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BETWEEN HIGH POLITICS AND PUBLIC ORDER. THE ITALIAN ARMY AND ITS MEN IN THE TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY CRISIS, 1896-1901

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For the young Kingdom of Italy, the period between the fall of Francesco Crispi (10 March 1896) and the inauguration of the Zanardelli cabinet (15 February 1901) was one of profound political instability and violent social tensions due partly to the persistence of the country's structural problems, partly to the onset of the industrialisation process, highlighting the limits of its economic system. The 1898 uprisings and the killing of King Umberto I in 1900 were the most critical turning points in a phase of widespread violence. Against this backdrop, the armed forces played a central role, both as an organisation and as individuals. As a bulwark of law and order, the Army was actively engaged in quelling the uprisings. The conservatism of the officer corps – often bordering open reactionism – made it easy to play a repressive function, of which the action of General Fiorenzo Bava Beccaris in Milan was just one example. However, the military also played other roles. Most importantly, due to its ties with the Crown, the Army provided key figures to manage the "turn-of-the-century crisis" at the political level. These figures typically fought a rearguard battle against the ongoing social transformations. However, despite this character, the long phase of the King's governments was an essential step toward the new early Twentieth-century political balance and the decline of the men and forces who had driven the Risorgimento process.

Keywords: Kingdom of Italy; Turn-of-the-century crisis; Popular riots; Public order; Military repression; Italian Army's political role.

Between the end of the Nineteenth and the beginning of the Twentieth century, the young Kingdom of Italy lived in a complex and turbulent period. In 1887, Francesco Crispi (1818-1901) was appointed President of the Council of Ministers, soon impressing a sharp personalistic and authoritarian turn to the Kingdom's policy.[1] Crispi – a central figure of the Risorgimento and, after the Unification, one of the leaders of the Historical Left[2] – had ruled the country almost uninterruptedly for about ten years, with just a short break in 1891-93, when he was replaced first by Marquess Antonio Starabba di Rudinì (1839-1908) and later by Giovanni Giolitti (1842-1928), who led his first cabinet in 1892-93. Despite a challenging domestic and international context, Crispi's two long cabinets (July 1887-February 1891 and December 1893-March 1896) played a fundamental role in modernising and strengthening the country, paying special attention to the political and military dimensions. Among other, Crispi actively fostered Italy's rapprochement with Austria-Hungary and the German Second Reich, staunchly supporting the alliance ("Triple Alliance") the three countries had signed in 1882; encouraged, together with the King and the military establishment, the Army's and Navy's transition to a less defensive posture, and supported Italy's overseas initiatives, establishing the Eritrea colony after the death of Ethiopian Emperor Yohannes IV (1889), and enforcing a protectorate over the Somali sultanates, forerunner of the future Somalia colony.

Crispi's long and turbulent political career ended abruptly when General Oreste Baratieri was defeated in the battle of Adwa on 1-2 March 1896. In the battle, some 6,000 men – nationals and natives – died and between 3,000 and 4,000 were taken prisoners after the Italian and Askari columns clashed against Emperor Menelik II's overwhelming Ethiopian forces. Crispi (who had insistently forced Baratieri to take the field, hoping for an easy victory despite the strength of the enemy army) assumed the political responsibility for the setback and the decision to appoint as Governor of

1. On Crispi life and policy, the best English synthesis is, probably, Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi, 1818-1901. From Nation to Nationalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). A detailed picture of Italy's contemporary political, economic and social developments is in Giorgio Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia moderna*, esp. vols. 6, *Lo sviluppo del capitalismo e del movimentio operaio, 1871-1896*, and 7, *La crisi di fine secolo e l'età giolittiana, 1896-1914*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1970-1974).

2. The Historical Left ("Sinistra storica") was the dominant political group in the Italian Parliament between the 1870s and the early 1910s. While its counterpart, the Historical Right ("Destra storica"), represented the interests of the Northern bourgeoisie and the Southern aristocracy, the Left was a coalition of the Northern and Southern middle class, small businessmen, journalists and academics. Originally a progressive force (it supported broadening the suffrage, was in favour of expanding public education for all children and opposed the high tax policies promoted by the Right), after the 1890s, it assumed more conservative tendencies, including advocating breaking strikes and protests and promoting an aggressive colonialist policy in Africa.

the Eritrea colony and Commander in Chief of the colony's troops a man like Baratieri, who was rather unpopular among his brigadiers and seen more as an amateur than a professional soldier, having started his military career among Garibaldi's "Red Shirts" without the professional training of a regular army's officer. The defeat of a Western army by the hand of a "primitive" and "uncivilised" foe (as Ethiopians were regarded) heavily impacted Europe's and Italy's public opinion. In those years, Italy was already on the brink of war with France,[3] and when the scale of the defeat became known, widespread riots erupted, especially in the cities of Northern Italy, where protesters tried to prevent new troops from being sent overseas by occupying the stations and sabotaging the railway lines, as it would have happened fifteen years later, at the time of the war for Libya.[4]

Italy's turbulent social and political landscape

Beyond their immediate reasons, the Adwa troubles and Crispi's resignation had deep roots in recent Italian history. Since the 1880s, the ongoing social and economic transformations had put the country's political order based on the primacy of the local power brokers ("notables") and their cliques under increasing strain. Adopting protectionism and abandoning the traditional free trade policy favoured the emergence of a new industrial sector, which, nonetheless, remained heavily reliant on the state's support. On the other hand, protectionism negatively affected agriculture, which, in the previous years, had benefitted from the problems Italy's main competitors faced. In 1888, a tariff war with France started, which would have lasted until 1898, costing – according to estimates – some two billion lire in lost exports.[5] Finally, the spread of the inequalities that the industrialisation process fuelled led to the emergence of the first workers' movements, largely imbued with Socialism and Anarchism. Especially Anarchism had a long tradition in Italy due to the influence of figures like Carlo Cafiero (1846-92) and Errico Malatesta (1853-1932), who promoted and supported popular revolts since the mid-1870s, elaborating on the experience of the Paris Commune. Industrialisation also highlighted the inherent limits of the Italian economic system, with its deeply entrenched regional differences, limited financial capital, poor bank

3. On Italy's international posture, see Richard J.B. Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World, 1860-1960*, (London, Routledge, 1996), esp. 15 ff. Franco-Italian tensions dated back to 1870, when Italy forced the provisions of the September Convention (1864), invaded the Papal State and occupied Rome, which became the Kingdom's new capital. In the following years, competition for control of North Africa led to several episodes of diplomatic and economic hostility. After the French invasion of Tunisia (1881), relations became sharply negative for the whole decade, contributing to Italy's entry into the Triple Alliance.

4. Roberto Battaglia, *La prima guerra d'Africa*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1958), 791 ff.; Nicola Labanca, *In marcia verso Adua*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), 360 ff.; Carlo Carbone, "L'anticolonialismo italiano durante la prima guerra d'Africa", *Studi Storici* 13, no. 2 (1972): 418-421.

5. Denis Mack Smith, *Italy and its Monarchy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 134; on the evolution of Italia economic policy in the transition from free trade to protectionism, see, briefly, Frank J. Coppa, "The Italian Tariff and the Conflict between Agriculture and Industry: The Commercial Policy of Liberal Italy, 1860-1922," *The Journal of Economic History* 30, no. 4 (1970): 742-769.

system, low-skilled and exuberant workforce, an asphyctic domestic market and few export opportunities.

These factors had already led to the rise of protest movements, the most prominent being the Fasci siciliani (Sicilian workers leagues), which channelled the frustration and discontent of the island's poorest and most exploited classes between the late 1880s and the early 1890s.[6] An intricate mix of old and new that kept traditionalism and social reform together, the Fasci comprised a score of associations aggregating farm workers, tenant farmers, and small sharecroppers, as well as artisans, intellectuals, and industrial workers. Their immediate demands were fair land rents, higher wages, lower local taxes and distribution of misappropriated common land, and for a certain period, they seemed able to reach at least part of their aims.[7] However, increasing pressure from the landowners, the birth of the second Crispi cabinet and a fresh outburst of violence in late 1893 paved the way for their repression. The Fasci were crushed by declaring the state of siege, and the order was restored through military force. In the mid-1890s, similar measures were adopted in other parts of Italy, where protests assumed what the government labelled insurrectional traits. In all these cases, the Army was widely involved in suppressing protests and riots, and the military courts charged with the following trials, raising deprecation among moderate figures like Giuseppe Zanardelli (1826-1903), another important leader of the Historical Left who, as the Minister of Justice in the first Crispi cabinet, approved the introduction of a more modern criminal code in 1889.

Crispi's efforts to tackle the issues the Fasci had raised were only partly successful; a (relatively moderate) land reform project was abandoned due to the great landholders' pressures, while some social legislation provisions were adopted only after the cabinet's fall. In the meantime, the emergence of a full-fledged industrial working class (especially in the so-called "Industrial Triangle" revolving around the plants of Turin, Genoa, and Milan) fueled new tensions due also to the rivalry between Socialists and Anarchists and the rifts among their different factions. The drastic provisions enforced by the Minister of Finance and the Treasury, Sidney Sonnino (1847-1922),[8] led to new taxes and cuts in public spending. The state's budget deficit declined from 174 million lire in 1893-94 to 36 million in 1896-97, and by 1898-99, there was a surplus, which lasted for another eleven

6. A contemporary – and sympathetic – picture of the Fasci experience is in Napoleone Colajanni, *Gli avvenimenti di Sicilia e le loro cause*, (Palermo: Sandron, 1895); in English, see the remarks in Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), 93 ff.; for a more complete study, see, in Italian, Francesco Renda, *I fasci siciliani 1892-94*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1977).

7. Christopher Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism 1870-1925*, (London: Methuen & Co, 1967), 161-63. See pp. 166-168 for a synthesis of the movement's repression and the following Crispi's efforts to tackle the problems the Fasci had raised.

8. Sonnino was Minister for Treasury in the third and fourth Crispi cabinets (respectively, from December 1893 to June 1894 and from June 1894 to March 1896) and Minister for Finance in the third cabinet, being replaced in the fourth cabinet by Paolo Boselli (1838-1932), who would have served as President of the Council of Ministers in the turbulent period between the Austrian *Strafexpedition* of May-July 1916 and the battle of Caporetto, in October-November 1917.

years.[9] However, the greatest burden was shouldered on a working class struggling to adapt to the new socio-economic scenario and where discontent remained widespread. The inability of Crispi's successor (once again the Marquess di Rudinì, who inaugurated his second cabinet on 10 March 1896) to mark a clear break from the past and cope with these multiple challenges exacerbated the situation. Despite the social provisions introduced under the impulse of the new Minister of the Treasury, the economist Luigi Luzzatti (1841-1927), Rudinì's policy – mixing social authoritarianism with conservative reformism – could not cope with an economic situation that was newly deteriorating due also to the evolutions of the international context.

In January 1898, another wave of protest hit the country, triggered by increased foodstuff prices. Between April 1897 and January 1898, bread price passed from 30 to 38 lire per pound due to domestic shortage. In the following months, the situation worsened, while the outbreak of the Spanish-American War (21 April-10 December 1898) made wheat imports from the United States more and more difficult. The government tried to provide some relief by reducing the import duty from 7.5 to 5 lire per quintal, but the provision did not defuse tensions. Like behind the Fasci siciliani, behind the "Bread riots" of 1898, there were different elements, including jacquerie, economic claims, anti-fiscal protest, and the quest for greater social justice. Since the beginning, the Army has been massively engaged in quelling the riots. In late January, the state of siege was proclaimed in Ancona under General Antonio Baldissera, who had recently returned from Eritrea, where he had replaced Baratieri as the colony's governor. In early February, the same measure was adopted in Perugia and in March in Bassano. In April, riots affected Ferrara, Faenza, Pesaro, Naples, Bari, and Palermo. On 25 April, Bari was placed under a state of siege. Between 28 and 30 April, new demonstrations in Campania and Apulia were equally harshly repressed, although, in the meantime, violence spread to Rimini, Ravenna, Benevento, and Molfetta, affecting much of the Peninsula.

The 1898 Milan riots

On this occasion, the Army's involvement in public order was probably the most massive since the war against brigandage in 1861-65, when – at the moment of the maximum effort – some 120,000 men were engaged in the then recently annexed southern provinces. In January, after the first turmoil, the government mobilised some 40,000 reservists to face the mounting crisis. In Milan, where the riots would have been the most violent (and, possibly, the most politically oriented)[10], on the eve of 6 May (the first day of the

9. Martin Clark, *Modern Italy. 1871 to the Present*, 3rd ed. (Harlow: Pearson, 2008), 147. In a period of severe economic crisis, Sonnino not only contributed to restoring the state's finances by increasing taxes and levies but also worked to refound the banking system on a sounder basis, placing the Treasury at the centre of monetary action, redefining the operational scope of the Bank of Italy, and laying the foundations of the role it would have assumed in the following years.

10. For an history of the Milan riots, their origin and impact, see Alfredo Canavero, *Milano e la crisi di fine secolo (1896-1900)*, (Milan: SugarCo, 1976). Among the contemporary sources, see, together with the often biased "first-

crisis), the III Army Corps commander, General Fiorenzo Bava Beccaris (1831-1924), deployed some 4,000 men, including infantry, cavalry, horse artillery and police forces. On the other side (but figures are tentative, and the sources are often biased), there were 30,000 essentially unarmed protesters, both men and women of different ages. In the following days, the government called back to colours the recently discharged draftees of the 1873 class. Bava Beccaris commanded other units to reach the town, the first being the 5th Alpini regiment, recalled from its summer training camp. Moreover, by 8 May, together with Bava Beccaris' troops, two flying columns with a total strength of fourteen infantry battalions, five cavalry squadrons, four artillery batteries, plus one engineers company and one section, were deployed in the city neighbourhood, under the orders of the IV Army Corps commander, General Leone Pelloux.

A few days before the crisis, the government's instructions stressed the need to tackle the riots with the utmost energy. For instance, on 30 April, the Undersecretary for War, General Achille Afan de Rivera, upon order of the Minister, General Alessandro Asinari di San Marzano, telegraphed to local military authorities, ordering them to employ their troops "energetically so to quell disorders as soon as they start". On the same day, in another telegram, de Rivera remarked that, in facing widespread disorders, troops should not have been fractioned but concentrated "at a given point with overwhelming force, to get quickly on top of the revolt".[11] This attitude, coupled with the deeply rooted opinion of being faced with a general, revolutionary uprising (probably the greatest fear of the late XIX century Italian elites), goes a long way in explaining why the situation deteriorated so rapidly. Prefect Antonio Winspeare's ineffective action was another source of problems and favoured the transfer of responsibility from civilians to military authorities. Finally, the government – weakened by the divisions between its moderate and conservative components – was eager to get rid of the problem by appointing Bava Beccaris as Royal Extraordinary Commissioner, granting him full powers, and proclaiming the state of siege, an institute that the Albertine Statute did not envisage but was routinely applied since the time of the Fasci siciliani.[12]

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hand accounts" by Paolo Valera, Napoleone Colajanni, *L'Italia nel 1898. Tumulti e reazione*, (Milan: Società Editrice Lombarda, 1898).

11. Both telegrams are now quoted in Sergio Pelagalli, "Le Cinque Giornate di Milano alla rovescia: il Generale Bava Beccaris e i moti del 1898," *Studi Storico Militari 1997* (Rome: Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito - Ufficio Storico, 2000): 303-387 (314).

12. In practical terms, the state of siege (declared by Royal Decree upon the Government's proposal) was a sort of internal declaration of war, adopted in the event of insurrections or severe natural disasters. Practically, it equated a portion of the national territory to a war theatre, transferring all powers in the hands of the military authority, establishing war tribunals to try non-military persons who were guilty of certain crimes, and allowing the military authority to issue notices and orders having the force of law in the territory covered by the state of siege. In this sense, the state of siege *de facto* suspended some constitutional freedoms recognized by the Albertine Statute, expanded the police powers of the administrative and military authorities, and extended the jurisdiction of the military courts to crimes whose jurisdiction typically lay with the ordinary courts.

Despite the full powers and a large military establishment, it took Bava Beccaris from 6 to 10 May to restore order. There are no reliable figures on protesters' casualties. Comparing the different sources, on 8 May (the most turbulent day; the state of siege had been proclaimed on the previous day), the number of protesters killed ranged between 80 and 350, and those of protesters wounded between 450 and more than 1,000. On the opposite front, on the same day, just two people died: a law enforcement agent, Domenico Violi, possibly killed by friendly fire, and a soldier, Graziantonio Tomasetti, of the 92nd Infantry regiment, killed probably in an accident, although the radical journalist and polygrapher Paolo Valera (1850-1926) soon popularised the version that he was shot after refusing to fire on the crowd.[13] The imbalance is similar in wounded, with the total number of soldiers and law enforcement agents injured amounting to 51. When the state of siege was lifted, in the territories under Bava Beccaris' authority (amounting to a fair share of western Lombardy), there were some 2,000 arrests, with some 1,150 people deferred to the military tribunal. Some 830 people were trialled, including women and minors, and 688 were condemned, although most of them were sentenced just to short periods of detention. The trials (especially those involving journalists, leaders of the workers' unions and left-wing political exponents) soon became *causes célèbres*, and an active pro-amnesty movement started operating in January 1899.

Beyond Milan, the Army and (partly) the Navy were employed in several other parts of Italy. The state of siege was imposed in Naples (under General Nestore Malacria) and Florence (first under General Nicola Heusch, who extended it to the whole territory of the VIII Army Corps, later under General Baldissera, who replaced Heusch on 18 June). Extending the state of siege to the territory of the III Army Corps, Bava Beccaris banned the circulation of «bikes, trikes, tandems and similar vehicles» to prevent the "rebels" from using them to distribute orders and prevent protesters coming from more distant neighbourhoods from entering Milan. The new measure was enforced on 11 May. To cope with possible outbursts of violence outside the town, the General divided the territory of the two provinces of Milan and Como into four military districts, with their headquarters in Como, Monza, Milan, and Lodi. In the town, he applied the same logic, allotting his troops to three sectors and one centrale reserve, respectively, under Generals Giovanni Riva Palazzi, Enrico Radicati Talice di Passerano, Cesare Ponza di San Martino and Vincenzo Marras. The government also expressed concern about possible provokers coming from neighbouring Switzerland, a famed safe haven for turbulent expatriates. Uncontrolled rumours fuelled this fear. Despite Bava Beccaris' personal scepticism, between 8 and 11 May, a small observation corps under General Ponza di San Martino was even deployed on the Italo-Swiss border, just in case.

With this emphasis on law and order, Rudinì was trying to cement his cabinet's unity. Since 1896, the Marquess had presided over three different governments, constantly

13. Paolo Valera, *La sanguinosa settimana del maggio '98. Storia aneddotica e documentata*, (Genoa: Libreria Moderna, 1907).

troubled by clashes with the Parliament and among the cabinets' various components.[14] The third government had fallen in December 1897 due to contrasts between the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the conservative Emilio Visconti Venosta, who insisted on introducing restrictive laws on the press and associations and limiting suffrage for administrative elections, and the more liberal elements of the coalition. The fourth (an all-party cabinet including a large share of military officers, technicians and senators, which would have lasted until May 1898) had tried to combine restrictions on political freedoms with financial and social reforms. Among the measures were provisions on forced residence, the militarisation of railway and postal workers, the ban on strikes and associations in the civil service, and severe restrictions on freedom of the press and teaching, but the House's majority had dissolved on these issues. When Milan riots exploded, Rudinì had just inaugurated a fifth government with full powers and a programme still combining repression and reforms. However, facing the country's tensions, the parliamentary majority, once again, evaporated.[15] Lacking the support of the King – who refused to dissolve the House for the second time in one year and establish the executive by Royal Decree – the government definitively resigned on 18 June 1898.

Generals turned politician: the troubled Pelloux cabinets

Rudinì's resignation and the permanent stalemate of parliamentary life paved the way for a more active role of the military elites in managing the political aspects of the turn-of-the-century crisis. Due to their strong ties with the Crown, these elites were probably the best suited to play the part. Generals and Admirals (as well as former Generals and Admirals) have been a constant presence in the Italian cabinets since the establishment of the new Kingdom. Generals Alfonso La Marmora and Luigi Menabrea also served as Presidents of the Council of Ministers, respectively, in 1864-66 and 1867-69. When confronted with the turmoil, the attitude of the military elites varied greatly. For instance, General Luigi Pelloux (1839-1924), who King Umberto I appointed as his special envoy in Apulia, Basilicata and Calabria in May 1898, dealt with the crisis without resorting to the state of siege. Following a radically different approach, when he became Minister for Public Works the following June, General Afan de Rivera (1842-1904) militarised some 70,000 railway workers (Socialist in the large majority), placing them under military discipline and banning them from voting. When the fifth Rudinì cabinet fell, one of the candidates to succeed him was General Cesare Ricotti Magnani (1822-1917), Minister for War in Rudinì's second cabinet. Finally, the King's favour fell again on Luigi Pelloux (he himself a former Minister in two Rudinì cabinets, as well as in the first Giolitti cabinet) mainly due to his fame as a moderate, which made him the

14. A detailed analysis of Rudinì's political experiement is in Mario Belardinelli, *Un esperimento liberal-conservatore: i governi di Rudinì (1896-1900)*, (Rome: Elia, 1976).

15. The fifth Rudinì government had sworn in on 1 June 1898, and would have lasted until 29 June, resigning without even facing the confidence vote.

best suited to lead a conservative restoration without triggering potentially dangerous reactions.

According to contemporary observers and one part of the following historiography, behind Pelloux's appointment, there were the cached ambitions of the Court and the most conservative political circles to carry out a full-fledged coup d'etat, significantly denting the constitutional rights enshrined in the Albertine Statute.[16] Other authors have assumed more nuanced positions.[17] In any case, keeping the balance between openings and restoration proved difficult, and Pelloux (especially with his second cabinet, inaugurated on 14 May 1899, which was far more right-leaning than the first) increasingly embraced a Prussian-style domestic policy, targeting political freedoms and the Parliament's role. The quarrel on the so-called "political measures" decree (which introduced tighter provisions on public security and freedom of the press than the temporary measures adopted by the previous governments) was probably the most relevant issue of his tenure, and the inability to secure its approval led to its downfall in June 1900. However, Pelloux's approach enjoyed widespread support. An early version of the "political measures" decree had been voted by figures like Zanardelli and Giolitti, who supported dialogue with the left-wing forces. On his turn, on the right side of the spectrum, Baron Sonnino had already expressed his opinion about the need to restore the provisions of the Albertine Statute and reassert the Crown's superiority over Parliament and government as the only way out of the existing political and moral crisis.[18]

Strictly connected through personal and professional bonds to the King and the Court, Italy's military elites broadly shared and supported these conservative visions, albeit with internal differences, sometimes connected to the profound personal and professional rivalries crisscrossing it.[19] Moreover, as part of the country's ruling class, the military establishment feared the possible negative impact of opening the political system to new groups and classes, seen as a dangerous threat to the existing social order. Subalterns and field officers shared the same fears; at the same time, they feared losing their social status, often the only element separating them from the petty bourgeoisie and the lower middle class. At the end of the Nineteenth century, this sense

16. For instance, see Umberto Levra, *Il colpo di stato della borghesia. La crisi politica di fine secolo in Italia, 1896-1900*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1975). A noteworthy contemporary source is Eugenio Torelli-Viollier (1842-1900), director of the daily *Corriere della Sera*, traditional voice of the North Italian centre-right moderates, who, on 3 June 1898, expressed to the historian and politician Pasquale Villari his opinion of being «in the midst of a coup d'état for the benefit of the bourgeoisie against the people» [Lucio Villari, "I fatti di Milano del 1898. La testimonianza di Eugenio Torelli-Viollier," *Studi Storici* 9, no. 3 (1967): 534-549].

17. From this perspective, see, among others, Ernesto Ragionieri, "La storia politica e sociale," in *Storia d'Italia*, vol. 4/3, *Dall'Unità a oggi*, eds. Ruggiero Romano and Corrado Vivanti, (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), esp. 1844-1846, and Fulvio Cammarano, *Storia politica dell'Italia liberale. L'età del liberalismo classico, 1861-1901* (Roma and Bari: Laterza, 1999).

18. Un deputato [Sidney Sonnino], "Torniamo allo Statuto," *Nuova Antologia* 151, 1 January 1897: 9-28.

19. Jacopo Lorenzini, "Managing the Army, governing the State: the Italian military élite in national politics, 1882-1915", *Revista Universitaria De Historia Militar*, 6, no. 11 (2017): 197-216. A social portrait of the Italian military elites in the liberal age is in Jacopo Lorenzini, *Uomini e generali. L'élite militare nell'Italia liberale (1882-1915)*, (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2017).

of frustration had probably reached its apex, with the Army's activity *de facto* limited to garrison duties and the prospects for officers' careers constrained by the lack of any real professional opportunity. This frustration explained why the military wholeheartedly supported Italy's colonial expansion and cheered – a few years later – the outbreak of the Italian-Turkish War over Libya.[20] Finally, the military elites considered themselves the guarantors of the "true" spirit of the Risorgimento, which it considered intimately linked with the monarchic institution and incompatible not only with Socialism but also with the increasingly active role the Catholic workers' organisations were assuming.

On 29 July 1900, anarchist Gaetano Bresci (1869-1901) killed King Umberto I, proclaiming to have done it to vindicate the victims of the 1898 incidents. It was probably the last – albeit the most momentous – consequence of the riots. On 11 August, Umberto's son, Victor Emanuel III (1869-1947), swore in front of the Parliament, announcing in his first public speech the transition to a more conciliatory policy. Among the first steps, in November, amnesty was granted for all press offences and all offences against freedom of labour and the sentences imposed for the 1898 uprisings were half pardoned. At the institutional level, since the end of June, the President of the Council of Ministers was Giuseppe Saracco (1821-1907), an institutional figure leading a national solidarity "decompression" cabinet, with the task of easing the tensions of the previous years. The new King confirmed Saracco's position, stabilising the liberal turn of Italy's political life. However, the social and political situation remained tense. The Saracco cabinet fell in February 1901, when it first banned, then withdrew the ban to open a trade union section in Genoa. This contradictory decision raised the protest of both the liberals, deeming the ban too strict, and the conservatives, deeming its withdrawal too dangerously open. However, the general elections of June 1900 had already paved the way to a new balance, and time was ripe for Giuseppe Zanardelli to replace Saracco.[21]

Concluding remarks

With this new turn, the involvement of the military elites in Italian politics declined, apart from their "traditional" roles in the Ministries for War and the Navy. Between 1900 and 1914, the only civilian Minister for War was Severino Casana in 1907-1909 (Casana was also the first civilian to hold the position since the Kingdom's proclamation), and the only civilian Minister for the Navy was Giovanni Giolitti, who had a brief *interim* in autumn 1903 until the return to Italy of the appointed Minister, Rear Admiral Carlo Mirabello, then serving in the Far East. However, the Army's involvement in public order remained crucial. For instance, military units were employed – together with civilian

20. Nicola Labanca, *Discorsi coloniali in uniforme militare, da Assab via Adua verso Tripoli*, in *Storia d'Italia - Annali*, vol. 18, *Guerra e pace*, ed. Walter Barberis, (Turin: Einaudi, 2002), 505-545. On the Army's own end-of the-century crisis, see Giorgio Rochat and Giorgio Massobrio, *Breve storia dell'esercito italiano da 1861 al 1943*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), 124 ff., and (in English) John Whittam, *The Politics of the Italian Army, 1861-1918*, (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 131 ff.

21. Emilio Falco, *Il ministero Saracco. Un governo liberalconservatore dalla crisi di fine Ottocento all'età giolittiana*, (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2007).

armed groups supported by local landowners – to curb the long agrarian strike in Parma proclaimed by the local Chamber of Labour in 1908, confirming how even Giovanni Goilitti's openings to the workers' parties could not do without the traditional "big stick".[22] The Socialist Party, the Republican Party and the other progressive political forces heavily criticised this state of things. More surprisingly, critics also came from the military establishment. Amid growing international tensions, the engagement in public order made the Army a sort of half-service force, cheap and suitable for all jobs, with poorly paid and ill-treated officers and NCOs, and units scattered from one part of the country to another, dismembered and often separated from their commanders.

This sentiment would have proved long-lasting. In 1929, General Felice de Chaurand de Saint Eustache (1857-1944) blamed the public order duties as one of the reasons for the operational and organisational problems the Italian Army faced when it entered the First World War.[23] There are some reasons to share his vision. It has been argued that public order duties were unpopular among troops and offices alike, sapped the sense of duty and fed draft evasion,[24] making the Army extremely unpopular among the same social groups – especially the rural working class – that provided the bulk of the troops. Moreover, they reduced the possibilities for actual training and absorbed a relevant share of the military budgets, whose ups and downs over the decades were another constant source of trouble. However, focusing only on the repressive role the armed forces played during the end-of-the-century crisis and its impacts on the Army efficiency underplays the broader political function of the military elites and the different visions existing among its members. Instead, beyond the shared loyalty towards the King, the Crown and the monarchy as an institution, between the end of the Nineteenth and the beginning of the Twentieth century, the officer corps and its leaders, as well as the military establishment as a whole, mirrored the contrasting feelings of the Italian society and its oft-ambiguous sentiments towards the changes the country was living.

22. In this sense, see, for instance, di Jonathan Dunnage, "Istituzioni e ordine pubblico nell'Italia giolittiana. Le forze di polizia in provincia di Bologna," *Italia Contemporanea* 41, no. 177 (1989): 5-26.

23. «The established custom of distracting, at every rustling of leaves, numerous and strong batches of troops from their normal tasks to place them at the disposal of the political and public security authorities, who were induced to make strong demands for men to cover their own responsibility in every event, contributed to the Army's discomfort. These units had to remain idle in barracks or other premises, usually cramped and musty, where the soldier often lacked the opportunity to sit, inciting discontent and recriminations. Discipline suffered, and time was wasted to the detriment of military instructions, noting that such service, dependent on changing political criteria, left responsibilities undefined» [Felice de Chaurand de Saint Eustache, *Come l'Esercito italiano entrò in guerra* (Milan: Mondadori, 1929), 161-162].

24. Vanda Wilcox, "Encountering Italy: Military Service and National Identity during the First World War," *Bulletin of Italian Politics* 3, no. 2 (2011): 283-302.

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