

The flight of Giovanni Bassanesi

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The most spectacular action of the Lugano exiles took place on 11 July 1930. At 10.30 in the morning the young pilot Giovanni Bassanesi took off from the airfield of Bellinzona, picked up a load of leaflets at Lodrino in the Riviera valley and flew to Milan, where he dropped some 150,000 anti-fascist leaflets over the city. On the return flight he crashed at about 18.30 near the hospice of the Gotthard pass and was injured.¹ The operation had been organized by Alberto Tarchiani and Carlo Rosselli of Giustizia e Libertà, with discreet support from Ticino, and Pacciardi had taken part in its preparation.² Writing in the Ticinese press on the eightieth anniversary of the flight, Brenno Bernardi describes Canevascini, then a member of the cantonal government, as the head of the anti-fascist network that made the operation possible.³

The legal consequences show the range of instruments available to the Swiss State. Bassanesi, Rosselli, Tarchiani, Carlo Martignoli and others were tried before the Federal Criminal Court, which sat in Lugano. The defence was entrusted to a team of lawyers of different parties that included the Ticinese Enrico Celio and Francesco Borella, the Parisian advocate Vincent de Moro-Giafferi and Mario Raspini-Orelli. By judgment of 22 November 1930 Bassanesi was sentenced to four months' imprisonment and a fine for violating the federal decrees on air navigation, while all the other defendants were acquitted.⁴ The acquittals did not end the matter. Within days the Federal Council decided to expel Bassanesi, Tarchiani and Rosselli from Switzerland for reasons of State. Mussolini had followed the case with the greatest attention, and Italian pressure was exerted through diplomatic channels.⁵ Bassanesi was expelled to France after serving his sentence.⁶

1 Expulsions and the asylum bargain

The expulsion of the organizers of the Milan flight was part of a broader policy. The Historical Dictionary explains that the Federal Council adopted an increasingly harsh practice towards the Italian anti-fascists persecuted from 1924, in part because it hoped that accommodation in refugee policy would induce Mussolini to restrain his irredentist appetites for Ticino.⁷ Pacciardi himself was expelled by the federal authorities in 1933.⁸ He went to France and later to Spain, where during the civil war he commanded the Garibaldi Battalion of the International Brigades. Several dozen Ticinese volunteers also fought in Spain.⁹ In 1948 he became Italy's minister of defence, which is a measure of how the exile of the 1920s and 1930s shaped the post-war Italian Republic.¹⁰

The bargain had an economic counterpart that is easily overlooked. The anti-fascist organizations needed money for newspapers, couriers, travel and the support of families. Much of it came from private wealth, from émigré communities in France and the Americas and from the socialist and labour movements of Switzerland. Rosselli, for instance, came from a Jewish family belonging to the elite of the new Italian State and made a large material contribution of his own to the mobilization and organization of the anti-fascist movement.¹¹ These funds moved across borders through bank accounts, cash couriers and intermediaries, under the eyes of police services that tried to trace them. The same networks of trust that carried leaflets and people across the border could carry banknotes. Ticino's experience with anti-fascist finance thus anticipated, on a small scale, the cross-border movement of private money that became the business of the Lugano banks after 1945.

2 The exile as a political school

The exiles of the interwar years left a legacy in both countries. In Ticino they reinforced the democratic and anti-fascist identity of the left and connected Lugano's socialists with the leaders of the future Italian Republic. In November 1943, when the second wave of exiles had arrived, representatives of the Italian anti-fascist parties founded the *Colonie libere italiane* in Olten, an organization of Italian emigrants that survived the war.¹² The memory of the exile made Ticino a familiar place for the Italian political class after 1945. That familiarity had consequences for the banking business as well, since politicians, industrialists and professionals who had known Lugano as a place of refuge later knew it as a place where money was safe.

Essentials. Swiss asylum practice in the Fascist period tolerated Italian antifascist exiles but prohibited political activity that could compromise relations with Italy. The Federal Council warned Angelo Tonello in 1925, expelled Bassanesi, Tarchiani and Rosselli in November 1930 after the Federal Criminal Court in Lugano had acquitted all except Bassanesi, and expelled Pacciardi in 1933. The Historical Dictionary links this harsh practice to the hope of moderating Italian irredentist claims on Ticino. *Libera Stampa* and Guglielmo Canevascini, member of the cantonal government from 1922 to 1959, formed the Ticinese core of the anti-fascist network.

3 Notes

1. Insubrica Historica, "Giovanni Bassanesi: antifa flight from Bellinzona to Milan in 1930", 2 April 2018, <https://insubricahistorica.ch/svizzera/02/04/2018/giovanni-bassanesi-antifa-flight-from-bellinzona-to-milan-in-1930/>. ↩
2. Cerutti, "Antifascismus" (above); Mauro Cerutti, "Antifascisme", in DHS, version of 27 June 2016, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/027835>, which states that Pacciardi organized the flight together with Tarchiani and Rosselli. ↩
3. Brenno Bernardi, article in *laRegioneticino*, 10 July 2010, reproduced at https://www.circolorossellimilano.org/MaterialePDF/OTTANTESIMO_Volo_Bassanesi_laRegioneticino.pdf. ↩
4. Bernardi (above). ↩
5. Bernardi (above), referring to the Swiss minister in Rome, Georges Wagnière. ↩
6. Insubrica Historica (above). ↩
7. Portmann-Tinguely and von Cranach, "Flüchtlinge" (above). ↩
8. Cerutti, "Antifascisme" (above): Bern expelled Pacciardi in 1933. ↩
9. Cerutti, "Antifascismus" (above): "einige Dutzend Tessiner Freiwillige". ↩
10. Treccani, Enciclopedia on line, "Pacciardi, Randolfo", <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/randolfo-pacciardi/>: "Esule in Svizzera (1926)", expelled in 1933, "(1948-53) ministro della Difesa". ↩
11. Mauro Moretti, "Rosselli, Carlo", in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 88 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2017), [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-rosselli_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-rosselli_(Dizionario-Biografico)): both parents came from Jewish families belonging "alla

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classe eletta della nuova Italia", and Rosselli offered a "largo contributo materiale [...] alla mobilitazione e all'organizzazione antifascista". ↩

12. Cerutti, "Antifaschismus" (above). ↩

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