

A POLITICAL EXILE 'RELIVED'.
PAOLO TREVES IN GREAT BRITAIN (1938-1945)

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ABSTRACT

Paolo Treves (1908-1958), son of the well-known Socialist leader Claudio, grew up in close contact with many great representatives of the Italian anti-fascist movement. He and his whole family were persecuted by the Fascist regime for their political views and were forced to leave the country. After the racial laws Treves migrated to Great Britain, where he stayed until 1945. During his years of exile, he worked at the BBC as writer and speaker for the Italian Service. He was also engaged in the *Free Italy Movement*, the group formed by Italian exiles in the United Kingdom, and wrote for several British newspapers, mainly linked with the Labour Party and the Fabian Society. All of these propaganda activities helped him to create a network also with other European refugees, turning a negative and painful experience as exile in an opportunity to fight the Fascist regime. Thanks to the British editor Victor Gollancz, he started to write for the periodical "The Left News" and for its supplement "International Socialist Forum". These periodicals had the aim to give voice to Socialist exiles from all over Europe, encouraging the debate between them.

Keywords: Exile, Socialism, Antifascism, BBC, Great Britain.

1. In his autobiography, *What Mussolini did to us*,¹ first published in English in Great Britain in 1940, and then translated in Italian in 1945, the Italian socialist and antifascist Paolo Treves² wrote:

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¹ See TREVES 1940. The first Italian edition was published by Einaudi in 1945. For the latest edition see TREVES 1996.

² Paolo Treves' biography has been only recently fully explored by historiography. See FIORANI 2017; RICCIARDI 2018; FIORANI 2019; FIORANI 2020.

I lived too the life of political exile which I felt I was 'reliving', because in a certain sense there were more Italians about me in exile than at home, and those six years of veiled captivity had left their mark on me.³

This words effectively summarizes Treves' vision of the years he spent in exile from 1938 to 1945: not entirely a simple "success story",⁴ but certainly a phase that would prove to be central, in many ways, for his political education. Even if in those years he encountered several difficulties and moments of bewilderment, his experience can be considered overall quite enriching. Treves built a network of contacts which, along with his sincere love for British society prevented him from living "in the almost total vacuum of extraterritoriality".⁵

Already in his youth, exile was, in some way, a sadly known presence for all his family. Paolo was born in Milan in 1908 and he was the eldest son of the well-known socialist leader Claudio, one of the main personalities, alongside Filippo Turati, of the Italian Socialist Party.⁶ His whole family had been suffering for many years from the oppression and limitations imposed by the fascist regime due to their political convictions and their deep – rooted antifascism. His father, with his close friend Turati, had been one of the main opponents of Mussolini since he came to power. He was forced to take refuge in France in 1926, where he died in 1933 without seeing Italy again.⁷

Paolo and his whole family – his mother Olga Levi and his younger brother Piero –⁸ spent many years suffering from the suffocating police surveillance which stalked and followed them every day. They were, using another of Treves' definition, like "hostages" in their own country. In 1929, when he was a Law student at the University of Turin, Treves also served a few months in prison just for having signed, together with other students, a letter of solidarity addressed to Benedetto Croce who was roughly insulted by Mussolini due to his criticism towards the Lateran Pact.⁹

³ TREVES 1940: 354.

⁴ For this expression connected with exiles' experiences see. TRAVERSO 2004: 7-8.

⁵ KRACAUER 2000 (1985): 67-68.

⁶ On Claudio Treves see SAPELLI 1978; CASALI 1985. For a selection of his main writings and speeches see also TREVES 1925; TREVES 1983.

⁷ Paolo Treves witnessed his father's death while he was in Paris visiting him. For the touching description on this moment see TREVES 1996: 290-292.

⁸ On Piero Treves see at least FRANCO 1998; PERTICI 1999: 199-257; 259-264; FRANCO 2011: VII-LIII.

⁹ On this episode see DE FREDE 1983: 114-137. Croce himself heard about the arrests and was really impressed and upset about that. See the letter to Adolfo Omodeo in GIGANTE 1978: 23. On the intellectual antifascist network in Turin see at least BONGIOVANNI and LEVI 1976; D'ORSI 1997-1998: 3-52; D'ORSI 2000.

In 1938 the fascist racial laws further affected Paolo and his family, who were Jews by origins. The new legislation placed huge restrictions for all the Italian Jews and constituted a further obstacle to the possibility of effectively opposing the regime. So they were forced to leave Italy, the country that rejected them first for political and then for cultural and religious reasons. They choose to emigrate in Great Britain¹⁰ because his brother Piero had obtained a scholarship in Ancient History at St. John's College in Cambridge.

It should be noted that the choice of exile did not represent, for the Treves', only an easy escape route: it was a necessary path to be taken in order to continue the opposition to the fascist regime as effectively as possible, where this was prevented in their own country, a place from which they felt totally excluded and marginalized.¹¹

2. In the autumn of 1938 the Treves' arrived in England. Once they passed the Channel, the very tight surveillance to which they had been subjected in Italy gradually lost his power: despite the OVRA could count on a series of diligent informants,¹² the cadence of the reports received by the *Casellario Politico Centrale* became less frequent and registered mainly changes of residence or movements of family members.¹³

Due to a deep sense of uprooting, the adaptation to the new reality was not free from difficulties. First of all Treves had the urgent need to find a sufficiently stable and remunerative job. He decided to accept the assignment offered him by the University of Liverpool, where he worked on the drafting of a multilingual dictionary, sponsored by the International Auxiliary Language Association and partially financed by the Rockefeller Foundation.¹⁴ The project however ended at the beginning of the war and Treves was hired by Bedford College as an Italian lecturer.

In December 1939 he wrote about his new job to his admired mentor and friend Benedetto Croce:

¹⁰ On Italian antifascist exiles in Great Britain see GAROSCI 1953; BERNABEI 1997; RICHET 2018; COLACICCO 2018. On the development of antifascism in England see BUCHANAN 2016: 61-75; COPSEY: 2017; COLACICCO 2020.

¹¹ On this point see also TREVES 1940: 364-365.

¹² On the OVRA's activities in Great Britain see BERNABEI 1997: 144-160 and FRANZINELLI 1999: 201-202.

¹³ A note from the Italian Embassy in London to the Home Office, dated 20th November 1939, for example, reported that Paolo Treves was in Liverpool, residing at 13 Abercromby Square, "[...] where he is housed in a guest house run by a certain Annie Hodgson", without carrying out "any particular activities". See Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell'Interno, Casellario Politico Centrale (ACS, MI, CPC), b. 5210, f. 3226.

¹⁴ See the Treves' *curriculum vitae* in BBC Written Archives Centre, Reading (BBC, WAC), Staff File, L1/426/1.

My silence also depends on my reluctance to bore you with my personal cases, in reality not too cheerful, especially [...] since they closed the Department of the University of Liverpool where I worked. So the day is very long, in forced inactivity, and this idleness does not help my spirit too much. Fortunately, I am not completely unemployed, because I found a five hours per week position, teaching Italian at Bedford College, the women's section of the University of London which was transferred here for the war. I will not say that it is a very satisfactory teaching, especially for the curious and frightening ignorance of my pupils. But it's better than nothing. Unfortunately, the salary is completely insufficient and so I am still searching, and in vain, for a better accommodation.¹⁵

These academic collaborations, although initially not really high – profile, were certainly a precious resource to accelerate his insertion in the local intellectual networks. Curt Sigmar Gutkind was the head of Bedford College in those years. He was a German scholar of Italian Philology and History, forced to leave Germany for his Jewish origins.¹⁶ It was Gutkind himself who suggested to Treves to contact the BBC to seek another workplace at the recently inaugurated Italian Service that, as will be seen later, started its broadcast in the winter of 1939. Following this advice Treves managed to escape the precariousness that had characterized his first year of exile.

Meanwhile, the 'Treves' became part of the anti-fascist circle led by Decio Pettoello¹⁷ in Cambridge, who met in his house many of the Italian and German refugees with whom he shared a similar personal story.

Here Paolo met the woman that would become his wife: Lotte Dann, a young German of Jewish origin. She was born in Augsburg in 1912 and was forced to leave her hometown in 1933, shortly after Hitler's advent to power. She was deeply in love with Italy because she had studied Medicine in Turin with the distinguished pathologist Giuseppe Levi, shortly before 1938.¹⁸

It is Lotte Dann herself who gave us a memory of her first encounter with Treves, also describing the atmosphere of Pettoello's anti-fascist circle:

¹⁵ Paolo Treves to Benedetto Croce, 16th December 1939, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Polizia Politica (ACS, MI, DGPS, DPP), Fascicoli personali, b. 366, f. 25514.

¹⁶ On Gutkind see DUGGAN 2013: 350-351.

¹⁷ Professor of Italian Literature at the university of the city and already known opponent of the Fascist regime. Originally from Turin, he had emigrated to Great Britain in 1922 with his wife Antonietta and had immediately expressed his opposition to Fascism also during his lessons, leading the authorities to refuse him permission to return to Italy.

¹⁸ On Lotte Dann Treves see her memoir DANN TREVES 2012.

Decio Pettoello was an Italian lecturer in one of Cambridge colleges and lived [...] in a beautiful house, if I remember correctly at number 10 of Harvey Street, where every Sunday afternoon the international anti-fascism gathering was present in Cambridge; among others the mother, widows and children of the Rosselli brothers [...] and there, in early January 1940, I met Paolo. We happened to sit near the large table where we had tea and we immediately discovered that we had much in common. In fact, Luisa Levi, practically the first person I had met in Turin, was Paolo's first cousin and Professor Levi and his daughter Natalia were his old and great friends [...] Paolo had been the intermediary through whom Natalia, still in high school, had published his first short stories in the paper "Il Lavoro" in Genoa. So there was no lack of conversation. I know that after the tea, when everyone had gone back to the big living room [...] I saw that the Treves' were leaving. From the door, Paolo gave me a look of the deepest despair that I will never forget, because it was an invocation for help and at the same time he said: you cannot help me either. That evening, returning to my room, I suddenly heard myself say: "he will understand me".¹⁹

This testimony, beyond recalling an important moment for Treves' personal life, can provide some information on how he lived his exile condition during the first months in Great Britain. An attentive observer can easily see the fragility and the sense of uprooting of those who had already suffered from the dictatorship, partially alleviated by this peculiar environment, in which even the new encounters could give a familiar feeling, generated by the mutual commonality of ideals and personal stories.

A dramatic turning point was marked, for Treves and for the other Italian antifascists, by Mussolini's war declaration on June 10th 1940. In response to what was perceived as a stab in the back,²⁰ the British authorities arrested all the so-called 'enemy aliens', Italians together with Germans and Austrians, regardless of their political position. Most of them, after the arrest, were sent to internment and prison camps.²¹

¹⁹ DANN TREVES 2012: 59.

²⁰ In an article published in 1941 in the periodical of the Fabian Society, "Fabian Quarterly", Treves recalled that he had never shared "the amazement of his English friends", adding that he had tried in every way, in the preceding months, to convince his interlocutors of the great probability that Italy would go to war. See TREVES, *Italy: what's next?*, "Fabian Quarterly", spring 1941, now in FIORANI 2017: 71-76.

²¹ On the internment of enemy aliens see SPONZA 2000a; SPONZA 2000b: 256-279; CESARANO and KUSHNER 1993.

In the April of that same year, the British Aliens Department had instructed all the police stations in the country to be prepared to proceed with the arrest of all Italians aged between 16 and 70, who had been living in the United Kingdom for less than 20 years. A month later Winston Churchill himself, in order to avoid a potential 'fifth column', ordered a "very large round-up of every alien and suspect person in this country". See SPONZA 2000a: 75-77.

The impressive series of arrests also involved many well-known members of the antifascist community, including Paolo Treves, who was interned in the camp of Bury, in Lancashire. Treves narrowly escaped a tragic fate: he could have been boarded, due to a case of homonymy, on the *Arandora Star*, a ship directed to the Isle of Man which was wrecked, torpedoed by a German U-Boot, causing hundreds of victims.²² Treves managed to be freed thanks to the intervention of members of the Labour Party, in particular William Gillies, responsible of the International Section of the Labour.²³

3. As mentioned before, just in the summer of 1940 Treves had faced a job interview with the BBC, which wanted to expand the broadcasts to foreign countries during the war, recruiting new staff with a perfect knowledge of all the different languages involved.²⁴ So Treves collaborated with the Italian Service until January 1945 when he returned to Italy. He started working as an author of scripts for radio broadcasting and then as a speaker, also conducting, from 1943, his own personal column, the *Italian Correspondent* (in Italian *Sul fronte e dietro al fronte italiano*).²⁵ During this daily appointment Treves made comments on the Italian political situation, especially after the fall of Mussolini and the armistice of September 1943.

The work with the prestigious British broadcaster contributed considerably to Treves' integration in the English society. The BBC in those years, sometimes at odds with part of the public opinion and political forces, tried to widely collaborate with foreigners, even with the so-called 'enemy aliens'. The BBC often repeated, during all the conflict, the usefulness of investing in qualified personnel, at ease in dealing with the "language of the enemy". If it is true that lead roles often remained a prerogative of the British staff, the group of exiles that worked in *Radio Londra* gradually

²² On *Arandora Star* tragedy see BERNABEI 1997: 205 and BALESTRACCI 2002. More details on Treves' detention, with a testimony of his wife Lotte, are in RICCIARDI 2019: 173-177.

²³ William Gillies was, on this occasion, quite prompt in assisting European anti-fascists, especially the socialists. However, as will be mentioned later on, his relationship with the exiles, especially the Germans, was not without its bitter contrasts. Gillies in fact always showed an acute scepticism towards socialist internationalism, arguing that the interests of the Labour Party should be given the highest priority. See IMLAY 2017: 264-274.

²⁴ On the Italian Service and the BBC policy in the employment of alien staff see FIORANI 2018: 282-291; see also BRIGGS 1970; PICCIALUTI CAPRIOLI 1976, LO BIUNDO 2014. For a more extensive look on broadcasting and radio propaganda during World War II see at least BRIGGS 1970; PICCIALUTI CAPRIOLI 1976, HORTEN 2003; BRINSON and DOVE 2003; FOOTITT and TOBIA 2013; LO BIUNDO 2014.

²⁵ A selection of the scripts of this program was published in Italy in 1945. See TREVES 1945.

grew in number and skills. For Treves this was an opportunity to deal with new medium, discovering its great effectiveness. In addition to texts that more directly recalled a newsreel, the so-called 'talks', which commented the main events of the day, he experimented with the drafting of radio plays, such as a dramatization of the tragic events of Giacomo Matteotti's murder.²⁶

4. Beside his collaboration with the BBC, Paolo Treves worked intensely on propaganda against Fascism, especially on the press.

The articles published in the weekly "The Left News", probably the main voice of socialist exiles in Great Britain during the war, deserve a special mention. The magazine was founded in 1937 by the British publisher Victor Gollancz, a man particularly receptive to the instances and reflections that developed within the socialist universe in those troubled years.²⁷ It was the ideal means of expression for the Left Book Club,²⁸ created the previous year by these dynamic intellectual with the collaboration of Harold Laski, a member of the Labour Party and a professor of political theory at the London School of Economics, and John Strachey, a journalist, also affiliated with Labour. Since the beginning of the war, London had assumed the symbolic role of capital of the "other Europe", the one free from dictatorial regimes, the place that, more than any other, held the banner of democracy high on the continent. This was especially true for the socialist exiles, who in the British capital found refuge and space for debate.²⁹

The *International Socialist Forum* was attached to this magazine. The Austrian socialist and historian Julius Braunthal was editor-in-chief and Paolo Treves, the Germans Hans Vogel and Richard Löwenthal, the Belgian Louis De Brouckere, the Austrian Oscar Pollak and the Norwegian Hakon Lie were part of the editorial board. The members usually sent their contributions free of charge or for a symbolic fee, often responding to discussion proposals launched by the editorial staff.³⁰ In these pages there

²⁶ On Treves' broadcasting and activities in the Italian Service see RICCIARDI 2019: 185-189; FIORANI 2020: 117-127.

²⁷ On Victor Gollancz see HODGES 1978; DUDLEY EDWARDS 1987; HODGSON 2010: 166-168; COPSEY 2017 (2000): 40-41; 62-63. Treves held Gollancz in high esteem and defined him "his best friend" during the exile. On this point see RICCIARDI 2019: 225.

²⁸ The aim of the Club was to publish and sell at very low prices books dedicated to political and cultural analysis of socialism and, on the other hand, to the totalitarianism that subjugated Europe. The declared intention was to give the readers greater awareness, which would gradually prepare them to fight against war and fascism. See NEAVILL 1971.

²⁹ On London as aggregation centre for socialist political leaders see TOMBS 1991; TOMBS 1999.

³⁰ Braunthal sent Treves a cheque for seven guineas, adding that the collaborators were

was place for a large number of issues, for example the need to think new strategies for the Socialist International. Moreover, exiles of different nationalities brought their reflections on political situation in their respective countries.³¹ Treves took part in these debates on several occasions; in particular with a series of articles that appeared after July 25th 1943, concerning the fall of Fascist regime and, above all, the future of Italy in that difficult phase of transition.³²

In January 1943 Harold Laski invited socialist exiles from different countries to intervene on the future of the Socialist International, with particular regard to the issue of unity of action with the Communists. The British intellectual severely criticized the socialist movements throughout Europe for their inability to settle ideological differences, thereby dismissing the possibility to present themselves as a strong guide for working classes in the aftermath of the war. Even many of the socialist refugees in Great Britain, at least according to Laski, were often unable to avoid considerations and proposals too narrowed in their respective national spheres, failing to find a “single voice” and a shared point of view that would undoubtedly prove valuable for the future. Laski also criticized the British Labour, which appeared more anxious to attack enemies than to find new allies.

In the April of the same year Treves wrote an article in this regard, focusing on the comparison between the Second and Third Internationals and the significance that it had taken on in the context of war. While attesting his unconditional solidarity with the Soviet people who strenuously opposed the German invasion, Treves emphasized that the policy of the Communist parties in Europe was modeled exclusively on the needs of Moscow. This was a fact that made any debate on the possible attainment of unity between the two Internationals very controversial and problematic, raising questions about whether a real alliance could actually be established.

The author wrote:

After this war, each nation will have to face different problems, all equally complex, but each to be solved in a different way, according to the situation [...]. What would be the attitude of the Comintern or the Foreign Ministry? Or rather: are all these problems solvable in the most convenient way?³³

not usually paid. See Julius Braunthal to Paolo Treves, 27th September 1942, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Julius Braunthal Archive, Correspondence, f. 87.

³¹ For an assessment of this debate see TOMBS 1999: 263-279.

³² All these writings are now in FIORANI 2017: 80-104.

³³ See Treves, “The Unity of the Socialist International”, *The Left News*, 82, April 1943: 2450-2451, now in FIORANI 2017: 85-87.

Considering the diversified picture that would emerge at the end of the war, it would therefore have been appropriate to question the Soviet willingness to set aside its own interests in favour of those of the other nations. An eventuality which, in Treves' opinion, could certainly not be taken for granted and which highlighted the need, for the European Socialists, not to exceed in excessively theoretical and doctrinal discussions, which could damage the image of the movement, perceived as distant and with few concrete proposals for the working classes. The main objective was, in his view, to create a common front ready to confront the changing reality of those years: "Unity is fundamental for the working class movement, but it cannot be achieved by surrendering to the Comintern or clinging to old stereotypes and ideals".³⁴

In Treves' analysis, the proud affirmation of socialist ideals was matched with the necessity of an internal reform and the creation of a new mental attitude in the movement, which should arise from the tragedy of the war in order to regain compactness. Only with this internal change the movement could present itself as a valid alternative in European reconstruction.

For Victor Gollancz Treves also published two of his main essays: the forementioned autobiography *What Mussolini did to us* in 1940 and, two years later, *Italy. Yesterday, today, tomorrow*, which retraced the most significant moments in Italian history from 1870 to the present day, concluding with a reflection on the future of the country in the aftermath of the war. The heart of this reconstruction was undoubtedly the analysis of Fascism, starting from Mussolini's past militancy in the Italian Socialist Party. This moment was seen as the result of a profound incoherence of a purely facade adherence to the ideals of the party. Treves identified in violence and in the systematic recourse to force to prevail against the adversary as the only real driving force of Mussolini's entire political vision. The absolute incompatibility with Mussolini's militancy in the Socialist Party resided, according to Treves, right in this exaltation of violence by all means. It was no coincidence, according to the Italian socialist, that the moment when the political personality of the future dictator clearly emerged the most was precisely the spread of rage that had preceded and accompanied the Great War: "It was his moment: it was war. Mussolini's intervention was no more than an exasperated lust for action, and all his so-called doctrine was based on formulas derived from a vague nationalism. [...] Nothing more. The legend grew up later".³⁵

³⁴ FIORANI 2017: 86.

³⁵ FIORANI 2017: 28-29.

5. Together with the forementioned International Socialist Forum, there are several testimonies of meetings, conferences and demonstrations that brought together exiles from the countries oppressed by Nazi-fascism, suggesting a deep sense of European unity to which Treves always adhered with great enthusiasm.

During his years of exile Treves was also part of the organization created by the Italian refugees, the Free Italy Movement. Until 1940, there weren't many Italian anti-fascists in Great Britain and so they had not gathered in real organizations, undertaking propaganda actions on individual initiative or seeking the support of British sympathizers.

A first attempt to create an association, in order to give greater effectiveness to the action of the exiles, arose from the Carlo Petrone's initiative.³⁶ He was a Catholic former member of the Popular Party, who, in September 1940, gave birth to the Free Italy Committee. The association had a rather troubled life, characterized by repeated internal divisions. Petrone's leadership immediately proved extremely fragile and received severe criticism from both the other exiles, including Paolo Treves, and from British observers, especially from the Foreign Office and the Labour Party. The embattled founder was therefore soon ousted and the renewed association, called Free Italy Movement, presented itself in its Statute as open to "Italians of birth, descent and nationality", united "to collaborate in the liberation of Italy from fascist tyranny and German servitude, as well as its moral and social reconstruction in a spirit of freedom, equality and brotherhood among peoples".³⁷ On British side, the impression on the failure of the controversial leader, whose ousting seemed inevitable and necessary, focused rather on the latent antagonism between the Left-wing exiles and the Catholic ones. This opposition was presented, in a report drawn up by Ian S. Munro of the Ministry of Information, as the central knot that had undermined the Free Italy Committee to its foundations and as a potential threat "[...] not only here but among Free Italian Italian Movements all over the world".³⁸ The line to be taken towards the renewed association should therefore be based on the construction of a fruitful cooperation in a war context, aimed first of all at defeating fascism.

Paolo Treves, who had personally supported Petrone's exclusion, while acknowledging some of his merits during the assembly in July, did

³⁶ On Carlo Petrone see ODDATI 1980.

³⁷ Free Italy Movement Statute, July 26th 1941, The National Archives, Kew, Foreign Office (TNA, FO), 371/29937. On the strong disagreements between Petrone and other Italian exiles, including Treves see FIORANI 2020: 90-95.

³⁸ Memorandum on the present position of Free Italy Movement, July 18th 1941, TNA, FO, 371/29937.

not fail to show great satisfaction for the new course of the movement, as evidenced by the letter sent on 1 September 1941 to Emilio Lussu, in which the Sardinian anti-fascist was warmly invited to join the English committee:

I need not to underline – he wrote – the importance of our movement which may become, later on, the centre of Italian representation both at the Peace Conference and before that to have our say on British policy [...] Obviously it is in London and not in Washington or New York that the course of events is being decided today and our presence is certainly more important here than elsewhere.³⁹

He probably showed such a confident attitude because he believed that the differences between the other members were definitely settled and, above all, he thought of having the “full support” of the British institutions, in particular the Ministry of Information and the BBC.⁴⁰

The change of leadership had an undoubtedly positive effect for the image of the anti-fascist committee, which gathered around it an increasing number of English sympathizers: a part of these supporters created, in September 1941, the association Friends of Free Italy. The British authorities, also on the Labour side, remained however quite skeptical about the real possibilities of such an organization, still too torn by internal contrasts, which led shortly thereafter to a new split. At the end of 1942, the same Treves brothers left the movement.

The latter had attempted to establish a closer link with the Mazzini Society in the United States and with the Foreign Center of the Italian Socialist Party, led by Ignazio Silone in Zurich, supporting many of their initiatives. However, they found, within the movement, a very strong opposition from other members.⁴¹ Therefore Paolo Treves expressed several times a very critical judgment on many of the Movement's initiatives, that showed in fact very few results,⁴² and found much more fertile ground in those activities with a more international perspective, such as the International Socialist Forum.

A note signed by Paolo and Piero Treves, dated March 20th, 1943 and sent to William Gillies by the two brothers, stated that they had already severed their ties with the organization three months before, in December

³⁹ Paolo Treves to Emilio Lussu, 1st September 1941, TNA, FO, 371/29938.

⁴⁰ Paolo Treves to Emilio Lussu, 1st September 1941, TNA, FO 371/29938.

⁴¹ On the Foreign Centre see GAROSCI 1953: 283-289; POLOTTI and MERLI 1992: 9-30; MERLI 1993: 79-99.

⁴² On this judgment on the movement and its results see also RICCIARDI 2019: 195.

1942. Their decision followed the remarks published in the “Notiziario Italiano” of that month and, until then, they had chosen to keep it silent, “in the hope that a better spirit would prevail in the Movement”.⁴³ A hope that evidently was not satisfied in those early months of 1943, pushing the two brothers to make their dissent public.

Even they, at this stage, felt a deep disillusionment about the real possibility of realizing their political projects in London. Writing to his cousin Antonello Gerbi, Piero stated in a rather discouraged tone: “Paolo and I are unfortunately also engaged in what should be called political work, if the appellation were not too high and honourable for this misery here”.⁴⁴ Other letters addressed to the Gerbi’s in the following years show how the Treves’ judgment on the other members of the movement had not changed too much even after their departure.

The lacerating debate that divided the organization, particularly heated within the London group but also widespread in the other centres of anti-fascist emigration, anticipated an issue that would prove critical and crucial for post-fascist Italy and for the future of national socialism.

Paolo Treves’ exile ended in January 1945, after several attempts in the previous months to return to his homeland. He found, among other things, the BBC itself as an obstacle. The Italian Service, in fact, did not want to deprive itself of an expert and really appreciated collaborator.⁴⁵

A quick look at Paolo Treves’ exile could give us, on one side, quite a positive picture: thanks above all to his employment at the BBC and his network with other Socialist refugee, he managed to fit into English society, of which he deeply admired many aspects.⁴⁶

However, it is not my intention to describe an excessively downhill road: Treves’ desire always remained to return to Italy and to actively participate in the reconstruction of democracy in his country.

It should be noted that in the post-war period, during his political career as deputy of the PSDI, Treves often expressed a strong disappointment

⁴³ Note signed by Paolo and Piero Treves, March 20th 1943. The note had no recipient but it was arguably addressed to William Gillies. See Fondazione di Studi Storici “Filippo Turati”, Firenze, Fondo Paolo Treves, Scritti, b. 3. A copy is also in Labour Party Archives, Manchester, James Middleton Papers (International), b. 10.

⁴⁴ Piero Treves to Antonello Gerbi, January 7th 1943, Archivio Storico Intesa Sanpaolo, Banca Commerciale Italiana, Fondo Antonello Gerbi, cart. 57, f. 1.

⁴⁵ Negotiations to organize the return to Italy were long and difficult. Treves had to contact many times the British authorities, with the help of the Labour MP Philip Noel-Baker. See RICCIARDI 2019: 230-231. On the attitude of the BBC, who wanted to retain both the Treves brothers as long as possible, see FIORANI 2020: 163-164.

⁴⁶ Treves wrote also an essay which celebrated many of the peculiarity of the English people. See TREVES 1947.

for the way in which the Italian Republic had been constituted.⁴⁷ In many ways the renewed and finally democratic Italy seemed different from what he had foreseen in the years of exile. One of the aspects that failed him the most was the excessively absolutory attitude towards of the legacy of the fascist dictatorship.

In conclusion, the experience of exile represented for Paolo Treves a watershed which, although marked with hard challenges and difficulties, kept him suspended between two worlds. The first one, that of youth in fascist Italy, was sealed by pain, by the distance and the death of his beloved father, but also by the comforting presence of exemplary figures, which constituted a role model for him from both a moral and political point of view even in the years to come. As often happens to those who are forced to abandon their homeland, Treves succumbed to the temptation to idealize his roots, hoping to be able to find them, in some form, at the time of his return to Italy. But post-fascist Italy, that universe so intensely dreamed of and coveted, revealed itself with its lights but also with many shadows, which sometimes didn't match the image that the exile had shaped while he was away.

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⁴⁷ For Paolo Treves' parliamentary and political activities in the postwar period see RICCIARDI 2019: 251-376; FIORANI 2020: 167-288.

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