

The nuovo indirizzo, 1875–1890

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The radical era ended in the elections of 21 February 1875, in which the liberalconservatives won a majority in the Grand Council. After early elections on 19 January 1877 the Grand Council elected a Council of State composed entirely of conservatives.¹ The new government called its programme the *nuovo indirizzo*, the new direction. Its leader was the Locarno lawyer Gioachimo Respini, born in Cevio in 1836, who had spent eight years as a miner in Australia before studying law in Italy. He led the conservative party from 1875 to 1896 and sat in the Council of States from 1880 to 1885, where he defended the autonomy and the Italian character of Ticino. The DSS credits his governments with the secret ballot, the popular initiative and referendum, the permanent capital at Bellinzona and support for the railways.² They also reversed radical legislation on the Church and the schools. The school law of 14 May 1879, named after the state councillor Martino Pedrazzini, extended religious instruction under the supervision of the ecclesiastical authority to every level and type of school.³

The conservatives consolidated their majority by an electoral geography that the liberals regarded as fraudulent. From 1875 the boundaries of the electoral circles were redrawn and the electoral registers manipulated to their advantage.⁴ The elections of March 1889 exposed the effects of this manipulation of electoral geography.⁵ The Confederation intervened in Ticino in 1876, after clashes between radicals and conservatives at Stabio, and again in 1889 over the Grand Council elections. In 1884 the mere threat of sending federal troops had forced the canton to withdraw electoral provisions that violated federal law.⁶

1 The revolution of 11 September 1890 and proportional representation

On 11 September 1890 the liberals took matters into their own hands. Armed men occupied the arsenal of Bellinzona and then, accompanied by

a noisy crowd, stormed the government building in the centre of the town. In the confusion the conservative state councillor Luigi Rossi was shot dead.⁷ Rossi was twenty-six years old. Born in Castelrotto in 1864, he had studied law at Louvain, entered the Grand Council in 1889 and become head of the Department of Justice and Police in 1890. His death inside the government palace made him a conservative martyr and stirred emotion far beyond the canton.⁸ The insurgents installed a provisional government under Rinaldo Simen. The federal authorities reacted firmly and sent the federal commissioner Arnold Künzli to restore constitutional order. A government under Agostino Soldati that included both parties then replaced the provisional regime.

The man accused of firing the fatal shot fled to London, where the Swiss government requested his extradition for murder. The Queen's Bench Division refused it in *Re Castioni*, [1891] 1 QB 149. The court held that an offence committed in the course of and as part of a political disturbance was an offence of a political character, for which English law barred surrender.⁹ The case became the leading authority on the political offence exception in the common law world and is still cited in extradition proceedings. Swiss law has its own version of the exception in Article 3 of the Federal Act on International Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters (IMAC), although that provision excludes certain grave crimes from its protection.¹⁰ Chapter H.IV discusses the modern law of extradition and mutual assistance between Switzerland and Italy, in which the political character of an offence plays a much smaller role.

The lasting result of 1890 was electoral reform. In 1891 Ticino became the first Swiss canton to elect its Grand Council by proportional representation, and in 1892 the Council of State was also elected by proportional vote.¹¹ The HLS describes Ticino after 1892 as a "politisches Versuchslabor", a political laboratory, in which Switzerland first tested proportional elections and the sharing of government among the major parties that became known as concordance.¹² The Confederation followed only in 1918, when the voters approved proportional elections for the National Council by 66.8 per cent, with the first proportional federal elections following in October 1919. The cantonal constitution of 1997 still provides that both the Grand Council and the Council of State are elected in a single constituency by proportional representation (Articles 58 and 66).¹³

In figures. Of the nine federal interventions in the internal affairs of cantons in the nineteenth century, five concerned Ticino: 1855, 1870, 1876, 1889 and 1890.¹⁴ In 1843 a constitutional revision was rejected by 6,986

votes to 3,810. In 1855 the Grand Council approved the reform following the *pronunciamento* by 67 votes to 1, and 31 of 37 voting circles accepted it.¹⁵ In 1891 Ticino became the first canton to elect its parliament by proportional representation, twenty-seven years before the Confederation adopted proportional elections in 1918.¹⁶

The conflicts of 1839 to 1890 absorbed the energy of the canton's political class and exposed property to the risks of revolution and confiscation. Their resolution through proportional representation was therefore also an economic event. From the 1890s both major parties shared responsibility in government, and changes of majority no longer threatened the property or the liberty of the losers. That stability, together with the opening of the Gotthard railway in 1882, described in Chapter C.III, was the setting in which the first generation of Ticinese banks grew, and in which they collapsed in 1914 for the economic reasons that Chapter C.IV examines.

2 Notes

1. "Il nuovo indirizzo e la legge scolastica Pedrazzini", Scuola ticinese, no. 102, https://www4.ti.ch/fileadmin/DECS/DS/Rivista_scuola_ticinese/ST_n.102/ST_102_Snider_nuovo_indirizzo_e_legge_scolastica_Pedrazzini.pdf. ↩
2. Luchessa, "Respini" (above). ↩
3. "Il nuovo indirizzo" (above). ↩
4. Marco Marcacci, "Tessiner Putsch", HLS, version of 10 February 2012, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/043029/2012-02-10/>. ↩
5. Review of Andrea Ghiringhelli, *Il Ticino della transizione 1889–1922* (Locarno: Dadò, 1988), Scuola ticinese, no. 148, https://m4.ti.ch/fileadmin/DECS/DS/Rivista_scuola_ticinese/ST_n.148/ST_148_Jauch_Ticino_della_transizione_1889-1922.pdf. ↩
6. Wili (above). ↩
7. Marcacci, "Tessiner Putsch" (above). ↩
8. Christian Luchessa, "Rossi, Luigi", DSS, version of 23 April 2010, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/006972/2010-04-23/>. ↩
9. Re Castioni [1891] 1 QB 149, summary on vLex, <https://vlex.co.uk/vid/re-castioni-806662765>; "Political offence exception", Wikipedia (secondary aid), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_offence_exception. ↩

10. Federal Act on International Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters of 20 March 1981 (IMAC), SR 351.1, Art. 3. ↩
11. Servizio dell'informazione e della comunicazione del Consiglio di Stato, ArgomenTi, 2019, no. 2, https://www4.ti.ch/fileadmin/CAN/argomenti/pdf/2019_2.pdf. ↩
12. Marcacci, "Tessiner Putsch" (above). ↩
13. Costituzione cantonale (above), Art. 58 and 66. ↩
14. Wili (above). ↩
15. Marazzi, reform of 1855 (above). ↩
16. ArgomenTi (above). ↩

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