Evidence, History and the Great War

Historians and the Impact of 1914–18

Edited by Gail Braybon

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Italian Women During the Great War*

Simonetta Ortaggi

(Translated by Guido M. R. Franzinetti)

1. History and memory

Our memory of Italian women's experience of the Great War has been influenced by Fascism in a number of ways. In the first place, Fascism liquidated the most energetic and militant Italian women who had opposed the war both in the countryside and the cities. Secondly, Fascism absorbed and undermined the drive towards emancipation which was inherent in movements such as the women's Red Cross.[1] In addition, Fascism marked not only a serious step backwards for women and for the consciousness which had emerged during the war years, but more generally it purged the political and ideological debate, previously dominated by the great events of socialism and of the Russian revolution. The Great War was thenceforth remembered in an instrumental fashion, as a way of demonising the socialist and popular movements, accusing them of having betrayed the country because of their firm and obstinate pacifism. Mourning, which affected women, workingclass women in particular, so strongly, was expressed in only one dimension – the pompous celebratory rhetoric of state monuments.

* Simonetta Ortaggi died suddenly on 24 October 1999. This text had been completed, with the exception of the title and some bibliographic references. Her husband Paolo Cammarosano has edited the Italian text and takes responsibility for any inaccuracies remaining.

This was the starting-point for Italian historiography between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1970s. During these years, a body of work was produced by respected scholars, who carried out wide-ranging research in the archives and who confronted the political issues which were the immediate heritage of the traumatic divisions which had taken place during the Great War and of the rise of Fascism.

The extremely rich sources offered by the reports from the security services have revealed the importance of women's presence in popular protest against the war. This was a presence which the Italian *prefetti** described from an irredeemably male chauvinist point of view, by attributing the initiative to external male figures: the Young Socialists, soldiers returning home on leave, clergymen, or all of these figures together with others. With a fine touch of irony Paul Corner has remembered the list, 'brief but decidedly ecumenical', which was provided by a *prefetto* in Northern Italy, stressing that on one point local functionaries were in complete agreement: the fact that these movements were of a revolutionary nature.[2]

The first scholar to have explored these vast archival sources was Renzo De Felice, who at the beginning of the 1960s was interested in reconstructing popular and Socialist attitudes towards the war. In an article of 1963, which became famous, he focused his attention on the pacifist propaganda of the Socialist Party, and reached the conclusion that the effects of this propaganda were not to be overestimated. On the one hand, he pointed out that 'popular unrest, especially when created by women' was 'of a generally spontaneous nature, affected only indirectly by Catholic and especially Socialist propaganda'. On the other hand, he pointed out that 'until the end of 1916 and at the beginning of 1917 the Socialists' propagandising efforts were unable to have any real effect on the masses'. The author added that 'Socialist propaganda began to achieve indeed a measure of success *(especially amongst women)* at the beginning of 1917' [author's italics]. De Felice added as an appendix to the article detailed extracts from contemporary documents, summarising the reports in which (for the period December 1916 to January 1917) practically all the *prefetti* of the various provinces had described anti-war movements, led by women from the countryside, demanding the return of their husbands from the front, and most frequently of all protesting against the supplementary benefit which the state paid to the poorest wives of soldiers.[3]

The incidental and basically contradictory nature of De Felice's remarks regarding women are symptomatic of a lack of interest in

* Translator's note: There is no equivalent in British administrative language for the term *prefetto/prefetti*. It is derived from the French *prefet*, and by and large follows French administrative practice. In Italy since unification (1861) the *prefetto* has been the direct representative of central government in every province, and is an employee of the Minister of the Interior. His function is to coordinate state activities, to monitor (and if need be, control) local government, and last, but not least, to ensure the maintenance of public order.

women as true agents of this unrest, reflecting his own political agenda. This means that two statements which appear largely contradictory nevertheless have an identical general meaning: the fact that the protest against the war was carried out by women – and peasant women, at that – was a feature which reduced the political relevance of the protest itself in the overall context of his study. This approach was echoed by many, and for more than a decade it influenced research carried out by historians with a variety political viewpoints, including women.[4]

Piero Melograni, in his *Storia politica della Grande Guerra* (1969), also strove to correct the view (which was affected by the long shadow of the Turin insurrection of August 1917) that 'the proletariat of the big industrial centres was at the vanguard of the anti-war protest'. For this reason he emphasised reports of the *prefetti*, from which it would appear that 'protests emerged and spread especially in small municipalities, in the countryside, and were carried out mainly by women'.[5]

Compared to De Felice, Melograni proved more attentive to the role of women. He stressed the specificity of women's experience, which led them to be 'instinctively' pacifist. The 'hostility of women to the war in a certain sense belonged to the natural order of things', because of the instinctive refusal of wives and mothers to separate themselves from their husbands and sons. He reminded readers that while the middle classes in wartime had complained of loose morals resulting from the 'easy money' made through work connected with the military effort, in fact the war led women to emancipate themselves through work which was a harsh and unavoidable necessity, and which by no means gave them wealth. It increased their suffering and exhaustion, and at the same time deprived the family of attention precisely 'in a period in which the running of households became more complex because of the difficulty in obtaining supplies, and in which educating children became more difficult because of the absence of husbands'.[6]

The moral and patriotic inspiration which had initially guided Piero Melograni's studies on the Great War, together with his anti-Socialist sentiments which emerged on various occasions (for example in the antithesis between on the one hand the peasants who were infantrymen and on the other the workers and middleclass people who were shirkers [*imboscati*, literally 'in the woods']) constituted a challenge which was taken up in the work of Giovanna Procacci. Through wide-ranging archival research, and with the combination of intelligence and sensitivity which characterises Procacci's work, discussion of the role of women's anti-war initiatives acquired more relevance and depth. These were placed in the context of a general picture which stressed the deep-rooted hostility of the Italian state to the lower classes and the common people, a hostility which actually increased during the war.[7]

The 1980s witnessed a widening of the debate, which started with two equally provocative studies by Santo Peli and Anna Bravo. The starting-point of Peli's reflections was a radical critique of the 'public order vision

of the Great war' which had been expressed by De Felice in 1963 and by Natalia Di Stefano in 1967, and which he described in the following terms:

> We know that, in examining the problem of 'public order' through the reports made by the security services, one has the impression that (especially in the provinces) the crowds typically emerge around groups of women who, in particular on the day when soldiers' pay arrived, gathered on the main village square to protest and, in many cases, even cry out 'Down with the War!'

On the contrary, Peli proposed to 'stress how the picture – that is, of workers getting on with their work in the factories, while women were involved in a bit of understandable but sterile protest – was arbitrary and tendentious'.[8]

In remembering the vast and important protest movements which emerged in a whole series of industrial areas throughout 1917 and 1918 (and which were led by women), Peli stressed the role of women workers in breaking the balance of power at factory level. He did not see this role as essentially subordinate (i.e. as 'a sort of commission given by skilled workers to the sector of the labour forces which was less vulnerable to repression'). He instead saw a need to explain this role by 'coming to terms with the *specifically female* exasperation' which derived from working conditions in the factory and 'from the repetitive, piece-work, underpaid labour on the one hand, and on the other from the vast price increases and from the consequent increase in domestic work'.[9]

A more radical challenge was launched in 1980 by the original approach of an oral historian, Anna Bravo. In her article, 'Donne contadine e prima guerra mondiale', Bravo proposed an approach based on oral sources rather than written, and concerning the world of the peasants rather than the workingclass struggles which Santo Peli had studied. Through the oral testimonies of a group of peasant women born at the turn of the century, Bravo proposed to study the 'modalities through which these women began to express a more radical change in their attitudes and in their vision of the world', 'the modalities according to which the war intervenes' in the mental structures of women, characterised by the contradiction between 'the importance and the complexity of the family and working role' and the 'extreme limitation of formal rights for women', 'between their self-image and the acceptance of the weakness of their social status'. Bravo saw this approach as a challenge on the one hand to studies on the Great War and the world of peasants (which in her view had been mainly centred on the 'peasant soldier'), and on the other to studies on women and the war, which until then had been confined to 'women's workingclass struggles and to urban reality'.[10]

These two kinds of studies presented a dichotomous view of reality, which focused first on one aspect or war, and then on another: the various studies did not communicate between each other, but proceeded as closed units, isolating peasant women and women workers, the country

and the city, Catholics and Socialists, working conditions and psychological and emotional conditions, although every unit represented a piece of reality.

The 1980s witnessed the entry into the field of studies on the Great War many women historians who addressed both class and gender issues. The topic of class was addressed through research into a variety of aspects of social and working conditions. Gender issues – despite Anna Bravo's efforts to encourage studies in qualitative history, on oral testimonies and on feminine sensitivity as an intensely contradictory experience – have definitely played a much smaller role, mostly because of the lack of documentary material illustrating subjective attitudes.[11]

An exception to this general picture is offered by the book *Donne socialiste nel Biellese* (1984), written by an independent scholar, Luigi Moranino. This book contains references to precious and rare written sources. These are articles published during the war in a column which a Socialist newspaper, *Corriere Biellese*, reserved for women. These articles are not the product of memory, i.e., an *ex post facto* reconstruction, nor even of historiography, but are women's history as produced by the women themselves: they speak in the first person, as events unfold, without the benefit of hindsight.[12] The preface is written by Gianni Perona, a historian of great sensitivity, and a highly sophisticated critic, who poses two fundamental theoretical questions. The first concerns the relationship between a mobilisation which was strictly connected to the war (and therefore connected to the emotional and existential sphere) and its subsequent implications in terms of a more general emancipation. The second concerns the gap between 'the extremely long time scale of changes in women's conditions and the extremely short time scale of political action'. These are crucial issues, which will be discussed at the end of this paper.[13]

2. Women and the Great War

In Italy, where the process of women's emancipation was much less advanced than in other European countries, the Great War activated women's moral and intellectual energies as never before. It forced them to take a stand on a political issue, on a topic which had hitherto been a masculine preserve. The 'abstract' problem of the lack of the political or administrative vote could never have achieved such a result.

This point applied both to proletarian and middleclass women, albeit with a crucial difference. Many middleclass women took the opportunity to come out of the strictly domestic and family context not to oppose the war (an attitude which would have clashed with their entire social and family upbringing) but rather to devote themselves enthusiastically to charities working to alleviate the suffering caused by war. This was also a way through which women could emerge from a pre-occupation with

family, and develop a more altruistic role in the wider world. An excellent example of this can be found in Ursula Hirschmann's memoirs, when referring to her mother-in-law, Clara Pontecorvo. Clara's husband, who was connected to the business world and the cultural circles of Milan, had taken part, as a moderate Liberal, in the 'enthusiastic drive which brought Italy into the war'. Clara herself, who 'because of her nature put a bit less Liberalism and a bit more asceticism in what she did ... at the end of the day was engulfed by the patriotic wave to a much greater extent than her husband (who remained a worldly man) ever was'.[14]

In this context, an understanding existed between the middleclass women involved in care and assistance, and the women Socialist intellectuals who were in favour of the war effort, while a sharp opposition developed between these same Socialist intellectuals and those working-class women who refused to support the war as part of the defence of the Motherland. When asked if she would be pleased to live under German occupation, one of the latter answered, on behalf of workingclass women in Milan: 'we would oppose a foreign occupation, in the name of that same sense of rebellion against injustice and oppression which leads us to fight against Italian bosses.' She then added, as if to tone down the divergence in opinion: 'at the end of the day we think the same as they do, it's just that being closer to the people as we are born of the people we believe we understand better their feelings and that [desire for] absolute neutrality, which seems absurd, but which in reality is not at all.'[15]

The popularist women's opposition to the war was a movement which included peasant and workingclass women, young and married, of Northern, Central and Southern Italy. It undoubtedly had its roots in the emotional and existential context* which saw these women concerned for the lives of their husbands, brothers and fathers, but which did not necessarily imply a full mobilisation against the war. On the contrary, as Anna Kuliscioff aptly remarks in her book *Monopolio dell'uomo*, women's selflessness in the family context had always run the risk of being interpreted as selfishness in a wider social context.[16] This kind of 'selfishness' did not occur during the war, when women were moved by social inequalities, as well as by the strength of their affections, to invent thousands of kinds of protest.

3. Women's War

The links between women who were at home and men at the front were strengthened during these years, as is shown by the incredible number of letters and postcards sent in both directions.

Writing to loved ones at the front became a duty, which in the family and social division of labour was allocated to the younger[17] and less pro-

* Translator's note: 'existential' in this context is not the strictly philosophical term, but is used by the writer to mean personal problems in a wider sense.

ductive family members or, in rural centres where illiteracy was still widespread, to the village figure who personified education and culture – the village teacher. In the area around Biella (north-eastern Piedmont) reading out loud letters addressed to soldiers represented – for the young people who were joining the Socialist movement – an important time for discussion and for organisational activities.[18] In the countryside letters were read aloud, commented upon, and passed from one individual to another. Soldiers writing home asked for help, made suggestions and gave advice, or expressed approval. Peasants gave detailed instructions to their wives on the bureaucratic procedures to be followed to obtain leave in time for harvests. And the wives promptly carried out these instructions, hoping to get their men away from the front. In the province of Rome alone, the number of requests for leave in 1917 was 20,000 (of which 2,000 were accepted).[19] This took time away from the thousands of duties which kept them busy all day, both in the city and in the country. Everyday life was so deeply permeated and conditioned by war that women, who took over in its entirety the burden of the battle for survival, could rightly say: 'Oh yes, we also fought the war, staying at home. Men were at war, and women staying at home had to fight *an even greater war*, a measured bit of black bread, no sugar, no oil.'[20]

This last statement comes from a peasant woman in the area around Cuneo (south-west Piedmont). This is no coincidence, as life in the countryside could be much harder than in the urban centres, especially for those with no land. In families which owned or rented land, women could take over (with the assistance of the elderly and children) all the duties formerly carried out by men, but at least they managed to survive. However, landless peasant women, alone and 'mostly with large families',[21] either took on hard, often seasonal, work as farm labourers, for very low wages, or were forced to steal to survive (usually from the fields) or were driven to take over uncultivated land. Women went to the fields a few at a time, often at night, and marked with a stick 'their' territory, or they began to plough the land with spades and hoes, running away when the police came, and returning later. The uncultivated pieces of land were small, so these women still had to work as labourers on other people's land.

4. The Benefits War

Material difficulties caused deprivation, and thus protest, which usually took the form of a peasant *jacquerie* (against requisitions of wheat, the lack of flour, rise in the price of staple goods), but the rebellious state of women in the countryside was also closely connected with the general war situation, and this was often focused on a public occasion, namely the payment of war benefits.

The state provided assistance to the most needy families in the form of a benefit (*sussidio*), which in theory was supposed to compensate for the

missing wages of the absent breadwinner. It amounted to very little, just as the wages women could earn were very small. In 1915 it was 60 centimes for the wife, and 30 for children under the age of twelve, at a time when bread in Milan cost 56 centimes per kilo, and a seamstress working on military clothing earned 82 centimes for a twelve-hour day.[22] In July 1917 the benefit was increased to 70–75 centimes for the wife, but in the mean time the cost of living had increased much more.[23]

On the day benefits were paid (usually a Monday) about a hundred women from the surrounding districts and houses gathered at each village square and then converged on the Town Hall. The benefit, which was declining in real terms, was often paid late and on an irregular basis. Collection of benefit itself represented a burden which peasant women, busy with labouring, could not always take on. Fairly naturally these meetings became an occasion for organising protest.

In effect women rapidly switched from a protest against the paucity of the benefit to a refusal to collect it, seeing it as a symbol in itself of war and its atrocities. To collect it implied a sort of tacit acquiescence to the massacre. It created feelings of guilt and of complicity. In any case, as long as benefits were being paid, the war went on.

Between December 1916 and January 1917 all the provinces of Italy witnessed peasant protests against the benefit, and demands from women that their husbands should be sent back home. In many areas female farm labourers refused to work, claiming that the wages were inadequate, or that they needed to go to the Town Hall to collect their benefit.

These movements were simply a gigantic action group directed at supporting the peace openings which were then appearing on the international scene. In Italy, on 6 December 1916, the Chamber of Deputies (the lower House) discussed a motion tabled by the Socialist Party. The motion asked the house to explore the chances for an equitable peace through an international conference. On 12 December the entire world (combatant and non-combatant) was caught off balance by the diplomatic initiative launched by Germany (together with Austria, Bulgaria and Turkey) which called for peace.[24]

The fact that all these peasant movements in Italy were directed at the sole objective of bringing about peace was perfectly clear to the Italian officials responsible for public order. The women's protests which had wreaked havoc in the province of Piacenza in December 1916, the *prefetto* wrote, were 'made with the specious pretext of wanting their relatives to come home and to obtain an increase in the benefit', whilst in fact 'they were directed at supporting the motion for peace which has been tabled at the Chamber of Deputies by the Socialist parliamentary group'.[25] One should take note of the fact that, as in Italy the cities and the countryside were traditionally strongly connected, and as the Socialist Party was widely present and rooted in the countryside, those peasant women had a whole range of antennae attuned to the world of politics, thanks to their connections with the

Young Socialists, or with the village teachers who wrote their letters to husbands at the front.

Most other *prefetti* agreed with their colleague in Piacenza. This interpretation was validated by subsequent protest movements in the spring: from the Polesine to Tuscany to Latium, rural districts witnessed demonstrations by peasant women who on this occasion were protesting against the increase of the benefit, which was seen as a sign that the war was going to go on.[26] Encouragement to follow this course of action came from the soldiers themselves, trapped in a war machine which cruelly crushed any attempt to resist. 'The government is tricking us, it sends us benefit and now, by signing, we condemn our men to another two years of war': this is what the peasant women of the Polesine said, and in saying this they were repeating 'what all the soldiers on leave say'.[27]

Women's protest movements carried on through the summer, lasting well into autumn. They affected not only the countryside but also cities and the big industrial centres. Significantly, they also coincided with the bloody but futile offensives at the front in June and September. At the beginning of September 1917 one soldier wrote, appealing to women to oppose the war in all possible ways, and start by refusing benefit: 'You cannot stay as you are without doing anything while soldiers are all being massacred'. So the women of his village, who in the previous month had demonstrated against the lack of flour, came out again into the streets: 'Down with the war, we want our husbands back, otherwise we will make a revolution'.[28]

In the summer of 1917 the 'benefits war' was joined by other, more incisive forms of protest. To end the war – and on this point the popular masses were unanimous – it was necessary to deprive the army of wheat, arms and men. In the irrigated areas of the Po Valley women farm labourers refused to work on the harvest: they wanted the wheat to rot in the fields so that – with the army lacking all means of subsistence – the war would come to an end. In some cases they had the support of their male fellow workers; the harvesters declared that they had given in to threats, or 'so as not to have anything to do with women'. The women explained why it was necessary to deprive the army of wheat; sometimes they issued threats, and sometimes they argued their case, recalling the sons they had lost in the war.[29]

The prevention of arms production in an attempt to end the slaughter was the other crucial aspect of the action programme. To interrupt production, women in the countryside gathered in crowds at railway stations to discourage the departure of young women who were going to work in armaments factories in urban centres, and also organised hundreds of trips to these factories. 'They are Furies': this was the expression used by Filippo Turati with reference to one of these incursions by women in Milan.[30] He described precisely what peasant women from a district of the Polesine did. Three hundred of them left from Polesella and travelled to Guarda Veneta to bring about the suspension of work by

women workers at a depot for material destined for the front. They threw into the river Po 1,200 wooden hurdles, 1,500 stakes and another 1,500 pieces of wood which were destined to strengthen trenches.[31] One may note that in these actions peasant women generally had the support of female and male workers, who often came from the same villages and who in any case came close to them in their common hatred of the war.

From an instinctive feeling of solidarity, and a profound, deeply felt opposition to the war, boys, girls and women also offered sympathy and help to deserters. According to police reports, women were the first to hold back their husbands from returning to the front when they were home on leave, in order to deprive the war of the raw material on which it fed.

There are many different sources which demonstrate the widespread nature of protection offered by women to deserting soldiers. These testify to the audacity and courage of those who took such actions, which could even lead to them directly confronting the forces of law and order, especially when very young women, who were either friends or relatives of the soldiers, were involved. There are numerous references to different locations which attribute to women the initiative in holding back the men and encouraging them to desert. In Genzano (in the province of Rome) those who turned up for service 'were convinced not to by their fellow soldiers and by women'. In Agrigento [Sicily] soldiers failed to return from leave 'also because they [were] encouraged by the women, who had come to the conclusion that with a growing number of deserters the war would come to an end'.[32]

One might even suspect some male chauvinist malice in these reports, were it not for the fact that (in an intervention which sounds out of tune with the chorus against the war) one can read in *Difesa delle Lavoratrici* [Defence of Women Workers – a newspaper] of a woman exhorting women *not* to make their men desert, saying: 'if my husband were to become a deserter, it would weigh on my conscience.'[33]

A confirmation of the unanimous view of women's actions held by the *prefetti* may be found in oral testimonies of women who, when young, had helped the deserters in the countryside around Cuneo [south-western Piedmont]. At many years' distance, these women were able to remember accurately the individuals – even their nicknames – who were hiding in that area. Anna Bravo has pointed out that this is an incontrovertible sign of approval and emotional involvement. These women, who until then had been living in tight family groups, insulated from the enthusiasm of class solidarity and the lure of politics, had admired those 'courageous' young men, who were capable of challenging authority to the point of meeting to play football, exposing themselves to retaliation from the forces of order.[34] For example, Palma Gasparoni belonged to a workingclass family from Venetia living near Schio (close to Verona). Her recollection of two cousins who had deserted was positively tinged. She later followed the path of anti-Fascism. 'Already at that time' – she remembers – 'in my family the cousins were ... not yet anti-Fascists [since Fascism

had not yet emerged] but Socialists. Two of my cousins had deserted in the First World War. They hid in the mountains.'[35]

When, in the first months of 1918, during the repression which followed the Italian defeat at Caporetto, civilian and military authorities began demanding better results in the fight against deserters, young women who protected brothers, relatives or friends responded with great energy against attempts to capture the men. 'Rotten government spies f*** o**'; 'Screws, that's what you are ... paid just to make the war continue and to kill our poor boys.'[36] In these words we can feel in all its depth the radicalisation of social conflict which the war had engendered.

We have already seen women advocated the return of their husbands, threatening revolution otherwise. Between these two extremes of private and public activity the dynamics of women's emancipation evolved during the war years. Women and girls, including children, all felt a tremendous responsibility for putting an end to the slaughter, not least because of the requests for help which were coming back from the front. They felt the profound iniquity of social divisions which the war had made intolerable – for what was now being distributed, according to one's income, was life or death. This enabled 'daddy's boys' (*figli di papà*) to avoid military service, and to be 'shirkers', flouting their privilege openly to the irritation of local authorities. It offended the popular masses' sense of justice, and particularly the feelings of mothers, wives and daughters.

5. War Work

Having been transformed into breadwinners the women agricultural labourers ended up organising themselves in *leghe* (agricultural labourers' leagues), fighting for a wage which was not simply a supplement to men's wages. Alongside the struggle against the war, women had to fight to survive themselves. Necessity led large parts of the population to abandon rural areas and the South, seeking work in other parts of Italy. During the war, the industrial centres expanded enormously: mere rural settlements became townships, with all the rationing problems which this involved. Cities such as Turin and Milan had to cope with the influx of thousands of people, who were mainly from the provinces or the region. The industrial belt around Milan increased rapidly. The population was migrating towards the only field in which work was available: military production. The migrants were overwhelmingly adult women who had suddenly become breadwinners when husbands were called up, or twelve to thirteen-year-old girls who had become the only form of support for mothers with young families, or girls who migrated with groups of friends, and who settled down in the outskirts of big industrial centres such as Milan.[37]

An enormous number of women were employed by the military simply sewing coats and blankets. It was quite another matter to actually

produce weapons, weapons which killed: in this case there was an inevitable clash between the women's working role and the pacifism which was so deeply rooted in them. But it was in fact in the field of armaments production that many women and youngsters were employed, partly due to changes in technology and the process of standardisation in the factory. A government memo dated 23 August 1916 ordered a tenfold increase in numbers of women and children employed in the production of bullets and munitions, so that by 31 October they together amounted to 50 percent of the labour force, and by 31 December to 80 percent.[38] There were, however, technical limitations to the deployment of women, and limits to their availability for work (as shown by the textile sector, where women had been employed for a long time).[39]

So, while adult women with small children, or elderly women, preferred to work at home – working on boots and shoes, sewing military uniforms, mending used clothes – a vast number of other women and girls worked in military factories: in foundries, in the munitions industry as turners, in fuse factories, and in explosives. This was an army of women which, although much smaller than the 600,000 working in sewing and mending military clothing (and smaller than that which was mobilised in other European countries), was nevertheless remarkable for the speed at which it developed and the size it reached. The few women workers of the prewar era had become 200,000 by 1918, and they represented the most important component of the urban working class, next to male workers who had not been called up (*operai borghesi*).

Teresa Noce remembers, of Turin: 'Almost all working women – women of the people, mothers, mothers or daughters of soldiers and of men who had been called up – had been forced to work in military production workshops.'[40] This was due to economic necessity. Teresa Noce (who had worked at Fiat Brevetti herself) described in her autobiographical novel how eventually the heroine resigned herself to work in an armaments factory for that reason, and defended those young women who had made the same choice – the young women held responsible for young men's call-up by wives and relatives.

In fact the young women workers who worked in munitions production felt a moral unease which was added to the physical and material suffering caused by the work itself, just as did Noce's heroine in *Gioventù senza sole* (*Youth without Sun*). As usual, their wages were lower than men's; they could compensate for this only partly through piecework. Filippo Turati described their working conditions in the following terms:

> These ever-increasing legions of women (often mothers or young wives with small children to look after) ... went into improvised or barely equipped industrial plants, without setting up any washrooms, separate facilities, rooms for breast-feeding and creches, canteens, in other words, everything which would have been necessary. These women were taken on with wages ranging between 1.50 and 2.40 liras, which were often reduced further because of

> fines, for exhausting work and long hours, standing up all day, militarised and therefore treated harshly, chased by the police and then punished as if they were soldiers abandoning their place in the field if they should ever be absent from work for a couple of day because of exhaustion. If one thinks of these conditions, one can imagine what state of affairs had been reached.[41]

This picture was no exaggeration. The outbreak of war marked the suspension of the few timid protective laws passed in the previous decade. Until 1917 nothing was put in their place. This affected both working hours and more especially provision for the inspection of working conditions. Until the end of that year there was no regulatory agency in existence for the inspection of hygiene in the buildings, to monitor hours worked, or to check the dangers involved in the manufacturing process. Indeed, the working week was so long that by October 1916 women workers in Emilia were asking to be able to rest at least on Sunday afternoons.[42]

Women and children, no less than men, came under the military penal code introduced in April 1915 in 'auxiliary' factories, so that breaking a factory rule was considered a form of insubordination and unauthorised absence for a few hours or days was punished as if it were desertion. To remedy this situation, in November 1916 a special disciplinary system was introduced for youths over the age of sixteen, but not subject to call-up, transforming many punishments into fines – but still retained was the sentence of imprisonment from two months to a year for absenteeism by women workers, even if this absence had only amounted to twenty-four hours.

These measures were directed against brief absences, which were deemed to occur particularly amongst women workers. This was in general a senseless and unfounded suspicion, as a doctor who worked as a consultant for the *Comitato di Mobilitazione Industriale per la Liguria* pointed out in August 1917, since most such cases of absence were due to accidents, i.e., verifiable, in which 'injury is manifest'.[43] Young women were in fact employed in many explosives factories, where the number of accidents at work was extremely high, with often fatal consequences for the women workers.

Married women with children, however, were often absent for a few hours or days. This was due to a variety of reasons, not least the fact that the working day was a minimum of twelve hours, work was frequently done at night, and was always performed at the intense pace caused by piecework. On top of this, women had the burdens of domestic and family life, which the war increased enormously. Buying food, for example, involved long queues at the shops, picking up benefits, picking up ration cards, and dealing with other bureaucratic matters which involved queuing at various offices. We should also bear in mind the chronic malnutrition of the masses, aggravated by shortages and rising costs of foodstuffs. It is no surprise that this state of affairs produced in women workers the condition which Professor Cosimo Rubino described as the 'indefinable

pain derived from tiredness and which often leads to the sudden need to interrupt work.'[44]

In any case it was an incontrovertible fact (confirmed at national level in the summer of 1917) that those leaving factories 'after a few months of permanency' were chiefly women – 'married or married mothers'.[45] This was confirmed by some major companies, such as Pirelli in Milan, where the opposite had been the case prewar, as adult married women were the most stable component of the female labour force.[46] The reality of exploitation in Italy leaves little doubt about how impossible it was for a woman – who was no longer twenty years old, and with children to look after – to sustain the cumulative burden of household and factory work. This in my view leaves little room for discussion as to the usefulness of protective legislation or controls specifically directed at women's employment.

The domestic and family commitments which all women, whether married or not, had to carry out (for children, or for younger siblings in the case of girls) meant that the issue of rest days was vital for women. The women at the Ansaldo's bullet factory 'La Fiumara' wrote: 'We did not protest against working overtime or at night, despite the burden it represents for us as women; but we do believe it would be humane to allow a day off (on Sundays) or at least to allow those who feel the need for it to take that day off, because a woman working at a plant neglects the house, and herself, so she feels the need for the free day, for resting, for personal hygiene, and for cleaning the house.'[47]

A crowded trade union meeting had been held to protest against the Milanese employers' decision to impose work on Sundays (leaving a day off during the week). There had been a proposal for women to take the children to work with them. But the women workers adopted a less obvious but more radical solution by going on strike on the following two working Sundays in March 1917: those two days saw 17,405 case of unofficial leave of absence and entire workshops were paralysed.[48]

Once they started working in factories women rapidly joined trade unions. This process was accelerated by the war itself. Initially they tried to compensate for the inadequacy of their basic wages by increasing their piecework earnings, working long and intense hours. In so doing, they provoked a hostile reaction amongst male trade unionists, who had been trying for some time to slow down the pace of work.[49] The men expressed their displeasure 'in a vigorous and threatening way', because women were doing the same work as men for lower wages and no less industriously.[50] Men and trade unions then started taking an active interest in the problems of women workers not so much out of a desire to defend their own interests (as trade union leaders had advocated for some time) as out a feeling of solidarity, which united working people. They recognised the difficult situation in which many married women found themselves, trying to make up for the absence of husbands who had been called up.[51] Wage differentials between men and women remained significant, but some progress was made towards their reduc-

tion. For example, there was a strong egalitarian momentum expressed in the demand that the cost-of-living allowance (which by summer 1917 amounted to a large part of total earnings) should be equal for all (men, women and children). There was also a demand for the 25 percent pay increase for men working on hourly rates to be extended to women in the same category.[52] By the end of the war women had learnt from experience to demand a fixed daily wage sufficient for living (6 liras, in the case of the women workers from the Dora bullet factory in 1918), and for humane working hours: 'Of course – eight hours a day.'[53]

Nevertheless, women's experience of work in an armaments factory was very different from men's. For men this was a privileged position – not so much because of the wages (which were higher compared to other industries) but because it meant exemption from call-up. Women were compelled to deal every day with the increasing difficulties of ordinary life. In short, they experienced more intensely in a single existential dimension the specific problems of working conditions and the more general ones connected with the war.

One case well illustrates the interconnection between trade union demands and the anti-war mood which characterised the climate on the shop floor. On 2 August 1917 the *prefetto* of Leghorn reported that 'a woman worker at the Metallurgica was trying to convince the other women' to go on strike, so that there would have been no more bullets, 'and their respective husbands and relatives at the front would have been obliged to come back'. On 15 August a trade union meeting was announced. At this meeting there was going to be 'a discussion of the issue of the equality of sexes amongst workers, since at present a man earns 7 liras or more for every 700 slabs washed, while a woman earns 4 liras for every 800 slabs.'[54] The Workers' committee which signed the agreement with the *Società metallurgica* on 5 November included two women alongside seven men.[55]

The fact is that the war saw not only the old kind of conflicts (which of course did not disappear) but also new and more powerful forms of solidarity. Civilian workers exempted from military service worked next to women who had men at the front. They saw them exhausted at work, and also in long queues for food outside. This generated solidarity, and led to a greater understanding of women's protests and demands, and also encouraged a common sentiment against the war – which in turn often led to common political and trade union activity.

The revolt which exploded in the workingclass belt around Turin in August 1917 epitomises and exemplifies the combination of different elements which characterised social conflict in the great workingclass centres: the peasant *jacquerie,* with attacks on bread lorries and the ransacking of shops, urban guerrillas on the barricades, appeals to the troops to stop fighting, and the assignment of trade union representation to the *Commissioni interne.*[*]

* Translator's note: this is similar to a works council.

The testimonies of the 'sisters' interviewed in the 1970s by Bianca Guidetti Serra have enabled us to rediscover this aspect of popular revolt. Women who were then girls, or even children, tell the same story: their arrival in Turin during the war, looking for work to help their mothers and younger siblings (at eleven or twelve years of age being the only source of income for families lacking male breadwinners), early experiences of trade union militancy in the traditional textile factories, and their first experience of gunfire on the barricades.[56]

Maria Barbero recalls: 'And then we girls would go to negotiate with those soldiers to ask them not to shoot ... and we did manage to keep them at a distance ... Because we would tell them – And what are you doing at home? We are workers struggling because our brothers are at war – I had three brothers fighting – and so we want them to come home and we don't want to suffer hunger and all these things.' She concluded: 'We did manage to get on more or less familiar terms with these soldiers.'[57]

Anna Fenoglio, who became the main source of income for her mother and younger brother when she was an eleven-year-old, remembered the hunger which had sparked the revolt: 'In front of the factory gates [where we were working] there was a co-op, and at 6 a.m. a lorry came with bread in baskets. One morning they could not stop us any longer ... we got onto the lorry, we grabbed the bread and we took it home to our hungry brothers.'[58]

In the trials held over the following months there were many female defendants, charged and sentenced for having ransacked shops or (as happened at the trial at the War Tribunal in Turin, 'in the case of Laida Celenghin') for 'having incited the soldiers not to shoot during the events of last August'.[59]

On that occasion, women's particular attitudes and their own psychological and sentimental reasons clearly prevailed over economic and trade union issues. The men – who generally had higher qualifications on the shop floor and who were often representatives of trade unions or of Socialist movements – had followed the momentum which women had created: 'despite everything we were pleased and proud to have fought with courage, even unsuccessfully, against the war, the government and the bosses. We at least had the feeling ... that we had done our duty ... to ... millions of mothers, sisters and wives who were living in the continuous and horrible expectation of receiving news of death [in their family]'.[60]

Maria Montagnana's testimony faithfully reproduces – at many years' distance – the sense of moral unease which was also experienced by men who worked in armaments factories (and who were exempted from military service) when they compared themselves to their less fortunate friends who had been called up, and their respective wives, mothers, daughters and sisters.

We repeatedly find women in this propulsive role. Maria Barbero remembers that at Fiat Lingotto [in Turin], when 'the war was almost over', she and her women friends at work ('all young, all young girls') had

exhorted their male colleagues to go on strike, 'otherwise – they said – the war will not end and we will die of hunger and the others will die in the trenches. The men looked at us and came out with us. The Fiat guards looked at us but did not say anything'.[61]

There was one case of women's mobilisation which had few parallels in the rest of Italy, and is remarkable for its size and for the sophistication of its demands, and that was the movement in the Biella area [in northeastern Piedmont], the birthplace of the Italian industrial revolution. This was another case of an emancipation process which, while not exclusively focused on the struggle against war, nevertheless derived its stimulus and impulse from the war. In those valleys the development of the textile industry had created, by the end of the nineteenth century, a workingclass population which consisted of girls and women who did not leave factory work on marriage: in this sense, economic emancipation had already been achieved. The war enabled these women to go a step further, and to move on to political organisation. From 1916 to 1918 almost one thousand women, most of them textile workers, created dozens of Socialist Party branches, held meetings, subscribed in their hundreds to political newspapers, wrote letters and articles for newspapers, and wrote their own column in the local Socialist newspaper, *Il Corriere Biellese*.

6. Gender and class dynamics

The war was a powerful force in polarising popular and middleclass worlds around respectively refusal or acceptance of the conflict. Women were a crucial component in the deep social division which emerged.

Women were bound to perceive class conflict in a much more intense and acute way, given their feelings about motherhood and women's traditional role. This represented for many women the starting point for a process of self-analysis and for discerning a specifically feminine point of view on the anti-war movement.

In the *Corriere Biellese* 'G.B.' wrote that '... women give life to men ... and so she feels the sanctity of life much more than men do ... How have we been able to renounce our natural instincts and to hand over our own flesh to the cannons? How can we explain such an unnatural thing?'[62]

A woman worker from the area around Biella explained how in Turin (where she was visiting a relative) she had met the countess from a nearby village, who told her of the deprivations which her son had endured, forced to sleep in barracks, and of her husband's trip to Rome to pull strings and get their son sent back home. When the countess asked her for news of her own husband and her three brothers, and was told that they had been on the front for sixteen months, she then exclaimed: 'How lucky they are to be already used to such deprivations. Do give them my best wishes when you write to them.'[63]

There is another episode which illustrates the depth of the abyss which separated workingclass and peasant women from middleclass women. In the climate of patriotic enthusiasm and witch-hunting which followed Caporetto,[64] a group of women of the *Lega patriottica tra le impiegate* (a women's white-collar organisation), animated by love of their country, had gone to propagandise in the industrial belt around Milan, which had been particularly affected by rapid industrialisation caused by the war. Here they were surrounded by the local inhabitants, and in particular by 'a group of women', one of whom responded: 'The Germans are welcome, I will keep the pot ready to give them *polenta*.'[65]

Workingclass and peasant women refused to sublimate their mourning on the altar of the Fatherland, seeing the war as an instrument of oppression by the ruling classes; they did not accept that mourning the dead should be a reason for forgetting their opposition to the war. Later, this division – a civil war – continued under Fascism, and in turn Fascism used the issue as justification for some of its vendettas against feminism.

A perfect example of this silent war was the official ceremony which was organised in March 1918 by the municipality of Limbiate. Through a commemorative ceremony for the men who had died at the front, the authorities strove to placate women, and to undermine their protests against the war, which were now radicalised and inspired by the example of revolutionary Russia. 'I appeal especially to the mothers, to the wives, to the daughters of those who have died in the war. Do let your tears fall freely. Your tears are sacred for us. But ... do lift your faces up with pride.'[66]

Appeals to women's patriotism had begun with the Libyan War (1911 to 1912), and had immediately been unmasked by proletarian women.[67] Pleas from politicians were strongly echoed by middleclass feminists. 'A mother' wrote in 1917: 'Women of Italy, serene and strong Italian women, you know, don't you? We must not cry. Our sons must be able to look at us in the eyes and to find us prepared; we must be worthy of them.'[68]

According to the myth of the 'virile' woman, which was put forward by Futurist Feminism, women who at the beginning of the war were 'in tears, weak as little girls when facing the drama of separation' were destined to become, thanks to the war, 'companions tempered by the grandiosity of time'.[69] This was a model which was unacceptable to the women of the people, who had opposed war with such audacity and courage. The evidence I have presented here should demonstrate this.

The impact of the war on these women also coincided with the renunciation by middleclass feminists of that crucial objective of emancipation – the right to vote. This happened at precisely the moment when the Socialist women's movement was attempting to acquire political rights and a more radical equality with men in the Socialist Party itself.[70] The women of Biella were those who put on the agenda (at a national, not just at a local level) the issue of parity with men. In political terms, this meant the right for women to have their own organisation, and the right to participate in joint party structures actively, not merely in a consultative

capacity. In this regard, the movement was the most advanced expression of the transformation which had taken place amongst women during the war, and *because* of the war. With this experience before us, we may address the issues raised by Perona near the beginning of this chapter.

The first issue is that of the relationship between a mobilisation which was intimately connected to the anti-war movement (and therefore rooted in an emotional and existential context) and its effects in terms of women's emancipation. The conclusion must be that the capacity to mobilise and to take initiatives which women developed in their struggle against the war had a more general value and impact.

It is impossible to establish the relative impact of mobilisation in the countryside (which saw women developing peasant leagues and fighting for bread and against the war with such bravery) and the political and trade union organisation of the young Socialist women workers of the area around Biella. The latter reflected a level of consciousness and activity which derived from prewar developments, and the fact that they wrote down their thoughts and feelings allows us to examine their mind-set. We cannot do this with the rural women. They are remembered only through their dedications on tombstones for husbands who died in the war, now neglected and disappearing from country cemeteries.

The articles and the letters published in the women's column in the *Corriere Biellese* reflected a clear break with their traditional role within the family and with the lives lived by their mothers. Their feelings included pride at seizing a culture which had been denied to them when they left school early, feelings of liberation at breaking free from the restrictions imposed by the clergy, the sense of challenging older militants, who had turned a deaf ear to their requests for help, and the experience of affectionate sympathy and solidarity shown by the young men who helped them in their political activities. They reveal a reflectiveness which originated with the problem of war, but then led them to challenge orthodox views on specific aspects of women's condition.

The fact that this wartime emancipation was not merely a temporary or episodic experience is borne out by the fact that in most cases political participation did not end with the war, but continued in the difficult years of the immediate postwar period and (as the biographies collected by Bianca Guidetti Serra prove) during the years of Fascism and later Resistance. Many of the girls who had fought on the barricades in Turin in the days of August 1917 were active in the Workers' Councils, in the occupation of factories (at the Pirelli plants and at the spinning-mills in the Vittoriese area for example), and as Red Guards, involved in obtaining arms, which they would hide under their clothes. Those who had worked silently in the wartime years, oppressed by the immense apparatus of state repression, also took part in strikes and occupations. And the wave of emancipation now involved girls of the petty bourgeoisie, who were seriously affected by the exclusion of women from most kinds of state employment.

The change which resulted from such experiences could not be so radical as to sweep away overnight the subordination which had characterised relations between men and women in Italy, especially in the workingclass and peasant world. Political emancipation and general emancipation clearly do not neatly coincide. Even the young and brave Socialist women from the area around Biella could not escape the painful contradiction between immediate political change and the slowness of emancipation within the family and wider society. The latter required a profound change in men (who were used to having full and unquestioned authority) and in women (who had been used to suppressing their feelings during centuries of clerical oppression). How, for example, did the young Socialist women from the area around Biella think about love? Gianni Perona has noticed that their voices contain a 'reticence, inspired by profound modesty' when talking about love, together with absolute silence concerning their fathers. At the end of the war, in this area as elsewhere, women gave way to men who were coming back from the front, and who (because of the ordeal they had endured) felt they had a greater right to reclaim their past authority.

Conversely, the supposed liberalisation of sexual morals which took place everywhere, even Italy, as a result the exceptional wartime situation, did not constitute a clear indication of women's true emancipation. Greater 'freedom' in sexual relations was accompanied by a large increase in prostitution, both at the front and in urban centres.[71]

Even in Italy, however, relations between men and women, within the family or society, did not return to their previous state. Fascism came to power. On the one hand this meant the movement monopolised and amplified the myth of the heroic woman, working for the glory of the Fatherland (in anticipation of the next war), and awarded posts in government to middleclass and Socialist feminists who had accepted the rationale of the war, and who in the immediate postwar period had renounced the struggle for the vote.[72] On the other hand, Fascism took revenge on women who had not accepted the need to sublimate their mourning on the altar of the Fatherland. The Acerbo Bill, which was presented to parliament on 6 June 1923, proposed to give the right to vote to mothers and to war widows, 'but only to those who had maintained with an exemplary conduct the glorious cult of the heroes who died in the war'.[73]

But Fascism was unable to stop the process of women's emancipation which was inexorably connected to economic development and to the needs of the labour market. Barbara Curli[74] has recently published an important book, based on a wide range of archival and statistical sources. She has shown that the traditional view, according to which the end of the war marked the return home of all women who had found employment in different sectors, is simply a rhetorical myth. The reality was quite different: female employment grew consistently in the white-collar sectors after 1918, and did not decrease in the industrial sectors, as one might have expected. This is a very important demonstration of the fact

that Fascist rhetoric, which exalted the role of the mother within the household while neglecting the wage-earning woman, has sometimes been taken all too easily for reality.

Notes

1. In 1926 the Women's Red Cross, whose activities had brought about important innovations for women, was absorbed into the assistance programme of women's *fasci*. Fascism developed an incessant propaganda campaign against the new generation of women, centred on women's duty to produce children and to sacrifice them for the Fatherland. The women of the Red Cross, who even under Fascism had reached the conclusion 'Never again war!', were forced into silence. On all these issues see Stefania Bartoloni, 'L'associazionismo femminile nella prima guera mondiale e la mobilitazione per l'assistenza civile e la propaganda', in A. Gigli Marchetti and N. Torcellan (eds), *Donna lombarda, 1860–1945*, Angeli, 1992, 65–91; S. Bartoloni (ed.), *Donne al fronte. Le infermiere volontarie nella Grande Guerra*, Jouvence, 1995.
2. Paul Corner, *Contadini e industrializzazione. Società rurale e impresa in Italia dal 1840 al 1940,* Laterza, 1993, 121.
3. Renzo De Felice, 'Ordine pubblico e orientamenti delle masse popolari italiane nella prima metà del 1917', *Rivista storica del socialismo*, 6 (20),1963, 467–504 (quotations taken from 471–472, italics added; the remark in brackets should be noted).
4. See Giovanni Gozzini, *Alle origini del comunismo italiano. Storia della Federazione giovanile socialista (1907–1921),* Bari, Dedalo, 1979, 57 and note 33, 161–162; Natalia De Stefano, 'Moti popolari in Emilia-Romagna e in Toscana 1915–1917', *Rivista storica del socialismo*, 10 (32), 1967, 191–216.
5. Piero Melograni, *Storia politica della Grande Guerra, 1915–1918*, Laterza, 1969, 331.
6. Melograni, *Storia politica della Grande Guerra,* 336–337.
7. From Giovanna Procacci's vast output I would like to mention at least the following articles: 'Dalla rassegnazione alla rivolta: osservazioni sul comportamento popolare in Italia negli ani della prima guerra mondiale', *Ricerche storiche*, 19 (1), 1989, 45–112, and 'La protesta delle donne delle campagne in tempo di guerra', *Annali dell'Istituto 'Alcide Cervi'*, 13, 1991, 57–86.
8. Santo Peli, 'La nuova cl asse operaia', in Alessandro Camarda and S. Peli, *L'altro esercito. La classe operaia durante la prima guerra mondiale*, Feltrinelli, 1980, 91.
9. Peli, 'La nuova classe operaia' respectively 95 and 93.
10. Anna Bravo, 'Donne contadine e prima guerra mondiale', *Società e Storia*, 3 (10), 1980, 843–862. See also, by the same author, 'Italian Peasant Women and the First World War', in P. Thompson and N. Burcharat (eds), *Our Common History: The Transformation of Europe*, Pluto Press, 1982, 157–170, subsequently reprinted in C. Emsley, A. Marwick and W. Simpson (eds), *War, Peace and Social Change in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Open University Press, 1989, 102–115.
11. Together with the studies by Giovanna Procacci, Bruna Bianchi and Stefania Bartoloni mentioned in this paper, I would also like to mention Simonetta Soldani (especially ' La Grande guerra lontano dal fronte', in Giorgio Mori (ed.), *La Toscana (Storia d'Italia. Le regioni dall'Unità a oggi),* Einaudi, 1986, 343–452), and those on women of the urban petty-bourgeois world by Alessandra Staderini, especially *Combattenti senza divisa. Roma nella Grande guerra*, Il Mulino, 1995.
12. Luigi Moranino, *Le donne socialiste nel Biellese (1900–1918)*, Vercelli, Istituto per la storia della Resistenza in provincia di Vercelli 'Cino Moscatelli', 1984. The scarcity of articles written by women in the Socialist press is mentioned. For example see *La Difesa delle lavoratrici. Giornale delle Donne socialiste* (henceforth abbreviated as *DL*), issue dated 6 August 1916.

13. Gianni Perona, Preface to Moranino, *Le donne socialiste*, i–xii.
14. Ursula Hirschmann, *Noi senzapatria*, Il Mulino, 1993, 144.
15. Maria Cerri, *DL*, 7 marzo 1915, 4.
16. Anna Kuliscioff, *Il monopolio dell'uomo*, 1st edition,1890, 2nd edition, 1894, Follonica, Zefiro,1995, 28.
17. This is mentioned, for example, in the interview with Albina Lusso, in a video edited by Paola Zanetti Casorati, deposited at the *Archivio nazionale cinematografico della Resistenza* in Turin.
18. Moranino, *Le donne socialiste*, 113 (with reference to the area of Cossato).
19. Melograni, *Storia politica della Grande Guerra*, 328–329.
20. Nuto Revelli, *L'anello forte. La donna: storie di vita contadina*, Einaudi, 1985, 23.
21. Procacci, 'La protesta delle donne', note 25.
22. *DL*, 7 March 1915, 2: the data are taken from an inquiry of 1914.
23. Bruna Bianchi, 'La protesta popolare nel Polesine durante la guerra', in Nicola Badaloni (ed.), *Gino Piva e il socialismo padano veneto. Atti del XX Convegno di Studi Storici*, Rovigo, 16–17 November 1996, Associazione Culturale Minelliana, 1998, 157–188, 158 n. 9.
24. Alberto Malatesta, *I socialisti italiani durante la guerra*, Mondadori, 1926, 124–125.
25. De Felice, 'Ordine pubblico', 486.
26. De Felice, 'Ordine pubblico', 483, 488, 491; Melograni, *Storia politica della grande guerra,* 330 and n. 144; Bianchi, 'La protesta popolare nel Polesine'.
27. Bianchi, 'La protesta popolare nel Polesine', 174 (telegram to the *prefetto* dated 16 May 1917).
28. Bianchi, 'La protesta popolare nel Polesine', 182–183 (Rovigo).
29. Bianchi, 'La protesta popolare nel Polesine', 175–177.
30. Filippo Turati, Anna Kuliscioff, *Carteggio*, Vol. 4, part 1, Einaudi, 1977, 501 (letter dated 3 May 1917).
31. Bianchi, 'La protesta popolare nel Polesine', 175.
32. Bruna Bianchi, *Crescere in tempo di guerra. Il lavoro e la protesta dei ragazzi in Italia. 1915–1918*, Libreria editrice Cafoscarina, 1995, 136, 138.
33. *DL*, 6 June 1915, 4.
34. Bravo, 'Donne contadine', 858.
35. Bianca Guidetti Serra, *Compagne. Testimonianze di partecipazione politica femminile*, 2 Volumes, Einaudi, 1977, Volume 1, 263.
36. Paola Peconi, Paolo Sorcinelli, 'Vittime e colpevoli nei processi della pretura e del tribunale di Pesaro (1910–1920)', in Paolo Sorcinelli (ed.*), Lavoro, criminalità, alienazione mentale. Ricerche sulle Marche tra Otto e Novecento,* Il lavoro editoriale, 1987, 51–81, especially 69.
37. Extremely interesting data may be found in Barbara Curli, *Italiane al lavoro, 1914–1920*, Marsilio, 1998, 129 (for the case of Pirelli).
38. Filippo Turati, *Discorsi parlamentari pubblicati per deliberazione della Camera dei Deputati*, Vol. 3, Camera dei Deputati, 1950, 1449.
39. Curli, *Italiane al lavoro*, 78.
40. Teresa Noce, *Gioventù senza sole*, Macchia 1950, 166.
41. Turati, *Discorsi parlamentari*, vol. 3, 15 December 1916, 1451–1452.
42. In August 1916 new regulations for the employment of women and children were passed, and in the spring-summer of 1917 the *Servizio di vigilanza igienico-sanitaria* (Hygiene and Health Inspectorate) was created, but these changes were not in fact carried out for a long time. See Bruna Bianchi, 'Salute e intervento pubblico nella industria di guerra', in Giovanna Procacci (ed.), *Stato e classe operaia in Italia durante la prima guerra mondiale*, Franco Angeli, 1983, 138–162, in particular 146–147 and 156. On working hours, see Maurizio Bettini, 'Orari di lavoro nell'industria italiana, 1907–1923', in Paolo Giovannini (ed.), *Di fronte alla Grande Guerra. Militari e civili tra coercizione e rivolta*, Il Lavoro Editoriale, 1997, 11–59.
43. See Bianchi, 'Salute e intervento pubblico', 158. Out of a 12–13 percent of total absences, 10 percent were due to illness. See also Camarda, in *L'altro esercito* (mentioned above, note 8), 155 note 11.

44. Bianchi, 'Salute e intervento pubblico', 158.
45. Circular sent by the newly created *Servizio di vigilanza igienico-sanitaria* to the regional committees, 16 June 1917, 156–157.
46. Curli, *Italiane al lavoro*, 145 (on Pirelli).
47. Letter dated 30 September 1916, reproduced in Bettini, 'Orari di lavoro', 22–23.
48. Rosalia Muci, 'Produrre armi, domandare pace: le operaie milanesi durante la prima guerra mondiale', *Storia in Lombardia*, 3, 1985, 59–60.
49. Muci, 'Produrre armi', 42 (note 22) and 48.
50. This is what happened, for example, at the Ansaldo shipyards of Sampierdarena, in the Bullets and Light Artillery Section, on 22 September 1916. See *Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Direzione generale della pubblica sicurezza, Divisione affari generali e riservati, Conflagrazione europea 1914–1918*, Cat. A5G (henceforth ACS, A5G), b. 49, Prefetto di Genova, 29 September 1916. ACS is Archivo Centrale di Stato, Roma.
51. This is the conclusion reached by a very detailed study on Milan: Muci, 'Produrre armi', especially 58.
52. See S. Ortaggi Cammarosano, *Il prezzo del lavoro. Torino e l'industria italiana nel primo '900*, Rosemberg & Sellier, 1988, 208–210. See also Curli, *Italiane al lavoro*, 88–89.
53. Ortaggi Cammarosano, *Il prezzo del lavoro*, 217.
54. ACS, A5G, b.50.
55. Ortaggi Cammarosano, *Il prezzo del lavoro*, 235.
56. Guidetti Serra, *Compagne*.
57. Guidetti Serra, *Compagne*, Vol. 1, 213.
58. Guidetti Serra, *Compagne*.
59. She was sentenced to six months in prison. See ACS, A5G, b.124, *Prefettura di Torino*, 22 January 1918.
60. Mario Montagnana, *Ricordi di un operaio torinese*, Edizioni Rinascita, 1949, Vol. 1, 78. (I have quoted some of Montagnana's testimonies in my article 'Testimonianze proletarie e socialiste sulla guerra' in D. Leoni and D. Zadra (eds.), *La grande guerra. Esperienza memoria immagini*, Il Mulino, 1986, 577–604, in particular 586–588.
61. Guidetti Serra, *Compagne*, Vol. 1, 213.
62. Moranino, *Le donne socialiste nel Biellese*, 153–155, (from *Corriere Biellese* dated 22 and 26 September 1916).
63. Moranino, *Le donne socialiste nel Biellese*,147–148 (*In piedi!*, Turin, 4 September 1916, signed Ada [Catella]).
64. On 24 October 1917 Austrian and German troops broke through the Italian lines above Caporetto in Venetia Giulia. The defeat turned into a rout and military collapse. (Translator's note.)
65. ACS, A5G, b.104, Prefettura di Milano, 15 April 1918.
66. Limbiate, marzo 1918, pamphlet in ACS.
67. See, for example, *DL*, 7 January 1912.
68. C. Del Soldato, *Tempo di guerra. Note di una mamma*, Firenze, Bemporad, 1918, 83 (quoted by Michela De Giorgio, 'Dalla "donna nuova" alla donna della "nuova" Italia', in Leoni and Zadra, *La grande guerra*, 307–329, 317.
69. Claudia Salaris, *Le futuriste*, Edizioni delle donne, 1982, respectively 297 and 295 .
70. See Tilde Momigliano in *DL*, 16 December 1917, 2: 'L'organizzazione femminile in seno al Partito'.
71. Emilio Franzina, 'Il tempo libero dalla guerra. Case del soldato e postriboli militari', in Leoni and Zadra, *La grande guerra*, 161–230.
72. Margherita Sarfatti, Regina Terruzzi and Giselda Brebbia were politically active with Mussolini in his Socialist phase, and joined the Fascist movement from its beginnings. See Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945*, University of California Press, 1992, 31–32.
73. See Marina Addis Saba, 'La politica del regime fascista nei confronti delle donne', *Rivista Abruzzese di studi storici dal Fascismo alla Resistenza*, 4, 1983, 1.
74. Curli, *Italiane al lavoro, 1914–1920.*