

The counter-revolution of July 1841

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

The radical government soon moved against the property of the Church. In July 1841 an order to take an inventory of the property of the convents provoked a conservative uprising. The plan was for Giovanni Antonio Rusca to land with armed men at the Saleggi near Locarno, for Giuseppe Nessi to hold the bridge of Tenero with men from the Verzasca, and for Carlo Poggia of Olivone to advance from Biasca with some six hundred men from Blenio and the Leventina. On 2 July Nessi's men were defeated at Tenero, and Poggia withdrew over the Lucomagno when he saw that his forces were insufficient.¹

The repression was swift. A summary court-martial (*tribunale statario*) tried Giuseppe Nessi on 4 July 1841 and condemned him to death. He was shot on 5 July. Three further death sentences were pronounced against Poggia, Benedetto Pometta and the parish priest Chiappella, who had all escaped across the border. Other participants received prison sentences and fines and lost their property by confiscation. Luvini-Perseghini organized the *carabinieri* that suppressed the attempt. The use of confiscation as a political sanction against the defeated party left a mark on the canton's legal culture, in which the security of property depended for decades on the outcome of political struggles. In January 1843, when the twelve-year bar on constitutional amendment had expired, the voters rejected a radical revision by 6,986 votes to 3,810, a sign that the radical majority in the Grand Council did not command a majority in the country.²

1 Church property, the pronunciamento of 1855 and the direct tax

The year 1848 brought the radicals' most far-reaching measure. A law of 18 March 1848, adopted by 50 votes to 22, required the religious corporations of the canton to hand over all their credit instruments to the state treasury. The capital involved was estimated at about 1,100,000 cantonal lire. The

same legislation suppressed a series of religious houses, among them the Angioli, the Benedictines and the Augustinian nuns in Lugano, San Francesco and the Madonna del Sasso in Locarno, the Grazie in Bellinzona and the Ursulines of Mendrisio and Bellinzona. It also limited the number of religious persons in the canton to 153.³ The expulsion of the Lombard Capuchins in 1852, which belongs to the history of the Austrian blockade treated in Chapter C.II, later cost the canton an indemnity of 115,000 francs.

The financial strain caused by the Federal Constitution of 1848, discussed in the next section, paralysed cantonal politics in the early 1850s, because the governing liberals faced a coalition of dissident radicals and conservatives in the Grand Council. On 20 February 1855 Degiorgi, a political figure of Locarno, was killed in that town. The killing set off an armed movement of the radicals, known as the *pronunciamento*, which forced a constitutional revision. By 7 March the government had proclaimed the revised constitutional rules, which the Grand Council approved by 67 votes to 1 and which 31 of the 37 voting circles accepted.⁴ The Confederation intervened to restore order.⁵

The reform of 1855 reduced the Council of State from nine to seven members, gave the Grand Council the right of legislative initiative, introduced popular juries for serious criminal cases, excluded the clergy from voting and from elected office, and lowered the voting age to twenty and the age of eligibility to twenty-five. A politicoecclesiastical law of 24 May 1855 made the exercise of ecclesiastical functions subject to the government's *placet*. In the same year the Grand Council voted the canton's first direct tax, on income and on wealth.⁶ The administration was reorganized at the same time. The study of the cantonal administration published by the Archivio di Stato in 2022 takes 1855 as the end of the collegial system of government, in which the Council of State had decided all matters together, and as the start of administration by departments.⁷

2 Notes

1. Agliati, 1839 and 1841 (above). ↩
2. Marazzi, reform of 1855 (above). ↩
3. Broggin, study of Church property and the laws of 1855, Scuola ticinese, no. 94, https://m4.ti.ch/fileadmin/DECS/DS/Rivista_scuola_ticinese/ST_n.94/ST_94_Broggin_dall__incameramento_dei_beni_religiosi_alle_leggi_politico-ecclesiastiche_1855.pdf. ↩

4. Marazzi, reform of 1855 (above). ↩
5. Wili (above). ↩
6. Marazzi, reform of 1855 (above); Broggini (above). ↩
7. Jessica Beffa, Come nasce un Cantone. Storia dell'amministrazione cantonale ticinese, 1803–1855 (Bellinzona: Edizioni dello Stato del Cantone Ticino, 2022), information sheet, https://www4.ti.ch/fileadmin/DECS/DCSU/ASTI/Documenti/Com_e-nasce-un-cantone_scheda.pdf. ↩

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