

**An Early Anti-Fascist Organisation: the Women's
International Matteotti Committee**

RICHARD PANKHURST

The assassination, by the Fascists, of the Italian Socialist Deputy, Giacomo Matteotti, on 10 June 1924, had a significant impact, even outside Italy. One of the murder's repercussions was the establishment in Britain, by my mother Sylvia Pankhurst and others, of a typically British voluntary society. This was the Women's International Matteotti Committee (hereafter WIMC), an early Anti-Fascist organisation, whose history, ideals, and activities, have not hitherto been chronicled. In the course of its short existence, from 1932 to 1935, it organised an influential petition, held public meetings, and despatched letters to statesmen, leaders of opinion, and the press, with a view to drawing public attention to what it considered the iniquities of the Italian Fascist Regime. The Committee also engaged in polemics, notably with the British playwright George Bernard Shaw, and attempted to provide medical facilities for detainees at Ponza, one of Mussolini's penal islands. The following article is based largely on the Committee's documents, in the author's possession, which have thus far not been studied.¹

The WIMC was established in London in the summer of 1932, when it was reported that the deceased's widow Velia Matteotti (hereafter Velia) was suffering severe persecution at the hands of the Fascist Government, and that an Italian physician, Dr. Mario Germani, accused of attempting to help her escape from Italy, had been sentenced to ten

years' detention on the island of Ponza. One of the first reports of Velia's deplorable position was embodied in a letter from an unimpeachable source: the Italian Anti-fascist Carlo Rosselli, then an exile in France. Writing to my father, Silvio Corio,² in Italian, on 26 June 1932, he observed:

As a result of the above message, and others arriving at about the same time, news of Velia's condition reached a handful of politically interested people in Britain.

One of them, Sylvia Pankhurst (hereafter Sylvia), was predisposed to take an immediate interest, as she had witnessed the emergence of the Fascists in Italy as early as 1919. She was later to recall, in a letter of 9 January 1936 to William Gilles of the Labour Party's International Department: "I was in Italy in 1919 when Mussolini was in hiding in Bologna, and I was actually present when there was a clash between the Socialists and the Arditi [i.e. Fascist assault squads], through whom he and his agents were then working. The Socialists were absolutely blameless, and I ought not to say the Socialists, because the whole people were involved, a great crowd of ordinary citizens."

Sylvia, who became Hon. Secretary, interested three other women in Velia's case. They were Charlotte Drake, who had previously worked with her in the East of London; Mrs. Patricia French-Barrass, a miner's wife; and Mrs. Helen Allen, who lived in Golders Green, London, and became Hon. Treasurer. (She was later replaced in this post by Mrs French-Barrass).

These four women joined together to found the WIMC. Its members also included three prominent American feminists, Alice Stone Blackwell, Harriett Staunton Blatch, and Rose Scheidemann; the Spanish woman Deputy Victoria Kent; the Dutch poetess Roland Holst; the British writers Dora Russell and Ethell Manning; and the Irish woman Hannah Sheehy Skeffington, whose Socialist husband had been murdered, for his pacifist beliefs, in Easter Week 1916.

The Committee's political ideals and objectives were stated in an International Petition, which was drawn up towards the end of 1932. The text, which was highly emotive, drew public attention to the story of Velia Matteotti and of Mario Germani, and embodied a sweeping condemnation of Mussolini's Fascist regime.

Petition

This Petition, drafted by Sylvia, read as follows:

"We, the undersigned, appeal to the conscience of humanity against the cruel persecution of the widowed Velia Matteotti during the 8 years since her husband's murder, a persecution which keeps her and her children under perpetual police surveillance; cuts them off from all intercourse with their kind by punishing with imprisonment or internment all those who dare to visit them; forbids her children to bear their father's name in school or to visit his grave; and imposes on the family a calculated system of intimidations and inhibitions which, as Mrs. Matteotti herself rightly declared, has reduced them to the condition of prisoners, and which has punished by 10 years' imprisonment Dr. Germani who hoped to help them leave Italy. This persecution is directed

against a blameless woman, whose only offence is that she is the widow of one who was murdered by the Fascists, because, from his seat in the Italian Parliament, he bravely exposed the iniquities of the Fascist regime.

“We are deeply sensible that the persecution of the Matteotti family is but the crowning outrage of a Dictatorship excelling in terrorism and oppression that which prompted the historic protest of Gladstone against the Government of Naples. This Dictatorship has destroyed all the forms of democratic Government. It has suppressed all newspapers and organisations which are not of its own following. It punishes by sentences of up to 20 years' imprisonment those who belonged to the dissolved organisations before they were declared illegal and has interned on the penal islands, incarcerated in the dungeons, or driven into exile, thousands of the most talented and public spirited citizens of Italy.

“The recent amnesty has set free some 35,000 ordinary criminals, but has released only 639 political prisoners, and the vast majority are still incarcerated. Under Fascism, liberated political prisoners, if not immediately re-arrested, pass to a persecution similar to that suffered by the Matteotti family. Unable to work, isolated from their friends, they are menaced by death from starvation.

“Fascism has expelled women Professors from the Universities and Lyceums of Italy. It compels all University Professors to take an oath of allegiance to the Fascist State; and imposes its official text-books and propaganda even upon the children in the elementary schools.

“We register our protest against this appalling and retrograde regime. To remain silent in the face of this outrage is to share responsibility for the deed. We desire to make known the persecution of a defenceless woman and her children. We urge all who cherish ideals of liberty and justice to support our demand that this persecution shall cease, that Mrs. Matteotti and her family shall enjoy the liberties which rightly belong to all citizens and shall be free to reside either in Italy or abroad as they may desire”.³

A French version was produced by Adrienne Marchand, a musician and member of the French Liegue des Droits de l’Homme, who been expelled from Italy, in 1928, for befriending Velia Matteotti.

The Petition, which was widely circulated in Feminist, Left-wing, and Pacifist circles, was signed by a number of well-known British feminists, several of whom had worked with Sylvia in the East End of London,⁴ and various other personalities of the country, mainly Socialists. The list thus included the philosopher Bertrand Russell; the political scientist Professor Harold Laski, and his wife Frida; the writer on industrial relations Roger Baldwin; the Labour politicians George Lansbury, Sommerville Hastings, Ellen Wilkinson and Jennie Lee; the feminists Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, Charlotte Despard, Dora Montefiore, Evelyn Sharp, and Monica Whately; the pacifist Miles Malleon; the author Naomi Mitchison; the playwright Laurence Housman, and the journalist Henry W. Nevinson.

Press Statement

The Committee's position was further formulated in a Press Statement, also written by Sylvia, which was sent to the Manchester Guardian, the Yorkshire Post, and numerous London newspapers, and sympathetic publications abroad. This statement recalled the assassination of Matteotti, and drew attention to the predicament of his widow. The document also outlined the IWMC's purpose and objectives as follows:

"It is widely known that Matteotti, the Parliamentary Secretary of the Italian Socialist Party, was murdered on the direct instigation of the Fascist Government... Matteotti came to this country and arranged for the publication of a book⁵ which he had prepared giving detailed information on the huge series of murders and outrages by which Mussolini's administration had secured dictatorial power in Italy. Returning to Rome, Matteotti tabled a parliamentary interpolation dealing with the financial corruption of the Fascist regime, with its methods of violence and with the suppression of the free right of voting, which it had perpetrated in the then recent Parliamentary elections. He delivered a powerful attack on Fascism in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, and a few days later, was kidnapped and murdered, his body being mutilated and hidden. Responsibility for this murder was directly traced to the Fascist Government.

"Few people know that since that day, Matteotti's widow has lived under a heavy and continuous persecution. The fascist police have given her a warning, which is in effect a threat, not to visit her husband's grave if she cares for the safety of her children. Her dwelling is under the observation of fifty police agents controlled by an officer of the Fascist Militia. Few dare to visit her. Whoever has the temerity to do so is

ordered by the police on duty outside her residence to state his or her name and address, occupation, reason for visiting the unfortunate widow, etc. Even persons visiting people in other flats in the same building are shadowed lest they should slip surreptitiously into Mrs. Matteotti flat. At night a searchlight plays on her house that all who come and go may be observed.

“The revenue from the small property left by her husband only in part reaches her on account of Fascist interference. Thus she is in financial straits. F.N. Nitti, nephew of an ex-Prime Minister of Italy, a Liberal in politics, called once on Signora Matteotti to present her with a wreath of flowers for her husband’s grave. For this sole ‘offence’ he was sentenced to five years on the terrible penal islands, as he has recorded in his book ‘Escape’...⁶

“The very name Matteotti is not permitted in Italy. The children of the murdered Deputy are not allowed to bear it. They have been denied access to school because their mother refused to send them under another name. Recently, to get some sort of education for her eldest son, she reluctantly agreed to let him be registered at a secondary school under her maiden name. This unfortunate lad is compelled to sing Fascist hymns, to salute, in so-called Roman fashion, the portrait of Mussolini, the man who is charged with direct responsibility for the murder of this young Matteotti's father; the man who to this day dictates the persecution of this young Matteotti's mother!

“Early last year Dr. Mario Germani, a friend of the murdered Deputy, well known for his medical studies in Paris, Berlin and Vienna, returned to Italy to arrange for Signora Matteotti to leave Italy with her

children. He was arrested, kept in prison for a year, and on the charge of attempting to get the widow secretly across the frontier, sentenced to ten years' penal servitude! Even according to the Fascist Code the sentence was excessive, for the Code imposes a sentence of five years only on persons actually caught in the act of escaping from Italy without permission - an offence rather common in these days! Dr. Germani was punished by a sentence of double duration as an accomplice to an act never committed, for Signora Matteotti had not moved from her dwelling in Rome.

“The persecution of the Matteotti family, in short, has come to a pass where international action becomes a claimant need. The ‘Women's International Matteotti Committee’ has, therefore, been formed for the direct object to bring this odious persecution to an end.”

The Press Statement concluded by stating the WIMC's objectives as follows:

“Firstly, we have to make the facts of the persecution known in all countries, and already, the facts have been widely published in the Press of America, Spain, Holland, France, Germany, and other countries....

“Secondly, we have to approach all the Foreign Offices of Europe appealing to them to make representations to the Italian Government that this atrocity is an international disgrace.

“Thirdly, we have to negotiate directly with the Italian Government with a view to securing that should Madame Matteotti desire to remain in Italy, she shall do so in peace and freedom, or if she desires

to leave the country, she and her children shall have their passports and leave as soon as they chose in safety. In any case her property shall be fully safe-guarded for her use. In order to deal effectively with the Italian Government, it is our purpose to organise an international delegation of women to go to Italy to investigate all the facts at first hand and deal directly with the Italian Government on Mrs. Matteotti's behalf.

“All who desire to aid this work are requested to correspond either with me [i.e. Sylvia] or with the Hon. Treasurer, Mrs. Helen Allen, 56, Corringham Road, Golders Green, London, N.W.11”.

The Committee also issued a broadsheet, entitled Humanity, which sold for a penny. Published in “October 1932”, it contained a lengthy exposition of “The Matteotti Case”, and “Why the Women’s International Matteotti Committee Has Come Into Being”. The front page likewise carried a poignant statement by Matteotti, uttered on the day of his death. It declared: “You can kill me, but you cannot kill the thought within me”

The WIMC later approached British officialdom. A letter was despatched to the Foreign Office, on 18 October, requesting it to receive a delegation of women, with a view to making representations about Velia to the Italian Government. This request was rejected, the Foreign Secretary’s Private Secretary replying, “Sir John Simon has consulted with the Prime Minister on this subject and he desires me to say that the circumstances are such that it is unfortunately not possible to accede to your requests”. A letter to the British Embassy in Rome, begging it to investigate the question of Velia Matteotti and Dr. Germani also received a negative response.⁷

Letters were also sent to statesmen in various parts of the world, among them the American President Franklin D. Roosevelt, to whom Sylvia wrote:

“On behalf of the Women's International Matteotti Committee I approach you as President of one of the Great Powers to bring to your notice the sad and iniquitous persecution of the widow and children of Giacomo Matteotti who was murdered at the instigation of the Fascist Government of Italy... I enclose a brief statement of facts...

“The entire Press of Italy, save that of Fascism itself, is now published abroad owing to the appalling censorship of opinion now existing in Italy. The exiled Press of Italy has again and again made protest and appeal against the persecution of this blameless woman and her children.

“Representations are needed from more powerful quarters. The need for these representations transcends that which animated the historic protest of Gladstone against the cruelties of the Bourbon Government of Naples.

“To be silent in face of this crime is to condone it and to share its guilt. I appeal to you to take action without delay”.

Support in Britain

The WIMC created some excitement in British Left-wing circles, as can be seen from the letters it received. Frida Laski, writing on her

own behalf, and that of her Professor husband, wrote to Sylvia, personally, on 15 July 1932:

“Of course I will do all I can help, well realising the plight of the antis in Italy today. My husband will look out for an opportunity to give publicity as he always does so that we in this country should not be allowed to forget our friends in Italy.

“As you know most of our time is devoted to the Indian cause... English people are inclined to be self-sufficient, and it is hard to get them worked up about people outside their little island. I hope there is more sympathy for Italy than we find for India. If not you must be in the last clutches of despair”.

Bertrand Russell wrote, on 2 December 1932:

“I have signed the appeal on behalf of Matteotti’s widow. I cannot at the moment afford to send money, but later if you find great difficulty in raising funds, perhaps you will let me know”.

The feminist Charlotte Despard, founder a decade earlier of the Women’s Freedom League, wrote, from Ireland, on 7 February 1933:

“I read with the greatest indignation your statement on the cruelties inflicted by a Monster of Terror on an innocent family. I shall take care to make it known here...

“I should like to express to you how much I admire your courage and tenacity as acting as secretary...”

Continental Europe

The WIMC also gained support from several societies on the continent of Europe. These included the Liegue des Droits de l'Homme, several of whose committee members signed the petition, and the Liegue Internationale des Femmes pour la Paix et la Liberté, both in Paris. The London-based Italian branch of the former organisation, and the Polish branch of the latter, were particularly supportive.

In Madrid, Spain, a Spanish branch of the Committee, the Asociaciòn de Nujeres Españols "Velia Matteotti", was established by a Spanish woman Teresa Nevot, who became its secretary. The Spanish Government was approached to ascertain whether the Committee's Anti-Fascist stance would endanger Spanish relations with Italy. The Government raised no objection.

Italian Anti-Fascist Reactions

The Committee's objectives were welcomed by several leading Italian Anti-fascist exiles, who were already acquainted with Velia's plight. They included Carlo Rosselli and Francesco F. Nitti, both of whom had been imprisoned on the penal island of Lipari, but had earlier escaped to France; Professor Gaetano Salvemini, who had also been imprisoned in Italy, before obtaining refuge in the United States; and Max Salvadori, an ex-detainee on the island of Ponza, who by had by then reached England.⁸

Carlo Rosselli was the most dedicated to Velia's cause.⁹ An Italian patriot, whose family had supported of Mazzini during the Italian unity struggle, he had engineered the escape from Italy of the veteran Socialist leader Filippo Turati, for which act was sentenced to ten months imprisonment. Rosselli subsequently founded Italy's principal non-Communist Anti-Fascist organisation: Giustizia e Libertà, i.e. Justice and Liberty. Having initially alerted London friends to Velia's case, he left it thereafter largely to his wife Marion, an English woman, née Cave, who had herself earlier been imprisoned by the Fascists.¹⁰ A committed supporter of the Anti-Fascist cause, she wrote to Sylvia, 3 August 1932:

"I am extremely interested in your propaganda campaign... I know, as no doubt you do, that Signora Matteotti is extremely desirous to leave Italy. But her situation is complicated by serious financial difficulties, which might make it impossible for her to profit by the results of your campaign, should it be successful..."

Despite this concern, Marion Rosselli gave the WIMC her full support, and, speaking from personal experience as a sometime prisoner of the Italian Fascist state, continued:

"Returning to the subject of your campaign, I think you are certainly right as to the efficacy of an agitation in England... My own experience is, I think, conclusive. It was only the campaign in the English press on my behalf which brought about my release when I was arrested after my husband's escape from Lipari, & only the continuation of the campaign which obtained a passport... an unheard of thing for the wife of an exile..."

"I shall be very glad to be on your committee, & to be of any use I can".

Francesco Nitti, in Paris, was no less enthusiastic. Writing on 22 September 1932, he described the serious condition in which Velia found herself, and offered to undertake a lecture tour to the US on her behalf. He wrote:

"I have had the privilege and honour of knowing personally Mrs. Matteotti shortly after the barbaric murder of her Husband, and I was for a long time an assiduous frequenter of that house of sorrow, until the day when the Fashist [sic] police, depriving me of my liberty, prevented me.

"I remember well the very sad and offensive conditions in which Signora Matteotti and her little children were living under the insidious and oppressive surveillance of brutal police-agents. The conditions of this Family to-day are even worse and therefore the work of your Committee can be defined as an action of the highest good and the greatest humanity.

"I believe that my personal testimony in a series of lectures in America would be of concrete help to this splendid cause. My book 'Escape', which has had a certain success, has made my name known to Americans and to the readers of several other countries (Germany, Spain, France and Sweden) having been translated in five languages".

Nitti reverted to the question of Mrs. Matteotti, and of the Fascist Government's treatment of its political opponents, in two further letters, written to Sylvia in the following month. In the first, of 9 October, he asked her advice about his plan to travel to England, for which country he

had thus far not been able to obtain a visa, and alluded more widely to the problems then confronting Italian refugees. "In these days", he wrote, "I am feeling once more how furious is the Fascist government against its opponents. By not delivering passports to the political emigrants Mussolini realizes to make them serious difficulties. He is doing all his possible to prevent them of a free circulation in different countries".

Turning to the WIMC's work, but addressing Sylvia personally, he expressed his "admiration of all the struggles you started & continued for so many years & came out victorious... I am also sure that the struggle you started for the good & noble woman & the little orphans Matteotti will be victorious & I really will be happy if I'll be able to give my humble contribution to it".

Discussing the Fascist Government's probable reaction to the agitation then afoot, he wrote, in a further letter of 30 October, "I am sure that the answer of the fascist government will be the following: 'It is absolutely false that Mrs. Matteotti and her children have their liberty limited and that they are persecuted. Those are the news invented and diffused by fuorusciti [i.e. Italian exiles abroad], enemies of the actual regime.'

"I believe that only an energetic and well organised campaign in the principal countries of the World can give the results which we desire to reach to. The fascist government is fearing mostly, or even only, of what is told abroad about its politics. Mussolini is personally immensely annoyed by every campaign which is done against him or his regime in some foreign countries. I believe that when several and frequent meetings will be organised in the principal foreign cities and when the

International press will reproduce echoes of those meetings the fascist government will then understand that the best thing would be to give up”.

Gaetano Salvemini, in America, also expressed warm support for the WIMC, and in particular for Sylvia's efforts to rally public opinion against Mussolini. Writing from Yale University, on 7 August 1932, he observed: “It is a fine work you are doing to help Mrs. Matteotti”. On 31 October, he added, “If there were all over the world no more than ten people like you, Fascist propaganda would be hopeless. You know how much should we like the Matteotti Committee to widen its work”.

Support was also received from Tito Torriano, the President of an Italian emigré *Unione Democratica Italiana*. He wrote, on 27 August 1932, that Velia and her family should be smuggled out of Italy, either by in a fast car, or by aeroplane. He wrote again, on 10 December:

“It goes without saying that I adhere most heartily to your initiative. The Matteotti Crime has been one of the most shocking facts of modern politics and it is and always will be a shame to the tyrant who is now oppressing Italy...

“When I see in too many papers abroad: eulogious comment and even praise for Mussolini's work, I feel ashamed for Human Nature itself, that it can fall so low, as deliberately [to] put aside horrible crimes, in order to exalt, for money, dreadful criminals.

“I consider that Mussolini is nothing else than a criminal and head of criminals”.

Another emigré, Luigi Strurzo, wrote to the WIMC, on 1 December 1932, offering his "earnest wishes" for the "successful achievement" of its aim.

Dr. Germani, and the Detainees of Ponza

The question of Dr. Germani, detained on Ponza for having befriended Signora Matteotti, and allegedly discussing the possibility of her escape, came to the fore in the Spring of 1933. This happened fortuitously on account the political activities of another, today far better known Italian Anti-Fascist, Max Salvadori. After three years of clandestine activity for Giustizia e Libertà he had been arrested, in July 1932, and sentenced, in September, to five years' confinement (subsequently reduced to one). During his detention, he was confined to Ponza, where his mother Giacinta Salvadori succeeded in visiting him.

Giacinta Salvadori, though living under conditions of censorship in Fascist Italy, was aware of the WIMC I - but thought it was called the "Germani Society". On returning from Ponza, she wrote a moving letter to Sylvia. Dated "March 1933", in declared:

"I have just paid a visit to Ponza where my boy, Max Salvadori, has been deported. There I met Dr. Germani, who, having been freed from the prison to which he had been sentenced for ten years in consequence of having tried to help Signora Matteotti, is now a deportee on that island.

"He told me that in Ponza, a village of about 6,000 inhabitants, plus 300 deportees and 400 police, there is a great dearth of all medical

appliances and especially surgical instruments. The best doctor, a blackshirt militia officer of no great capacity, sends bad cases to Naples by the boat. The crossing, often rough, in the small steamer takes seven hours, during which the patient in need of surgical aid has leisure to die. In these last weeks a village child died of diphtheria, and a woman of appendicitis, for want of the necessary operation.

“I have heard that there is a Germani Society, and I am certain that nothing would give greater pleasure to Dr. Germani, or be useful to the sick of Ponza, political, native, and police, than a case of surgical instruments, as he is often called in preference to the local doctor. I hope that kind friends abroad may collect money for the purpose, and send it direct to: Dr. Germani, Confinato Politico all'Isola di Ponza, Italy.

“I feel certain that this act of charity towards those who suffer that their country may again be free, will appeal to all those who bear the flame of liberty in their hearts.

“Yours sincerely,

“GIACINTHA SALVADORI

“P.S. Please do not answer or make mention of my name”.

The WIMC responded to this remarkable letter, by writing to the editor of the Lancet and several other British medical publications, and organisations, as well as to the Manchester Guardian, appealing for support to purchase the surgical equipment Dr. Germani needed. The London-based Socialist Medical Association, and several private

individuals, were persuaded to co-operate, but asked precisely what equipment Dr. Germani wanted. Sylvia, taking advantage of the fact that the Fascist regime in its treatment of political detainees was still not fully totalitarian, accordingly wrote to the surgeon, care of the British Embassy in Rome, on 18 October 1932, as follows:

“Dear Dr. Germani,

“It has been conveyed to me that you are willing to place your professional services at the disposal of the sufferers interned on the island of Ponza, but that you are lacking the surgical and medical equipment... necessary for your work.

“A London Medical Association has been good enough to offer the necessary equipment if you will be kind enough to notify us of your requirements. The Doctors... inform me that the instruments which may be preferred by one surgeon may be considered quite useless by another, and that each one makes his own list according to his preference.

“Therefore, they desire that you should give a list of all the equipment you need...”

Dr. Germani replied, on 24 October. He wrote in Italian, but appended an English translation, which declared:

“I am deeply grateful for your letter dated 18th inst, received today, and for the generous offer therein.

“I accept it, profoundly moved by such act of Christian charity which is above petty human prejudices; I accept it, trusting to be worthy of the confidence reposed in me.

“I am in need of a small cabinet and instruments necessary for a small operating room for urgent aseptic operations; all reduced to the bare necessary, on the style of a small military field operating room...

“Although the things could be sent personally to me it will be my strict duty to see that the humanitarian aims which have prompted this offer should be fulfilled”.

Max Salvadori, whose mother had initiated the question of the surgical instruments, had meanwhile been transferred from detention to house arrest. He then, escaped, secretly crossed the frontier into Switzerland, and fled to freedom in England. Almost immediately after his arrival, he wrote to Sylvia, on 1 November 1933, asking how the project was faring:

“From Prof Povey,¹¹ whom I saw yesterday in Cambridge, I knew that you had put a letter to the Manchester Guardian about dr Germani and his difficulties which he must face in order to be able to exercise his profession.

“I am myself a friend of dr Germani and I have been with him during five months on the island of Ponza. It was by my interest that a letter¹² had been sent abroad about the sanitary conditions of the deportees on the island of Ponza. In July 1933 I was set free and have been able to come abroad.

"I have a few days ago a card from Germani and from the letter of a friend who left Ponza a fortnight ago I learn that no medical instruments had until then reached the island.

"Would you be so kind as to let me know what could be possible to do to help dr Germani and allow him to exercise his medical profession in favour of the deportees.

"If my name is completely new to you, you can ask about me to the Editor of the 'Manchester Guardian', ditto to my friend prof Rosselli [who] wrote a letter in which he explained my case and my little experiences in the Italian prisons".

In the months which followed, Salvadori, the WIMC and Dr. Germani corresponded about the surgical equipment required. On 5 January 1934 the surgeon informed Corio that, if he received the equipment he needed, he would "naturally" provide surgical assistance to all detainees free of charge "senza distinzione di partito". He felt that such a declaration, also on Sylvia's part, would be important "per dimostrare ai comunisti che non vogliane mai fare questioni di partito ora chi tratta di lottare tutti insieme contra il Fascismo".

Shortly after this, on 17 January 1934, Salvadori reported to Mrs. Patricia French-Barrass that conditions on the penal island had been tightened. "Since the middle of December deportees in Ponza", he wrote, "are not allowed to receive any correspondence from people who are not very near relations". He therefore advised that "Before sending the

instruments it would be better to ask the direction of the 'confine' in Ponza if they allow the instruments to be given to Germani".

In response to this idea Sylvia wrote to the "Commandante di Ponza", first in English, and then in Italian, but received no reply.

This occasioned the Committee considerable unease, and uncertainty as to what action to follow. Two approaches, as Corio explained to Salvemini, on 2 February 1934, were under consideration: "To send [the articles], which risks loss, but with the opportunity of making a public protest if the goods are not delivered; or to draw back, notifying Germani of the impossibility of proceeding". "Corio, for his part, disliked the second alternative, but asked Salvemini his opinion.

Salvadori meanwhile saw another difficulty. In a message of 11 April 1934 he gave Sylvia the disturbing news that Dr Germani's permission to practice the medical profession had been "withdrawn".¹³ In a subsequent letter, of 16 April he emphasised that Germani, even if allowed to receive the surgical instruments, might not be permitted to use them. He declared that there was in fact an "equivaco" for, as he put it:

"The fact of sending medical instruments has nothing to do with the authorisation of exercising the medical profession. Since the month of December last, deportees are not allowed to receive or send any post to people who are not their very near relatives. On the other hand no doctor can in Italy exercise the medical profession if he is not inscribed in the panel. Germani's name was taken out from the panel when he was sentenced by the Special Tribunal. When he arrived in Ponza, he asked to be allowed to exercise his profession among the deportees and the

inhabitants of the island; such authorization was firstly granted to him, then, a few months ago... such authorization was withdrawn, probably because the local doctors and the Militia doctor were afraid of his concurrence [sic].

“I think that the best thing to do is to send all the same the medical instruments, as a sign of solidarity, eventually they will come back and that would give reason to a strong campaign against the Fascist regime...

“Yours sincerely,

“MAX SALVADORI

“PS. The above quoted information I received by letter and by a friend of mine who left Ponza less than two months ago”.

Sylvia, following Salvadori's earlier suggestion that the Italian authorities should be approached, had meanwhile written to the Italian Embassy in London, requesting an assurance that Dr. Germani would be allowed to receive the surgical instruments. To this, she received only an evasive reply, sent on 18 April 1934. Having by then received Salvadori's letter about the “equivocal” situation facing Dr. Germani, she wrote back to the Italian Embassy, with some passion, on the following day, saying:

“Dear Sir,

"I am in receipt of your letter of 18th instant for which I thank you. The information conveyed in the first paragraph is, however, not that which I seek. It is known to everybody that parcels may be sent to Italy through the ordinary postal channels.

"What I desire to know is whether Dr. Germani, who is a political internee on the Island of Ponza, may receive, without hindrance, a parcel containing surgical instruments which have been subscribed for by a group of eminent British medical men. As I informed you previously, these instruments have been presented to him that he may use them for the service of sick people on Ponza, and I am entrusted with the duty of ensuring that he will receive them. I do not desire to enter into the question raised in the second paragraph of your letter, as to whether or not the medical service on the Island of Ponza is, as you say, 'perfectly adequate to the needs of the inhabitants'. I only wish to know whether there is any obstacle to prevent Dr. Germani from giving the benefit of his skill to those who may desire it, without fee. There can be no question that two doctors are often better than one the world over, but of that matter it is not necessary for me to judge.

"May I ask you to reply clearly on the two points, as to whether there is anything to prevent Dr. Germani receiving the instruments, and whether, on receipt of them, he will be able to use them..."

To this the Embassy's First Secretary briefly replied, on 1 May: "I beg to confirm that there is nothing to prevent the sending of parcels to anyone in Italy through the usual postal channels".

The question whether Germani would in fact be allowed to use the instruments sent was left unanswered.

Salvadori's warning that detainees could receive post only from close relatives, and the Italian Embassy's assurance that parcels could be sent to "anyone... through the usual postal channels", caused the WIMC to change its policy. It was decided to despatch the instruments, not to Dr. Germani directly, but to his wife, Signora Elsa Germani, who lived in Trieste. Sylvia accordingly wrote to her, saying:

"As you probably know, Dr. Germani desired surgical instruments in order that he might care for his fellow political internees. After some effort, I was able to get from Doctors and other sympathisers surgical instruments, a very complete set, worth more than £40, and I was about to send them off when an Italian friend here reported that he had heard from Ponza that the parcel would not be permitted to reach Dr. Germani. I therefore again wrote to Dr. Germani, asking him to get permission to receive the parcel, and also to the authorities in Ponza. I obtained from the latter only evasive replies, and some communications from Dr. Germani that showed me he was unable to write more. I wrote also to the Italian Embassy in London, and received evasive replies.

"I now suggest that you should write to Ponza and see if you have the means to send to Dr. Germani the surgical instruments, and ask permission to do so from yourself. If you get permission, I will send the instruments to you so that you can forward them. In the meantime, I am writing to the Embassy, stating that English doctors will be offended if their gift is not received as it should be, and I will wait to see what developments arise here.

"If you have special information which will clear up the matter, I shall be glad to have it. I am most anxious that Dr. Germani should have the instruments, but it is useless to send them unless we know that he is going to be allowed to have them".

Signora Germani duly replied, in English, on 19 May, saying:

" Thank you very much for your kind letter, with the enclosed list of instruments. I am very touched by your so generous kindness and I do not know how to express to you my and my husband's deep gratitude. As soon as the instruments arrive I will inform you directly. You are so kind to ask me about our future projects. My husband must remain still three years and 9 months in Ponza. When the detention expires I really do not know what he will do. All is so difficult for us. The struggle for life is now very hard for everyone and is doubled for us. I can not tell you about the enormous difficulties in our way. I have proved them - and my husband more than I - in the last years, each day, each hour. I am working here, teaching German and philosophy, but I do not know how long it will be possible. My little boy (7 years old) is with his father on the island, to keep him company. Also our life is not very easy, we try to make the best of things...

"Again thanking you very, very, much for your noble work and for your kind help, and with kindest regards I remain,

"Yours Sincerely,

"ELSA GERMANI"

The instruments, despatched by the transport firm of Fratelli Gondrand finally arrived in Trieste two weeks later, whereupon Elsa Germani wrote, on 6 June, saying, enthusiastically:

“I am glad to tell you that the box of instruments arrived to-day quite safely. I was delighted to see such a beautiful and complete collection of instruments and I think how enchanted my husband will be to receive them, after being such a long time without the means of carrying on his medical work in which he takes such a profound interest. It will now be such a great satisfaction for him to be able to help many suffering people on the island. I can not sufficiently express my deep gratitude to you and the kind doctors who have done such a noble work of humanity”.

Signora Germani duly despatched the instruments to her husband.

Germani was at first allowed to use this equipment, but permission, as Max Salvadori had anticipated, was almost immediately afterwards withdrawn. Informing Mrs. French-Barrass, on 14 April, Sylvia wrote: “I am writing to the Embassy about it, and until this information is confirmed, I am not making it public in case it should only make matters worse”.

The report, however, proved only too true. This caused Sylvia later to write to Mrs. French-Barrass, on 21 October 1935, that the question “should have been made the subject of great propaganda, but the trouble is that I have not been able to get the medical profession to take it up as it should. The Socialist Medical Association ought to have made a strong

protest, and had the doctors done that, the loss of the instruments would have been recompensed by the propaganda”.

On that note the Committee's involvement in the island of Ponza came to a close.¹⁴

Hitler's Rise to Power

The founding of the WIMC, in the summer of 1932, had meanwhile been followed, only half a year later, by Hitler's rise to power, in the early spring of 1933. The Committee, founded to oppose Italian Fascism, had thereafter to take account of the existence of a similar regime in Germany. This posed a major problem for the Committee in that people in both Britain and France tended to be much more interested in Germany than in Italy. Many Western Socialists, and Liberals therefore opposed Hitler's dictatorship but were largely oblivious of that of Mussolini. The Committee, which opposed both dictatorships equally, felt its duty lay in redressing the balance of public opinion, by emphasising that Fascism had begun in Italy, that the Italians had suffered from oppression for over a decade, and that the regime under which they lived should be opposed no less strenuously than the recently established one in Germany.

Carlo Rosselli's Visit to London

The WIMC, while pursuing the question of Dr. Germani's surgical instruments, had by no means abandoned its more general Anti-Fascist propaganda. To this end it arranged for Carlo Rosselli, who came to England to speak to the Royal Institute of International Affairs, also to

address a large public meeting at the Caxton Hall, Westminster, on the evening of 22 March 1933. The character of his speech can be judged from a letter he wrote to Sylvia, on 5 March, in which he explained:

“I shall especially be concerned with the Fascist foreign policy and the Italian internal situation... I shall speak very informally...

“In any case we are anxious to see you and to thank you for all you are doing for our cause”.

Political Agitation: an International Day of Protest

The WIM also decided, in the summer of 1933, to promote an International Day of Protest, in support of the Victims of Italian Fascism. This event was to be held on 29 October, the eleventh anniversary of Mussolini's “March on Rome”.¹⁵

The Committee's plans for a Protest Day, and its objective of placing emphasis on Italian, as opposed to German, Fascism, can be seen in a private letter of 2 August 1933, which Sylvia wrote to Alberto Tarchiani, the former editor of the Corriere della Sera, and an editor of Carlo Rosselli's refugee newspaper Giustizia et Libertà, in Paris. She wrote:

“My Committee proposes to send out an appeal through the Italian Anti-Fascist Press and the Socialist Press of England, for a day some time next month, to be set aside as a day of Protest in favour of the Victims of Italian Fascism.

“The idea is that such protest should take place, as far as possible, on the same day everywhere; that money collected should be sent to Committees of the various political parties, thus ensuring unity in freedom. Those who desire could send to the Matteotti Fund at the Labour party; the Anarchists to Anarchist centres, and so on. Only isolated individuals, or unattached, are asked to send to our Hon. Financial Sec, for the Political Victims to be distributed at the Committee discretion.

“We are looking not so much at the money question, but at the moral effect of the Protest.

“I have written to Campolonghi to get the aid of the LIDU [i.e. the London-based Italian emigré Liga Internazionale della Diritti del’Uomo, L.I.D.U., or Italian branch of the International League of the Rights of Man]; to Giuseppe Emanuele Modigliani, as a friend and a member of the E.C. of the International [i.e. the Socialist International].

“We need the assistance too of G.L. [i.e. Giustizia et Libertà] and the assistance of persons or organisations able to get the news of this event known in Italy. This is of some importance. If this committee had some money we could be printing thin Manifestini to be sent through the post. My friend Corio used to send a good number of Becco Giallo to Commercial addresses in Italy, taken at random from the Italian Directory in envelopes bearing a business name... Would it be possible to get in touch with somebody willing to do the same for this appeal to infuse courage into our friends in Italy?

"The second reason which has moved our Committee to prepare such demonstration, which will succeed if friends assist us, is that here in England for the majority of people, and even for Working Class organisations, Fascism only connotes the deeds of Hitler; it even appears that Fascism no longer exists in Italy. *Le vittime del Fascismo Italiano sono dimenticate...*

"The circulars to the Press Agencies are ready; it only remains to fill in the day for the day of Protest which will be decided at a meeting to be held a few days hence: it is suggested that it should be the 29 of October..."

The objectives of the Protest Day, and the Committee's policy in general, were outlined in a subsequent letter of 5 September from Sylvia to Ani Anzani, the chairman of the London-based *Liga Internazionale della Diritti del' Uomo*.¹⁶ She wrote:

"We are sending out to all the Anti-fascist Press and to the Socialist Press an appeal for an International day of Protest in favour of the Victims of Italian fascism. This appeal has been prepared by some English friends and we hope it shall meet with the full approval of our Italian friends. The reason for sending out this appeal is this: Since the advent to power of Hitler the conditions of the Italian workers have passed very much out of sight and memory. And yet the victims of Italian Fascism have suffered for now over ten years and the day of liberation is not quite in sight yet.

"Our Committee", she continued, "has the advantage over other organisations in that it appears purely humanitarian and, if that is

possible, above party; on the other hand it has the disadvantage that it is a very lone organisation with its members... scattered all over the world. It is difficult to obtain immediate financial support from them, although we hope to receive it in due course. Again, many of our members suffer from the common error of the present hour, that is that Fascism is chiefly in Germany. The boycott called against German goods was not called against Italian goods, and yet the situation [in the two countries] was almost the same. I personally see in the anti-Germanism that characterises the wave of anti-fascism in England a danger for peace, as it revives the hatred of Germany, fostered during the war.¹⁷

“For example our Treasurer has left us, as she says that to combat Fascism in Germany is more urgent than to do something in favour of the sufferers in Italy. In this work of protest in favour of the Victims, which ought to resolve itself in a protest against fascism pure and simple, we should like to unite all persons of anti-fascist views, forgetting for a moment doctrinal differences. Suffering, the prison and the deportation does not distinguish between party. We therefore ask that all should unite in this protest, forgetting differences, but money collected in common effort should be sent to those funds that most appeal to the local organisers... We hope that both LIDU and G. e L. [Giustizia e Libertà] will join us.

“Even here in London there are divisions which, I personally quite understand, though I should not push them to such an extreme as many do. Can you get them to drop them were it only for this occasion? It would be well. This work should be undertaken by an Italian who knows the ins and outs of such divisions, in many cases influenced also by personal feelings.

"In due course you will receive the circulars we are sending out and the date of the demonstration which is being fixed having in consideration other movements. Meanwhile we ask your assistance and that of other members of the LIDU, and any unattached persons you may know.

"The assistance we ask from you we ask should be given in species, in order to distinguish it from assistance given in money which will be used if sent, for we do not specifically ask that it should be sent to us".

She therefore appealed for paper, envelopes, and stamps, and added: "Needlesstosay all labour in conjunction with this effort is voluntary".

Publicity for Committee's Day of Protest appeared in a number of British newspapers, among them the Manchester Guardian, which published the following news item, on 22 September:

"VICTIMS OF ITALIAN FASCISM

"An International Protest Day

"In a statement issued by Miss Sylvia Pankhurst, the Women's International Matteotti Committee appeals that October 29 should be dedicated to a world-wide protest on behalf of the victims of Italian Fascism suffering in the prisons and islands of deportation.

"We urge all who are united in opposition to Fascism, in every part of the world, to co-operate in this protest without distinction of party or political opinion" (says the appeal), which continues: "Fascism denies and destroys all freedom of thought, party, press, association; exploits and enslaves the workers; tramples on every popular liberty won during the last two centuries; re-establishes the juridical concepts of the Middle Ages; is guilty of the ill-treatment and murder of its political opponents. The Italian political victims, upheld by a high faith in human destiny, have for eleven years resisted unprecedented torture and persecution. Over them lies the agonising sorrow that their families, isolated from friends, surrounded by Fascist hatred, the object of continual menace, daily face the risk of death or violent assault and suffer miserable poverty every day intensified. Their heroic endurance should be made known to all the world.

"Our committee does not forget that the German people also lately entered upon the same tragic road. We express our solidarity with their suffering and with every protest made by the civilised world against the newly arisen barbarism. Yet we deem it opportune to issue this appeal for remembrance and support for those who have remained staunch under the same tyranny since 1922.

"We urge that in every centre of Italian emigration and wherever opponents of fascism are to be found, demonstration be organised demanding full and complete amnesty for all victims of Italian Fascism, making known that despite the much vaunted recent amnesty, the majority of the prisoners are still incarcerated and that the few who were liberated from the dungeons were mostly taken to immediate internment on the terrible prison islands.

“Collections are to be made on the demonstration. The hon. treasurer of the Women's International Matteotti Committee is Mrs. Patricia French-Barrass, Broadway House, Chester-le-Street, County Durham.”

Further information on the Committee's Protest Day, as seen from the organisers' perspective, is provided in a letter of 16 October 1933 from Sylvia to Mrs. French-Barrass. It indicates that the demonstration had elicited most of its support in France, Switzerland and perhaps Spain and Sweden, and considerably less in Britain itself. She wrote:

“Regarding the International Day, in Paris there is to be a joint Demonstration organised by the Italian Socialist Party, supported by the Anti-Fascist Concentration of all Anti-Fascist Parties, and by the French Socialist Party. In the South of France, ten Demonstrations have been organised for the day by Pietro Nenni. In Switzerland, the Editor of two papers, who had published the Appeal, sent me the names of seven others, asking me to send the Appeals there. I know that the Appeal has appeared in a number of French, American and Spanish papers, also in the "Social Democraten" in Sweden. You may have seen the note in "Reynolds".¹⁸ I expect we shall get more presently. This country will be the weakest in support. The Co-op Party says it has too many demonstrations on hand to take it up, but some of the local organisations will perhaps. The I.L.P.¹⁹ has not promised to do anything yet. It was with difficulty that I got them to put in the Appeal... Can you get the Socialist League to do something? I don't know if they were written to: probably not. I will write to them today. The Labour Party took the matter into consideration, and decided that it was very difficult for them

to do anything because the November elections took place immediately after the Day, and there is a day for the victims of German Fascism on November 9th. I replied that one cannot help these Anniversaries coming together, and that the Italian Day was selected because it was the Anniversary of that on which Mussolini was called to Rome by the King...

“The Italian Anti-Fascists publish about fifty papers in different parts of the world, and these have all taken up the Day with enthusiasm. The Italians in this country are the most difficult to work on. They are mostly restaurant keepers..., and not disposed to make themselves prominent, or perhaps we should say, those who are in control of such organisations of Italians as exist in London at any rate are mostly in business of some sort. Nevertheless, they have provided stamps for sending out the appeals all over the world, and so will bear sympathy in that way. The Italian Socialist Party, which has its headquarters in Paris, circularised all its branches throughout the world, asking them to work for the Day. Even the Italian Free Masons, Scottish Rite, sent us some stamps”.

Support for the Protest Day was also expressed by the Giustizia e Libertà group in Paris. Alberto Tarchiani, wrote on 7 September:

“I have observed myself that the anti-hitlerian effort is killing our anti-fascist efforts. An anti-fascist day in England is a very good initiative. We will do our best to introduce into Italy the news of this agitation, G. e L. will certainly co-operate in this work”.

Salvemini, however, was less sanguine. Writing from Yale, on 12 September, he observed:

“As regards the manifestation... I am afraid the attention of everybody now is focused towards Hitler. Within a few years they will get accustomed to Hitler. Nobody minds about Italy. Mussolini is there since 12 years. Thus he is right. Mankind is disgusting: voilà tout”.

A Political Controversy with George Bernard Shaw

The drafting of the WIMC Petition had led meanwhile to a lengthy controversy between Sylvia and George Bernard Shaw. Asked to add his name to the petition, the playwright had flatly refused. Justifying this, he wrote, on 2 December 1932:

“My dear Sylvia,

“As this memorial will make Mrs. Matteotti's situation worse, I will not sign it. What the memorialists, including your incorrigible pugnacious self, are doing is making an attack on the Fascist regime in Italy under cover of sympathy with the distressed widow and her orphans. Obviously the effect will be to irritate the Fascists and harden them against their liberal opponents. If you want to soften the Fascist Government, you must accept at least that it is a Government and approach it as a friend, and assuming its desire to be just and humane. Even though you are at a disadvantage of being a foreigner meddling in matters which are Italy's business and not yours, and running the risk of being snubbed accordingly and finding that you had better have left it

alone, still if the appeal can be made internationally, and not tarred with any particular brush, and is tactfully worded, it might be worth trying.

“But if you do not care a rap, and simply want a handful of mud on the black shirt (where it will not show) then go ahead by all means and pile on the agony, only you must not expect me to sign it, as being a Communist, I am strongly in favour of the Corporate State in Italy as against the Liberal bourgeois democracy represented by the party of Matteotti and Salvemini. Please remember that these virtuously indignant attacks on foreign states have failed to save Sacco and Vanzetti²⁰ etc etc, and even helped to seal their doom, as I said when I refused to join them. But my protest was in vain; you cannot cure nations - least of all the English Nation - of the vice of lecturing other nations on their moral inferiority. Nor I shall cure you”

Sylvia replied at once on 5 December. She began by alluding to the assistance she had previously received from Shaw in a case involving the victimisation of a British conscientious objector during World War I,²¹ and declared:

“I do not agree with you that the memorial will worsen Mrs. Matteotti's situation because I believe that what is necessary to improve her position is international publicity and the more of it the better. When that budding poet, Mr. Eric Cheppelow, was stationed outside a barrack yard in little more of his own clothing than his stockings and a blanket stripped around him because he refused to don khaki, I asked your assistance in getting publicity, and I also telephoned to Mr. Lloyd George and had a few straight words with his daughter, Megan, who answered the phone in his stead. The result of our joint efforts was that Mr.

Chappelow was released from his unfortunate situation and thereafter was treated very much better than most of the Conscientious Objectors.

“Professor Salvemini, Mrs. Rosselli, and other Italians held prisoner by the Fascist Government were freed by agitation in this country. I believe that as much can be done for Mrs. Matteotti”.

Turning to the Committee's idea of despatching a group of women to Italy to demand Velia Matteotti's release, she continued in more humorous vein:

“An excellent idea occurs to me. It is that you and two or more women of our joint choosing should go as soon as possible to Italy to effect the release of Mrs. Matteotti and her children from their present most miserable situation. The sooner the journey is made, the better. The time of the year is excellent for the purpose and a visit to Italy would undoubtedly do you good. You would be able to enjoy the sun which we see so little of here at present.

“I hope I shall hear from you immediately that you will go. As probably you will have seen from the Press, it was already our project to send a delegation of women to Italy. We have volunteers from three countries already, and are expecting to have from others.

“You say that the appeal on Mrs. Matteotti's behalf should be international. That is certainly my own view. Our Committee is international and we have representatives from Britain, France, Spain, Germany, Russia, Austria, America, Holland, Sweden, Ireland, and the Italian exiles.

"I beg to differ from your view that the handful of mud which falls on the black shirt on the account of the persecution of the Matteotti family does not show. I think the fact is exceedingly prejudicial to their reputation and I am fully aware that they know it.

"I take exception to your argument about the vice of the English lecturing other nations for the simple reason that I do not recognise nationality at all in this matter. It is a question of ideas and ideals. It has nothing whatsoever to do with nationality. As far as I am concerned, you know, and everyone else knows, that I should be just as eager to do this for Mrs. Matteotti if she happened to be English or if she happened to be a native of Ireland, India, Egypt, or any other nation under British rule.

"Moreover it is absurd for anyone calling himself a Communist to employ such an argument which is typical, if you will permit to say, of Liberal bourgeois ideology".

"I am sorry to have to tell you that your statement that you are in favour of the Corporate State in Italy is absolutely appalling to me and I must protest that either you are not a Communist, or you do not know how the Corporate State in Italy is constituted".

Elaborating on this latter point, she examined the structure of Italian Fascist Government in some detail, and observed:

"You are perhaps under the impression that this so-called Corporate State is something on the lines of a Soviet, the community having taken control of the industries, the workers in each industry

electing their delegates to manage the Corporate State. The Corporate State of Italy is nothing of the kind. Industry remains in the hands of the Capitalists as it always did. The Government of Italy at the present time to all intents and purposes is vested in Mussolini and the small cliques of his satellites in the Fascist Party.

“The constitution of Italy provides for Government by the Dictator and the Fascist Grand Council which is composed of:

“The first two categories comprise 35 persons. The numbers of the third is not fixed. In Category Two only the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies are nominated by their respective assemblies; the others owe office to the Dictator. Members of category three are likewise all nominated by the Dictator. One of the important functions of the Grand Council is that of ‘designating’ members of the Chamber of Deputies.

“So much for the Grand Council. Now we come to the Chamber of Deputies, the members of whom are ‘designated’ by the Fascist Grand Council. Here we reach the features of the so-called Corporative State which have perhaps caught your fancy and cause you to think there is something of the Soviet character about it.

“There are six National Confederations of Employers and six corresponding Confederations of Employed persons. As for the latter, they are not like the old Italian Trade unions or Trade unions as we know them in this country. They are Fascist organisations and are controlled by the Fascist Party.

“The Confederations of Employers and Employed nominate 200 persons for the Chamber of Deputies, and various Fascist organisations which are termed ‘cultural, educational or charitable’ also nominate 200 persons. To the above 1,000 nominations the Fascist Grand Council may add others if it chooses. From the total nominations it chooses 400 deputies. The 400 names are then submitted to the electors who must answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’, and practically speaking there is no alternative.

“In any case this Chamber of Deputies is quite without power, which resides in the Dictator and his satellites, as I have said. There is nothing whatsoever of the character of an industrial organisation in the Government of Italy”. Turning to the basic character of Mussolini’s regime, she declared:

“Fascism is the regime of a clique maintained by violence and terrorism and by hordes of spies and provocative agents who are placed not only amongst the anti-Fascists, [but also within] the regular Army, in the factories, the schools and even within the Fascist Militia and the Fascist party. The schools are militarised, the little boys of 8 to 14 drilling with wooden rifles and the boys over 14 with real rifles. Patriotic songs and salutations of Mussolini and the Royal family take a considerable part of the time which ought to be devoted to learning something of utility and interest. The boys are taught that their aim in life should be to be a soldier; the girls to marry early, have their cradles full and bear soldiers to extend the dominions of Italy.

“All the best positions are reserved for members of the Fascist Party and indeed it is a distinct handicap to anyone not to be at least a member of it. The women Fascists are subordinated to the men, political

activities are prohibited to them, and the woman secretary takes her orders not from their own members but from the man secretary of the corresponding male Fascist unit. The Press is gagged, censored and dictated to and only the Fascist press is permitted”.

After completing this long survey of Fascist Government, she turned more directly to Shaw, before formulating a theoretical, and more or less Marxist, analysis of Fascism. Writing in personal vein, she declared:

“It is absolutely certain that if you were an Italian in Italy you would be in prison or on one of the islands. Culturally speaking, Fascism is reactionary and repressive and this has been painfully discovered by authors who had no desire to take part in politics, again and again.

“The idea of the Corporate State was not initiated by Mussolini. It was originated before the dawn of the Christian era; it is simply a euphemistic phrase to indicate that the workers are to remain content in the station of life in which they are born; that their betters are to do the thinking and that they must carry out the toil of the community, as the hands and feet of the human body do the will of the directing brain, without presuming either to express an opinion, or to cherish a desire or an aspiration of their own.

“Those who agree with that view of society should call themselves Tories at once and follow the lead of Ramsay MacDonald²² in putting his neck under the heel of the Tory Party.

"I am glad to know that in recent years you have become a Communist but I must say the regime of terror and oppression under Mussolini in Italy seems to me poles apart from Communism. Communism, as I conceive it, entails an equalitarian society in which all shall share the material plenty, leisure and cultural opportunities which modern communities, when efficiently organised, will be able to give their members.

"Fascism, as all true Marxists are aware, is a manifestation of Capitalism, which it creates when it finds itself in difficulties, to protect itself against the rising power of the workers and the advance of Communism. Italian Fascism is simply a Capitalist dictatorship, acting through Mussolini and other mercenaries, and differs not at all in essence from the White Terror which crushed the Hungarian Sovietists under the leadership of Horthy.²³

"Viewing all this, I have no sense of nationality. I see the Italian situation as one of the phenomena which have developed in this transition period which in a book I am writing now I have called the 'Red Twilight'.²⁴

Bernard Shaw remained entirely unmoved by the above arguments. He replied briefly, on 12 December, with one of his characteristically snappy little post-cards. It read as follows:

"No; you can't bully me; and you can't even bully Mussolini. If you want to help Mrs. M., and not merely sandbag him with her, you must be scrupulously polite.

“Eric Chapelow was not an Italian.

“An attack on the Corporate State is, in effect, a defence of the parliamentary system. Both Fascism and Communism can make common cause against that, up to a point. I know perfectly (human error excepted) what I am about”.

“G.B.S.”

A Proposed Women's Deputation to Italy

The idea of despatching a women's deputation to Italy to insist on Velia's right to leave Italy, had first been proposed, as we have seen, in the Committee's original Petition. The case for facilitating the widow's departure from Italy was greatly strengthened by a letter of 4 October 1932 from her French friend Adrienne Marchand, which elaborated on the persecution from which Velia was then afflicted.

Adrienne Marchand stated that Signora Matteotti had told her that she had been called to the police headquarters, in Rome, and advised to abandon her black clothes of mourning, on the ground that “everything was now changed”, and that the county “wanted to forget” Matteotti's death. She had refused, declaring that as long as she was worthy of her husband's memory she would continue to wear her widow's garb.

On another occasion, while outside her house, with her children, so Velia had reported, she had heard someone cry out, “They should all be exterminated!”.

Adrienne Marchand's letter, outlining further acts of persecution, continued:

"At the sea where she goes in the summer, accompanied by 7 policemen, the boys swim at different times: a policeman is always in the sea at the very same time as they. One day, on the beach, a young student got talking with the elder of the two boys, Giancarlo; he asked him some mathematical questions; the boy answered so correctly that the student cried out, 'Long live Giancarlo Matteotti', and embraced him. The policemen heard. The student was imprisoned for a month.

"Madame Matteotti... placed a cross on the grave of her husband, and some shrubs... Each time she came to bring flowers, she found the cross broken or torn up (she replaced it 8 or 9 times); one day the ground had stones dumped on it, on another day refuse. And each time she put it back in order. Now I understand that the land has been ploughed over like the rest of the field".

Signora Matteotti, according to Adrienne Marchand, subsequently transferred the remains of her husband to a cemetery, where she erected a small chapel over the grave. When she lit candles there, police and carabinieri immediately rushed in, crying, "Put them out, Put them out!". On All Souls' Day, when people brought flowers, the guards cried out, "Take them away! Take them away!"

Adrienne Marchand wrote to Sylvia again, on 29 November, reiterating her conviction that it was the wish of Velia, if she could only cross the frontier from Italy, to go and live in either Switzerland or England.

Despite such letters the WIMC's plan to send a deputation to Rome was gravely handicapped by the fact that Velia, who had lived under Fascist persecution for almost a decade, seemed reluctant to incur Mussolini's wrath by appealing for outside help, and had never in fact dared to request a passport with which to leave Italy. Fascist police surveillance moreover rendered direct contact with her impossible. There was therefore no way of ascertaining how far she would be willing to risk escalating Fascist persecution, by openly declaring her wish to leave the country, or whether she would be financially in a position to do so. Uncertainty on this score was intensified when Salvemini wrote a depressing letter to Sylvia, from Yale on 11 October 1932, saying:

"We have bad news from Italy. Signora Matteotti is in a state of deep political and moral collapse. Moreover her conditions are desperate. Some among her friends are afraid that in a moment of discouragement she may write for help to some person in the Government and publish a letter stating that she did not authorise your campaign and does not want to leave Italy. It is necessary for you to be prepared to such a surprise".

Elaborating on his fears he added:

"I think the only thing to do, if she surrenders, is to intensify protests. When she is abroad, then only she will be regarded as free. Until she is in Italy, her statements are to be regarded as extorted by threat and pressure. But perhaps she will go on heroically as she did until now. So there is no reason to change your attitude in any way.

“Postscript: It is very difficult to correspond with Signora Matteotti. Only very seldom the opportunity arises of sending her a friendly word!”

Notwithstanding Salvemini's fears, the Committee, though acutely short of funds, persevered in its hope of sending a women's deputation to Italy. Proposed delegates included Hannah Sheehy Skeffington, whose husband had been murdered in Dublin 1916²⁵; Mrs. Katherine Gillett-Gatty, a former British Suffragette and member of the Women's Freedom League, who travelled widely on the European continent to promote the Committee's activities; Simone Téry, the daughter of the founder of the French Socialist newspaper L'Oeuvre; Madmoiselle Fournier, of the French Socialist Party; and Teresa Nevat, secretary of the WIMC's Spanish branch. There was also talk of having representatives from the United States, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

The view of one of the above enthusiasts, Simone Téry, is preserved in a letter of 15 December 1932. It sets the proposed deputation in the contemporary French context: “The present time”, she observed, “seems ill chosen in France to launch an anti-fascist campaign. Everything has been said here against the fascist regime, and just now there is a marked tendency in government circles as well as journalistic for a friendship between Italy and France. But of course a ‘delegation’ that would negotiate for the sake of a person without seeming to interfere in the interior politics of Italy might have success. And it is surely worth trying”. She was, she says, therefore “glad” to be a member of a deputation that would “be of help to such an unfortunate and noble woman”.

The Committee took the view, as Sylvia informed Marion Rosselli on 19 February 1933, that the women's deputation should go to Italy that Easter. This, they believed, would be "the best time for several people to go". Carlo Rosselli and his wife Marion both agreed.

Plans for the deputation were, however, frustrated at about this time by the news that the Fascist authorities, doubtless responding to the Committee agitation, had, after nine long years, finally begun to relax Velia's persecution. On 3 February 1933 Mrs. Gillett-Gatty reported that the widow's house was no longer as strictly supervised as in the past; and, on 10 July, that Velia was, at long last, allowed to visitors, and her sons were permitted to use their father's name.

Dr. Germani was prematurely released from Ponza at about the same time.

Professor Salvemini shortly afterwards obtained independent confirmation of the above dramatic change in Velia's position. He wrote to Sylvia, on 12 September 1933, that he was "sorry" to say that "according to quite reliable information Signora Matteotti, finding herself in very difficult circumstances, accepted the help of Mussolini in lending money from a bank. We must be indulgent", he added, "towards that unhappy and lonely woman. But it is so disgusting!"

What had happened, Sylvia later informed Adrienne Marchand, on 10 December 1934, was that Velia and her children had "come under the protection of the Catholic Church". The widow's long years of

persecution had thus come to an end. The WIMC, which had been founded to secure Velia's release, had thus achieved its immediate aim.

Women's Committee against War and Fascism

Sylvia, and another former British Suffragette, Hannah Laurie, then joined with a French woman Madame Duchesne, and others, both Socialists and Communists, in founding a new organisation, the Women's Committee against War and Fascism.²⁶ Hannah Laurie served a Honorary Secretary, and Sylvia as Honorary Treasurer. The latter joined the committee, she later confided to William Gilles on 9 January 1936, in the hope of "getting hold of women", particularly those who had been in the "old Suffrage and Suffragette Movements", but were "not actually in the Labour Movement", and probably would "not join anything except a women's society". This committee, which lies outside of the present article, in a sense, represented a continuation of the old WIMC, without the latter's commitment to Velia Matteotti.

Sylvia, and the Countess of Oxford and Asquith

Sylvia's view of the rise of Fascism, and of the British political scene in which she had founded the WIMC, can be further deduced from a letter she wrote to the Countess of Oxford and Asquith, on 25 April 1934.

Commenting on a letter against war and Fascism", which the Countess had written to the London Times, "she declared these "the two great dangers of the present time". Writing as a former Suffragette, as well as the founder of the WIMC, she concluded: "In my opinion it was a

tragedy that the Women's Movement of Suffrage times, instead of falling to pieces, did not pull itself together to be the big Social Reform and Peace Party of the country".

Renewed Controversy with Bernard Shaw

The controversy between Sylvia and Bernard Shaw, begun over the latter's refusal to sign the WIMC's Petition, was resumed three years later, in 1935. Disputation began in the summer, when it was reported, to Sylvia's surprise, that the playwright had accepted membership of an International Committee of Writers against Fascism. She immediately reacted, on 5 July, by sending him a wide-ranging letter in which she observed:

"Dear Bernard Shaw,

"In view of the correspondence on the subject of Fascism which you and I have had, over a period beginning in 1928, in which you definitely declared your approval of Fascism, I was surprised, but definitely interested, to learn that you had accepted membership of the International Committee of writers against Fascism. I trust that this means that at last you have understood Fascism to be a totally reactionary movement, opposed to all forms of social advance, and destructive of all the causes with which you have sided during a long and useful life.

"Your change of front will probably occasion as much surprise as did that of Asquith²⁷ when he came out for Votes for Women after his long resistance to it. You will recall that I vainly appealed to you for support on behalf of more than one victim of Fascism, notably the

widow and children of the brave Socialist, Matteotti, who had been persecuted ever since his dastardly murder by Mussolini's gang. Giustizia e Libertà, so ably edited by Professor Carlo Rosselli, the Italian refugee organ in Paris, is raising a protest against your nomination to the anti-Fascist Writers' Committee, pointing out that, in 1925, you refused to sign a petition against the arrest of Unamuno,²⁸ that you defended dictatorship in Jugoslavia, and that you have many times publicly eulogised Mussolini and Hitler.

“When Hitler rose to power, and the Nazis visited their terror on Jews, Socialists and all Pacifists and Reformers, and particularly against the writers and thinkers of Germany, I pleaded with you that, at last, you would declare against this evil and reactionary movement, and at least raise your voice to defend the German intellectuals, even if you felt no solidarity with the Socialists and Communists.

“Well, better late than never; I rejoice that at last you have decided to separate yourself from the Fascism reaction, and have seen through the phantasmagoric Corporate State, the hughest sham ever offered to a credulous world!

“Watching, as I know you do, the threatening international situation, the policies of Governments and the manoeuvres of the crowd of interested persons who strive to manipulate diplomacy, I do not doubt you view with concern, as I do, the tendency for the a powerful bloc of Fascist and pro-Fascist Governments to be formed, with a strong drive toward a war, which would be a life and death contest between the forces of privilege and reaction, and those of Freedom and progress. Undoubtedly there are active and powerful influences in this country who

would like to draw Britain into the reactionary Fascist group. The fulsome compliments to the red-handed Nazi leaders by certain persons who have been raised to rank, for no reason which can be disclosed in the light of day, are straws driving in an ominous wind. The unilateral Anglo-German Naval Agreement²⁹, made apart from the League of Nations, and in direct conflict with the assurances given to France immediately before; the assistance, quietly provided by our National Government, to the Italian Fascist Government in its attack on Abyssinia, despite professions of a desire to preserve Italo-Abyssinian peace, occasion deep and anxious thought. I cannot doubt that you are alive to these tendencies, and that they have aroused you to signify your change of opinion in regard to Fascism, and to accept membership of the International Committee of Writers against it. I await the vigorous exposure of the sinister character of Fascism, which I trust you know intend.

“I take this opportunity to congratulate you upon your able Broadcast on Liberty, and the skill with which you put certain ideas across, despite the censorship of the B.B.C., which is one of the most glorious of those Pecksniffian windmills against which you have always tilted.

“Your fellow Socialist,

“SYLVIA PANKHURST”.

Bernard Shaw had, however, by no means changed his stand, and had accepted nomination to the writers' committee without realising its Anti-Fascist character. He accordingly wrote back, on 7 July 1935,

making his pro-Fascist stance abundantly clear. In a lengthy theoretical analysis, which bordered on special pleading, he wrote:

“My dear Sylvia,

“What is it all about? The meeting of writers which took place somewhere the other day wrote to me to say that they had chosen me with some others to represent international literature. There was not a word about Fascism nor any suggestion that the organization was a political one. I was glad to see that there was a strong set of literary opinion in favour of the U.S.S.R.; but since I have been an open supporter of the Soviets since 1917 my own views remain unaffected.

“As against Salvemini, Rosselli, and the Liberal parliamentarians, generally I am on the side of Mussolini. Liberty, as understood by his opponents, is, as he said, a putrefying corpse; and he interpreted mass feeling correctly when he assumed that people were sick of endless cackle about capitalist ‘freedom’, and wanted discipline, organization, silence, authority, and national consciousness. His Corporate State is an immense advance on Laisser faire. His difficulty is that a Corporate State which is not also a Communist State, owning all the sources of production it has to control, is only a scrap of paper and an explosion of gas. But he is a long step nearer to learning this than his Liberal opponents.

“All revolutionary leaders have thus to organize a revolutionary police. Such a police begins without traditions of public service and responsibility, and almost without discipline. It is joined not only by enthusiastic young idealists and hero worshippers, but by Sadists and

gangsters who murder, torture, levy blackmail, and gratify their personal hatreds and lusts whenever they get the chance until the new order is established and they can be weeded out ruthlessly.

“Meanwhile the inevitable outrages they commit are seized upon by the reaction to prove that the revolutionists are villains of the very darkest hue. All the political incapables who can grasp nothing bigger than a sensational police case become shrieking deserters. The big issue of Liberal party parliamentarians versus Fascism shrinks into THE MURDER OF MATTEOTTI. And when the murder of Matteotti leaves me as unmoved politically as the liquidation of the Tsar, you write and tell me that I have changed my opinions, which is exactly what I have not done. If I changed my opinions at every assassination I should have no opinions at all.

“Give your mind seriously to this, Sylvia; for you are much given to shrieking. For instance, you never approach me except to shriek at me.

“Don't.

“Too faithfully,

“GEORGE BERNARD SHAW”.

The above letter evoked an immediate response, in which Sylvia developed her own particular critique of Fascism, and of Mussolini in person. She wrote, on 9 July:

“Dear Bernard Shaw,

"I am glad you have at last realised that the fascist Corporate State is only 'a scrap of paper and an explosion of gas', so far as any change in the capitalist system is concerned. It does not interfere with private property except in a comparatively few cases, where the owner is an anti-Fascist or is a poor man.

"You say the murder of Matteotti leaves you 'unmoved', but Matteotti was murdered because he was engaged in exposing the patent fact that Fascism had come to break the Socialist Movement, and to develop the most reactionary type of capitalism ever known. It is because Matteotti had the courage to stand up and tell the truth, where others refrained to save their lives, that many, even of the bourgeoisie, who lacked his courage and did not share his convictions, honour his memory today.

"You say that Mussolini is a long chalk nearer to learning the futility of his Corporate State from his experience than are his liberal supporters, but, of course, Mussolini was brought up in the Socialist Movement, which was, theoretically, better informed in Italy than ever the Socialist Movement has been in this country. He had heard the theories of Marx expounded time and time again by men who have studied his doctrine seriously, not by the sort who have only read a pamphlet about him, or perhaps not even that, who call themselves Marxists in this country. Moreover, he sprang from the working class, not from the ranks of déclassé intellectuals and down-at-heel bourgeoisie and he knew perfectly well what he was about when he placed the shackles of Fascism on his fellow workers. To him it was merely a matter of self-

interest. His doctrine may be confused, but not so confused that he ever thought there was any salvation for the masses through Fascism!

“You have said that liberty, as understood by the upholders of Capitalism, is a ‘putrefying corpse’. To a large extent you are right, for if people are the slaves of economic stress, as so many are everywhere today, they often find themselves unable to exercise the liberty of standing up for their convictions as they would desire, but at least, in the non-Fascist countries, most of us are able to do propaganda for our convictions, as you and I do. Your whole life is devoted to propaganda; if you lived in Italy, you would not be permitted to do any propaganda, except on behalf of the ruling clique, and the big interests which keep them in power. You would not be permitted to say that the Corporate State is a ‘scrap of paper and an explosion of gas’. There are men and women in the dungeons and on the penal islands of Italy for saying just that very thing, and I warrant if you say it long enough, you will not be permitted to go to Italy for your holidays, as you are in the habit of doing, nor will your plays any longer be permitted there. Dare to write about it in the ‘Times’, and this will be the result”.

This letter crossed with a post-card, dated 9 July 1935, from Bernard Shaw, in which he wrote briefly:

“I have just learnt that the I. A. of Writers is for ‘culture against war and Fascism’. I have therefore refused to have anything to do with it”.

The Invasion of Ethiopia

The Italian Fascist Invasion of Ethiopia, on 3 October 1935, which moved public opinion throughout Britain and the democratic world, met with an immediate, and no less forthright, response from the WIMC. The organisation's policy was outlined four days later in a letter from Sylvia to Mrs. French-Barrass, in which she declared:

"The Women's International Matteotti Committee, formed to assist victims of Fascism, now appeals for donations to a fund to assist the victims of Fascist aggression in Abyssinia. The need for this is imperative, as Abyssinia is a poor and primitive country, and the extensive use of aircraft bombing 'planes by the Italian troops is creating terrible havoc amongst the civilian population whose homes are being destroyed. Destitute families, injured women and children, orphans of tender years, have all to be cared for. We appeal to the large hearted British public to give generously".

The WIMC, no less interested in the plight of Italian opponents of Fascism, also wrote to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, Joseph Avenol, later in the month, appealing for his support for Italian soldiers opposed to serving in the invasion of Ethiopia. Avenol, who had adopted a pro-Fascist line, does not appear to have answered.

The question of Italian opponents of the regime was, however, soon increasingly overshadowed by that of the principal victims of the war, the Ethiopians themselves. The Committee therefore turned its attention from Italy to Ethiopia. Sylvia urged that assistance be sent to the organisation most directly concerned. This, she wrote on 23 November, was the Ethiopian Fund of Mercy, organised by the Ethiopian Minister in London, Dr. Charles Workneh Martin.

The WIMC's support for Ethiopia, as the victim of Fascist aggression, found further expression when the Committee joined the widespread opposition to the Hoare-Laval Plan of December 1935.³⁰ This agreement between the British and French leaders was generally regarded as a surrender to Mussolini, because it would have granted the invader large stretches of Ethiopian territory. Sylvia, writing on the WIMC's behalf, wrote a lengthy letter to the British Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, on 13 December, expressing Anti-Fascist support for the League of Nations, as follows:

"Sir,

"We desire to express our profound dismay at the fact... that the British and French Governments have proposed terms for the settlement of the Italo-Ethiopian dispute which offer a large concession of Ethiopian territory to the Italian fascist Government, a proposal which, as Ethiopia justly protests, would flagrantly violate the Covenant of the League, and destroy all faith in the maintenance of justice and security through the League.

"The only conclusion of the Italo-Abyssinian conflict which the League of Nations could justly approve would be for the Fascist Government to withdraw from Ethiopian territory and pay compensation for the damage it has done...

"The great support for the League and the Covenant which obtains in this country was clearly manifested in the Peace Ballot³¹ last summer. In the General Election, people of all Parties expressed satisfaction that

whatever their differences might be on other questions, the principle of Collective Security would be upheld by Britain at Geneva whichever Party was returned to power. This belief rested upon the declarations of your Government, and the known policy of the Labour Party. Many earnest supporters of peace, who have been accustomed to vote Labour on other occasions, we know cast their vote for the National Government, believing its triumphant return would demonstrate the unity of the British people behind the imposition of Sanctions against the aggressor, in which the National Government was regarded as having taken the lead.

“Before the Election, certain Conservative newspapers demanded that after the Election the policy of Sanctions should be abandoned because, were it to succeed in preventing the success of Italy's attack on Ethiopia, the fascist Government would fall. The majority of electors refused to believe this unworthy suggestion represented the policy of your Government.

“Should your Government definitely take up the stand at Geneva that Sanctions, which the League had commenced to apply in order to punish Italian aggression, are to be stopped, and the aggressor State rewarded with the territory of the League Member on whom it has made unwarrantable and unprovoked attack, the mass of the people of this country will believe that this sacrifice of principle has been made to save fascism, which does not represent the will of the Italian people, but is a military dictatorship maintained by force of arms and the suppression of democratic institutions. This belief would arise in the public mind deep indignation and disquiet, and grave distrust of the policy of the present Government, both national and international.

“Whilst expressing our profound concern at the disclosures in regard to this matter, which have appeared in the Press, and the replies which the Government has made in the House of Commons, we urge that the Government will yet maintain at Geneva the principle that the aggressor nation shall reap no advantage by this breach of the Covenant”.

The Committee's support for the Ethiopian cause was further demonstrated early in 1936, when it was announced that another voluntary society in Britain, the Abyssinia Committee, was establishing an Abyssinia Association, to mobilise public opinion on the victim nation's behalf. Sylvia, writing for the WIMC, on 18 February, to Miss F.A. McKechnie of the Abyssinia Committee, welcomed the birth of the new association. Recalling that she had herself been “active... in support of Abyssinia in many directions”, she reported that Modigliani, the former Parliamentary leader of the Italian Socialist Party, and its representative in exile on the Labour and Socialist International, would shortly be in London. Writing as an old friend of his, she explained that she was making arrangements for his tour, and declared:

“I think it would be a fine thing if he were to address a great meeting in opposition to the Italian aggression in Abyssinia, thereby voicing the view of all the best Italians. Mr. Modigliani is one of the most eloquent speakers at the present time...”.

The WIMC's involvement in the Ethiopian struggle was not, however, readily accepted by the Abyssinia Committee. Its Honorary Secretary, Professor H. Stanley Jevons, replied to Sylvia, on 28 February:

"I am sorry we do not find it possible to co-operate with the 'Women's International Matteotti Committee'. I raised the matter at our committee meeting this week, and the committee was unanimous on the point that we did not wish to be associated in the public eye with an anti-Fascist organization... they feel that linking the question of protest against the War and assistance to Abyssinia with condemnation of Fascism is impolitic".

The WIMC's rejection of this point of view was expressed in Sylvia's essentially Anti-Fascist reply, written of the following day:

"I wish to say... quite definitely that I think your view is utterly wrong. After all, it is Fascism which is making war in Abyssinia, and no-one else...

"I feel very strongly that all who have Peace loving and democratic views must take the Fascist menace more seriously in future than they have in the past. It is not just a government of any sort. It is a move to destroy all democracy and create a military state of the most backward sort..."

Notwithstanding this difference of approach, the WIMC participated, with many Women's, Peace, Labour, Anti-Fascist, and Africanist organisations, in a great Trafalgar Square demonstration in support of Ethiopia and the League of Nations, on 17 May.

End of the WIMC

The above demonstration marked the end of the WIMC's activities. The demise of the Committee at this time was perhaps not surprising: During its brief existence the situation which had led to its foundation had radically changed. Velia's persecution had, largely as a result of the Committee's agitation, at last come to an end. Dr. Germani had been released from Ponza, and the flow of refugees from Fascist Italy was beginning to decline.

Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, and the branding of Fascist Italy by the League of Nations as the aggressor, had on the other hand created a new political climate, in Britain, Italy and the wider world.

Opposition to Italian Fascism, for many if not most of the Committee's members, was giving way to sympathy, or active support, for Ethiopia, as the victim of Fascist aggression. Symbolic of this change was the fact that within little more than half a year of the opening of hostilities, Sylvia, the editor of Humanity, had founded an entirely new publication, New Times and Ethiopia News, in the African country's defence.

1 These are currently still uncatalogued, but can be identified by the author, addressee and date as cited in the following text.

2 See Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, Rome, 24, 1983, 87-90.

3 A further statement on 'The Matteotti Case' is preserved in the Pankhurst Papers at the International Institute for Social History, hereafter IISH, in Amsterdam, No. 289.

-
- 4 Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement, An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideas, London, 1931; idem, The Home Front, London, 1932.
- 5 Giacomo Matteotti, The Fascists Exposed, London, 1924.
- 6 F.F. Nitti, Escape. The Political Narrative of a Political Prisoner, London, 1930.
- 7 This correspondence is listed in the Foreign Office index, but the actual letters are among innumerable documents shreaded to save archival space.
- 8 On his stay on Ponza, the 600 guards there, and the medical conditions confronting Dr Germani, see Massimo Salvadori, Resistenza ed azione (ricordi di un liberale), Foggia, n.d., pp. 107-10, and J. and E. Lussu, Alba Rossa transeuropa, Ancona, 1991, p. 17.
- 9 On his life, and activities, see G. Salvemini, Carlo and Nello Rosselli, London, 1937, and A. Garosci, La vita di Carlo Rosselli, Rome, 1945.
- 10 On Marion Rosselli's arrest, and the British agitation for her release, see Garosci, La vita, I, 111, II, 135.
- 11 Kenneth Povey, a Librarian at Cambridge University Library, and subsequently University Librarian at Liverpool.
- 12 A reference of course to his mother's above-quoted letter.
- 13 IISH, Pankhurst Papers, No. 315.
- 14 Sylvia gave a detailed report on this in a letter to the Manchester Guardian of 20 February 1935.
- 15 Advance information on this Protest Day appeared for example in the Manchester Guardian of 22 September 1933.
- 16 On the life of Anzani, and his tragic death on the 'Arandora Star', see New Times and Ethiopia News, 20 July 1940.
- 17 i.e. World War I.
- 18 The British Left-wing newspaper Reynold's News.

-
- 19 i.e. the Independent Labour Party.
- 20 The case of two American Anarchists of Italian origin, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, executed in 1927, after being convicted of murder on flimsy evidence six years earlier .
- 21 This incident is described in Pankhurst, Home Front, pp. 316-317.
- 22 Ramsay MacDonald, leader of the then pro-Conservative, or Tory, National Government.
- 23 The pro-Fascist Hungarian dictator Miklòs Horthy de Nagybanya.
- 24 Drafts of this projected history of the post-World War I Socialist movement are preserved in the IISH, Pankhurst Papers, Nos. 76-80, 83, 86-8.
- 25 Pankhurst, Home Front, pp. 323-4.
- 26 A file on this organisation is to be found among the Pankhurst Papers at the IISH, Pankhurst Papers, Nos. 291-3.
- 27 Herbert Asquith, British Prime Minister at the height of the Suffragette agitation for Votes for Women prior to World War I.
- 28 The Spanish philosopher, and republican, Miguel de Unamuno, incarcerated on the Spanish penal island of Fuerteventura from 1924 to 1930,
- 29 The Anglo-German Naval Agreement, of 1935, which marked the rearmament of post-World War I Germany.
- 30 See D. Whaley, British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War 1935-6, London, 1975.
- 31 The 'Peace Ballot', or to use its official name, the National Declaration on the League of Nations and Armaments was unofficial poll, organised in Britain, in the Summer of 1935, by the League of Nations Union. Over eleven million answered questions, a little more than half as many as voted in the subsequent General Election of

November 1935. In the ballot over ten million people declared that members of the League of Nations should combine to resist aggression.

F. Hardie, The Abyssinian Crisis, London, 1974, pp. 51-2.