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Like another Chouannerie

Giacinto de' Sivo: an enemy of Italian unification

April 11, 2018 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

Having spoken about il Risorgimento

(<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2018/01/13/controrisorgimento/>) and the “partito moderati” (<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2017/12/06/radicalism-in-moderation/>) in revolutionary Italy before to various degrees, a logical next avenue to pursue is the question of who best epitomizes the intellectual legacy of the Lost Cause of the Italian South. The Lost Cause of the American South had and continues to have various partisans and spokesmen, but the one in Italy is much more sparsely represented.

Over 130 years later, Jefferson Davis' *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* (1881) remains something of the ur-text of Lost Cause historiography, though how much is it still read is a different question. Is there an analogue to Davis' memoirs and history for the Southern Italian Bourbonist resistance? I think there is. That would be Giacinto de' Sivo's *Storia delle Due Sicilie dal 1847 al 1861*, published in two volumes between 1863 and 1867, and reissued twice afterward. De' Sivo came from a loyalist family, his grandfather having fought for the sanfedisti in 1799, and de' Sivo himself served in various state positions in the Two Sicilies; he was part of the Commission for Public Education, then in 1848 he was appointed Councilor of Intendance of the province of Terra di Lavoro, with seven hundred men at his orders, and in January 1849 he was commander of one of the four companies of the National Guard of Maddaloni, until its dissolution.

However, the 'Storia delle Due Sicilie' is not the specific work I want to draw attention to in this piece. Previously I excerpted from a pamphlet by de' Sivo entitled *I napolitani al cospetto delle nazioni civili*, specifically the portion where he criticizes the hypocrisy of the non-interventionist stance (<https://carlsbad1819.wordpress.com/2018/04/11/non-interventionism-and-neutrality-as-a-machiavellian-instrument/>) in a period of revolutionary tumult.

Today we will be looking at what is probably his most emotional essay, *L'Italia e il suo dramma politico nel 1861* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=98eG9512ufgC>). It is truly savage, an outpouring of pure contempt, of raw unadulterated Bourbonist rage against the Garibaldist and Piedmontese machine for what to him was the destruction of an entirely separate country, the Two Sicilies. Reading it made me want to buy a plane ticket to Italy so I can go blow up statues of Mazzini, Cavour, Garibaldi, Charles Albert and other monuments to figures of that movement. Disclaimer: I ~~do not condone~~ entirely condone such activity.

"Nowadays the cry of unity is heard everywhere, and it seems at first sight that everyone conspires to add to this supreme end, with which one would hope to put an end to so much civil war for more than half a century, which more or less is seen to be lit by the work of secret conspiracies in the different eras of revolutions," is how he opens up.

De' Sivo underlines the persistence of a faction he calls the absolute unitarians, who want Italy under one scepter for the purpose of "buying at the price of gold the councilors of kings," to break the bond of public and private right, and to unlawfully annex the states of the Italian peninsula to what is effectively in his view a Savoyard rump state.

The result being that, as Metternich would have said so himself, "all of Europe with us today is convinced that Italian unity is a geographical expression, and the task that motivated the great reformers of Piedmont gave no results. In fact, they did not understand, nor would they persuade themselves into it being too arduous a task to impose a new nationality on a people with a pre-existing civil and historical natural right."

De' Sivo identifies the Piedmontese annexation as being born partially out of economic envy and a certain inferiority complex. He notes that at the conclusion of the so-called "Second Italian War of Independence" in 1859, Austria and France had settled with the Peace of Villafranca to create an Italian confederation under the Pope, with Lombardy sans Mantua and Pescheria being ceded away from Austria, and Venetia part of the confederation but still formally part of the Austrian Empire. These terms were ignored immediately, and De' Sivo claims this was because it would have de facto led to a Neapolitan ascendancy:

The men of the revolution who had already been sold to Piedmont could not look with indifference at the Treaty of Villafranca, since with an Italian confederation that Kingdom would have been the lowest, and the Neapolitan the maximum, as it could not be denied that between Rome, Naples, the Grand Duchies, and Venice there was already an anticipated bond of sympathy and kinship: they knew well that among all the Kingdoms of Italy, the Two Sicilies would always have had the primacy of population, of historical greatness, of the glory of sciences and arts, of great commerce, of the fertility of the soil, of the vast sources of industry, and of the vast arsenals; therefore to the supremacy of the always proud Piedmont, it was necessary to squander every more holy principle of law, and to overthrow the foundations of Divine Right to establish a new right that could in one or another day be used to subvert the whole political order of Europe, if the sovereigns did not rush to stop this tremendous whirlwind that threatens all the Thrones and the peace of the peoples. – -, And this act, which in the true sense can be said to be the liberticide of the Nations was consummated – and the greatest work lent it the vaunted patriots doubly distorted, and parricides The infamous betrayal was accomplished, and Naples this Kingdom, which was rightly called the garden of Italy; Florence, Milan, Parma, Piacenza, and other rich and flourishing cities were sold productively to the dominion of the superb Piedmont.

Economic management under Francis II of the Two Sicilies had been satisfactory. Even in the place of mercantile franchises, existing budget surpluses meant shortages of bread did not develop into famine. Massive quantities of wheat had been imported on several occasions, customs and tariffs reduced. The annexation had now disturbed foreign trade, and moreover many public works and manufacturing employees had been fired and replaced with "experts" from Turin. Under the legitimate king, there had been booming works of steel, gold, silver and bronze; silk, thread and cotton; sculpture, painting, calligraphy; pastures; oxen and horses — all of this had since rapidly tanked.

The Piedmontese ministries had made particular attempts to procure enemies, he writes. The bourgeois ministers had irritated the aristocracy with the “ridiculous and antisocial principle” that “we are all the same,” a principle that was proclaimed for others, but not the noble martyrs themselves, and done by people without history or title. The clergy were made out to be retrograde and reactionary, a move that in de' Sivo's estimation had been estimated to produce atheism and to pull Italians away from the subjection of the Supreme Pontiff. Soldiers and militiamen who had capitulated at the Siege of Gaeta were stuffed in the prisons of Castel Capuano, or deported to Ponza, an island in the Tyrrhenian Sea. Commoners' houses were routinely ransacked. “There is no class of people (if you take away a few sold out souls) that does not curse the revolution, Mazzini, and Piedmont, who threw us into an appalling abyss of misery and anarchy.”

The phenomenon of brigandage, so infamous to that region, is described by de' Sivo as a relatively rational response to the heavy-handed occupation of the Minister of Police, Silvio Spaventa. “This gave rise to the establishment of armed gangs, which have been waging war for legitimacy for a year; a war of blood, of destruction, of a brutal war, a fratricide, but a war of right, because it is against an oppressor who comes to put a chain of servitude on us. This band is given the name of brigandage; Why? Because they burnt down some houses? They had the right; as the Piedmontese in their turn burnt not one, not a hundred houses, but entire countries [Naples and Sicily] leaving thousands of families in horror and desolation; they wielded whoever came to them with impunity, not sparing old men, children, priests, and even some Monks.”

Military schools were closed, weapons drained from armories and monasteries dissolved: “What have you done in Naples in recent times? Those military schools as brilliant as those of France and England suppressed, and established in Piedmont: the unmanned shipyards, the ships shipped to Piedmont: the rich armories completely emptied, and the weapons carried in Piedmont. What remained to poor Naples? The assets of the monasteries: and here is another law that suppresses the orders, which will auction off their possessions, and the money will be sent to... Turin! – And the powers of Europe will suffer this last execrable theft that we try to make of our substances, yes ... – ours, because those incomes are partial endowments made to the girls who consecrated themselves to the Lord by their parents; they are endowments that pious souls did for the shine of our Sacred Religion! Where is the right of a foreigner who after having robbed us of everything, extends his hand to the goods of the Church, and perhaps today, or tomorrow will also spread it on the chalices of the Lord, on the gold of the altars?”

The attack on the Papal States was the most devious of all, for “the war that is being done today, is not only to the Pope as King of Rome, is not limited only to the temporal power, it is not against the Papal domination that hurls the poisonous sow of the Sectarians: it is also directly against the principles of Religion, which they would like to be replaced by the vaunted Rationalism.”

The Pontiff cannot exercise his spiritual power without also holding to his temporal dominions: “The Pope needs to be independent and free in his States, so that all the peoples of the earth could freely agree to the Seat of Charity and love, to the seat of charity and forgiveness, of the One whose power has no human origin, but Divine origin – the minds of the sectarians will not weaken the respect, love and obedience towards the Papacy which is the greatest glory of Italy – no – the new philosophy that seeks to disseminate dictates with backing of empires will not deter the Italians from their religious principles.”

De' Sivo, possibly following Maistre, thought the papacy still had a role to balance the scales of European politics, and so every attempt made to decrease or landing its temporal power, would be a positive prejudice to the political and moral interest of the other states — not just of Italy.

Although he does not think highly of Napoleon III (obviously, given his role in brokering the Plombières Agreement with Cavour), he does recognize his guardianship of Rome as practically important, if on shaky ground due to both English opposition and the weakening of the clerical party in domestic French politics.

Now the plan of the revolutionary/48'er sect according to de' Sivo (and mostly right in retrospect, though happening in mixed order) consisted in striking Austria from the Po Valley, fomenting revolt in Hungary, Croatia and Transylvania to diverge Austria from the Danube, France would abandon Rome and run on the Rhine to revive the revolutionary ideal of "natural frontiers," triggering war with Prussia, and Russia being on less-than-friendly terms with Austria over both the Eastern Question and Congress Poland, would refuse to intervene.

In contradiction to Risorgimento mythology, de' Sivo was an Austrophile and recognized that "Austrian politics, far from making itself heavy and hateful to its peoples, has been given a conciliatory system that can produce only fruits of peace and harmony."

Actually he was a tad optimistic. He thought that England would implicitly resist such a plan by sending arms and by stationing its navy in the Adriatic, and in the Ionian to protect Venice, Trieste, and Dalmatia. "England is an eminently calculating power, and has seen well that the strongest party of the European powers is that of peace, of order, of legitimacy: therefore its politics is precisely today more legitimist in the fund, no matter what the outside promises, advices, and keeps continually out of the embarrassment – It was, is, and will always be the enemy of Napoleonic France." He had apparently overlooked their alliance in the Crimean War, the signing of the Cobden-Chevalier trade treaty and had failed to predict the Entente Cordiale. He had also misjudged the strength of the legitimist forces, and the increasing English hostility to papal rule in Romagna with the foundation of the Liberal Party in 1859 after Palmerston's second government.

But, as of then, he summarized the external state of Italy as consisting of England's "pernicious sympathy," Austria's loose hold on Venetia, the impossibility of Rome being the capital of Italy (until it was ultimately besieged in 1870), and French abandonment.

Internally, for the Two Sicilies: "an invisible war of defamation against the Pope, and against the religion of our fathers: anti-Catholic propaganda; demoralization very evident; irreconcilability of laws, customs, systems; the growing misery that Conte Ricciardi himself publicly declared in Parliament, where he compared the current state of the Neapolitan Provinces with the very flourishing state in which it was under the domination of the Bourbons: taxes inconsistent with our way of seeing; workers, clerks, aristocrats, priests, civilians, and servicemen all in disgust."

The claims of Italian nationalism being a unifying force for the Italian people, is very clearly a sham: "This boasted unity, achieved in this way, is a lying word. Piedmont has taken the Alps out of place. The revolutionary shouts "Out with the stranger!," but in enters another stranger in the heart of his lands, settles it, and uses its worth to chase the Italian princes out of their thrones. In this way he demolishes the weak dukes of Modena and Tuscany; chases the peaceful Pope from the Marche and Umbria; He crushes the King of Naples with bombs, and tempers the schismatic and irreligious arms to send the Pope of God out of the seat of Peter. Piedmont shouts "Italy," and makes war with the Italians; because *it does not want to make Italy, but wants to eat Italy.*"

Not to mention Garibaldi's expedition was very diverse and multicultural, so there was the delightful situation of a national revolution being achieved via hordes of foreign mercenaries (not at all atypical): "And while proclaiming Italy for the Italians, and the expulsion of foreigners, it calls in men of all the

earth, chirping the strangest dialects. With Garibaldi came Belgians, Dalmatians, Greeks, Jews, Croats, Hungarians, Poles, Prussians, British, Americans, Swiss, and Turks.”

I should also add that there were Bulgarians in the redshirts, too: Stefan Dunjov and Ivan Hadjidimitrov being the two most notable.

Thus, “The Piedmontese knows he can not win France, England, and Germany; but he does not even think of returning Nice, Savoy, Corsica, Malta, and Venice; but he is content to get Tuscany, Romagna and Sicily, i.e. Italian states; because this can be done with foreign help.”

(Nice actually would end up being returned, and a region that for centuries predominantly spoke an Italic-Occitanian dialect called “Nizzardo” became predominantly French-speaking. The Maddalena archipelago linking Corsica and Sardinia remained Sardinian/Piedmontese, and to this day is still “Italian.”)

“Each being can not change its essence; and a nation will always be what it was. It may progress by becoming great and strong, but it will not base the fruits of different seeds, because God gave everything to man, except the power to disturb the laws of creation. The path of peoples is like a syllogism, consequently where there are consequences that do not stem from the premises one has a sophism. **Italy is a sophistry.**”

De’ Sivo thought that the heterogeneous parts of a disjointed whole which marked “unified” Italy, would end up dissolving into civil war using premises not dissimilar from modern ethnonationalist argumentation, though more providentialist. He draws a parallel to Greece, likening Piedmont to a would-be Macedon. Athens, Sparta, Thebes and Corinth could not be merged, he said, only dominated. The Romans had been wise to *federate*, not unify (and de’ Sivo himself was not against Italian federation per se). Not even Charlemagne could achieve Italian unity, for “Italy was not like England, Spain, and France, because God created it different, long and thin, and broken by rivers and mountains; the people being of different races, of different degrees of indolence, of needs, of customs, and also of language.”

A Tuscan will not intend to hear a Neapolitan. It is not possible for an ideal nationality to destroy real nationalities, and a unification-by-patchwork means each country is its own state with blood, folklore, passions and a desire for independence and own laws.

Unless, of course, the state is crafted to practice “assimilation” into some sort of syncretic civic faith. All the people who say that civic nationalism doesn’t work are wrong. Civic nationalism worked so well that today all of the most vocal civic nationalists are convinced that they’re actually ethnic nationalists. What happened in Naples and Sicily is but an illustration of a process that happened throughout the whole continent to varying degrees.

“Francesco is the Neapolitan king; and more than for the blood and for the forefathers of his fathers, he is king for our sustained national honor, for the fists of Volturnus, and for the flames of Gaeta [referring to battle of Volturnus and siege of Gaeta]. Europe is afflicted on the Neapolitan question: and what is the question? Given that Rome is [still] of the Pope, the Italian unity is broken; here remains a kingdom, which has its king. The Piedmontese go out, and the question is resolute. This is the only one, it is the only solution to this very easy problem: We want our king. For this like wild beasts we are driven out into caves and valleys, and in very harsh exiles; our cities between fire, rape and looting, before the eyes of civilized Europe, fall overturned by the vandalic oppressors. I want our king.”

And with these words de' Sivo concludes his essay, with neither him nor any other Neapolitan seeing his king ever again. Italy would transition into parliamentary trasformismo culminating in the sclerosis and graft of Giolittian liberalism before heading to fascism, then social democracy, and whatever it's supposed to be now.

Death to the Italian state.

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