

Preface

I am Luigi Galleani's grandson, he was my mother's father. I did not know him, he died well before I was born. My mother told me only a little about him. She was not at all unwilling to talk about him, but she would do so only when asked; and, with the arrogance of youth and to my great regret, I did not ask much about him. So when I was growing up I had only a sketchy awareness of his life and activities, and it was not until after my mother died that I started to become interested in his life. When, at last, I did begin to look into my family's history, one of the first steps I took was to look to see if there was anything about him on the internet. I was amazed to discover how much there was there, and to realise what an important person he had been and what a remarkable life he had led.

As Antonio Senta describes in these pages, he was born in 1861, in Vercelli (Piedmont), one of four children in a respectable middle class, catholic family. His father was an elementary school teacher. Galleani was evidently a spirited and independently minded person even in his youth. According to family legend, he was pressured by his father against his wishes into studying law at the University of Turin, but he didn't take his degree, by that time he was already actively engaged in radical politics.

He became a leading activist in North West Italy as well as in the Lunigiana area, around Carrara (Tuscany), the site of the famous marble quarries. A series of strikes and demonstrations by quarry workers were put down with brutal military force by the government. To avoid arrest Galleani fled to France, but he was expelled from there and moved to Switzerland. When he returned to Italy he was arrested and charged, under the Crispi government's notorious Article 248, with 35 others with 'conspiracy', and sentenced to three years imprisonment. From prison he was sent directly into internal exile (domicilio coatto) on the tiny and inaccessible island of Pantelleria, between Sicily and Tunisia.

Pantelleria is now a fashionable resort. In the 1890s, when Galleani was exiled there, it was poor, bleak and extremely remote. This was the harshest of punishments: the prisoners called themselves 'i morti' in a newspaper with that title that they managed to smuggle out. Among its articles was one by my grandfather with the title '*manet immota fides*', the Latin for 'the faith remains unchanged' (he was fond of Latin quotations). That became his motto.

On Pantelleria he met a remarkable young woman called Maria Rallo, from a local family. My mother said that they owned a vineyard. By the time they met Maria was already a widow with a son and an infant daughter. She and Luigi became lovers and she became my grandmother. Then Galleani decided to escape. According to my mother, Maria's family helped him to get a little boat, in which he made the perilous crossing to Tunisia. From thence he made his way to Alexandria in Egypt, where he was joined by Maria and her two children (Salvatore ~~Errera~~ and Ilia). By then she was eight and a half months pregnant with a third child (Cossyra).

In Egypt they were threatened with extradition back to Italy. So, in 1900, the family made its way via London to the USA, where Galleani had been invited to become Editor of *La Questione Sociale* which was the leading Italian American anarchist paper at that time, based in Paterson, NJ.

Soon after the family arrived there, however, there was a major strike by the local silk workers, many of whom were Italian immigrants. Galleani was injured by the police in a demonstration, and then charged with incitement to riot. Before the trial, he managed to escape to Montreal, across the border in Canada. When the hue and cry died down, he slipped back across the border under an assumed name, and settled with his family in Barre, Vermont.

Barre was a congenial place for them. There is a huge granite quarry on the outskirts of the town which employed a large number of Italian quarry workers and stone cutters, many from Carrara where Galleani had been active. Even before Galleani arrived it had a strong radical tradition, and this endures still: its Senator is Bernie Sanders, the socialist candidate who did so well in the 2016 Primary elections for the Democratic Party presidential nomination.

Soon after settling in Barre, in 1903, Galleani started his own newspaper, *Cronaca Sovversiva*. It was lively and provocative and it rapidly built up a large following. In time it became the best-selling anarchist periodical in North America. Galleani was a brilliant and powerful orator and he made frequent lecture tours around the country to spread his ideas.

Eventually, in 1907, he was betrayed to the New Jersey authorities and extradited back there to stand trial on the charges arising from the demonstration in 1902; but there was a hung jury and he was acquitted. He returned to Barre to a triumphant welcome.

By this time he and Maria had two daughters (Ilia, Cossyra), two sons (Olimpio, Balilla) and a stepson (Salvatore). In 1909 their youngest child, my mother, Mentana (always known as 'Tana') was born in Barre. Three years later, Galleani relocated *Cronaca Sovversiva*, to Lynn, Massachusetts, near Boston, and the family moved to Wrentham, Massachusetts – a small and typical New England town, also near Boston where there was a large population of Italian workers, and where Galleani had many followers. He soon gained more – including, most famously, Nicolo Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, whose visits to the family's farm outside Wrentham my mother remembered and talked about.

Galleani's group, together with other anarchists and radicals in America, had always been the targets of persecution and attacks. These grew much worse in 1917 when the US entered World War I and with the upsurge of radical activity that followed the Russian Revolution. Galleani opposed the war with the slogan, blazened across his newspaper, '*contro la Guerra, contro la pace, per la rivoluzione*'. He tacitly advised his followers not to register for the draft which was compulsory even for foreigners, some of whom, including Sacco and Vanzetti, moved temporarily to Mexico. The government and the Press whipped up a vicious anti-anarchist and anti-red scare, a hate-filled, xenophobic and racist campaign demonizing radicals and foreigners. Italians and other recent immigrants were treated as dangerous and evil.

The government repeatedly tried to close down *Cronaca Sovversiva*. They banned it from the Mail, but its supporters distributed it by hand; they raided its offices, seized its distribution lists and intimidated and arrested its subscribers. Indeed, subscribing to *Cronaca Sovversiva* was treated as a ground for deportation.¹ My mother remembered frequent police raids and searches at the family home, and interrogations of the family and neighbours.

¹Bruce Watson, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Men, the Murders, and the Judgment of Mankind*. New York: Viking Books, 2007, p. 16.

The government wanted to deport Galleani, but they could not do so. The law as it stood did not allow the deportation of anyone who had family born in the US, who had been resident for more than six years, and who hadn't broken the law. So they brought in a new law: the Immigration Act (1918). Galleani and literally thousands of other foreign immigrants suspected of being anarchists and radicals, were rounded up and deported without charge or trial in what became known as the 'Palmer raids' after the Attorney General, A. Mitchell Palmer, who ordered them.

My mother remembered visiting her father in prison while he was awaiting deportation. She brought some chocolates which the guards cut up into little pieces to check that nothing was hidden in them. A police report describes the way in which her older sister Ilia, who became a distinguished doctor, was treated on one such visit. The file is headed "In re: Bomb outrages ... (anarchistic matter)". Bureau of Investigation agents had been interrogating a neighbour of our family, who said:

"My husband goes to church and he knows Galliani [sic] and got some books from Galliani [sic] and he burned them because we did not want to get in trouble."

The report continues,

When Agents got through with this lady, we noticed that the girl in the waiting room desired to see Galliani [sic]. When questioned she said that her name was Ilia Galliani [sic]; that she ... is about 22 years of age now, ... that her father's name was Louis Galliani [sic] and that he was now in the detention room awaiting deportation.

Then they questioned her:

Q. Do you believe in the American form of Government?

A. I came here to see my father: I did not come here to answer any questions. I don't see why I should answer questions at all.

Q. We are Government Officers and we expect you to answer that question.

A. I don't see why I should answer that.

Q. Do you believe in the over-throw of the Government?

A. I don't interest myself in such questions....

Q. Do you believe in the trickeries of anarchism?

A. I haven't formed any idea. I have not adopted any form of ideals.²

I am struck by the calm way in which my aunt handled herself, although no doubt she and other members of the family were used to being treated in this sort of way.

Galleani was deported to Italy in 1919. There he immediately began political activity again and restarted *Cronaca Sovversiva*, bringing out some further issues, but it was closed down

² F. Weiss, "In re: Bomb outrages in Washington, DC, Cleveland, Boston, Etc. (Anarchist Matter)", B.I. report 19 June 1919, p. 4.

for the final time in 1920. In 1922, Mussolini and the fascists came to power; Galleani was imprisoned for writing anti-military articles, and then he was sent into internal exile again – this time on Lipari, another small island like Pantelleria off the coast of Sicily.

In 1930 he was released back to the mainland. His health had deteriorated, he was suffering from diabetes. He lived in Caprigliola, a small hilltop village in the Lunigiana area where he was guarded 24 hours a day by the police who reported daily on his activities. He died of a heart attack on his regular afternoon walk in 1931, age 70. He is buried in the cemetery nearby.

When Galleani was deported, his family (Maria and their six children) were left in the US. Maria still had a young child (my mother, Tana, who was only ten years old), but she had to get a job; she found work in a local knitwear factory. According to my mother she met new people and got to like it. One of her daughters (Cossyra) went back to Italy to look after Galleani. The oldest daughter, Iliia, became a pioneer of birth control and a doctor to the anarchist community in the Boston area (they always called her “*la dottoressa*”).

My mother loved and revered her father who was suddenly taken away from her. In a brief memoir recorded at the end of her life she said:

When my father was to be deported, my parents were discussing it and I went up to their bedroom and said to him, ‘why don’t you say you don’t believe any more?’ I’ll never ever forget the look on his face. Now, I’m so glad he lived the way he did and believed in what he did.

She was proud of him, she was inspired by him. Eventually she became a communist. Although there is often bitter antagonism between anarchists and communists, she felt that she was continuing his work, fighting for the same ideals. She moved to New York where she met and married my father, an Irish writer who had moved to America in the 1930s. My younger brother and I were both born in New York in the 1940s.

After the end of the Second World War there was another anti-red scare in America, McCarthyism. My father was working in TV. He was blacklisted and couldn’t get work. We left America. We lived for a while in Ireland and Italy before settling in London in 1949.

I went to school and university in England and then I became a university teacher of philosophy. My work focuses on Hegel and Marx. I was inspired by my mother and by my grandfather. I am proud to be his grandson. I would like to think that I too, in a small way, am continuing his work.

A few years ago I began doing more systematic research on my grandfather. This started almost accidentally. I was on holiday near Carrara and decided to visit the local state archive to see whether they had any information about him. At first they were suspicious of me and would hardly open the door, but when I mentioned Galleani’s name, they produced a thick file of police records on him for the 18 months he lived in the area at the end of his life.

The police reported on him every day, even when there was nothing significant to report; they opened his letters and – very helpfully – typed them out before sending them on to him. This inspired me to visit other archives and it whetted my appetite to learn more. I started to learn Italian in order to read these documents and his writings.

As I discovered what an important and interesting figure he was, I formed the plan to write a biography, and begun reading and collecting other material; but I was working on my own, and I was soon overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of information that I was accumulating and the difficulty of the task I had embarked upon. I was starting to despair when I was put in touch with Antonio Senta, who was also doing research on Galleani and who wanted to write a biography of him. He is much better qualified than I am to do so, and we rapidly agreed that he would write the biography and I would help with research as and when I could. This book is the excellent result.

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In Galleani's time, anarchism was an powerful and important political movement. Indeed, until the Russian Revolution, it was more influential on the far left than Marxism or communism.<sup>3</sup> Then, and even to some extent still now, there was a widespread view that anarchism is a purely negative and destructive philosophy, an arbitrary and irrational sort of nihilism. The popular image of anarchists in this period was that they were conspiratorial, bomb throwing terrorists, bent on causing chaos and destruction. This is an image that was successfully spread by widely read novels such as Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed* and Conrad's *The Secret Agent*.

This picture must be set aside completely if one is to understand Galleani. He was not in the least conspiratorial or secretive, he proclaimed his views to the world in a fearless and forthright manner. Those who heard him testify to his power and eloquence as a speaker, even the police reports regularly mention this. He was also a prolific writer of trenchant and persuasive prose. He wrote (and no doubt spoke) in an elaborate and strongly rhetorical style; he peppers his paragraphs with Latin sayings and quotations. It is remarkable that he had such a large following among ordinary workers.

Moreover, anarchism – of his kind at least – is not a form of nihilism. It is not a purely negative philosophy. On the contrary, it is a positive philosophy with a history that can be traced back to nineteenth century thinkers such as Proudhon and Kropotkin, and which is going through a strong revival at present. Anarchism is the philosophy that the state, private property, and all forms of authority are harmful and unnecessary. As Galleani himself put it,

We do not argue about whether property means greed or not, if masters are good or bad, if the State is paternal or despotic, if laws are just or unjust, if courts are fair or unfair, if the police are merciful or brutal. When we talk about property, State, masters, government, laws, courts and police, we say only that *we don't want any of them.*<sup>4</sup>

These are not purely negative or nihilistic ideas. They spring from the hugely confident, optimistic – even utopian – belief that people can live together cooperatively without the need for property, the restraints of law or coercive authority to maintain order. It is a hopeful and idealistic philosophy. At its basis is an enormously positive faith in human nature – the belief

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<sup>3</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*. London: Michael Joseph, 1994, p. 74.

<sup>4</sup> Luigi Galleani, *The End of Anarchism?* Translated by Max Sartin and Robert D'Atillio. Orkney: Cienfuegos Press, 1982, p. 48.

that people are basically good not evil, and that they do not need to be forced by law or authority to live and work together harmoniously: a voluntary cooperative community is possible. This is what Galleani and his group believed in and worked for. They called this the 'idea', or even the 'beautiful idea'.

What is preventing such a community from being created, they believed, is capitalism. This exploits and oppresses people, and uses all the power of the state to do so. Galleani and his group called themselves 'communist anarchists'. At the basis of the exploitation and oppression in current society are private property and the state. Like Marxist communists they advocated the abolition of bourgeois or capitalist private property (i.e., the private ownership of the means of production). Production, they argued, should be organised collectively, for use and not for private profit.

However, they rejected what they regarded as the authoritarian side of Marxism: they questioned the Marxist belief that a socialist state would be required to create a communist society. People, they maintained, are capable of living together and organizing themselves by themselves, without needing to be forced or coerced; and they would do so spontaneously when the forces preventing this – private property and the state – are abolished.

The anarchism of Galleani and his associates took a rigorous and uncompromising form. In the first place, they advocated and practiced an 'anti-organizational' form of anarchism which involved the radical rejection of hierarchy in all its forms. They repudiated every kind of political organization and party structure as oppressive and coercive, and they criticized trade unions on the same grounds. Recent writers have increasingly come to refer to them as 'Galleanisti', but Galleani and his associates never used this title. If they had to describe themselves collectively, they called themselves followers of 'the idea'. The policies and activities of the group were not imposed from on high, but decided by direct democracy at informal meetings, often at Sunday picnics held at the family farm. My mother remembered these gatherings well and enjoyed arguing about politics with the participants who came to them.

As well as being a prolific writer and speaker, Galleani also advocated 'propaganda of the deed' – direct action against the state and the forces of oppression. To understand this one must see it in the context of the time. The political situation in Italy and in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth century was extremely volatile and violent. The police sided with employers and broke up strikes and demonstrations, often with brutal force. Workers and those who supported them were spied upon, assaulted, arrested, imprisoned, and even deported. Galleani and his associates believed that when they were attacked, as they constantly were, it was legitimate for them to fight back – they were not pacifists. They were also convinced that in the tense and volatile conditions that then existed, a few insurrectionary acts would spark off spontaneous revolutionary risings of workers to overthrow the system.

In 1906, Galleani published a slim and plain-looking pamphlet with the innocuous sounding title, *La salute è in voi* (The Power is in Your Hands). It was in fact a practical bomb making manual. In 1919 and 1920, there was a series of bombings in the US for which Galleani's group were prime suspects. It was not suggested that Galleani himself was directly involved, he had been deported by that time, but he was regularly held to be a main advocate of violence and branded as the prime instigator of terrorism. For example, in a widely syndicated article under the banner headline 'On the Trail of the Anarchist Bandits', William J

Flynn (Director of the Bureau of Investigation, 1919-1921) accuses 'the Galleani reds' of numerous bomb outrages and claims, 'The United States government has conclusive evidence of the truth of what I say.'<sup>5</sup> In fact the government had no such evidence, although the Bureau of Investigation<sup>6</sup> had worked very hard to find some, even sending agents to Italy after Galleani had been deported, but they eventually returned empty handed.<sup>7</sup>

Terrorism is again at the centre of political attention, and Galleani is being cast once more in the role of one of its main advocates. Articles, scholarly books, and even novels portraying him in this way have proliferated in recent years. Perhaps the most egregious instance is the current English language Wikipedia page on Galleani.<sup>8</sup> It gives no sense of his ideas or of what he stood for, but it contains a lengthy catalogue of bombings throughout the USA starting in 1914 and stretching all the way to 1932, most of which have no conceivable connection with Galleani.

One popular writer recently even called him the "Osama Bin Laden of his time".<sup>9</sup> That is absurd. In contrast to recent Islamic terrorism, the bombings of 1919-20 (whoever was responsible for them) were not indiscriminate explosions in crowds. For the most part they were carefully targeted at individuals: at big businessmen and bankers like John D Rockefeller and J P Morgan; at politicians responsible for waging war on working people and anarchists such as Attorney General Palmer, responsible for the 'Palmer Raids' and mass deportations.

Having such a prominent supposed terrorist in the family has made me aware of how false the popular stereotype of the terrorist is, in my grandfather's case at least. He was not a cold-blooded and hate-filled fanatic; he was a warm and devoted father and family man, loved and revered by his wife and children. He was not a twisted and ruthless extremist; he was an immensely cultured, educated, and thoughtful person, trusted and admired by his comrades and friends. He was not a narrow and callous nihilist; he was a visionary thinker with a beautiful idea of how human society could be – an idea that still resonates today.

There is no doubt that he advocated violent means when he thought them necessary. I do not seek to defend him for this. However, if one is to understand him one must see that he lived through extremely violent times, and it was clear to many of the working people and immigrants for whom he spoke that the main perpetrators of this violence were the police and

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<sup>5</sup> William J Flynn. 'On the Trail of the Anarchist Bandits'. *New York Herald*, 5 March 1922, section VII.

<sup>6</sup> Forerunner of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

<sup>7</sup> Beverly Gage. *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in Its First Age of Terror*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, Part IV.

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luigi\\_Galleani](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luigi_Galleani).

<sup>9</sup> Dennis Lehane interviewed about his best-selling novel, *The Given Day*, in which Galleani figures prominently as the 'main orchestrator' of 'urban terrorism' (Chris Vognar. 'Chris Vognar Column: Dennis Lehane Expands His Literary Horizon'. *The Dallas Morning News* July 14. 2008).

the state. What happened to Galleani happened also to thousands of anarchists and other radicals: they were attacked, arrested and deported without any legal process. Some resisted and fought back. Galleani was at the forefront of that fight as this book shows by telling the story of his remarkable life and explaining the enduring significance of his ideas.

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