

THE CHANGING IMAGE OF « THE PEOPLE » IN ITALIAN SPACES FROM THE CRISIS OF THE ANCIEN REGIME TO THE REVOLUTION

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This paper will examine the question of what ideological changes the French Revolution brought about in Italy, and in particular how the image of society was modified in different contexts. In the main this reconstruction can only be based on hypotheses, first of all by attempting to identify some of the collective indicators which give us an outline of representation of the society and of the social groups composing it. Of course, any attempt to understand the consolidation of new iconographies within the image-schemes of social groups must continue to favour the privileged classes whose functions they essentially are. I am referring to the schools, the press, to traditional disciplines such as history and the emergence of new ones like political economy, or as it was then called « civic » economy, which gave an analysis of that society and its strata.

Public education, a subject of lengthy discussion (and major reforms) in the 1770s, appears as a mechanism which summons up that image of a people divided into *sacerdotes*, *bellatores* and *laboratores* which Dumézil identified as the archetypal trifunctional ideology. The schools (see Gian Rinaldo Carli, Giuseppe Gorani and in particular Book IV of Gaetano Filangieri's *Scienza della legislazione*)¹ tended to give a picture of the people which was already stratified into those who were destined for intellectual work and those fated for manual occupations. In the speeches of the physiocrats concerned with public education we begin to touch on the distinctions between productive and non-productive workers Adam Smith was to make still more explicit.

State education, based on the secularisation of the Jesuit model, offered through classical studies many stylisations which were to be adopted, by analogy, in the learning of the present and the future. In Piedmontese secondary schools in the 18th century, the pupils were divided into two « peoples » – the Carthaginians and the Romans – coordinated by their

¹ See D. Balani - M. Roggero, *La scuola in Italia dalla Controriforma al secolo dei Lumi*, Torino, Loescher, 1976. See also G. Ricuperati - M. Roggero, *Educational Policies in Eighteenth Century in Italy*, in AA.VV., *Facets of Education in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by S.E. Leith, in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, vol. CLXVII, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation 1977, p. 223-270.

respective magistracies and in competition with each other². Greek authors, but more especially Roman – Cicero, Livy, Tacitus – supplied a republican political language and idea of freedom which was different from that of modern thinkers.

History also, which had then only indirectly, through rhetoric and classical readings, become a part of the education of youth, helped to create a latent « republican » language, where the dominating political model was that of absolutism. This was true of the important histories written in the first half of the 18th century whose influence lasted throughout the second half. I am referring to the *Histoire romaine* of Rollin, or that of Catrou-Rouillé. Both these writers, despite their different points of view (the former pro-Jansenist and the latter Jesuitic), had an element in common: their exaltation, through Livy, of the Roman Republic as the great model for *libertas*. An example is the Jesuit's *Histoire romaine*; The Republican part alone was translated into English in a « republican » and « commonwealth » setting. It is interesting to note that the same procedure was adopted in Venice, for a patrician republic. The *Universal History*, a gigantic and hypertrophic collection of « republican » stereotypes from Rollin, Catrou-Rouillé, T. Gordon, J. Trenchard, was read throughout Europe in two French translations, one German, four Italian, and numerous abridgements, introducing a vast reading public to the polemic over *lex regia*, the praise of Brutus and open criticism of Octavian Augustus who had cunningly undermined Republican institutions³. We shall see how this latent substratum was to become dominant, through the mechanism of analogy, during the French Revolution, not only as a means of understanding the present but above all to prepare the future.

History was only one of the forms of political education. It may be asked, and it is a question of enormous import, what was the real influence of thinkers such as Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Diderot and Holbach, who in their different ways had continually raised the question not only of the analysis of society and its social groups, but also of power and its relationship to class. It is of interest to note that, unlike other of Locke's works, the *Treatise of Government*, where he forcefully expounded the issue of representation, was translated late into Italian, in 1773, and, not by chance, under the patronage of a patrician family of the Republic of Genoa⁴. As far as Montesquieu was concerned, Italian literary men most commonly read him as a theorist of monarchy, ignoring, or openly disputing, the thesis that

² Biblioteca Reale di Torino, ms. St. Patria 616, I. Della Chiesa, *Storia dell'Università di Torino*, c. 149 sgg.

³ See G. Ricuperati, « Universal History: storia di un progetto europeo. Impostori storici ed editori nella Ancient part » in *Studi settecenteschi*, 2, 1981, pp. 7-90.

⁴ See *Il governo civile di Mr. Locke tradotto nell'italiano idioma e dedicato a Sua Eccellenza il Sig. Girolamo Durazzo dell'eccellentissimo Marcello*, Amsterdam (but Genoa), 1773. The anonymous translator calls G. Durazzo as protector and patron of his work. Durazzo's family was one of the more influential patrician families of Genoa.

only republics were based on the concept of virtue. Rousseau was interpreted by the Italians in acute and conservative analyses of the concept of equality. I am referring not so much to Gian Rinaldo Carli's *L'uomo libero*, as to Francesco Antonio Grimaldi and his essay on inequality⁵.

With a wide margin of generalisation, we may say that the idea of representative democracy reached Italy late and indirectly, breaking official schema. The state of Savoy, the Hapsburg and Bourbon states were more interested in a different kind of reformism, which, as in the great plan of Joseph II, would be based on the role and power of the prince, the protagonist of a new « *pubblica felicità* ». Only in Tuscany was the concept of representation accepted, although it was resisted by the public administrator, Francesco Maria Gianni⁶. Italian periodicals began to discuss the question, naturally enough, on the eve of the French Revolution. The opening of the Estates General could not be ignored. But the reference model for an outstanding journalist like Giambattista Vasco was still the experiment of a *philosophe* in power. He had a clear vision of the costs of a revolution in social and human terms. For this reason he gently but firmly attacked Alfieri's anti-tyrannical position, upholding the transforming capacities of monarchic reformism against Pliny's polemical Panegyric to Trajan⁷. The reasons for the clash were clear. The author of the *Principe e delle lettere*, drawing on Rousseau, Holbach and the anti-Christian literature of the *côteries*, radically attacked those scientific policies which Vasco, as a would-be member of the Scientific Academy of Turin, was to be closely involved in.

The policies of reform, when they touched on social issues, tended to modify the image the classes had of themselves and their inter-relationships. A very obvious case is that of the enfranchising laws in Savoy in the last years of the reign of Carlo Emanuele III⁸. This is clear from the protests of the nobles, who tried to persuade the new king to repeal the 1771 law, which they considered not only unjust but also harmful to the monarchy. Indeed, had not Montesquieu spoken of a kind of co-relation between the court and the nobility, due to their close inter-relationship? But more relevant to our paper is the fact that the nobles were aware of the state of dissent, unrest and polemics towards those to whom they were bound by ancient, if at times tenuous, ties. The action of the bailiffs who led the movement for enfranchisement also called for a break with ancient traditions of dependency. Drumrolls and parish meetings were seen by the Savoyard

⁵ See G.R. Carli, *L'uomo libero*, Milan, 1778; see also F.A. Grimaldi, *Riflessioni sopra l'ineguaglianza tra gli uomini*, Napoli, 1779-1780, voll. 3.

⁶ See F. Diaz, *F.M. Gianni, Dalla burocrazia alla politica*, Milano-Napoli, 1966.

⁷ G.B. Vasco, review on V. Alfieri, *Panegirico di Plinio a Traiano: nuovamente trovato e tradotto da Vittorio Alfieri*, Paris, 1787, on *Biblioteca oltremontana*, tomo III, vol. VIII, 1787, pp. 68-73. See G. Ricuperati, *Intellettuali e istituzioni della cultura nello Stato sabaudo della seconda metà del '700*, in AA.VV., *Vittorio Alfieri e la cultura piemontese fra Illuminismo e Rivoluzione* a cura di G. Ioli, Torino, 1985, pp. 3-15.

nobles as the end of a world where they had had privileges, but had also given their protection and had accepted with the nonchalance of superiors the thefts and cheating on which the survival of the peasants depended. From then on relations were to be strained and uncompromising. It was the end of social peace that they bemoaned, predicting, not without a hint of truth, a dark catastrophe to come.

The concept of revolutions was naturally to change meaning in Italy also as a consequence of the events in America. A few years previously, Carlo Denina had chosen the title for his book *Delle rivoluzioni d'Italia* (1769-70), where by revolution he meant any form of change whether institutional, political, religious or social. In this he was in line with a solid historical tradition, from Vertot to d'Orléans⁹. Denina himself was to use the term to describe the situation in Germany. The task of a historian compiling the reconstruction of a long period of a civilisation more dominated by unity and détente than others was to give a profound significance to change. But in European publications and the periodical press, the term Revolution was changing in meaning, and acquiring a specific relevance to the times which justified its capital letter. In the articles of Raynal and other journalists, Revolution became a complex fact. It was no longer merely the struggle for the defence of ancient rights, but the aspiration for a new freedom, which inevitably involved the whole of Europe. Thus the French Revolution in its beginnings was interpreted by Italian public opinion, and in particular by the Tuscan press which reflected the constitutional yearnings of Pietro Leopoldo, as a development consistent with the ideas of the Enlightenment. This explains why the first Revolutionary actions, such as the abolition of feudal rights, were reported without censorship in the Italian press. Things were to change after the arrest of the French king and his death sentence¹⁰.

In this paper we will be concerned mainly with documentation from Piedmontese sources, where the first echoes of the French Revolution struck a society which, despite its good central administration, was beginning to feel the effects of various ills which were all encompassed in the revolutionary intercycle. In the towns the artisan classes had been struck by the silk slumps of 1783 and 1788; in the countryside the changes in agricultural workers' contracts in the shift from the sharecropping system to tenancies, the transformation of the old husbandmen (*massari*) into lease holders (*schiavendai*) was causing deep-rooted tensions¹¹. But it was in the

⁸ See the still masterly book written in 1908 by M. Bruchet, *L'abolition des droits seigneuriaux en Savoie*, Annecy, 1908. I have utilized the Lafitte Reprints Marseille, 1979 (avec une préface de J. Nicolas). See also J. Nicolas, *La fin du régime seigneurial en Savoie (1771-1792)*, in AA.VV., *L'abolition de la féodalité dans le monde occidental*, Paris, 1971, I, pp. 27-208.

⁹ See K. Griewank, *Il concetto di rivoluzione nell'età moderna. Origini e sviluppo*, Firenze, 1979.

¹⁰ See M. Cuaz, *L'immagine della Rivoluzione francese nella stampa periodica italiana (1787-1795)*, tesi di dottorato in Storia (Storia della società europea), 1987, Biblioteca del Dipartimento di Storia, Università di Torino.

¹¹ See G. Prato, *L'evoluzione agricola nel secolo XVIII e le cause economiche dei moti*

towns especially that the first clear signs of a latent class struggle could be seen. In Cuneo, Alessandria, Asti, Dronero, Fossano the nobles withdrew into their country houses, while the middle classes had the coffee houses as their places of communication and formation of public opinion, and these, in turn, were different from the places where the working classes gathered in their free time. Another place of contention was the theatre, which was almost always in the hands of the nobility, who tended to either exclude or ostracize the other classes.

The case of Vercelli is of interest, a flourishing agricultural market, on the borders of Lombardy, where the systems of tenancy and hiring had been imposed on the old farming tradition. In the letters of the governor, an aristocrat who identified himself with the cause of the local gentry, we can find all the symptoms of unrest: the reading of French newspapers in the cafes, the complaints of the middle classes, especially the merchants, against the nobility, the unwillingness to pay those local taxes that only went into the pockets of the gentry (to pave the roads of the town for their carriages), the opposition to church tithes. The largest opposition group was identified by geographical location and profession: they were all tenant farmers, contractors, merchants from Lake Maggiore and therefore called *Laghisti*¹². The main subject of the controversy with the nobles was the administration of the hospital and the almshouses.

Despite the example of the French Revolution now in course, their actions would have petered out in dinners and anonymous sarcastic pasquinades about the local authorities and the aristocrats, if the Counter-Revolutionary fervour of the Ministry of the Interior had not begun to see in these signs of tension more sinister evidence of a plot. The most famous document is a false proclamation, signed « Graneri » (the Secretary for the Interior) in which the *Laghisti* pretended that the Minister, in agreement with the King, invited any subject who had suffered injustice, to report it directly to their ruler or his Minister to obtain redress. The game continued, in that the *Laghisti* themselves sent an answer contrary to the first document in which they declared themselves satisfied with the redress offered by the king's justice. At this point the government decided to arrest the promoters. There were dark rumours in Vercelli about the three arrested men. It was known that the court party wanted to hang them as an example. In the event, the governor decided for a milder line of action: after one month the prisoners were released.

del 1792-1798 in Piemonte, Torino, 1909. See also F. Catalano, « Il problema dell'affittanza nella seconda metà del Settecento in un'inchiesta piemontese del 1793 » in *Annali della fondazione Feltrinelli*, 1959, pp. 429-482.

¹² See G. Roberti, « Il cittadino Ranza. Ricerche documentate » in *Miscellanea di storia italiana*, tomo XXIX, Torino, 1890; see also D. Perrero, « Alcune dimostrazioni antisemitiche nel secolo passato », in *Curiosità e ricerche di storia subalpina*, V, 1983, pp. 373-392.

At this point, however, a man entered the scene who was destined to become a protagonist of Jacobin ideas not only in the Piedmont region. This was Giovanni Ranza, whose story is of interest for two different reasons: firstly to understand how and through what references to the past people became revolutionaries; the second because Ranza, as a journalist and correspondent, was an extraordinary and effective creator of stereotypes, which he used to form a language, or perhaps even more, an image of the people and of revolution. To answer the first question, that is, how did people become revolutionaries, we must read Roberti's accurate biography. Ranza, the son of a pork-butcher, had been able to study, as a result of the Amedean reform, in the provincial colleges. As Marina Roggero has noted in a recent book, the state expected these poor scholarship pupils to choose the most useful and less popular faculties: surgery or arts. Thus Ranza had become a secondary school teacher in his home town.

But teachers were obliged to remain single. Anyone wishing to get married was forced to find another profession; which happened to another teacher who was a martyr to the Revolution, Carlo Tenivelli, who was shot in 1797¹³. Ranza, who had started to work with the Vercelli printer Palnalis, on local church and civic matters and on his interests in economy (the problems of the silk and rice industries) had chosen the publishing profession, an activity in which he had been engaged for ten years at the outbreak of the Revolution.

In this Vercelli provincial we can find certain characteristics of the culture of the late Enlightenment: his parochial pro-Jansenism, which led him to correspond with Scipione di Ricci; his intense reading of Rousseau, which reinforced the idea of democracy and equality he had already found in the message of the Gospels provoking hostility to the institution of the Church. He was also an attentive reader of Italian periodicals and in particular those of Turin, such as the «Biblioteca oltremuriatana». Through similar reviews and other reading, Ranza must have formed a clear idea of what had happened in Paris and of the new dignity the Third Estate had attached. His role in the history of Vercelli thus takes on particular significance. He was not one of the Laghisti; his social level, habits and perhaps even his culture excluded him. He took part in the question as an intellectual, as a rational mediator and as a potential scapegoat.

The mixture was somewhat strange, but the result was effective. After a first letter to Graneri in which he informed him of the great success of the Laghisti writers and of the fundamental justice of their cause, listing the abuses of the nobility, their prevarications, the need to return to the substance of the *legge dei pubblici* which governed local administration¹⁴, Ranza

¹³ On C. Tenivelli, see C. Calcaterra, *Il nostro imminente Risorgimento*, Torino, 1935.

¹⁴ On the *Legge dei pubblici*, 6. July 1775 see A. Petracchi, *Le origini dell'ordinamento comunale e provinciale italiano sugli enti locali dalla fine dell'Antico Regime al chiudersi dell'età cavourriana*, Venezia, 1962, voll. 3, I.

offered himself as a mediator or even as a victim. The government only had to choose the way; that was the first step. As a rational representative of a people suffering injustice, he first went to Turin, and then to Moncalieri for an audience with the king. He only managed a few minutes' interview with an official who told him of the king's anger. In actual fact, the investigations Graneri set in motion at Vercelli, while uncovering no actual malpractice on the part of the nobles, were partially favorable to the popular party, advising the increase of the latter's presence in the local council. Ranza considered this as a personal victory, and followed it up with bombastic proclamations in which he maintained that for the first time « the sons of the earth » had defeated the « sons of light ». His attacks on the nobles' attempt to void this victory by putting forward a candidate they could easily control became harsher and harsher.

While Ranza was fighting this courageous battle, which was inevitably to lead to his flight, exile and a career as a militant revolutionary, he had begun another controversy, which has always somewhat puzzled scholars of this brilliant but complicated Jacobin. Clashing with a rich Jew of Vercelli, Salomon Levi, Ranza reported him to the state authorities not only because he had been disrespectful to him and had then had an official block Ranza's protest, but also because the other Jews (not only in Vercelli but elsewhere) no longer wore the badges prescribed by the 1770 Constitution and did not feel themselves confined to the Ghetto. One of the components of Ranza's anti-Semitism was undoubtedly of religious origin. The former Jansenist found it hard to forgive what he continued to think of as a people of deicides. But rather than dwell on this almost perverse contradiction in Ranza's nature, which he atoned for ten years later by including everyone in his formulation of a universal tolerance, two aspects are worthy of note. The first is that the identification with the popular cause (the People with a capital letter) should lead Ranza to discriminate another even more oppressed people as separate from the People. The second was that he felt the insult suffered at the hands of the Jew to be more serious because he considered his position as a professor to be that of a public official.

Ranza deserves attention, too, for his subsequent and for his iconographic innovations. Not by chance, his *Monitore italiano* opened with a verse from the St. John Gospel: « the truth will make you free »; and from the first issue Ranza dedicated much space to explaining the frieze which decorated his newspaper¹⁵: the Liberty cap between two daggers. According to Ranza it was based on a Roman medal coined after the assassination of Caesar. « The cap is a symbol of liberty because it was used by the slaves to cover their bare heads, and the two daggers stand for the two tyrannicides and liberators of Rome, Brutus and Cassius. On Nero's death the People wore the cap to demonstrate their freedom... »¹⁶. Both the *Monitore italiano* and

¹⁵ *Monitore italiano politico e letterario per l'anno 1793, secondo della repubblica francese e della redenzione de' popoli schiavi*, Monaco, 1793, 1° trim.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

the later *L'amico del Popolo* are invaluable sources for examining the changing image of the people and the revolution.

Ranza appears particularly sensitive to the stylizations of persuasive propaganda and to the ceremonial character republican preaching imposed. Not only did he invent the colours of the flag and the cockade of the Republic of Alba, substituting the French blue with pomegranate – the fruit of unity – but his Magnificat to the Mother of the Son of Man after the proclamation of the republic made the lay Jacobin Girolamo Saliceti smile¹⁷. As. A. Saitta has pointed out, in the *Projet* of 1796 which arose from the agreement between Buonarroti and the patriots who had taken refuge in Nice, among whom were Maurizio Pellisseri, Ignazio Bonafous and Ranza himself, a specific role was reserved for the parish priests and the parishes as a basic unit of the new democracy¹⁸. This was to be Ranza's position later in a text which had considerable influence, *Esame della confessione auricolare*, which not only attacked the institution of the Church, but demonstrated the full agreement of Christianity with assembly-based democracy. In any case, a column which appeared in the Lombard review *Termometro politico* was entitled the « Parroco repubblicano » (Republican Pastor), though the journal's point of view was slightly different from Ranza's.

The desire to construct a new vision of the world for a people who were by now totally integrated in their rights and duties led journalists like Ranza to examine and discard all the *topoi* of the anthropology of the past: not only education, but holidays and carnival (Ranza advocated a much more austere carnival without masks « because the apostles of Reason and truth must abhor them », with educational entertainment [« Andrea Chenier » and « Il matrimonio di fra Giovanni » by C.A. Pilati]) everything must be reformulated, even to ceremony of democratic death, where the universal guillotine was compared to the class deaths of hanging and beheading. Ranza, indeed, held that « after democratizing the execution block » « the place and rite of execution » must be democratized as well, by fixing « one place for everyone ».

Turning now from the able inventions of Jacobin journalists, which draw on a classical background, with the more complex aim of pinning down the ideological change in concepts such as people and revolution by seeking out the direct voice of those strata the Gramscian stereotype has defined as subordinate, we find that the sources available are not easy and almost all are indirect. An exception is a famous document, quoted by Giuseppe Prato and later published by Franco Catalano: dating from 1792, it was the starting point for an enquiry into rents in the lower provinces, for which we have the dramatic accounts of the bailiffs. The peasants, from communities stretching from the Langhe to the Pinerolese, appeal to the king, with the

¹⁷ G. Roberti, *Il cittadino Ranza*, cit.

¹⁸ See A. Saitta, « Struttura sociale e realtà politica nel progetto costituzionale dei giacobini piemontesi (1796) » in *Società*, 1949, pp. 436-475

mediation of the Cardinal Archbishop of Turin. They see the nobles and the great landlords as their enemies: if the king can bring justice and control those ravenous wolves for ever, he will have nothing to fear. But he will have the courage to act as the sovereign of his peasants and break with the nobles, who are not even capable of defending him. Otherwise, and herein lay the threat, they would not need to call on the French.

This document is highly interesting for our purposes. It was written when the war was already going on. We may ask who wrote it and in the name of what « people ». It is quite easy to see that this document, which cannot have been the only one to reach the government, came from the sharecroppers, from an area where the *masserizia* (steward farming) was threatened but still the prevalent system. Some months before, precisely in the Pinerolese, several sharecroppers had been arrested for circulating petitions against *affittanza* (tenancy system) and requesting the government to come to their aid. As we know, the Piedmontese state lost both Nice and Savoy in the space of a few days. The information the Ministry for the Interior continued to receive from informers in the territories occupied by the French are of great interest. There are, for example, various descriptions of the ceremonies the occupying forces organised at Nice in October 1792, when they set up the liberty tree. A beautiful woman, whom the informant guessed to be the mistress of General Anselme, had played the part of the Goddess Reason breaking the chains of Piedmont. Nevertheless, the informers insisted on the fact that the population, except for local civil servants, had not only remained faithful to the king of Savoy, but were only waiting for the signal and arms to rebel¹⁹. The peasants from the countryside and the mountains in the Counties had earned the nickname of *Barbetti*, which had once been used for the valiant Waldensians.

Things were different in Savoy, where only the nobility in service and the civil service had remained loyal to the old order, and the informers there were men like Joseph de Maistre and the ex-bailiff Vignet des Etoles, followers of Mallet du Pan²⁰. Even in the 1794 conspiracy, which was not limited to Turin alone, but spread to Alba and Asti, the real « people », that is the artisans and peasants, were basically uninvolved. The only category which took part to any extent was that of the hairdressers and wigmakers. Peasants and artisans were few. The report of the *Preside* of the Congregation of Superga, Caretti di Ferrere, who helped to discover the plot through a peasant, Fenoglio, recruited by the Junod, shows that Fenoglio's participation in the plot was prompted by his desire to make money out of those odd

¹⁹ Archivio di Stato di Torino (A.S.T.), *Materie politiche relative all'interno*, mazzo IV, fasc. 1, *Notizie politiche e militari relative a Nizza, Savoia e Piemonte...*, i, *Notizie relative alla città e contea di Nizza che si sono ricevute per diverse lettere dell'avvocato Cristini*.

²⁰ See J. Nicolas, *Un Intendant des Lumières: Vignet des Etoles en Val d'Aoste in AA.VV., L'età dei Lumi. Studi storici sul Settecento europeo*, Napoli, 1985, voll. 2, II, pp. 693-735.

bourgeois and military men who wanted to overturn the world by eating bread and sausage and drinking good wine and teaching the peasants that the nobles were tyrants and their ministers wicked men²¹.

There was no strong popular support for the Republic of Alba in 1796, either. But the urban and peasant rebellion of July 1797 was a different matter. Here the driving force was hunger, the fear of the wheat-growing areas that their crops would be carried off to a capital now seen as distant and parasitic. Then there were the mountain and hill districts which rebelled to get wheat, rice or at least corn. In this paper we are not concerned with the dynamics of these events, which all took place between July 20 and 30, when the situation was well under the control of the local counter-revolutionaries and the law courts. We may however note that at Fossano, one of the centres where the revolt first broke out, the Jacobins were never in full control even momentarily, but rather the professional bourgeoisie exploited the anger of the urban poor and the peasants to break the traditional power of the nobles. The mediation of the bishop, who obtained the king's pardon, re-established order without bloodshed. Events in Savigliano were similar. But the rebellion in Racconigi took a different, more radical turning; the artisans were more numerous than the peasants and they were helped by professional revolutionaries such as Giorgio Govean. Here they even managed to copy the political organization of the French Republic. Saluzzo was again different in that the revolt channeled itself into a revolutionary « army », led by Carlo Gallo. But the most complex situation of all was in Asti, where the republic was proclaimed; dominated by Jacobins, it set up three committees, and tried to constitute an army and a territory of its own.

If we compare the different accounts of these urban rebellions, we are struck by the fact that both at Fossano and Asti the initial bone of contention regarded religious ceremonies and the hierarchy of the classes in organizing processions. Another element of interest is the use of traditional alliances, like those involved in the *Pallio* between Alessandria and Asti, to propagandize the revolution²². The Asti radicals were well aware of the need to involve the Church; they limited themselves to eliminating the word « noble » from the statue of Saint Secondo, the patron saint of the town.

Moving into the countryside, apart from the political price of wheat, rice or corn, one of the commonest requests was for equality in funerals. Many areas register the complaint that when poor people die not even the parish priest accompanies them to the cemetery and the bells do not toll.

²¹ A.S.T., *Materie politiche relative all'interno*, mazzo V, fasc. 1, 1794. *Congiura Junod Chantel, Relazione del Signor Presidente della R. Basilica di Superga Casare Garretti di Ferrere intorno alla congiura fatta in Torino dai Junod, Chantel, etc.*

²² See C.L. Grandi, *Repubblica d'Asti dell'anno 1797. Relazione dei fatti seguita da un sommario della storia generale della città*, Asti, 1851. See also N. Gabiani, *Rivoluzione e controrivoluzione in Asti nel 1797 (diario sincrono di S. Incisa)*, Pinerolo, 1903; A. Bianco, *Asti ai tempi della Rivoluzione e dell'Impero*, Asti, 1964.

We may well ask why these revolts which increasingly closed Turin in their encircling grip, did not overthrow the State of Savoy in 1797. The reasons are many and stem from the French policy, which was indifferent, if not hostile, to the rebels. But most important was the fact that after the greatest wave of rebellion was over, the parish priests, mayors, judges and notables met in the local councils to restore the basic functions of the state: justice, the defence of property, assistance. The *Legge dei pubblici*, the cause of tension in large towns, where it has been badly administered, in small communities became an effective and flexible instrument for raising state functions in an orderly way from the very ashes of violence.

In conclusion, returning to a wider dimension than the Piedmontese situation I have been examining, I would like to mention some material that is invaluable for any examination of revolutionary ideas in Italy: the 51 essays, or those of them that still exist, presented in the competition on what government would be most useful in Italy, held in 1796²³, whose most important texts began to circulate in 1797. They confirm that the revolutionaries used material, models and ideologies of the past to create the future. The intellectuals exhibit concepts, impulses and obscure desires which police records attributed to the peasants. Thus Giovanni Fantoni²⁴ most articulately voiced the popular request for equality in death in an implicit materialism, when he wrote: « The earth is the burial place of all animals. Their bodies are destined for reproduction. Every man must be buried in his own fields, if he has any; if he doesn't, then in those of his friend or the relations who claim the body. On the grave must be planted a fruit-bearing tree if the deceased was married, a non-fruit-bearing tree if he was single. The body of those without friends or relations must be buried at the roadside »²⁵.

Much more realistically, the rebellious peasants of Scalenghe, a village in the province of Turin on the plain between Pinerolo and Carmagnola, July 24, 1797, added a significant request to their list of economic demands, for dignity on death: « the bodies of the local poor must be taken up on their respective houses without payment, for they put the body on a cart without lights as if they were animals, because the parish priest has his fat fee... »²⁶. They requested dignity in death, even if not the absolute equality the materialist Jacobin doctor and poet would have liked, and also the search for some sort of new quality in life. In fact, the seventh point of these

²³ See A. Saitta, *Alle origini del Risorgimento: i testi di un celebre concorso* (1976), Roma, 1964, voll. 3.

²⁴ G. Fantoni, *Risposta al quesito « Quale dei governi liberi convenga alla felicità dell'Italia »*, in A. Saitta, *Alle origini del Risorgimento*, cit., I, pp. 175-209.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

²⁶ A.S.T., *Materie politiche relative all'interno*, mazzo VII, fasc. 4, 1797 e s.d. *Situazione negli stati sabaudi di terra ferma con particolare riferimento ai movimenti insurrezionali, Scalenghe, copia di deliberazione per li tumulti vigenti li 26 luglio 1797*. The deliberation of the community of Scalenghe is a sort of justification for the decisions taken during the popular revolt and reports the requests of the poor. See cc. 277 sgg.

demands required the mill owners to adopt safety measures, and not to keep poultry and doves in adjacent yards, « nor pigs which could damage the flour » because they were harmful to the public. These demands for standards of hygiene, which the nobles and bourgeois of the century considered important, reveal a new dimension of *oeffentlichkeit* which the Revolution had conferred upon them as the People.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.