

Giacomo Matteotti and the Birth of Anti-Fascism

Giacomo Matteotti and the Birth of Anti-Fascism:

*Selected Journalistic Writings
(1901-1924)*

Edited and Translated by

Philip Balma

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PREFACE

WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT ANTI-FASCISM

On many occasions, I have had the opportunity to teach a survey course entitled *The Culture of Fascist Italy*. This course is offered as a general education, lower-level class, and the syllabus caters to those seeking an overview of the topic. However, without fail, students will want to explore more deeply the history of the Italian anti-fascist movement.¹ Indeed, any reference to an underground anti-fascist resistance movement working clandestinely against Mussolini's (and Hitler's) troops was almost guaranteed to grab my students' attention.

I was educated in the Italian public school system. When my classmates and I first heard about anti-fascism, it was part of a broader discussion about World War II. In this context, we were taught that regular people picked up weapons and fought because they had no choice. I have always thought of their heroism in very simple terms, like an exciting war movie or a spy film: they had to stash weapons, smuggle food and supplies, run off and hide in the mountains, and fight the enemy from within their own homeland. In the summer of 1943, after the Allied Forces took over Sicily and started fighting their way up the Italian peninsula, the anti-fascist resistance was involved in fighting a Civil War and a World War at the same time, or rather, both were raging within the Italian borders. On 8 September 1943, the national newspapers reported the signing of an armistice between the Italian armed forces and the Allied troops. Mussolini had been deposed and temporarily detained, but the Nazis were able to free him after they flooded the Italian territory with as many troops as they could. Marshall Pietro Badoglio took control of the Italian army, but many die-hard fascists chose to stay loyal to their leader. With the “assistance” of the German forces, Mussolini established the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (R.S.I.),² which stands for “Italian Social Republic.” It consisted of a puppet government ruling over a large northern portion of Italy, made possible by German military resources. The R.S.I. also attracted many of fascism's most

violent, angry supporters. These were the people the *partigiani* (partisans) had to fight,³ and the Nazi war machine was backing them up.⁴

But there's another side to the Italian anti-fascist movement. It's easy to be seduced by brave stories of valor and sacrifice in the struggle against a totalitarian regime, especially if guns, bombs, and battles seem like the only plausible response to a dictatorship. But these are sensationalistic tales of resistance, the great stories that survived the war. People forget that there was also a bureaucratic, administrative, journalistic, and political response to fascism by the members of its opposition, and this response necessarily had to be offered openly and publicly. For example: any statement against the fascist party (or the government) put forth by a member of the Italian Parliament in an official capacity, certainly became part of a historical record that was transcribed and recorded for posterity. This reality placed dissenters at risk. Their freedom, their property, their families, and their very lives were in jeopardy. The same could be said for journalists and newspaper editors who denounced the fascist regime in their publications. These were some of the anti-fascist voices who opposed Mussolini's government from its inception, at their own peril.

Though Mussolini rose to power in 1922,⁵ Italy did not officially enter World War II until June of 1940. While it makes little sense to speak of an organized partisan resistance before 1943, the same cannot (and should never) be said about anti-fascism. From the moment the Italian people fell under the thumb of a fascist government, there were many ways in which a person could support and advance the anti-fascist cause, and they did not necessarily involve fighting or weaponry of any kind. The fascists used violence and intimidation to achieve their political aims and to silence their rivals.⁶ But they couldn't intimidate everyone. They couldn't threaten everyone into silent submission.

Giacomo Matteotti was one of the people who, in the face of totalitarianism, refused to be intimidated by state-sanctioned violence and human rights abuses.⁷ He was very young when he joined the Italian Socialist Party⁸ (PSI) and started working as a journalist for *La lotta*, the weekly newspaper of the PSI in Matteotti's region. Imagine his level of knowledge about politics, journalism, and the rights of the working class at fifteen years of age—that's how old he was when he penned his first piece of political journalism in 1901. Shortly after his sixteenth birthday, Matteotti wrote another piece about the need to educate the working class in their struggle for dignity and equality. Or rather, he didn't write about it, he wrote a script that reads like a short work of theater: he produced a fictional conversation between two manual laborers, and his sole purpose was to envision and exemplify the words a farmer might use to explain

social injustices to a friend, attributing them to a poorly organized society rather than generically blaming evil men.

Combining straightforward, flawless logic with clear word choice and a profound understanding of the evolution of human society, an adolescent Matteotti was uniquely skilled at explaining complex notions with simplicity. In his early 20s, he began writing about systemic income inequality and fighting for social reforms, continuing to advocate for the needs of the working class, but his journalistic writings had evolved in terms of their focus and their approach. He was no longer trying to educate the masses on a conceptual level. Instead, his articles exposed various societal injustices in detail, making them more current, more relevant to his readership, and, on some level, more urgent. This is the reason why in 1913 he lamented the use of violence against workers to suppress a general strike, and two years later he expressed his strong opposition to Italy's entry into World War I.

In 1919 Matteotti was elected to the Chamber of Deputies (the lower chamber of the Italian Parliament—its counterpart is the Senate). Matteotti became an outspoken critic of the fascist government's corruption and abuses of power. During an address to the Chamber of Deputies, he openly opposed Mussolini's 1922 bill granting absolute powers to the Head of State, warning it would abolish parliamentary oversight and leave citizens' rights unprotected. The following year, he wrote an article on the first day of May in which he offered numerous concrete examples of serious human rights violations carried out by the fascists without repercussions of any kind, which included threatening the lives of newspaper editors, breaking into people's homes and terrorizing their families, even setting homes on fire. In short, Matteotti knew he was at risk.

His last public remarks came in a 1924 parliamentary speech in which he denounced the fascist government's overt violence and fraud in recent elections, arguing against validating their tainted results. Days later, fascist assassins abducted and murdered him. Matteotti embodied anti-fascism in its truest sense, as he vocally opposed Mussolini's oppressive regime from within the system, using his platform in journalism and government. He did so knowing that his integrity could cost him his life.

Giacomo Matteotti's bravery is unquestionable, as were his principles, his devotion to public service, and his desire to help create a more fair and just society. He never joined an underground resistance group, and he never sought to use violence to achieve an objective. Nevertheless, he was killed almost 20 years before the earliest wartime clashes between partisans and fascist soldiers took place. That's simply not how Matteotti “fought.” His eloquent voice was his strongest weapon, on paper or spoken

aloud during parliamentary proceedings. His attacks on the fascist regime never resulted in any loss of life, except his own. But they also lit a spark that ultimately contributed to the fall of Mussolini's dictatorship, fueling the fires of the anti-fascist movement.

He didn't live to see his 40th birthday, but he left an indelible mark on the history of Italian politics. Had he not been targeted for assassination, there's no telling what he might have accomplished. And more importantly, there's no telling what the Italian political landscape might look like today. In light of their context and rhetorical power, Matteotti's writings stand out for their value as historical documents. Both his journalism and a number of his parliamentary speeches attest to his tireless efforts to advocate for his constituents by embracing, engaging, and vehemently defending the democratic process.⁹ The ongoing relevance of his defense of democracy and social justice speaks to his legacy as a dedicated leader in the struggle against fascism. Not surprisingly, in countless Italian cities some streets or squares are named (or re-named) in honor of Giacomo Matteotti's memory.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During the first half of the 1980s, I attended the Dante Alighieri elementary school on Via dei Magazzini in Florence, the capital of Tuscany, Italy. It was here that I first learned to read and write in Italian, thanks to my teacher Lucia Perillo. I owe her so much that words could never fully express my gratitude or repay her.

In the second half of the 1980s, I continued my education at the Fratelli Rosselli middle school on Via San Gallo, also in Florence. This school, named after two heroes and martyrs of the anti-fascist cause, has remained vivid in my memory, thanks to Professor Carla Serra. Her passion, devotion, and strong sense of ethics taught me not only to think critically and distinguish between right and wrong, but also to seek the good in people and to protect it when necessary.

I owe what I am today to these two women. This book exists because of their mentorship.

I am also deeply grateful to my family for their unwavering support, love, and patience. A special thanks goes to Dr. Kathleen Jarchow, without whose help none of my recent projects would have come to fruition. I also wish to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Eleonora Buonocore, Dr. Clementina Ricci, Dr. Robert Hackett, and Dr. Giovanni Spani.

Lastly, I wish to thank Giacomo Matteotti. (*Riposa in pace*).

INTRODUCTION

MATTEOTTI'S WORDS

BY PHILIP BALMA

It doesn't matter how Giacomo Matteotti got his point across, whether it was by publishing articles in newspapers and magazines or delivering eloquent, passionate, and sometimes scathing parliamentary speeches exposing the abuses of the PNF,¹⁰ the National Fascist Party (founded by Mussolini in 1921). Matteotti was a skilled, charismatic leader, an exceptional public speaker, and a prolific writer. He published an important work of non-fiction titled *Un anno di dominazione fascista*¹¹ (“One Year of Fascist Domination”) in 1924. Initially conceived as a pamphlet, Matteotti's volume chronicles one year of crimes committed by the fascist government. Almost 100 pages in length in its original version, this document includes a lengthy series of highly detailed reports on misuses and misappropriations of funds, as well as a multitude of human rights violations and violent crimes. It was banned by the government two months after its release.

Some of the speeches Matteotti gave in Parliament are historically unique in their impact as well as their urgency, and they constitute one of the primary textual vehicles through which his life and work have typically been studied.¹² Nevertheless, a significant number of his journalistic writings clearly go hand in hand with his political efforts. The present volume aims to engage and enhance the extant historical and political discourse on Giacomo Matteotti by making a careful selection of his political journalism available to an English-speaking readership, starting from his first article in 1901 (written when he was only fifteen), up to and including his last piece published in an Italian periodical.¹³ In this context it's important to note that, due to the circumstances of his death and the trial that followed, an inordinate amount of time and ink has been devoted to reflections on his passing, how it occurred, and the specific people who were ultimately responsible for it. His murder is not just a tragic moment in the history of anti-fascism, it also constitutes a watershed moment, a historical

marker of sorts in the history of the Italian nation. Unsurprisingly, dozens of books published in Italian include the words “il delitto Matteotti” (“The Matteotti Murder”) in their title. There was even a popular film by Florestano Vancini released in 1973 entitled *Il delitto Matteotti*. Considered by some to be a masterpiece of historical and political cinema, the film began with a reenactment of the last parliamentary speech Matteotti gave in May of 1924, in which he openly accused the fascist majority of electoral fraud. In other words, in chronological terms, Vancini's feature started eleven days before Matteotti was killed, and addressed the conspiracy behind his assassination.¹⁴

On the 90th anniversary of his passing, a broad selection of Matteotti's journalistic writings appeared in an edited volume under the auspices of the *Fondazione Anna Kuliscioff*¹⁵ (located in Milan, Italy). The book in question is titled *Raccolta di articoli*,¹⁶ or rather, *Collected Articles*, which clearly emphasizes its focus on the writings he published in newspapers and periodicals, not the famous speeches he gave in the Chamber of Deputies. In other words, this 2014 volume explored his career as a journalist by zeroing in on many of the pieces he wrote, covering a myriad of topics. Additionally, it included a series of introductory texts (authored by Emilio Quinto) detailing the history and significance of every periodical with which he worked. In the preface to this precious edition, Walter Galbusera (the President of the *Fondazione Anna Kuliscioff*) acknowledges that Matteotti's work as a politician has been amply documented and studied, and he describes Matteotti's level of journalistic activity as “intense.” Nevertheless, his writing has not received anywhere near the same amount of attention from scholars and students of history, journalism, and political science. In fact, it would be fair to say that the surface has barely been scratched in this regard. Although he wrote *many* articles that were published anonymously or under a pseudonym, Galbusera's preface specifies that the particular project he collaborated on focused exclusively on articles that Giacomo Matteotti had signed, either with his full name or at least his initials (7).¹⁷ It goes on to depict Matteotti as an atheist who respected all faiths and religions, and a man whose approach to politics was rooted in a firm set of principles that were not subject to compromise for any reason. Perhaps the most salient detail in Galbusera's preface pertains to Matteotti's untouchable moral character. Specifically, it states that he viewed “power and the sense of duty as two faces of the same coin,” and that he truly believed in the importance of building a credible democratic, anti-fascist alternative to Mussolini's government (8-9).

In a sense, translating Matteotti's political journalism is a gesture that aims to achieve the exact opposite objective of those who murdered him. Fascist killers wanted to silence him. Their goal was not just to end his life, but, in simple, mathematical terms, they tried to limit the distance his voice and his ideas could travel, as well as the number of people they might influence. But more than just trying to influence people, Matteotti's writings aimed to inform the public of society's flaws, the injustices it allowed to transpire, and the importance of a truly democratic, representative government. The study of his journalistic writings enables us to evaluate and appreciate a specific facet of his professional life, but it also gives us insight into his way of thinking and how it evolved over the years. Lastly, by starting with an article he published when he was still in his teens and exploring his writing over the span of his career as a journalist, we are emphasizing the study of his life and his achievements specifically, not his death.

In the interest of full disclosure, it's worth acknowledging here that a significant number of Matteotti's articles would not be of interest to a general audience. For starters, many of his pieces concerned government expenditures in a specific handful of areas and were closer to detail-oriented reports than they were to a typical newspaper article. Additionally, in light of his political career, and the level of attention he paid to local politics and the needs of his constituents, it comes as no surprise that Matteotti also published numerous articles in a specialized magazine titled *Il Comune moderno* ("The Modern Municipality") whose primary focus is described as "municipal studies." These articles might be of interest to highly specialized scholars and students in the fields of history, economics, political science, and perhaps urban planning, but most readers would find them tedious. This manuscript includes writings that Matteotti published between 1901 and 1924 in a total of six different periodicals, but *Il Comune moderno* is not one of them, given how limited its intended audience was.

Matteotti denounced corrupt or illegal acts in writing as a means of documenting these events, and there were many. Unfortunately, this also means it would take years to reproduce all of his articles in any language. Consider that the collection *Raccolta di articoli* is over 370 pages in length, and it doesn't even come close to including the entirety of his journalistic writings. In fact, it underscores how difficult such an effort would be, and unlikely to succeed. After all, Matteotti did have 23 years of experience as a journalist.

His lengthy journalistic activity started with a periodical known as *La lotta* ("The Struggle"). It was located in the province of Rovigo, where it functioned as the primary local point of reference for the Italian socialist

party. It was one of many publications nationwide that were dedicated to divulging and promoting the ideas and programs of the socialist party in writing. Throughout its history, *La lotta* tended to side with the reformist faction of the party, with the exception of a brief period between 1904 and 1907, when Matteotti's appreciation for the paper waned.¹⁸ But this all changed in 1908 when he became a full-time member of its editorial staff. He continued working there until he officially broke away from the PSI in 1922.¹⁹

His first articles in *La lotta*, published when he was still quite young, were pure propaganda for the PSI. In that context, his first two articles were both titled “The Simple Struggle” (“La lotta semplice”), in a nod to the paper's name. What stands out about these works is how effectively he expressed himself in writing even as a young man. Having recently learned about socialism himself, perhaps he was in an ideal position to discuss it in concrete terms that anyone could grasp. In other words, his own clarity as to why he had personally (and recently) embraced this ideology came through quite evidently in his debut as a journalist. He didn't just write about government, private property, the rich, or an economic system that was crushing the working class. He took his readers as far back as Adam in the Garden of Eden, in order to demonstrate how many of society's ills and injustices exist because the ground had been laid for them centuries ago. Nevertheless, there is a sense of hope and optimism for the future in his words. In fact, his first article ended by saying that: “victory will come sooner than you might think” (Matteotti, 2014, 105-6).

The second article he published with this same title (about nine months later) shares a similar focus, but it's not actually a piece of journalistic writing: it's a short work of fiction, consisting entirely of a dialogue between two proletarians, and it constitutes one of the most creative pieces of writing he published. It stands out from the rest of his body of work in more ways than one can count. This text speaks for itself, and its ideological message is clear. Even a few years later, in 1906, Matteotti's work continued to address income inequalities and the struggle between classes, but he never engaged in naïve or simplistic arguments. In fact, it's important to underline that he never advocated for the use of violence in any circumstance. The kind of revolution Matteotti dreamt about did not involve bloodshed, it was about education, class awareness, and the working class learning to take up the reins of the country's production as well as its government. After all, the poor working class does constitute the real majority. Now in his early 20s, Matteotti was starting to use stronger, sharper language in his articles. A perfect example can be drawn from the last paragraph of a piece titled “Two-Bit Propaganda” (8 December 1906).

After commenting that the wealthy bourgeois²⁰ often mocked the workers for how many children they have, he tells proletarians to take pride in them, and in themselves:

you workers can say that without your children, who will later work in the fields, workshops, and mines, without your children who may even lay down their lives to defend what they call 'the homeland,' without your children, their reign of exploitation and injustice would come to an end! (Matteotti, 2014, 114-5).

A few years later, having paid his dues and proven himself as a professional journalist, Matteotti was asked to join the editorial staff at *La lotta*. He had stopped writing the purely ideological articles of his early years. An older, more experienced Matteotti, who was getting involved in local politics alongside his efforts as a journalist, had also started writing about the ideals and objectives of the reformist faction of the PSI. For example, one of the articles Matteotti penned in 1911 is titled “What We Mean by Reformism.” More importantly, he also started authoring pieces intended to concretely advocate for the needs and rights of workers in the present and the immediate future. Abhorred by the (sometimes lethal) violence carried out by the forces of law and order against workers engaging in a nationwide, general strike, in 1913 he wrote that his “current and practical goal is to prevent further proletarian massacres” (Matteotti, 2014, 117-8).

In 1915 Matteotti started working with other newspapers while continuing his role at *La lotta*. In particular, he began writing for *Critica Sociale*²¹ as well as *Avanti!*.²² On some level, the way his priorities had evolved in his writing boiled down to a single purpose: his desire to prevent the maximum number of people from being exploited, injured, or killed. Also, he believed that society was deliberately organized in such a way that the poor were made to suffer while the wealthy got richer. Rightly described as anti-militaristic, Matteotti opposed both the 1912 war with Libya as well as Italy's entry into World War I. This is one of the factors that distinguished him from many other members of the PSI. While he would never encourage insubordination or desertion, his 1915 article “Against the War: From the Point of View of Our Party” released in *Critica Sociale* expressed a clear and firm anti-war sentiment,²³ as he knew very well who would likely be conscripted to fight on the front lines, and it wasn't the sons of captains of industry or members of the royal family:

..the Socialist Party of every country has the duty to continuously oppose war, and its instrument and creator, which is militarism. Every socialist

party votes against the ordinary military expenditure of its own country (I have not yet heard anyone say the opposite) to signify the agreement and the international aspirations of the workers against the dominant governments. (Matteotti, 2014, 146)

By the end of the decade, after the disastrous end of the Great War, the Italian left was in a state of turmoil. Many Italian leftists took their cues directly from Lenin in Moscow, which led to one of the most divisive moments in the history of the PSI. In his 1920 article “Who Wants to Leave the Socialist Party?” Matteotti expressed his frustration and disappointment in the pages of *La lotta*, in which he described “Lenin's order” with the following language:

However nowadays in Moscow [...] the following was decided:
...“The parties that have held fast to their ancient **socialist**²⁴ programs, are now obligated to **alter** these programs and elaborate a **new communist program**.”
...“In compliance with this notion, all socialist parties must **change their name** and adopt the name of the **communist party**.”
...“It is necessary for every worker to understand clearly the difference between communist parties and the ancient official **socialist** parties, who have **betrayed** the flag of the **working** class.”
(Matteotti, 2014, 262)

This level of political pressure, applied all the way from Moscow, sowed division and discord among the rank and file of the PSI. One of the socialists who answered Lenin's call was Antonio Gramsci,²⁵ an influential politician, philosopher, and journalist who became one of the most widely recognized anti-fascist thinkers in the history of Italy. In fact, with the exception of Matteotti (and, perhaps, Mussolini himself), Gramsci might have been the most historically impactful member of the PSI, especially if one considers that his departure from the ranks of the socialists enabled him to play a fundamental role in creating, embracing, and leading Italy's communist party. On 21 January 1921, during the XVII Congress of the Italian Socialist Party in Livorno, the membership of the PSI effectively began to split up into three factions. The reformists (led by Filippo Turati²⁶ as well as Matteotti) supported parliamentary participation and opposed an immediate revolution. The maximalists (who would remain members of the PSI) proclaimed the need for a socialist revolution but lacked a clear strategy. Gramsci's revolutionary communist wing, on the other hand, sought a definitive break with reformism and pushed for immediate collective action in the form of strikes and protests. In essence, Matteotti believed that socialism should be achieved through parliamentary democracy to improve

the conditions of the working class, whereas Gramsci, especially after embracing Leninist theories, saw the party as a central instrument in the revolutionary struggle, guiding the proletariat toward seizing power.²⁷ In light of these divisions, in 1921 Matteotti published an article in *Avanti!* titled “They Want to Kick Us Out?!” openly addressing the problem, which had now devolved into a process through which pretexts to expel people from the PSI were basically being fabricated. The piece in question never actually uses the word communists, incidentally, though the comparison it draws is rather clear:

..party of the masses or sect party—economic-political organization or revolutionary terrorist group—positive party of workers or negative sect of the oppressed.

And more so than in the disputes, the solution lies in facts; more than inside the party it's actually outside the party. If there are those who truly love their country, let them know. The point of no return is too close. (Matteotti, 2014, 262-3)

One of the most interesting aspects of the trajectory and circumstances of Matteotti's career as a journalist is the fact that the articles he wrote, the dates of their publication, and the specific papers and magazines for which he wrote them, have left a trail of breadcrumbs chronicling the inner workings and conflicts of the Italian socialist party, particularly in the early 1920s. For example, aside from *La lotta*, one of the papers Matteotti wrote many articles for was *La Giustizia* (“Justice”). *La lotta* was a publication of the PSI, so he could not, in good faith, continue to work for them once he left the party. The weekly paper *La Giustizia*, on the other hand, became the primary textual vehicle of the PSU, the Unitarian Socialist Party started by Matteotti, Filippo Turati, and other reformists after their departure from the PSI. The PSU was a minority party, and Matteotti served as their first general secretary.²⁸ Unfortunately, this division within the socialist movement made it impossible for them to take on the fascist government effectively.²⁹ Mussolini's initial rise to power took place in 1922, and Matteotti's new party was powerless to stop it. In fact, the timing of things could not have been much worse (or closer): the PSU was founded less than three weeks before Mussolini and his followers carried out the ‘March on Rome’.³⁰

Matteotti's political and journalistic activities were certainly not limited to his efforts to combat fascism. At the same time, it would make little sense to assume that the newspaper *La Giustizia* was merely a means of clarifying and distinguishing between the diverging opinions of two ‘branches’ of Italian socialism. After all, while Matteotti certainly continued

to report on the illegal, violent acts of the fascists, his work for *La Giustizia* focused on a number of concrete criticisms of Mussolini's regime in terms of his approach to governing the nation, making him one of the most feared (and most visible) enemies of the PNF (Quinto, 2014, 13). He also warned his readers that their access to specific information could be manipulated or prevented at the drop of a hat, or rather, that any newspaper considered a vehicle of dissent against the government might be suddenly forced to “cease operations” permanently. Specifically, in 1923 he informed (or reminded) his readers that

..in the current regime, a Police Chief can threaten newspapers that dare to publish certain news items with retaliation. And every Fascist party leader can threaten the destruction of a printing press if the newspaper follows certain directives; threaten the lives of editors if they emphasize a particular tone; burn copies containing an unwelcome article; impose the firing of a director or editor, etc. (Matteotti, 2014, 42-43)

It's important to acknowledge that this state of affairs must have weighed heavily on millions of Italians, not just on Matteotti. As long as he could, he used his voice to try to make his country better, to fight for the working class, and yes, to expose injustices on both a local and a national scale. It's sufficient to examine the titles of some of the last pieces he published in *La Giustizia* in 1924 to see that he never abandoned his principles. Revisiting the problem of violent repressions of legal demonstrations, in February he wrote “Fascism and the Strikes.” In his article “The Fascist Elections” published in March, he detailed many violent abuses that invalidated the recent electoral results, including the murder of a candidate for office. These are some of the same violations he protested in his last parliamentary speech (Matteotti, 2014, 91).

From February to June of 1924, Giacomo Matteotti started collaborating with the editors of *Echi e commenti* (“Echoes and Comments”). In April of the same year, he became a member of their editorial committee, eventually authoring a total of five pieces for this paper. Because of the historically and politically tumultuous times in which he wrote for them, it makes sense that, in one form or another, he chose to discuss the fraudulent elections (in April) and their repercussions in *each and every one* of those five articles.³¹ See, for example, his piece dated 15 May 1924:

So, it is definitively clear that the Fascist Government intends to rule by force. This is how the results of the elections are to be interpreted, and it explains the purpose of the National Militia, which is not national but

fascist, and puts 300,000 armed men at the disposal not of the Head of State, but the Head of the Fascist Faction. (Matteotti, 2014, 314)

On 5 June 1924, the last piece he wrote for an Italian paper was published with the title “Parliament and Government.” Here Matteotti's focus was on the impending disintegration of parliamentary procedures.

The fascist government believes the Chamber [of Deputies] only serves to approve what it does. Indeed, it believes, as does the new President of the Chamber, that Parliament can only exist on the condition that it never goes against the Government. And much like the fascists have declared that the Government is above the electoral process, it also considers itself above any vote taken in the Chamber. (Matteotti, 2014, 316)

Over the 23 years of his journalistic activity, he might have written dozens if not hundreds of articles that were published anonymously, or simply under a pseudonym. All the ones he wrote for *Echi e commenti* in 1924, however, included a reference to his position as an elected official and member of parliament. He signed them as follows:

G. MATTEOTTI
Parliamentary Deputy

For practical reasons, the writings by Matteotti contained in this volume are organized in chronological order. Organizing them based on the periodical in which they appeared could have also been a sensible approach, but given their inherent value as historical documents, it seemed wise (if not necessary) for them to appear in the order they were originally printed. Tracing the broad strokes of his career in journalism is one of many ways to preserve and honor the memory of his life and his achievements. It also constitutes a unique opportunity to examine the roots of anti-fascism in Italy, and to reflect on what can happen when fascists (or neo-fascists) are able to seize control of *any* country's government. Looking beyond his tireless efforts in the Chamber of Deputies, and setting aside most official government documents from this period, Matteotti's journalistic writings described the horrors of fascist terrorism in writing for posterity, and the country's financial woes, its militarism, and corruption at the highest levels. Additionally, they offer a glimpse into the inner rumblings of the Italian socialist party in the 1920s. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, they exemplify a kind of political journalism that seems all but extinct nowadays. His writing was both proactive and reactive: Matteotti used his voice to plan

for a better future just as often as he tried to address the difficult times in which he lived.

It matters not where people reside, nor which languages they speak, nor what their nationality might be, no one can guarantee that *their* country will never embrace fascism. And it is important to be vigilant, both when it comes to national governments, and when looking at individual states, regions, provinces, etc. Furthermore, it's also important to identify and acknowledge any neo-fascist views or behaviors displayed by elected officials, normalized by news outlets, or adopted by the forces of law and order. Lastly, and this cannot go unmentioned, any country that fails to provide quality education to *all* of its citizens, regardless of income or demographics, is a country that can be more easily manipulated into electing a dangerous demagogue.

For the sake of clarity, let us consider a specific (anecdotal) example at this point. After attending graduate school, I was fortunate enough to secure a position as a professor at a public university. Including my time as a teaching assistant, I've spent 25 years teaching for US-based institutions of higher education. After growing up in Italy, my experiences as an instructor have taught me that, when compared to Italian/European youths, American students have a radically different view of the political spectrum, one that might be skewed or merely incomplete. In the United States, most people live in a culture and a community that views a two-party system as normal, acceptable, and potentially impervious to change. We're accustomed to thinking in (binary) terms of Democrats versus Republicans, while an occasional third-party candidate might receive only a minority of the votes. When news outlets refer to the (liberal or progressive) "Left" they always mean "the Democrats," while the (conservative) Republican side is invariably identified as "the Right."

The members of Italy's now-defunct socialist and communist parties certainly represented the Italian Left during Matteotti's lifetime, and anyone with a knowledge of politics would also describe the national fascist party (PNF) as the Italian right during the span of Mussolini's dictatorial regime. While it would be wrong to equate the modern GOP with the PNF, it's impossible to deny that some of their supporters on the extreme right share specific objectives (and prejudices) that were also common among the members of Mussolini's party. On the "opposite" side of the political spectrum, something similar could be said for the socialist party during Matteotti's tenure as an elected official. The values, objectives, and strategies of some of their members go hand in hand with the worldview of a segment of (present-day) Americans on the "far Left." While the concept of the middle, of a political center, so to speak, exists in both countries, it's

worth noting that the modern-day iteration of the Democratic party in America might be better described as representing “the center.” Certainly, many individuals who hold leftist ideals in the United States are members (or simply supporters) of the Democratic party, this can’t be denied, yet nowadays Matteotti’s approach to politics, the economy, and the administration of a representative government might be viewed as radical by many Democrats and Republicans alike. Nevertheless, history has shown us that some of the bravest and most active leaders of the anti-fascist movement in Italy were socialist politicians with a lengthy history of advocacy in service of their constituents, first of all the impoverished masses. They fought for the side that resisted the will of a tyrannical fascist despot. This is the side that, between 1943 and 1945, was hunted, beaten, tortured, and executed by both Italian and German troops, as well as the *carabinieri*³² whose functions include those of a police force. We’re talking about individuals whose heroic sacrifices helped topple a dictator who was an ally to Adolf Hitler, and restore democracy to a war-torn nation, at times even fighting *alongside* or in concert with the Allied Forces. In other words, it’s appropriate to describe some socialists as heroes and leaders. In fact, it’s offensive to describe them in any other way. On the other hand, in the year 2024, in the United States of America, a significant number of people might be inclined to use the word socialist as an insult, and to take offense if one uses it to describe them. And they would certainly not think of a socialist as being a pro-democratic member of parliament who staunchly opposes totalitarianism and political violence and fights tirelessly for the future of working-class citizens. However, they might think of a socialist as someone who publishes numerous newspaper articles criticizing the government and speaking out against its policies. Given how complicated and divisive Italian politics were in the 1920s, Matteotti’s prolific, lengthy career as a writer for several newspapers and magazines allows for the unique opportunity to distill the essence of his political and socio-economic ideals in a context that sheds light on the dangerous threat posed by fascism. This is the most important element of his writing. He was brilliant and brutally honest, unwavering in his convictions, and he truly cared about other people, especially those less fortunate. More than anything, he fought for democracy, for fair and impartial elections, and for the people’s right to be represented by conscientious officials who consider service to their country and their community to be a sacred duty. In short, his writings are incredibly relevant to this day, and urgently applicable to our present-day reality in the Western world.

Ultimately, Matteotti’s diverse journalistic writings provide invaluable insight into a very complex period in Italian history. Through his articles,

we glimpse the multifaceted opposition to Mussolini from various factions on the left. Matteotti spoke truth to power, exposing corruption and injustice at great personal risk. His courageous example reminds us that the struggle for democracy requires vigilance. As Matteotti wrote in 1924, shortly before his murder, there are warning signs on the road to totalitarianism, for example: "a 'tightening of the screws,' will correspond [...] to fascist violence aimed at destroying the effects of the consent obtained by the majorities" (Matteotti, 2015, 315). Now more than ever, we must heed this warning to honor Matteotti's sacrifice, and remain ever-vigilant against tyranny reborn.

Storrs, Connecticut (USA)
20 November 2024

PART I.

POLITICAL JOURNALISM

THE EARLY YEARS (1901-1910)

THE SIMPLE STRUGGLE³³

(Published in *La lotta*, 19 January 1901)

In this simple article, we will prove how wrong people are when they say the world has always been the way it is. There are still a few slick talkers, but they're a dime a dozen, these pretentious know-it-alls who scream "It's always been this way" to anyone who listens.

Just between us, didn't you sometimes also utter this phrase, my fellow workers? Did you say something preposterous, my friends? The world has always been like this. Come on! The changes that took place in this ugly world from ancient times to the present are such (and so many) that it would take mountains of books to recount them all.

Have you ever asked yourself why artists depict Adam completely nude? Let me tell you. In his times, people didn't know how to make the fields bear fruit. Lands were not cultivated. Which means no cotton, no flax, no hemp, and no clothing. But in return, however, men were free (what a beautiful thing, huh?). They all possessed the same wealth. To feed themselves, they hunted wild animals. And everyone engaged in this activity. Those who didn't work, didn't eat. The land was common property. The good Lord didn't want to hear about masters and servants, so everyone lived in harmony, helping each other, and gradually managed to make weapons, clothing, houses, and so on. What do you think about that? Has the world not changed? Are you naked like Adam was?

But that's not how things worked. Just as soon as someone said, "This piece of land is mine, beware, anyone who touches it," the shrewdest folks followed suit, giving rise to ownership, which is the root of all evils (if we had socialists back then, they'd have straightened out those good-for-nothing bums). The weaker ones, not understanding the power of unity, submitted, and went from being as free as they were, to becoming slaves to men, meaning they could be bought, beaten, and killed. The masters had that right.

In the Middle Ages (from 495 to 1492) slavery gradually disappeared. Think about it: in ancient times even crazy people would have thought this to be impossible!

Slavery was replaced by servitude, that is, a slightly better version of things. Think of apprenticeships in the workplace. Once an apprentice learned his trade he would set up shop for himself, goodbye and so long. There was no bearded elder giving orders. Could apprenticeships continue to exist today? No chance. While you construct a rifle, machines aided by a

worker (which were nonexistent back when) will make you a hundred of them.

The world is evolving, dear friends, which means it's developing and progressing at the same time. At the end of the 18th century, around 1800, a great revolution took place in France. You should know that at the time there were widespread injustices, barbarism, and prejudices. There was no freedom whatsoever. Heaven forbid you held somewhat progressive ideas! The nobility thought they were of a different breed than us; they treated us like dogs. Except, of course, for taking the fruits of our labor, our wives, and so on. The laws were all in favor of the wealthy. The priests were supposed to look after the interests of the working class, and everybody knew they would come through. They ate lavishly and aligned themselves with the rich. The bourgeoisie (the people who are now in charge) grew tired of this situation and, with the help of the common people, carried out the famous revolution of 1793, which proclaimed the equality of all men. This was a huge step. The tyrants trembled on their tottering thrones and hastened to draft laws, to implement reforms. Today, we have constitutional governments, where the people participate in the administration of the state, or federal governments like Switzerland. All things that were once considered impossible.

Today, we enjoy a certain level of freedom, even if you might not know how to make the most of it. The famous inquisitions by the priests and many other such nuisances have come to an end. Don't even come here and tell us, "The world has always been this way."

Thanks to the socialists, you now have laws regarding the employment of women and children, workplace safety regulations, and a national social security system. Today, you also have the right to vote out wealthy representatives and replace them with intelligent workers who genuinely prioritize everyone's needs. This way, you can look confidently towards the future, which will be one of justice, equality, and peace.

Do you still put your faith in the statements made by those slick talkers? "Not on your life," is the answer I hear. Well done. But there's more.

The trains speeding through the countryside, the ships boldly sailing the seas, the airships piercing through the clouds, the telegraph connecting us to distant cities, the photographer, the telephone—what do all these things tell you?

Do the machines that bend steel, the machines that harvest entire crops in a matter of hours, those that produce paper, or clothing, and those that cater to the other necessities of life, do these things mean nothing to you?

If so many miracles have been possible, why shouldn't you believe in a future that guarantees you fair sustenance, which means the well-being of your family and your own?

It all hinges on your willingness to fight for it. The changes that have occurred in the world have come with rivers of tears. So, do you think manna will rain from the sky? Come on! Let's all work together, let's all contribute our efforts for the common good. And victory will come sooner than you might think.