the vast majority in the textile industry,⁵⁵ and the city could boast the biggest PPI section in Italy (with more than 10,000 members). A vast network of catholic institutions of all types stretched out across the countryside around Bergamo and assisted this growth.⁵⁶ In mid-1919 a young trade-unionist, Romano Cocchi, was appointed head of the UdL. Cocchi's political training had been at Cremona, with Miglioli.⁵⁷ UdL recruits were mainly peasant workers, and the union made little initial impact in 'pure' urban-based industries. For most UdL members, who were often women, 'the essential point of reference remained to the peasant world, of which the worker, outside of the factory, continued to be part, economically and culturally'.⁵⁸

Here, at Bergamo, at the very heart of the catholic world, was where the *estremisti* made their greatest national impact. UdL-led strikes in the textile industry demanded 50 per cent wage increases. This demand was largely granted, and followed similar agitation in autumn 1919.⁵⁹ By 1920, the UdL could claim over 100,000 members and its economic successes were making inroads into industries outside of normal catholic influence, such as amongst

⁵⁴ 24 Mar. 1920, quoted in V. Saba, 'L'agricoltura, contratti agrari e sindacati cristiani in Lombardia nel quadriennio, 1919–1922', *Bollettino*, XI (1976), 119.

⁵⁵ G. Bonomini puts the figures at 30,000 in the *Unione del Lavoro* (17,720 from textiles, 10,000 peasants, 936 button workers, 693 cement workers, 300 brick workers and 264 metalworkers); 'Il sindacalismo cattolico bergamasco nel primo dopoguerra', *Ricerche di Storia Contemporanea Bergamasca*, II–III (1972), 33. Other work on the extremists at Bergamo is to be found in later issues of this journal, and R. Amadei, 'Le vicende dell'Ufficio del Lavoro, 1919–1921' in A. Bendotti, ed., *Il movimento*, pp. 81–92. At the November 1919 election the PPI was the biggest party in the province with nearly 55,000 votes (64 per cent), taking five out of the seven seats on offer (one went to the PSI with 12,000 votes and one to the Liberal coalition with 18,000). The only candidate of the left on the PPI list, Cavalli, against whom the right-catholic paper *L'Eco di Bergamo* campaigned, gained the highest number of votes, with over 77,000 preferences; figures from G. Laterza, 'I primi anni del Partito Popolare a Bergamo', *Archivio Storico Bergamasco*, V (1983), 303.

⁵⁶ There were also twelve catholic worker mutual-aid societies, six 'rural banks', one workers' bank, five insurance societies, one building cooperative, one casa del popolo, and seven leagues of industrial workers in 1913, G. Formigoni, 'I cattolici deputati (1904–1919): per la storia di una classe dirigente in formazione', *Bollettino*, XX (1985), 110 and see pp. 109–10 for the figures for Brescia, Cremona and Milan.

⁵⁷ On Cocchi (1893–1944), whose extraordinary life definitely merits a biography, see Bonomini, 'Il sindacalismo', passim, and Saba, 'L'agricoltura', pp. 114–21. For Cocchi's side of the story see his pamphlet '*Scandali*' nella vandeia clericale (with Enrico Tulli) (Milan, 1923).

⁵⁸ M. Mazzucchetti in Bendotti, ed., *Il movimento*, p. 100.

⁵⁹ In April the CdL won the eight-hour day, by early August the catholics matched this success for their members and had secured a 20 per cent pay deal. Local socialists had negotiated more favourable agreements after an earlier 12-day strike; Bonomini, 'Il sindacalismo', p. 31.

the cement workers.⁶⁰ Left catholicism was rapidly gaining strength inside the PPI and managed to win control of the local provisional committee with twelve out of fifteen seats in May.⁶¹ Catholic factory owners around Bergamo viewed the UdL with dismay, and carried out a long campaign in *L'Eco di Bergamo* to discredit Cocchi and his supporters.

The national impact of these developments was only felt towards the end of March 1920, when news came through of a meeting of a so-called '*gruppo di avanguardia*' at Bergamo. A group of left-wing catholics in the PPI had met for two days (19–20 March 1920) to discuss tactics and policies for future *estremisti* action. Miglioli, Speranzini and Cocchi attended, as did militants from all parts of the country. The *Avanguardia* conference was widely reported in the national press, and was swiftly condemned by Sturzo, liberal and most catholic newspapers, and many PPI deputies.⁶²

From that point on a split in the party at Bergamo was inevitable, and the pope, in a letter to the local bishop – published in *L'Eco di Bergamo* – intervened strongly against the left. The leader of the catholic church described the use of socialist language by catholic organizers as 'an action completely perverse from the christian spirit'.⁶³ At the second congress of the PPI the defeat of the left made a swift clamp-down on the *estremisti* possible.⁶⁴ In June Cocchi was sacked from his position as UdL secretary by the local bishop, and a violent split racked local catholic organizations. The two sides clashed in church, in factories and on the streets. Families were torn apart. Cocchi supporters occupied the catholic *casa del popolo* and on 22 August a new federation was formed by the rebels, the *Unione del Lavoro* (UndL), with a newspaper, *Bandiera Bianca* [white flag].⁶⁵ The new UndL took the majority of the workers from the old organization, as many as 60,000 according to later research.⁶⁶ For the first time a catholic union had been formed which explicitly rejected confessional church authority – and it was operating in the very centre of 'white' power, the area with the biggest PPI section in the whole of Italy. What did these events, namely the unfolding of deep fissures in the catholic movement, and a class

⁶⁰ G. Gioli, 'Tra i cattolici rossi nelle Bergamasche', *Il Secolo*, 7 Feb. 1920.

⁶¹ 'Piena vittoria degli estremisti al convegno dei popolari a Bergamo', *Il Secolo*, 31 May 1920.

⁶² *L'Italia* was very critical, see for example 'Popolari estremisti', 21 Mar. 1920 (with the attack by Sturzo), and 'Gli "avanguardisti"', 25 Mar. 1920. For the national press note 'Dopo il convegno avanguardista di Bergamo: attacchi cattolici all'on. Miglioli' and 'I bolscevichi di Gesù', *Corriere della Sera* both 21 Mar. 1920. Later in 1920, *Gruppi di Avanguardia* met at Milan to criticise the political activity of the PPI leadership; Motta, 'Sindacalismo cristiano', p. 354.

⁶³ 'Al venerabile fratello L. Maria Vescovo di Bergamo', *L'Eco di Bergamo*, 24 Mar. 1920.

⁶⁴ On the defeat at Napoli see 'Gli estremisti battuti nel voto sulla questione agraria', *Corriere della Sera*, 11 Apr. 1920. Strangely enough Sturzo had earlier defended the 'white' unions against accusations of 'Bolshevism' by *L'Eco di Bergamo*, 'Il PPI ed il movimento economico: una circolare di Don Sturzo', *L'Italia*, 24 Feb. 1920.

⁶⁵ For divisions within families see ACdS, P.S. 1920, b.144, K.2, 'PPI', and for the catholic press note 'I "fatti" di Bergamo: come gli estremisti non hanno vinto', 6 June 1920, 'I "fatti" di Bergamo', 9 and 10 June 1920, 'Dopo i fatti di Bergamo', 13 June 1920, 'L'insegnamento dei fatti di Bergamo', 16 June 1920, all *L'Italia*.

⁶⁶ G. Bonomini, 'Il sindacalismo', p. 52. In ACdS, P.S. 1920, b.144 the claim was that two-thirds of the textile and cement workers in the old UdL left with Cocchi's new organization.

struggle within the ‘white’ world, mean for socialist–catholic relations in Bergamo? Above all did the presence of the Cocchian left make alliances more, or less likely?

In 1919, agitation over the eight-hour day and textile strikes had seen separate action by socialists and catholics. However, in early 1920 there were instances of unity. In February *L’Italia* reported that after a catholic meeting of textile workers, ‘many workers from the lignite quarries of Val Gandino united themselves to the striking masses, and to the usual agitators that attend similar events’. A violent demonstration followed in front of an industrialist’s house.⁶⁷

But, in the wake of the ‘fatti di Bergamo’ of June 1920, the PSI maintained its negative attitude towards the catholic left. As at Cremona, Leonetti argued that the events at Bergamo showed how catholic workers were a danger to the revolution – a ‘true obstacle’ – because of their links to the church and hence to domination and authority. Leonetti believed that this ‘danger’ was greater where the catholics were more left wing. Given this line, which was never countered in *Avanti!*, the socialists would have had to fight the left–catholics *with greater force than those on the right*.⁶⁸ Only Gramsci took a more positive view of the Bergamo organizations. Replying to a letter attacking a previous article, Gramsci asked whether socialists should be against soviets because at Bergamo any soviets would be controlled by catholics? He added another rhetorical question, ‘do we need to remove from Italian soil the race of workers and peasants that follow politically the flag of the left-wing of the Popular Party?’⁶⁹ There was a need to find ‘a system of equilibrium’. Apart from Gramsci, only the anarchists displayed a certain sympathy for the ‘white bolsheviks’ at Bergamo.⁷⁰

Bergamo was not free from the socialist–catholic violence that has been examined elsewhere. Such clashes occurred even during the moments of highest tension within the catholic movement, although on a smaller scale than in other areas.⁷¹ At least ten incidents were recorded between June and October 1920. The only edition of *Bandiera Bianca* that appeared in 1920 contained strong attacks on the PPI, a call for worker–peasant alliance *and* anti-socialist propaganda. In response to the accusation of being pro-socialist, *Bandiera Bianca* replied that ‘we are continuing to fight happily precisely against the

⁶⁷ ‘L’accordo nello sciopero dei tessili bergamaschi: intorno agli incidenti di Gandino’, 7 Feb. 1920.

⁶⁸ A. Leonetti, ‘L’autonomia politica del PP; dopo lo scandalo di Bergamo’, *Avanti!*, 24 June 1920 and ‘Gli eretici di Bergamo’, *ibid.* 10 June 1920. A better analysis was ‘La crisi dei popolari a Bergamo’, *ibid.* 10 June 1920.

⁶⁹ ‘Cronache dell’Ordine Nuovo’, *L’Ordine Nuovo*, 2, 41, 20 Mar. 1920.

⁷⁰ ‘Note Bergamasche: le ribellioni popolari e le conseguenti scomuniche’, *Umanità Nova*, 13 June 1920.

⁷¹ ACdS, P.S. 1920, b.78, ‘Violenze di socialisti contro popolari’. According to the prefect of Bergamo ‘in this province... there have not been systematic attacks by the reds against the *popolari* organisations and associations’ (Pref. – Min., 3 July 1920). The archive still reported two confrontations in June, two in July and October and three in November 1920. See also ‘Incruenta mischia nel Bergamasco fra cattolici e socialisti’, *Il Secolo*, 3 May 1920.

socialists ... we continue to confront the socialists with our christian trade union programme and our action'.⁷² Cocchi himself advocated violence in defence of catholic workers victimized by 'red' unions in Lombardy in early 1920.⁷³

However, these 'anti-socialist' articles were usually defensive replies to accusations from within the catholic world. The *estremisti* were not naturally anti-socialist and certainly did not prioritize what they criticized as 'a sterile anti-socialism'. The participation of 'Cocchian' workers in occupations of textile factories in October 1920, using the same methods as the 'red' unions, was evidence of this.⁷⁴ Yet, the need of the UndL to fight on three fronts, against its rival catholic federation, the employers *and* the socialists, without the support of church institutions, seriously limited its space for action. Real alliances with the socialists would only come later, and in a defensive sense, with fascism on the rise.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, Cocchi's short-lived attempt to form a 'lay catholic' workers' organization still represented a decisive moment for the 'whites' in the *biennio rosso*. Without church support, and unable to form alliances either to the left or to the centre, the *estremisti* could not survive. At Bergamo these lessons were quickly taken on board by Cocchi and his followers.

IV

I do not understand why the socialists are against the white organisations, while they should be making common cause in the interest of the proletariat they ... should unite all the proletarian forces.

(Miglioli to parliament, 4 February 1921)⁷⁶

With the increasing violence of the fascist squads in 1920 and 1921, the period of offensive action by both socialists and catholics came rapidly to an end. The

⁷² Il nostro programma giudicata dalla stampa', *Bandiera Bianca* [hereafter BB], 1, 1, 11 July 1920. For the attacks on the PPI see 'Come parla Cocchi a Napoli', *ibid.* 11 July 1920, and for the worker-peasant alliance 'In cammino', *ibid.* On Cocchi's anti-socialism see 'Una politica positiva contro il socialismo', *L'Eco di Bergamo*, 19 June 1920, and Cocchi's letter to Esposito, 'Dopo i fatti di Bergamo: Una parola agli operai ed operaie', *L'Italia*, 13 June 1920, where Cocchi assured his followers that he intended to 'continue to confront anti-christian socialism from amongst the masses'.

⁷³ In a telegram expressing solidarity with victimized catholic workers Cocchi wrote 'we will react [by] returning violence with all our force, all our faith', printed in *L'Italia*, 3 Feb. 1920, cited in Motta, 'Sindacalismo cristiano', p. 351.

⁷⁴ On these occupations compare Cocchi's account, which claimed the involvement of twenty factories and 25,000 workers, but only for one day, *Scandali*, pp. 65–6, with that of *L'Italia*, 'La vertenza dei tessili bergamaschi', 9 Oct. 1920.

⁷⁵ The other key areas of the *estremisti* strength in 1919–20 were Brescia, the Veneto and Trento. On alliances in the Veronese see 'L'agitazione agraria nel Veneto: una grande battaglia di 500,000 lavoratori bianchi', *L'Italia*, 13 June 1920, and A. Canavero, 'Il movimento sindacale bianco: I risultati di un incontro di studio', *Bollettino*, xvi (1981), 298–305. The agrarian pact of May 1920 in Vicentino was recognized by 'reds' and catholics alike. 'Red'–'white' strikes also took place at Padua, *L'Italia*, 17 May 1920. For socialist hostility to the Verona action see 'Veneto: la lotta dei contadini', *Battaglie Sindacali*, 19 June 1920. According to *Il Secolo*, 'I clericali prima e dopo la guerra', 3 Dec. 1920, there was a 'deadly hatred' between catholics and socialists at Verona but Zalin gives examples of joint agreements and union pluralism in the Veronese countryside, 'Lotte contadine', pp. 599–628.

⁷⁶ 'La discussione alla Camera', *L'Italia*, 4 Feb. 1921.

destruction of both 'white' and 'red' cooperatives and union headquarters, and attacks on members, imposed the necessity of defensive union struggle. It was only in the two leading regions of left catholicism that this situation produced alliances between socialists and catholics. At a national level the ambivalent attitude of the PPI, in often supporting fascist action and joining the anti-socialist blocs in the 1920–1 local elections, contrasted with the vicious struggles at Cremona and Bergamo. Miglioli's house was burnt down twice by the fascists and he was personally attacked, as was Cocchi. Yet, at Milan, the attitude of the PPI and catholic establishment strongly supported the fascist occupation of local government offices and the end of local democracy after 1922.⁷⁷ Once again the rural *estremisti* had shown themselves to be far more radical than the conservative urban catholics at Milan.

At Bergamo, the aforementioned split in the 'white' unions facilitated an alliance between the new UndL and the CGL. This agreement, the first of its kind in Italian history, was signed in August 1921. The rise of fascism had necessitated a 'proletarian block and a united trade union front'.⁷⁸ *Bandiera Bianca* wrote that catholic workers were now 'part of the great proletarian Italian family'.⁷⁹ The pact allowed religious freedom, and proclaimed economic defence of its members.⁸⁰ *L'Italia* saw the alliance as proof, if any was needed, of the real intentions of Cocchi all along. His 'red methods' had finally led him to ally with the 'enemy' – socialism.⁸¹

A similar pact was agreed at Cremona in March 1922, where a formal alliance had seemed likely after a long period of informal ties and attacks on both organizations by the fascist squads led by Farinacci.⁸² Cremona's alliance sanctioned common defence against fascism, and called for such a pact at a national level, between unions and political parties.⁸³ However, both the PPI and PSI leaderships attacked the agreement. Sturzo repudiated the idea of local pacts, whilst the socialists also criticized the whole concept of such an alliance.⁸⁴ The Cgdl, however, called the pact an example of 'class unity'. Both local organizations bravely replied to these criticisms and re-emphasized the need for national change. Yet, no such moves were made and the pact at Cremona remained a series of minor and localistic episodes, such as a unified

⁷⁷ Vecchio, *I cattolici milanesi*, pp. 252–61.

⁷⁸ 'Quello che insegna la reazione', *Bandiera Bianca*, 30 May 1921. The rapid reduction of the UndL's membership to 11,000 emphasized its reliance on church institutions for support.

⁷⁹ 'Il fronte unico realizzato', *Bandiera Bianca*, 1 Sept. 1921 and 'Monito e promessa', 11 Sept. 1921. See also Mazzucchetti, 'L'estremismo', p. 103 and Cocchi, *Scandal*, p. 75.

⁸⁰ ACdS, P.S. 1921, b.1115, Pref.-Min. 946/2, 28 Aug. 1921.

⁸¹ 'L'ultimo fasto del Cocchi', 12 July 1921.

⁸² The vice-president of the socialists at Cremona, Boldori, was killed by the fascists (12 Dec. 1921) and the PPI and PSI voted together for the first time at the local council in January 1922 on a motion attacking fascism, Duchi, 'Socialisti e migliolini', p. 88. A similar pact was agreed at Verona in 1921, Zalin, 'Lotte contadine'.

⁸³ The text is in 'Il patto di Cremona', *Battaglie Sindacali*, 16 Mar. 1922.

⁸⁴ Duchi, 'Socialisti e migliolini', p. 89. Claudio Treves gave limited and ambiguous support to the pact, 'Socialisti e popolari: il patto di Cremona e un incidente parlamentare', *Critica Sociale*, 16–31 Mar. 1922. *Battaglie Sindacali* was more positive about the agreement, pinpointing the enemy as fascism, not the PPI, 'Unità di classe', 16 Mar. 1922.

celebration for the first of May, rather than the spark towards more widespread alliances.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, it was significant that the two most important moments of anti-fascist ‘white’–‘red’ alliances took place in the areas of greatest left–catholic support. Where ‘positive’ coalitions had been impossible, alliances were formed in defence of democratic institutions.

In many other regions, the story continued to be one of separation and mutual mistrust. Despite a more open attitude in the Cgdl leadership to pluralist recognition,⁸⁶ incidents of socialist–catholic violence continued. Many of these clashes stemmed from a hardened anti-socialism on behalf of the PPI, but violent anticlericalism remained an integral part of maximalist propaganda.⁸⁷ Yet, the number and seriousness of these incidents was on a far smaller scale than in 1919–20, reflecting the slowing down of rural and urban class struggle. The expulsion of both Speranzini and Cocchi from the PPI in early 1921 signalled the internal defeat of the *estremisti* and the isolation of Miglioli within the party.⁸⁸ Many *popolari* now agreed that the very function of the catholic party was to defeat socialism. A pamphlet published in 1922 *Socialismo e il Partito Popolare*⁸⁹ argued that the PPI had to oppose ‘co-operative to co-operative, league to league, union to union, idea to idea’.⁹⁰ The programme of the anti-bolshevik leagues of 1919 was repeated word-for-word. *L’Italia* described socialism as ‘an adversary which has to be fought without quarter’.⁹¹

Alongside the survival of these old attitudes another process was taking place. Under the pressure of fascist repression and the local alliances at Bergamo and Cremona, some socialists and catholics began to reconsider their former enemies and re-analyse their position in society. These developments could not prevent the victory of fascism, but laid a theoretical basis for the future defeat of Mussolini in the resistance. The 1920s and 1930s saw a whole series of theoretical studies on alliances between ‘red’ and ‘white’ from all sides of the Italian anti-fascist movement.

Where does the responsibility lie for this sad story of sectarianism and recrimination? It is hard to attach too much blame to the catholic left. They were battling against tremendous odds – the church, the authorities, the landowners and the socialists. Nevertheless the *estremisti* managed to build important organizations and win innovative economic and social gains for their members. The socialists, locally and nationally, were bitterly opposed to the left–catholics. Nearly all ‘reds’ simply refused to accept that a real

⁸⁵ ‘Popolari e socialisti’, *L’Ordine Nuovo*, 20 Mar. 1922; Bello, *Le avanguardie*, p. 139.

⁸⁶ For example ‘L’on. D’Aragona e la collaborazione’, *L’Italia*, 21 Sept. 1921.

⁸⁷ For examples of the latter see ‘Vimercate’, ‘I 10 numeri e i 100 errori del PPI’, *La Battaglia Socialista*, 7 May 1921.

⁸⁸ *Bandiera Bianca*, 13 Feb. 1920. All UndL members were expelled in Bergamo, not just Cocchi.

⁸⁹ P. Maraglia (Pistoia, 1922). Catholic–socialist violence after 1920 is detailed in ASMi, b. 1015 (30 Mar. 1921 at Milan) and ACdS, P.S. 1921, b.69, at Rome, Magenta, and in the province of Milan, and on 21 Mar. 1921 at Abbiategrasso. Socialist local administrations at Novara and Pioltello decided to take down crucifixes in local schools in 1921, provoking a ferocious response from the local catholics, ACdS, P.S. 1921, C.2, b.79 and P.S. 1921, b. 115, K.2 on local government.

⁹⁰ Maraglia, *Socialismo*, p. 128.

⁹¹ ‘Volterriesimo Rosso’, 7 Jan. 1921.

movement existed in Cremona or Bergamo. For the socialists Miglioli was a ‘bluff’, a ‘trick’, a ‘servant of the employers’. All these accusations were so clearly untrue that it is difficult today to explain fully why they were made. This article has tried to draw out some of the main reasons, namely the twin traditions of anticlericalism and anti-socialism and above all the atmosphere created by the violence of the war, Russia and the *biennio rosso*.

It is often claimed that Gramsci and certain of his colleagues were different, that they were more open to alliances and analyses of the catholic *estremisti* in general. As a conclusion to this article I will assess how true these claims are. Certainly, only *L'Ordine Nuovo* attempted a real study of the PPI and its left wing. Initially, in June 1919, Gramsci adopted the same critique of Miglioli as that used by the maximalists – accusing the Cremonese deputy of opportunism and praising the reformist *Federterra* above the catholic organizations.⁹² The catholic left were ‘pseudo-revolutionaries’, typical of the movement that blossomed in periods of change.⁹³ Towards the end of 1919 Gramsci began to see the PPI in a different light – as a potentially useful organizer of the ‘backward’ masses that the PSI and *Federterra* could not draw into its ranks.⁹⁴ Catholic unions began to be placed more positively within the revolutionary process. During February 1920 this ‘role’ attributed to the ‘white’ leagues was further defined. The war had created a party ‘of the peasants’, the PPI, which appealed to rural classes and had the means (in particular financial institutions) to draw into its ranks many poor peasants and small proprietors. Gramsci underlined the mass nature of the PPI (he wrote that the party had ‘700,000 members!’), in ‘*Il popolare*’ only three months earlier, Gramsci had scoffed at how small PPI membership was!) and the eventual split that would take place within the party.⁹⁵ The PPI was a party of ‘two branches’ which, with class struggle, would split apart.⁹⁶ Left-catholics were by now seen as ‘revolutionary’ (the ‘pseudo’ had disappeared) and as helping the peasants to mount insurrectionary activity.⁹⁷ Yet, this period of reflection only lasted through February. With the Piedmontese general strike and the factory council movement the *ordinovisti* simply stopped examining the forces behind the PPI. Between February and September, *L'Ordine Nuovo* published one anti-religious article dedicated to ‘the thinkers of the PP’.⁹⁸ It was only with the defeat of the factory occupations in September that the theme returned. *L'Ordine Nuovo* argued that the PPI had organized the ‘historically lazy’ peasantry and its base had been taken over by the ‘*estremisti*’. Class struggle had exposed the contradictions of catholic interclassism.⁹⁹

Gramsci’s reflections on the PPI and its left in 1919–20 were important for

⁹² ‘Voci della Terra’, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 21 June 1919.

⁹³ *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 13 Sept. 1919, and see above all ‘I Popolari’, *ibid.* 1 Nov. 1919.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 28–9 Nov. 1919.

⁹⁵ The events at Bergamo and Cremona to some extent supported these predictions, *ibid.* 7 Feb. 1920 and *ibid.*, 11 and 18 Feb. 1920.

⁹⁶ *Avanti!* (Piedmont), 20 Feb. 1920.

⁹⁷ *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 26 Mar. 1920.

⁹⁸ The piece was a reprint from Croce, ‘La vanità della religione’, *ibid.* 17 July 1920.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 4 Sept. 1920.

two reasons. First, they opened the way to a real analysis of the classes organized by the catholics and to a positive evaluation of the role of the 'white' organizations in the countryside. Gramsci's analysis later formed the basis of the famous intervention by Terracini at the Livorno congress (1921) and of the reassessment of the catholic movement by Grieco, Di Vittorio and Gramsci under fascism. Secondly, the idea of splitting the PPI tied in with some of the views of the catholic left itself and prefigured later approaches to Miglioli and Cocchi in 1923–6, which were important attempts at socialist–catholic alliance building. However, the *ordinovisti*'s characterization of the PPI was also marked with severe problems.

For a start, the PPI was not a party of the peasantry as a whole, but of certain types of peasants and urban-based middle classes. The fight within the PPI could not just be reduced to a class struggle in the countryside. Secondly, the assumption of 'backwardness' in the PPI membership was paternalistic and opportunistic. In fact, at Cremona, catholic strength was amongst some of the most capitalistic agricultural enterprises in Italy. Far from being 'less' revolutionary than the socialists – as in Gramsci's analogy of Kerensky compared to Lenin – many of the struggles inspired by the catholic left were far more radical than those of the *Federterra*. In Lombardy (outside of Pavia) this was certainly the case. Thirdly, the *ordinovisti* were not united on the catholic question. The presence of Seassaro¹⁰⁰ and Leonetti, whose views on the PPI were negative in the extreme,¹⁰¹ in the same group was testimony to this. Finally, the idea of the PPI 'organizing the unorganized' left out one great area – the South. Such a theory may well have fitted certain areas of the North – the Veneto, and parts of Lombardy – but the PPI's electoral and material failure to make any impression on liberal and social-democratic hegemony in the south was vital.¹⁰² It showed that the catholics did not appeal to all 'small peasants' as such, but only certain small peasants in certain areas. These areas were, in the main, those where the church was *already* the dominant cultural and social organization, and catholic unions could exploit these structures as a spring-board. Elsewhere, as with the day-labourers of the Po Valley, 'red' culture (with its own 'religious' elements) was dominant. The historically specific nature of the southern question precluded any general analyses of the PPI as a 'peasant party' at that time. In addition, gender and its relation to the catholic movement formed no part of the analysis of the catholic party.

¹⁰⁰ Cesare Seassaro was a socialist–catholic and ex-combatant. He wrote that anticlericalism was part of bourgeois ideology and that many priests could be seen as workers ('La legislazione comunista: come applicare in Italia la costituzione russa'; *ibid.* 14 Feb. 1920), and attacked 'the parliamentary anticlericalism' (*ibid.* 31 July 1920) of the reformists as 'dogma', arguing for private religious freedom. The 'eccentric' nature of Seassaro's views and his early death in 1921 prevented any real dissemination of such opinions in the Communist Party.

¹⁰¹ 'Il partito carabinieri'.

¹⁰² The PPI did best in Sicily and the province of Rome, worst in Basilicata (no seats in Nov. 1919), Abruzzo (none), Sardinia (one) and Apulia (none). Although the Cosentino area in Calabria has been described as an 'oasis' of Catholic activity; J. Steinberg, 'The poor in Christ: peasants, priests and politics in the Cosenza general strike' in *History, society and the churches: essays in honour of Owen Chadwick*, eds., G. Best and D. Beales (Cambridge, 1985), p. 268.

Hence, even Gramsci's work on the catholics in 1919–20 was schematic and incomplete. Real linkage with the left catholics was to come only with the rise of fascism and the 'new' PCdI line after 1924. A real opportunity had been missed by the socialists in the *biennio rosso*. *Estremisti* organizers had taken on the 'white' bourgeoisie deep in their Lombard heartlands, and had briefly seemed to be winning. They received no support, only neutrality and opposition from the 'reds' – socialists, anarchists and syndicalists alike. The extraordinary rise and fall of the innovative *estremisti* in 1919–20 was a rich moment in catholic history. Socialists, even those around Gramsci, could only look back on their reactions with regret. In the years after 1920 a reassessment began which was to have profound theoretical implications for alliance theory. By then, however, fascism was on the rampage.