

Pietro Gori, 1898 and the socialists

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The 1890s brought a sharper federal response. After a wave of anarchist attacks in Europe, the Federal Council prepared a partial revision of the federal criminal code to punish anarchist crimes, which was adopted in 1894.¹ Italy had passed its own exceptional laws in the same year. The anarchist lawyer and poet Pietro Gori fled to Lugano. In January 1895, under international pressure, the Swiss authorities authorized his arrest together with seventeen other Italian anarchists. After two weeks in prison they were expelled across the German border at Basel. In prison Gori wrote the "Canto degli anarchici espulsi", better known by its first line, "Addio Lugano bella", which became one of the best-known songs of the European labour movement.² After the assassination of Empress Elisabeth of Austria in Geneva in September 1898 by an Italian anarchist, the Federal Council expelled several dozen anarchists or presumed anarchists.³

The repression of the Milanese riots of May 1898 by General Bava Beccaris brought a further group of Italian socialists to Lugano. Angelo Oliviero Olivetti, born in Ravenna in 1874, settled in Lugano to escape the repression, opened a law and notarial practice with the Ticinese Brenno Bertoni in 1900, wrote for the *Gazzetta Ticinese* and *Il Socialista*, founded the *Piccola rivista ticinese* with the writer Francesco Chiesa and sat on the leadership of the Italian Socialist Party in Switzerland from 1902 to 1906. He also chaired the Italian hospital in Lugano.⁴ In 1912 the Federal Council expelled him after he had published articles warning of the "Germanification" of Italian Switzerland. Olivetti answered with *La mia espulsione dalla Svizzera* (1913) and later moved to Fascism.⁵

1 Exiles as residents, buyers and investors

Many exiles of both generations did more than pass through. They bought houses and land, invested money and stayed for years or decades, and in doing so they left traces in the property registers of the canton that

complement the political record. Giacomo Ciani bought property first in Bellinzona and then in Lugano and in 1855 built the Hôtel du Parc, one of the first large hotels of the town.⁶ Carlo Cattaneo lived for twenty years, from 1849 until his death in 1869, in the country house of the Peri family at Castagnola, which his biographer Ernesto Sestan calls a modest little house among the greenery.⁷ Sara Nathan, widowed in 1859 by the death of her husband Mayer Moses Nathan, a German stockbroker with whom she had lived in London since 1837, bought the Villa La Tanzina in Lugano in 1865, and the house became a meeting place of the democratic opposition in exile.⁸ Carlo Cafiero bought La Baronata near Minusio in August 1873 to provide the anarchist movement with a base, and Bakunin acquired a villa at Besso near Lugano in March 1875.⁹

These purchases followed a common logic. A refugee who expected to stay for an uncertain time, and who could not safely keep his wealth at home, converted part of it into property in the country of refuge. Land and houses in Ticino were beyond the reach of the police of his country of origin, they provided a residence and a meeting place, and they could be sold again if the political situation changed. The same logic, in a less political form, later brought Italian buyers to the villas on the shores of Lake Lugano and Lake Maggiore throughout the twentieth century. Swiss law has since restricted such purchases. Under the Federal Act of 16 December 1983 on the Acquisition of Real Estate by Persons Abroad (*Lex Koller*, SR 211.412.41), persons abroad within the meaning of the Act require a permit from the competent cantonal authority to acquire real estate, unless the property serves as a permanent business establishment or as the buyer's main residence at his place of lawful and actual domicile, and the cantons may authorize the purchase of holiday homes only within the cantonal quota.¹⁰ The exiles of the nineteenth century faced no such restrictions. Their purchases were limited only by their means and by the willingness of Ticinese sellers.

2 Notes

1. "Anarchisme", in DHS, version of 17 June 2002, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/017399/2002-06-17/> (consulted 4 October 2026): "le Conseil fédéral élaborera une révision partielle du Code pénal fédéral pour réprimer les crimes anarchistes, adoptée en 1894". ↩
2. RSI, "Addio Lugano bella", 19 November 2023, <https://www.rsi.ch/cultura/musica/speciali/Addio-Lugano-Bella--1993159.html> (consulted 4 October 2026). ↩

3. "Anarchisme" (above): "Le Conseil fédéral expulsa plusieurs dizaines d'anarchistes ou supposés tels." ↩
4. Pasquale Genasci, "Olivetti, Angelo Oliviero", in DSS, version of 16 November 2009, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/027904/> (consulted 4 October 2026). ↩
5. Genasci, "Olivetti, Angelo Oliviero" (above). ↩
6. Agliati, "Ciani, Giacomo" (above); Martinola, "I primi esuli" (above), on the purchases in Bellinzona and Lugano. ↩
7. Mariani, "Cattaneo, un capofila del Risorgimento in Ticino" (above), on the "casa di campagna della famiglia Peri, a Castagnola"; Gili, "Castagnola" (above), for the years 1849 to 1869; Sestan, "Cattaneo, Carlo" (above): "rimarrà a Castagnola presso Lugano, in una modesta casetta fra il verde". ↩
8. Agliati, "Nathan, Sara" (above): "1836 Mayer Moses N., dt. Börsenmakler"; "Nach dem Tod ihres Mannes 1859 kehrte sie nach Italien zurück"; "1865 erwarb sie in Lugano die Villa La Tanzina, die zum Treffpunkt der demokrat. Opposition im Exil wurde". The article does not say how the purchase was financed. ↩
9. Brogini, "Nuovi esuli nel Ticino" (above). ↩
10. Federal Act of 16 December 1983 on the Acquisition of Real Estate by Persons Abroad (Lex Koller), SR 211.412.41, Art. 2 (permit requirement and exceptions) and Art. 9 (cantonal grounds for authorization, including holiday homes within the cantonal quota), German and French text at <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/de-fr/2/21/211.412.41-2-5.html> and <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/de-fr/2/21/211.412.41-9-13.html> (consulted 5 October 2026). ↩

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