

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

Radicalism in moderation

December 6, 2017 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

By some odd occurrence, it is accepted in the historiography of the Risorgimento to refer to a motley band of centrist/liberal Italian unificationists as being the “partito moderato” or “moderati” (the latter name now also used by a Piedmontese regionalist party).

Pope Pius VII condemned the Carbonari (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecclesiam_a_Jesu_Christo) in 1821, the same year they staged a rebellion in Piedmont-Sardinia, triggering Victor Emmanuel I's abdication and the ascension of Charles Felix, probably one of the most counterrevolutionary monarchs of the 19th century. He willingly stationed Austrian troops for a couple of years after the revolt, defying demands of self-determination coming from the intelligentsia. Charles Felix had earlier served as Viceroy of Sardinia amidst tumult, his motto for dealing with rebels being “Slaughter, slaughter, for the good of the human race.”

Yet the Carbonari's aims would spread in diluted form all across the peninsula, influencing Charles Felix's successor, Charles Albert of Sardinia. Initially an Austrophile and conservative, having served in Louis XVIII of France's expedition in 1823 to restore Ferdinand VII to the Spanish throne and abort the Trienio Liberal, he would have a change of heart by the late 1840s, seeing himself as an anointed caudillo destined to unify the Italian peninsula under a Savoyard dynasty.

One of his apologists, the Italian diplomat Alberto Blanc (1835-1904), drops a possible hint as to why the shift, in an article (https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/De_la_Monarchie_repr%C3%A9sentative_en_Italie/01), for the *Revue des Deux Mondes* from 1859:

In 1817, however, bored with the idleness of the garrisons, [Cesare Balbo] followed, as embassy attache, his father, sent from the king to Madrid. There, during a stay of two years, he completed his political studies, and when he returned to the army, he was convinced of the excellence of representative government. When Cesare Balbo and Charles Albert met in Genoa, what was the basis of their agreement, which would face, secret or confessed, twenty-eight years of misadventures? We find the meaning in a profession of faith sent in 1820 by Balbo to his friends, who counted on waiting for the opportunity to act, and who had asked him for a statement of principles...

A meeting with a certain philosophe and bureaucrat named Cesare Balbo, who indeed would go on to become the first Prime Minister of Sardinia in 1848 appointed by Charles Albert. It looks like the king may have had his conscience nag him for years about “the excellence of representative government.”

Balbo was generally secular though, unlike another influential philosopher of the time: Vincenzo Gioberti, who wanted a unified Italian state headed by a papal monarchy. His “Neo-Guelphist” vision would gain popularity, so when the Academic Legion toppled Metternich in 1848 and Charles Albert headed for Lombardy to “liberate” the peasants from the so-called “Austrian yoke,” it looked for a while as though Pius IX might have taken up the scepter. Then on May 2, he said “lol no.” General Radetzky smashed the Piedmontese at Custoza, and then again a year later when they vainly tried to recuperate at Novara, and all was over. In the short term anyway.

The “principles” in question of Balbo that Blanc mentions above are revealed to include such things as “reforms can be slow in coming, but they are inevitable,” and “a constitutional organization introduced little by little by the government; it would calm the anxious minds, satisfy those who want stable laws, reconcile the Genoese with the Piedmontese, attract all the Italians around the princes of Savoy.”

A devout Catholic who died in exile with a crucifix in his hands, Charles Albert’s desire for a Savoy-led unification of Italy and the concomitant destruction of Austrian Lombardy-Venetia would ultimately set in motion the Carbonari anticlericalism which would end the 1116-year reign of the Papal States (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capture_of_Rome), and the foundation of a Piedmontese tyranny crueler than anything the Austrians did in their normal administration (barring revolts like in Brescia, where the amazing General von Haynau knew how to let the bodies hit the floor) — as when Francesco Crispi unleashed summary executions against the Fasci Siciliani workingman’s revolts on January 1894, a type of repression that was in stark contrast to the far more legalistic (but still tough) methods of the vilified Charles Felix of Sardinia, scorned as an Austrian collaborator.

Hence Blanc’s self-serving condemnation:

The reign of Charles Felix, begun by the negation of the liberty of the citizens, ends by the negation of the autonomy of the state, and this last representative of an outdated policy completed, in spite of itself, to bring up clearly the national problem. The expiring branch, confined to absolutism, powerless to ally itself with new forces which were imperious like destiny, offered itself, by a feeling of utter helplessness, to the Austrian engrossment.

Sicilians and Neapolitans, it is your *destiny* to get the short end. Maybe it is?

“The insurrection of 1821 was less an uprising than an acclamation to the king. He was begged to declare war on Austria, the object of all hatreds and **cause of all sufferings**,” Blanc writes.

Was it?

And some slimy Burkean pseudo-conservatism to go: “While the general sentiment expressed the wish of an association between the king and the people [Ed’s note: blech], the untimely flag that was raised without understanding what it meant that one had to yield to the other a legitimate supremacy inherited from his predecessors.” It was illegitimate to do this but only because it was merely “untimely.”

But hey, something good came out of it. Charles Albert granted a damn fine constitution in 1848, the Statuto Albertino (<http://users.dickinson.edu/~rhyn/232/Four/Statuto.html>), among its guarantees “the right of peaceful assembly without arms is recognized, in conformity with laws that may regulate this right in the interest of public welfare,” and “all subjects of the Kingdom are equal before the law, regardless of their rank or title.” All the easier for organized Masonry to rock the world in said kingdom’s backyard. And all the merrier for ruthless absolutism, now in league with parliamentary shysters, to level everything below them.

Moderation. Never again.

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