

SOME COLORNI'S EARLY POLITICAL WRITINGS

From: **Problems of war** [August 1935]

Already, the Abyssinia mobilization allows us to make interesting observations and offers new opportunities for our struggle. There is no point in deluding ourselves about the revolutionary possibilities that might derive from this enterprise, viewed in isolation. Even failures in Africa (which would be carefully hidden from the public and dressed up as victories) would not in my opinion lead to significant upheavals in this country. Meanwhile unemployment is creating a favorable situation for the government, leading to voluntary enlistments. In any case, these early reactions should be carefully studied as an indication of what may follow. First of all, there is a notable absence of enthusiasm, even among volunteers. Enlistment is an entirely calculated way of swapping their present unemployment for a job they hope will be lucrative and not very dangerous; they think that if the war were to become serious they would be called up anyway, and that until it is serious they have everything to gain and little to lose. They go to war in the spirit of mercenaries. I believe the strongest climate of opposition is to be found among the middle classes, where there is a feeling, more widespread now than ever and sorely tested on this occasion, that they are at the mercy of a despotic will over which they have no control. For four days families watched their sons going off, in the wake of a simple postcard call-up, without knowing anything about their destination, without so much as a line in the newspapers. And suddenly there was a sense of panic; the muttering immediately began to get louder. Reassuring statements have quite naturally caused increased anxiety. Again, there is no need to overstate these phenomena, but perhaps on this occasion more than ever the Italian middle classes have the feeling that the chickens have come home to roost and that this fascism, for which they sold their souls as a guarantee against socialism, will lead them to ruin as well.

Our action will have to take these factors into account and not commit the traditional error of overlooking the middle classes. It should not be forgotten that without the support of at least part of this group, the revolution will not happen. If these classes should prove to be the starting point of an initial anti-authoritarian movement, we must not shut ourselves off from it, since it might be from there that our own anti-capitalist struggle begins. And this war, which for the first time does not affect the spiritual interests that the middle classes have shown themselves willing so casually to give up, but rather hits their closest material interests, may awaken in them some desire for autonomy and freedom. It is to them, therefore, that we must direct our propaganda, using language that responds to the state of mind described here.

Another problem, one of detail but important nonetheless, is the position each of us must take in response to the call to arms. I would like to propose a rapid discussion of this, since for some of us it is a tragically urgent issue.

The solution of leaving the country carries the implicit conviction that in the case of war all revolutionary action must fatally cease and that the only reason to stay would be to save one's personal dignity. But it is precisely in the event of war that

revolutionary action begins. War gives us an unprecedented opportunity for contact with the masses, and with masses who are in a condition particularly suited to accommodating revolutionary ideas. Disengaging from them in this situation would be a serious mistake. We must go to war, but as revolutionaries determined to sacrifice our lives not for the cause of the war but for the cause of the revolution. Our action will play out in barracks, trenches, and hospitals. How will it happen? What are its methods, its organization? These are the extremely important issues that I suggest should be debated.

Agostini

From: **The struggle within fascism** [31 October 1936]

(...) The only position that can really be adopted on a large scale among the working masses with a chance of success calls for propaganda not among the fascists, but in the context of fascism. Italian workers, although almost entirely non-Party members, nevertheless come under the influence of fascism in after-work recreation, trade unions, schools and sports clubs. This influence does not make them militants, but it makes people feel that fascism is an established fact to be passively put up with, something they do not always see as a direct oppressor. The links between fascism and capitalism are hidden, twisted, and confused by official propaganda in such a way that it is often difficult, especially for young people, to see clearly that the regime is the main support of the ruling class. Our activity will have to try to raise this awareness by accepting the political state of affairs and directing workers' attention towards more obvious purposes. But even in addressing aims that appear to them as fascist we must not present ourselves as socialists or communists, but rather as normal people for whom fascism is, as it is for everyone, simply the world we live in—a fact that we cannot help but accept, and to which direct opposition would be madness. We have to ensure that the masses of young people are educated to see the class struggle as something independent, not involving an immediate collision with the regime. Fascism has never raised its flag in defense of capitalism, nor has it ever bestowed a halo of national sanctity on the magnates of finance. On the contrary, it proclaims its concern for the working class and poses as their defender. We must take advantage of this hypocrisy and lead a propaganda campaign against institutions or people (better institutions than people) that it is not yet sacrilegious to offend. Let us promote action in support of claims that fascism has never officially said it wants to deny. We will thus set the workers on a path toward rediscovering the language of class with a new virginity, as if it had never existed, and without immediately incurring accusations of anti-fascism.

A political struggle

And this will not be a purely reformist movement, aimed exclusively at achieving wage increases. The struggle against the ruling class will be of a typically and essentially political character. This is the only way it will be able to achieve its purposes of renewal and education. What is new about this compared to previous positions is that the recognized enemy will no longer be fascism as such, but rather its master, the capitalist.

For this it is not in any case necessary or useful to conform to fascism. It is enough to live in its territory and recognize it as the normal state of existence, advocating change within it but not losing sight of our own existence and ultimate goals. We can thus create a post-fascist movement that does not present itself in the same way as the many parties fascism has eradicated, but rather as a development of the internal dialectic that will lead fascism inevitably to its end.

From: **Spontaneity is a form of organization** [12 June 1937]

Looking for direct collaborators in every workshop, every trade union, every neighborhood, is much more difficult than might be imagined, considering the general mood among the masses. The socialist or communist worker, although extremely concerned with political problems, is today reluctant to take on specific responsibilities which he knows carry great risks and whose effects long experience has made him skeptical about. Cadres formed in this way have always been unstable, deficient and inconsistent. The form of organization of groups linked to a single trustee would be excellent if such groups were already there, formed and organized, and ready to make contact with the Center. But if they are not? The job of forming them cannot be done by a single trustee; this would entail a set of relationships and ties of a type that can wreck a group even before it begins working.

Experience teaches us that the greatest dangers arrive when individuals from different environments come into contact: intellectuals and workers, trustees from the center and individuals from the base, petty bourgeois and proletarians.

People with different mindsets and different habits end up having trouble understanding each other, losing their political sensitivity and no longer able, in an environment that is not theirs, to recognize provocateurs and spies. It is obvious that the difficulties listed here are typically intrinsic to our work which, as we know, is not easy—and I would not dream of proposing that we abandon our deeper efforts which, though continuously interrupted by conditions, can never be abandoned. That said, however, I would like to suggest the possibility of a job which, although less radical, would be more wide-ranging and whose true scope and possible developments we have witnessed in the anti-fascist wave of last April.

Spontaneous action and organizational action

Our political parties' behavior toward the masses has always started with the idea of having to organize them according to the parties' own structures and methods. Spontaneity has always been considered a sign of both the maturity of the public and the weakness of the party. "Spontaneous" action and "organized" action have always opposed one another, like two antitheses. Too little thought, however, has been given to the idea that in every mass political action there is an element of organization, perhaps difficult to pin down, which is very important for us to understand if it is to serve our purposes. We commonly refer to any action as spontaneous if it hasn't been directed by a party. It hasn't occurred to us that spontaneity is itself a form of organization. [...]

The immediacy of people's reaction to recent events and the speed with which news, moods and slogans spread have revealed elementary forms of organization latent in the masses that it would be a very serious mistake to ignore.

Connections – contacts between people and among groups – already exist independently of parties. They are the links of long-standing friendship, kinship or cooperation that every worker has with every other, they are the ties of shared labor, reciprocal trust and everyday habit. The spirit of the masses is so homogeneous and widespread that every worker and every bourgeois may be said to have their own way of obtaining information, expressing opinions, commenting on facts; they each have, in other words, a personal political environment that feels safe, and that they wouldn't want to trade for other regulated and tested systems. Up to now, these environments have almost always been reserved for ineffectual grumbling and harmless gossip. But they can quite easily (as we have seen in recent months) evolve into more serious shapes. Once a word, a news item, or a pamphlet has been inserted into this network, it moves and spreads by itself, with no need for an additional push, and in no time the word or pamphlet is known to everyone.

The propaganda significance of the war in Spain

This situation, it seems to me, makes our work immeasurably easier.

The socialist or communist worker feels no need to make new contacts. He is not isolated at all. What is missing is not a sense of solidarity in the workshop, at home or in the tavern but rather a wider sense of solidarity that extends to the nation and the whole working class.

What is missing is the sense that the ideas that he and his friends develop are not just relics from the past, but are ideals that the affairs of the world still revolve around. This is the propaganda value of the war in Spain. Today once again the workers know that they are part of a whole; they have recovered their center of gravity, the security of being in the right, their trust in the future.

The party's job will be to make use of this system of natural connections invisible to the police, and give it political fuel. This does not mean eliminating spontaneity, but rather cultivating it, strengthening it, giving it content. Between the so-called uncontrolled action of the masses and the totally steered and disciplined action of the party there is a scale of infinite gradations. And concrete political action will from time to time graft itself to some point on this scale.

The April movements were spontaneous, it is true, but it must also be said that they were promoted, thanks to the deeds of our comrades in Guadalajara and Bermeo, and to the rapidity with which these victories were brought to the attention of the masses. We must act on this spontaneity of the masses, giving them increasingly precise directives and increasingly concrete words.

But if we want to avoid the dangers I have mentioned, we have to do this impersonally, allowing the latent and secure system of connections operating at the base to function as a distribution device.

Among the means available for this purpose, the recently rather neglected press has a predominant role to play. The main risk of the press as a propaganda vehicle is the difficulty of distribution, which can easily allow the police to piece together

the structure of the organization. But when distribution is entrusted to a system that is automatic, so to speak, and separate from the organs of the party, the only problem left is delivery and packaging at the site. This is not a serious difficulty and resolving it only requires a very small number of secure officers. The danger is greatly reduced both for readers and distributors (who would be friends, relatives, long-time acquaintances). Contact between center and periphery is no less direct and immediate this way than it would be if there were a cumbersome and dangerous network of emissaries and trustees.

From: **Political function and organizational function**

[Anselmi to Joseph, 6 August 1937]

[...] I would like to present a number of concrete proposals which I believe represent the thinking of other comrades at the Center, and which Tasca substantially agrees with.

[...] The recent arrests have shown that there was a defect in the composition of the Italian Center. In my view the error was that political and organizational functions were not differentiated and were entrusted to the same people. The Italian Center had control of virtually *all* the work in Italy, in all the cities. The comrades in charge knew all the soldiers on the ground and had contact with all the Party's business. This fact, a reflection of their splendid work and total dedication to the cause, is nevertheless what got them into trouble and allowed the police to carry out their huge raid and seize the most active and important centers. It also led to some confusion in the distinction between political and organizational work: for example, an extremely dangerous underground publishing apparatus of an ideological character (*Echi*) was set up locally when this could have been done abroad. In my view the function of the local press should be to produce immediate propaganda for the masses, the sort that requires extremely rapid circulation [...]. *Conclusion: the Center must remain active and be rebuilt as soon as possible.* It is an inescapable necessity for the practical effect of our work; it is the body that underpins our decisive superiority over the communist organizations. But *the Center, as such, has to have a political, not an organizational function.* It has to be a body that is compact and agile, composed of people who have long been in touch with the political situation and have maintained continuous contacts abroad. If possible these people should come from different Italian cities (but be able to meet periodically). Their business should be to draft policy directives for immediate transmission abroad. This way, the Center will not have to deal with organizational work (which does not rule out a member having a personal organizational activity in his specific field). But organizational work, in short, should not be centralized in the Center. For organizational purposes, each group, each city, should have its own direct foreign contacts [...]. Each group should receive the Center's directives, printed material, etc. from abroad. In this way, the pressure on the Center can be relieved. All that's required is that one person in each group have a passport. And the foreign Center, I repeat, will have to be modified. The leading elements in each Italian group *must not have any contact with any other Italian group.* Such contacts can be established

among the masses, spontaneously, but *among the people responsible, in organizational work, watertight compartments must be established.*

The function of the teacher in fascist schools [July 1937]

Secondary school, I

The problem of the political education of young people has quite different characteristics in elementary school, secondary school and at the universities. In primary schools it is mainly a problem of training the class of teachers and educating pupils' families through the teacher; that is, the problem primarily concerns the contact between the petty bourgeois teachers and the proletariat that the vast majority of pupils belongs to. In the universities, the work must take place in student circles directly, not only in the classrooms. Middle school, on the other hand, offers the possibility of direct influence of professors on students during the lessons, and presents a class of teachers that is particularly qualified for such work.

And first of all it should be kept in mind that secondary school cannot be identified, as it too often is, exclusively with Classical High School. Secondary school not only produces university students and the future so-called ruling classes but also – and mainly – the totality of clerks, officers, teachers, shopkeepers, accountants, surveyors and technicians who make up the middle classes that have up to now far too easily fallen prey to fascism. The families of the students generally belong to these same classes and often (especially in the case of technical schools, teacher's colleges, and industrial and commercial institutes) to the upper layers of the proletariat. These classes aim to move up, to improve their social position, and therefore to be responsive to the appeal of fascist bourgeois ideologies in which they recognize the ideals of the classes they aspire to belong to; but it would be a most seriously mistake to abandon them to their fate based on this bourgeois lackey tendency. In the secondary schools the young people who belong to these classes comprise the highest percentage of good students. They are attentive, intelligent, and interested in their studies, and school is for them not a burdensome obligation but rather a tool for success, an investment of time and money from which they seek to reap the maximum possible benefit. They often make sacrifices in pursuit of this aim, even against the will of their parents, who would like to see them working and earning as soon as possible. The fact that in many schools around a third of the students are partially or totally exempt from fees on the basis of merit gives an indication of the force of will of these young members of the petty bourgeoisie, the agricultural middle class and the proletariat, who see in education their only chance to rise from the poverty of their present state.

Now these young people's earnestness and sense of responsibility opens them to a curiosity about life that makes their political education easy and productive. Having been raised in a climate of fascism and almost unaware of the possibility

of any other conception of politics, they are nevertheless eager to find some content in the empty words of propaganda they hear from the O.B. hierarchs. It is true that they have no wish to object; but they do have a great desire to explore. In a confused way they hear in political problems a concrete expression of collective morality; they have a sense that this is where their most important material, moral, and intellectual interests are decided; they are bored and disaffected by simple phrases.

Professors have indisputable moral influence on them. Unlike students from rich families, who see in their teacher little more than some poor devil paid to give them lessons, and who are constantly led into a contemptuous comparison between the teacher's modest standard of living and their own luxurious lives, the great majority of students see the professor as the most cultivated person they ever come into contact with, and sometimes also (depending on the professor) the one with the broadest views.

He has travelled, he has a university education, he knows some foreign languages, he has had contact with the upper middle class. In their eyes he often represents the man who has achieved the modest ideal of bourgeois esteem that they aspire to. If the professor knows how to make use of his daily contact with his pupils so that one way or another he takes part in the things that interest them, if he is able to establish a certain confidence with them, and especially if he allows them the freedom of speech and discussion in the classroom which makes the lessons lively and interesting, if he is careful to free himself of all the musty scholastic and doctrinal rot and to come before his students as a modern man, living in his own time and taking an interest in today's problems; then he will easily succeed at winning their hearts and will gain significant influence over them.

Now secondary school teachers are largely not fascists. Whether enrolled or not, they still belong to the intellectual bourgeoisie that finds its spiritual bread and butter and its intellectual and moral purpose in struggles and debates over democracy. The youngest of them belong to the group of somewhat peculiar youths who in departments of arts and sciences distanced themselves from the sporting and carefree lives of the fascist students. Dedicated fascists are rare among secondary school professors; many have gone along, with or without difficulty, in a spirit of bureaucratic acquiescence; not a few of them still maintain an attitude of manly independence. Finding precise currents of political opposition among them would be difficult. Their opposition is generic, often of a liberal and masonic nature. It is the opposition of the intellectual offended in his most prized possession: his freedom of conscience, and exasperated by continuous mandatory interference in his teaching.

The teachers find themselves grappling with school curricula that at every turn impose statements and explanations of fascist concepts and ideals. This is highly embarrassing for them, and not only on the occasion of official commemorations, but in their actual teaching as well. Courses in Italian, history, Latin, philosophy, economics, and law constantly compel them to say things they don't believe and to glorify people and ideals that are hateful to them. This is precisely the issue that we think needs to be examined.

Almost all teachers under Fascism are essentially concerned with protecting their dignity, adopting a severe and disdainful attitude, where possible avoiding gestures and words that show acquiescence or participation in official policy, and

either passing over thorny subjects or addressing them with a tone that clearly shows that they do so under obligation and against their conscience. This more or less pronounced attitude is one of passive resistance; it has a certain nobility and is positive in the impression it can make on the students, which is that independent spirits and clear consciences do still exist; that there is still room in the world, and not only in books, for the attitudes of the heroes of the Risorgimento, for a Cato, a Bruno, a Vanini.

In this way the teacher has at least partly protected his conscience, his moral prestige. But has he looked after the education of his students? With this stance he has looked after his duty to himself, but not to the part of society he is professionally called upon to affect. One might respond that the example he sets is in itself educational. But what is the educational value of this mute example that dodges explanations? The students may or may not admire it, but they do not understand; and most of the time they consider the professor's reserve as simply the quirkiness of a man who belongs a world gone by.

To be satisfied, in front of young people, with this position as a "relic" or (as in some cases) to be almost pleased with it is not only sterile, it is reprehensible: it is surrendering and becoming an artifact commemorating one's own defeat.

The young are eager for explanations. They are impatient for those moments in the course when the professor is supposed to open up a bit, explain things, justify his attitude. And they are disappointed and irritated by the embarrassed and elusive phrases they get instead.

It is not true that students are in themselves inert and indifferent. They are when what they are offered is the usual declamatory fare; but as soon as they get into an actual political discussion they are more than interested.

Indeed, such discussions are the only conversations they are deeply interested in. And what's more, they don't know, they don't realize, that such discussions are prohibited. The great majority of young people today (especially the petty bourgeoisie) have never heard politics discussed, other than in a strictly local sense. They have never had occasion to experience the oppression of the police, because they have never known opposition, rebellion or struggle. They do not know in detail what a political party consists of or how a democratic state is organized. And it is precisely this ignorance, this intellectual segregation, that is Fascism's most powerful weapon. It is more powerful than favorable enthusiasm which, being attentive, involved and active, can therefore quickly change to disappointment and rebellion.

Now this ignorance, what I would call almost political naiveté, leads young people to view with great curiosity any perspective that opens new horizons to them, and shows them flashes of other social possibilities; it is curiosity about what is new and different, untroubled by any suspicion that it has already been officially branded disgraceful and is punished as a crime. And so, if on one hand the fascist teacher's empty ranting bores them, on the other, the decent, shy and reticent tone of the anti-fascist teacher, unaccompanied by anything remotely positive, arouses their suspicion: what they usually sense is sterile obstinacy.

Now how is it possible to escape from this ivory tower and make the sort of contact with young people that responds to their needs? And at the same time,

how is it possible to put into operation an anti-fascism that does not risk becoming an empty ceremony of abstention for personal satisfaction. The answer in the next issue.

Secondary school II

Obviously we cannot propose that explicit antifascist propaganda should be disseminated in the schools. But I think the only possible solution is that instead of ducking them, the teacher should face up to current political problems, especially the question of fascism; that he should overcome his horror at things he would rather not mention, aiming to arrive at an objective account, especially from a historical standpoint. He should first of all make it clear to the students what fascism is: how it arose and what its historical and doctrinal origins are. Young people don't know these things and, despite the provisions of the curricula, they don't learn them from their fascist professors, who limit themselves to vague and inconclusive panegyrics. The antifascist professor can earn the respect and gratitude of his students if he explains to them in a way that is objective, historical and scientific what these things that they are expected to idolize really are and, even more importantly, what the things are that they are expected to revile. Left in total ignorance about these things – and this quite often happens during lessons in history or corporate law – the students have to ask the professor what liberalism or socialism or communism refers to.

Explaining these things clearly and pervasively is not only possible, it is the official duty of the schools. And when students know and understand them, this is already a formidable element of propaganda against fascism.

It is not at all necessary that the professor should take a position. All he has to do is explain objectively, just as he lays out the facts of history objectively and without bias. And the facts speak for themselves: young people, on their own, whether because of social background or material and moral interest, will be drawn to the ideas they feel most strongly connected to.

This form of influence and education cannot be prevented by any ministerial directive, not unless the ministry decides to eliminate fascism from its curricula. But every time someone speaks of fascism, any conscientious professor should not be able to avoid framing it historically, and showing its position with respect to other political views and to the international situation.

What will we get back from this? The young people in the schools will certainly not simply and immediately become antifascists. Suggesting this as a goal would be utopian and absurd. But what we will get is that an intelligent student will realize that fascism is not the only possible and existing political reality, nor salvation sent to us by God to fight all evils, nor the army of light struggling against the army of darkness; but rather that it is one of several political systems, that it protects certain interests and opposes others; that it is predominantly represented by certain social classes, follows certain traditions and repudiates others, and takes a specific position when it comes to certain internal policy methods, which are distinct from other methods. What these conceptions are, these interests, these methods, and those they oppose (not just that the former are good and the latter bad): this is what all young Italians, who were born and live

under the Fascist regime, want to know. This is what every conscientious teacher, fascist or not, has the duty to teach them. And simply learning such concepts is of inestimable value for our struggle and has a destructive value for Fascism, which cannot be maintained without suppressing and disguising the truth.

Without wishing to give directives that are too detailed, I will indicate some examples of how instruction that adheres more closely to the needs and attitudes of the students might be practically implemented by teachers of any political shade, without incurring any danger of disciplinary or police action.

The word 'homeland' has so often been dragged through the mud of fascist propaganda (and for that matter by all reactionary propaganda), it has been so cynically used for supposedly righteous purposes, and it has with such deliberate skill been used to sell ideologies of selfishness, social oppression, and international plunder, that all socialists and antifascists now hesitate to pronounce the term for fear of being mistaken for those who speak the word only to prostitute it. It nevertheless remains a word that carries the evocation of a certain ideal and finds an immediate heartfelt response, especially among the middle classes. It is a word that young people have since their childhood been in the habit of pronouncing with devotion, as a symbol of everything pure and unselfish. Are we to allow this word to be stolen by the people's enemies?

The professor who to distinguish himself from his fascist colleagues does not speak of the homeland at school risks incurring the incomprehension and contempt of the students. He risks being seen as coldhearted in their eyes, closed to collective ideals.

But the word homeland has a value that goes much deeper than the way it is used by the class of exploiters to gain an advantage by confusing people's ideas.

Why not explain this value to the students? Why not teach them that the feelings that go with the homeland are nothing else but the sense of belonging to a community that has its own particular characteristics with respect to language, culture, history, traditions, and political and social problems, along with the will to resolve these problems within this same community? And why not emphasize actively resolving them and the fact that loving your homeland means getting to know its evils, contradictions and internal injustices, and trying to change it?

In this way young people will acquire a concept of homeland that is different from the imperialist idea based on believing, obeying and fighting, but is not for that any less seductive, but rather is much more responsive to their need for responsibility and sacrifice. They will come to realize that we ourselves are the homeland and that any battle fought to eliminate privilege and exploitation is in reality patriotic.

The Italian teacher finds himself regularly having to assign and correct compositions of a patriotic and fascist character. This is a task that even fascist professors find extremely embarrassing, because the students come to school with the finished paper in their pocket, or else they sprinkle it with ardent expressions of praise taken from the newspapers, confident that the professor will not be in a position to disapprove. Teachers are thus prevented from making any assessment of the value of the student.

Irritation and aversion toward topics on current affairs and the overblown rhetoric with which they are presented has therefore by now become widespread. Everyone feels the need to go back to concrete topics that allow an evaluation of the literary and historical thinking of the students and their ability to formulate and express their own ideas. The antifascist professor must be at the forefront of the fight against this rhetoric. This is a struggle that Fascism will never be able to prohibit, and already some fascist newspapers sometimes find themselves championing this campaign.

Secondary school III

The antifascist Italian teacher can and must always mark as insufficient any composition compiled from set phrases taken from official apologies. Even while acquiescing in the assignment of compositions concerning politics, the professor must require substance, information and a knowledge of the factual data. He must cease to accept generalities and insist on a detailed knowledge of the historical, political and economic situation in question.

The highest marks will then go to the most accomplished and intelligent students, who will thus be pushed to see with their own eyes a truth that transcends journalistic formulas, a truth that often, especially to young people, speaks for itself.

It is the history curriculum that most regularly and insistently forces the teacher to come to grips with these arguments. The political subject par excellence, history contributes more than any other to forming young people's consciousness. It is essential to ensure, however, that it not become the most arid subject of all, and to think of it as unified with the history of culture, philosophy, economics and literature.

Antifascist professors mostly affirm their own principles in the glorification of certain historical figures, events, and periods. Their political leanings are applied to exalting the Athenian Tyrannicides, or Spartacus, Brutus, or Cato, or to taking the side of the Communards, the peasants' revolt, the Reformation, the Huguenots, Holland in the 1600s, America in the 1700s, and above all to praising the French Revolution and placing Mazzini at the center of the Risorgimento.

This is an attitude that is right, but not sufficient. This way, the students will know where the professor's sympathies lie and will make note of it. But they will not acquire actual criteria for historical judgment. History will remain for them an account of events and struggles in which you can take one side or the other according to your own tastes or your own current political interests. But it will still not represent the human reality from which we are directly descended and which has passed down to us a set of concrete situations and problems that we cannot escape.

If the professor's idea of history is limited to looking for a certain number of analogies with the present political situation, he will reduce his course to a series of allusions; he will basically be accepting, although inverting it, the fascist

understanding of history as a continuous struggle between the principles of good and evil.

Now it is not necessary to be orthodox followers of historical materialism to have a more complete and organic vision of events than this and to recognize that economic and social factors are fundamental to political and cultural factors; to recognize, that is, that only a vision of these factors as dependent on one another can impart a vivid awareness of historical reality and link it with the present. This is indeed a conception that several official historians (Volpe, Rodolico, Gaggese) strongly influenced by Marxism followed in their best work, before they became Fascists and before the genius De Vecchi arrived to set everyone straight and establish once and for all that each and every historical event was the exclusive work of the House of Savoy.

Now the best way of giving a socialist or antifascist history course is to teach it in as complex and complete a way as possible, including all its social and economic connections; to see for example beneath the feudal economy and its derived social problems the substratum of the respective positions of the Empire and the Church and the culture that derived from them; to study the City-States, the Signoria, Humanism, the Renaissance, and the Reformation in relation to the new forces of the nascent bourgeoisie, the struggle of this bourgeoisie for political dominance, its position in relation to absolutism, its victory in the French Revolution, and the constitutional state as the political form that it bestowed on itself.

It is only when it has become a matter of course that historical facts and political ideologies are seen to be tightly bound to the social and economic world from which they arise, that students can be trained in a serious and concrete vision of the current political reality that will keep them from being duped by rhetoric and show instead that behind every gesture, every pose, and every legislative measure there is a set of needs that these things serve. Only then will the professor be able to talk of Fascism without recourse to the hymns of praise that so revolt him and without the clumsy evasions that revolt the students, discussing it instead as a current historical phenomenon that can be analyzed in terms of its origins, its causes in the post-war crisis of the middle class, its agrarian and petty bourgeois social makeup, its servitude in becoming the tool of Big Capital, and its reciprocal relations of support with the Monarchy and the Church. Only in this way can the origins of nationalism be sought in the ideologies of Bismark and of France in the early 20th century as distinct from the national unification movements of the 19th, showing the vitality and historical justification of the latter, and making it clear how today, now that national unification has arrived, the same words are being used and the same ideals exploited for purposes quite different from those that gave rise to them: purposes of imperialistic expansion that benefit no one but the big capitalists. This is the only way young people will come to understand how it is that in a Europe in which national problems have been almost completely resolved, the only point in stirring up national feelings that no longer have a real object to turn to is to distract attention from the real burning question of the age: the social problems within each country. This way they will also understand how, in the area of relations between one country and another, an ideology of all against all can be replaced with the ideology of cooperation of nation with nation, leaving to each the chance to resolve its own internal contradictions. This is the only way to set an ideal before the eyes of the young that includes the knowledge that they indeed belong to a national community, but that it has a function and meaning in

the larger arena which is the human community. And in doing this, in my view, the schools should not (as they often do) show or imply a limitless admiration for democracies like France or England or the United States. In spite of holding on to their democratic forms of government, these were nevertheless the countries that introduced the concepts of imperialism and colonialism to the modern world and in the recent Abyssinian crisis it was clear that attempts to defend them found no resonance in the expectations of even the most unprejudiced young people. Undoubtedly, siding with one or the other of these countries is appropriate in certain political situations. But the task we can perform in the schools is more general. And it would be neither fair nor possible, talking to young people who see things with innocent, unprejudiced eyes, to deny that the present balance in Europe, built as it was by capitalist countries, is intended to preserve these countries' commercial and colonial privileges. This fact is there for all to see, and for a professor to challenge it would give his teaching a sectarian tone that would alienate the minds of his students.