

Fondazione Bruno Kessler

Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento

Jahrbuch des italienisch-deutschen historischen Instituts in Trient

Contributi/Beiträge 32

I lettori che desiderano informarsi
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Dialogue against Violence

The Question of Trentino-South Tyrol in the International
Context

edited by

Giovanni Bernardini / Günther Pallaver



Società editrice il Mulino
Bologna



Duncker & Humblot
Berlin

FBK - Istituto Storico Italo-Germanico

Translations by Silvia Arnold and Ralph Nisbet

DIALOGUE

against violence : the question of Trentino South Tyrol in the international context /
edited by Giovanni Bernardini, Günther Pallaver. - Bologna : Il mulino ; Berlin : Duncker & Humblot,
2017. - 249 p. ; 24 cm. - (Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento. Contributi ; 32 =
Jahrbuch des italienisch-deutschen historischen Instituts in Trient. Beiträge ; 32)

Nell'occh. : Fondazione Bruno Kessler

ISBN 978-88-15-27340-6 - ISBN 978-3-428-15253-7

1. Trentino-Alto Adige - Autonomia 2. Trentino - Nazionalità 3. Alto Adige - Nazionalità
I. Bernardini, Giovanni II. Pallaver, Günther

945.38509 (DDC 22.ed.)

Cataloging in Publication record: FBK - Biblioteca

The translation of this work has been funded by SEPS
SEGRETIARIATO EUROPEO PER LE PUBBLICAZIONI SCIENTIFICHE



Via Val d'Aposa 7 - 40123 Bologna - Italy
seps@seps.it - www.seps.it

This book is published with the financial support of the Autonomous Region Trentino-South Tyrol and the Autonomous Province of Trento

ISBN 978-88-15-27340-6

ISBN 978-3-428-15253-7

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Conflict and Cooperation: Trentino-South Tyrol through the Prism of Autonomy

by *Giovanni Bernardini* and *Günther Pallaver*

The Trentino-South Tyrol affair took the entire twentieth century to work its course. That it presents unique and unrepeatable features is evident even to a superficial inspection. Only the presumption which political model-making sometimes displays could possibly gloss over the peculiar local historical ins-and-outs of the Brenner Pass dispute, integration of the Trentino and South Tyrolean communities into Italian national life, the magnitude of the issue to Austria's and Italy's political and social life, or the interweaving of violence with dialogue from 1919 on. But the present volume stems from the belief that in many respects the Trentino-South Tyrol issue is pertinent to European and international history as well: analyzing its main developments may stimulate comparative and transnational study of similar phenomena, past and present. To be honest, the authors of this book can hardly claim this discovery for themselves. The international literature on many frontier disputes, ethno-linguistic conflicts, and bids for autonomy or independence has tended to include South Tyrol as an instance of dark days of violence being transcended by negotiatory formulas and rules that proved satisfactory to all involved in the dispute. Where the book is innovative is in all its authors' shared decision to review the essential stages of that historical chapter through the prism of autonomy: the principle on which the Trentino-South Tyrol issue was first theoretically settled by the 1946 Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement, and then thrashed out in detail by the so-called "second statute" finalized in the early 1970s after a decade of intense negotiations interspersed with widespread violence.

The editors would like to thank the Regione Autonoma Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol and the SEPS for their contribution to this publication. *Translation by Ralph Nisbet*

It is well known that the story of the South Tyrolean question stemmed from a reconfiguration of Europe in the aftermath of World War I that cannot be reduced to mere rectification of borders between the parties involved. Appropriated from the Habsburg Empire when that multinational conglomerate collapsed even before the hour of defeat, the land became part of the Kingdom of Italy. Symbolically it was hailed as the last step rounding off Italian unity, in the name of which the Great War had been dubbed the “Fourth War of Independence”. It was by no means the only such case in Europe: four multinational empires had just ceased to exist. But more than any other, the Italian case raised new issues in that altered postwar situation, the first being the “principle of nationality” proclaimed by US President Woodrow Wilson as a commandment underpinning postwar order. It acted as a beacon to a host of ethnic and linguistic minorities who found to their dismay that they were trapped by a new frontier demarcation inside a political and territorial system that they deemed unjust. The issue was especially heartfelt when there was an outside country of reference (to the South Tyroleans it was the newly independent Austria), reunion with which was a goal. On the other hand, Wilson’s principle clashed with *realpolitik* and the claims of victors, like Italy, who demanded territorial recompense for their recent sacrifices or had needs to satisfy, such as frontier security.

Yet it would be wrong to maintain, as so often in the past, that annexation promptly led to a general deliberate bulldozing of ethnic, linguistic, administrative and political differences. Significantly, our book opens with Andrea Di Michele’s essay reconstructing the debate by the liberal Italian elite from 1919 to 1923 as to the need to set up some (admittedly vague) form of autonomy facilitating the new territories’ delicate process of integration into the greater national community. Evidently, in that short timespan hardline claims had not yet come to the fore. From such a debate one even glimpses the possibility that the Kingdom of Italy might have steered, politically and administratively, towards devolution of central to local power and upholding of citizen rights; or that certain arguments put forward at the time might have left a lasting trace, despite the clamp-down enforced by Fascism in the months to come. The next phase is covered by Eva Pfanzelter: the two interwar decades saw Fascism conducting an intense and brutal policy of Italianization even in Trentino, let alone South Tyrol. The aim was to stamp out any claim to a separate identity, political representation

in local affairs, or the experiment of decentralized administration. The acme of this period of spurned autonomy was reached with the pact between Fascism and Nazism (specifically dealt with by Pfanzelter): by it the South Tyrolean population were made to “opt” definitively between Italian nationality—entailing continued residence in their homeland but with no prospect of their ethnic or linguistic identity being retained—or German nationality, which would force them to emigrate to the Reich. The local community was brutally torn, spelling dramatic short- and long-term consequences, which, mysteriously, later historians have often re-scaled in terms of the political liabilities and the enforced change and separation involved for the German-speaking minority. The whole episode cries out for comparison with what took place elsewhere in Europe under the great dictators, and more generally the vexed relations between authoritarian or totalitarian regimes and the claims of autonomy, which are still very relevant to the world’s conflict areas.

Conceptually, Maurizio Cau’s essay stands as a bridge between the two postwar moments. He traces the evolution of ideas in a leading figure of the Italian and European scene: Alcide De Gasperi. De Gasperi’s Trentino background and his personal career spanning from the Imperial Habsburg Parliament to that of the Kingdom of Italy, to the office of Prime Minister in the Republican era, inevitably made him more sensitive than others to resumption of the autonomy cause, which he had never relinquished as one way of combining the need for state unity with defense of local communities. Cau’s paper shows how De Gasperi’s propensity for decentralization was not just a one-off gambit for solving the South Tyrolean question constructively, but an embedded form of resistance to the standardizing management of political and administrative affairs that emerged so strongly in liberal times and reached an extreme pitch under Fascism. Here again the topic has tie-ups with other parts of Europe (Germany above all) at times when an element of autonomy and decentralization was seen as an antidote to resurgent old, or emerging new, forms of authoritarianism.

Paolo Pombeni is still more explicit in placing a key moment of the affair in an international context: viz. the Paris Agreement for the protection of German-speaking residents of Alto Adige, signed on September 5, 1946, by Austrian Foreign Secretary Gruber and by De Gasperi. The essay points out above all the substantial differences between the two postwar periods as regards both Italy and Europe, and more generally

the new dynamics brought by the relative decline of the Old Continent and the rapid rise of new ideological and political conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. While that background weighed against Austria's request to revise the Brenner frontier, it did ultimately encourage autonomy as the solution defusing the conflict and transforming a permanent bone of contention into an area of cooperation between Vienna and Rome.

Rolf Steininger begins by tackling the same phase with more marked attention to the German-speakers' viewpoint. He rebuts the view that the Austrian leaders "sold the Alto Adige for a plate of lentils" in signing the Paris Agreement. Quite the reverse: the definition of autonomy contained in the wording marked a great step forward for the times; above all, it was the best that could be obtained from an objectively weak position and one where the chief international forces were against revising territorial boundaries. The essay also points out that in being included in the Peace Treaty among the winning powers and Italy, the Agreement conferred a certain international guarantee. It placed an additional restraint on the Italian authorities and would have consequences for the future. The importance that both the last two essays give to the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement highlights one basic point above all: where protection of minorities was concerned, it was unique of its kind on the European postwar scene. The issue was little regarded at the time: it had been perversely exploited by Nazi policy (which professed to be upholding Germanic minorities in Europe); it was also being upstaged by worldwide concern about protection of human rights on an individual and universal basis; and it was very much a side issue in the new Cold War setting. Yet both papers show how that document is still viewed as a source of inspiration in many parts of today's world whenever similar disputes need to be resolved. At the same time both essays reveal how the Italian authorities dragged their feet over translating the terms of the accord into the first *Statute of Autonomy*, not to mention implementing it properly over the next two decades. Such shortcomings, and a still unclear role played by certain interested third parties, triggered a new cycle of political radicalization, terrorist violence, and military build-up in the area.

Giovanni Bernardini's chapter sets out primarily to show what an unusual course the South Tyrolean question ran post 1945, compared to the more general resurgence of the ethno-nationalist phenomenon

in Europe. Bernardini particularly sifts the historical reasons why the issue of autonomy for the Trentino-South Tyrol enjoyed a phase of positive, concrete regulation during the 1960s, when by contrast many an ethnic or regional movement across Europe was running into deadlock and breakdown of dialogue, radicalizing quarrels in a way that would linger until our own day in some cases. What actually helped to codify and implement a new “statute” of autonomy was, internationally, the first signs of détente in the Cold War, broadening of the European integration process to which Italy belonged and which Austria eyed with interest; and in Italy the progressive reforming winds of the first center-left governments.

Miriam Rossi likewise develops an international line, tracing the hitherto under-explored episode of Austria’s early-1960s appeals to the UN to take a position on the South Tyrolean question. In the ensuing diplomatic battle, much of the concrete reasoning behind Vienna’s action came to light, but also an ill-concealed intent to reopen the frontier issue rather than stressing the dearth of autonomy. Vienna also attempted to steer the debate into the broader channels of self-determination of peoples, which were now being stirred up by Third World claims for full decolonization. The essay shows how the UN itself ultimately saw autonomy and the contents of the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement as the framework in which the dispute should be pursued, and bilateral talks between Austria and Italy as the only way of arriving at a satisfactory solution to the issue.

The same broad complex web of multi-level negotiations between Austria and Italy, South Tyrol and Trento, culminating in the *Second Statute of Autonomy*, forms the subject of Federico Scarano’s chapter. His essay focuses on the essential role of certain leaders of the day (above all Aldo Moro in Italy and Silvius Magnago in South Tyrol) in guiding the dispute towards forward-looking dialogue stripped of maximalism, and avoiding the mire of reiterated questions of principle based on recent or remote history. Scarano’s close attention to the Commission of 19, set up to devise new measures of Trentino and South Tyrolean autonomy, makes clear the patterns of negotiation that led to a positive outcome as well as creating multi-level institutional dialogue that has enabled controversy to be happily settled down to our own day and set a good example of conflict management for central and local powers in Italy and the rest of the world.

Peter Thaler's paper tackles the complex and thorny issue of rebirth of Austria's national identity after World War II and how this was affected by the spotlight on the South Tyrolean question. Vienna insisted on championing the rights of the South Tyroleans, unlike its line with other German-speaking minorities in the former Habsburg Empire. The reason for this distinction was that, unlike other territories, the South Tyrol felt like an amputation from the body of the Austrian nation causing serious damage to the social and economic fabric. The result, however, was a dangerous split between pursuance of realistic political goals and elevation of the South Tyrol to an identity symbol for the little central European state. The confusion of aims led some parts of Austrian society into ambiguous behavior at the height of the terrorist phase, until a more sensible political attitude prevailed. Once again, there prove to be clear analogies with other past and present cases where a country has got caught up in the role of protector to a minority subjected to an alien power.

Lastly, Günther Pallaver outlines the process by which South Tyrolean terrorism was overcome, and how the model for resolving the conflict came from implementing the second statute during the 1980s. The latter has proved to be the main source of strength in the developing autonomy of the two Provinces of Trento and Bolzano, bringing peaceful coexistence to the different linguistic groups. That model is called "contractual democracy" by the author, a participatory venture by all parties involved, international, national, and regional.

While the special features of that model teach how it was possible to solve such a violent and deep-seated conflict, leading us full circle to the local peculiarities of the situation this introduction began by sketching, nonetheless some of those basic features and the underlying spirit might serve as a positive model for emulation by other parts of the continent and the world where conflict born of the bid for autonomy has not managed to break out of the spiral of extreme violence and refusal to dialogue. It may indeed still be difficult to find results achieved elsewhere that compare with the case of the Trentino-South Tyrol in terms of autonomy breeding peace and spurring development; but the contributors to this volume sincerely hope that fuller understanding of this example may help make it a less exceptional event on the international scene.

Problems of Integration

Trentino and South Tyrol Pass from Austria to Italy

by *Andrea Di Michele*

1. *Introduction*

In a newspaper supplement, one may occasionally come across some potted historical account where the war's end and the baton of sovereignty passing from the Austro-Hungarians to Italy in the "lands of irredentism" seems to coincide more or less with the advent of Fascism. In such a reconstruction, Bolzano, Trento, and Trieste switch allegiance almost from one day to the next: from belonging to the multinational Double Monarchy—where tensions and contradictions are usually glossed over—to the Fascist state with its policy of denationalization. This distorted collapsing of the four years between late 1918 and the March on Rome is clearly reflected in the historical awareness of the inhabitants who lived through the events in question. To the non-Italian-speaking minority who joined Italy against their will, the trauma of separating from the rest of their community in the memory often merges with the high-handed treatment they received during the Fascist era. The brief interim, those four years of liberal government, inevitably get squashed between events that clearly encapsulate a period: the Great War and the collapse of Empire on the one hand, the rise of a Fascist dictatorship on the other.

2. *Moderation and contradictions under a military administration*

The trajectory by which the new Italians finished in the jaws of Fascism was actually not so swift or linear. The war had barely ended when a provisional military governorship was set up to administer the territories

Translation by Ralph Nisbet

Italy was bent on annexing¹. This occurred on the northern and the eastern frontiers. All Tyrolean territories south of the Brenner—South Tyrol, Trentino, and Ampezzano—were placed under General Guglielmo Pecori Giraldi who doubled as commander of the First Army on the Trentino front and plenipotentiary of government². Full powers, therefore, which the general wielded under guidance from the general secretariat for civil affairs, an office set up at high command on the outbreak of war, its task being to manage and govern any territory the Italian army might occupy.

Pecori Giraldi had a distinguished “African curriculum” to his name, having taken part in several overseas colonial operations³. First at Dogali in Eritrea from 1887 to 1889 on an expedition intended to avenge the January 1887 massacre; from 1895 to 1898 he was back in Eritrea; next from 1903 to 1907 he commanded the Royal Corps of Colonial Troops in Eritrea, including a period of temporary governorship⁴; lastly Tripoli and Cyrenaica in 1911-1912 where he commanded a mobile division in the Libyan campaign after which he was shipped home and put out to grass following an “unfortunate colonial episode”⁵, the defeat

¹ E. CAPUZZO, *Dal nesso asburgico alla sovranità italiana. Legislazione e amministrazione a Trento e Trieste (1918-1928)*, Milano 1992, and by the same author, *Dall’Austria all’Italia. Aspetti istituzionali e problemi normativi nella storia di una frontiera*, Roma 1996.

² U. CORSINI, *Il Trentino e l’Alto Adige nel periodo 3.11.1918 - 31.12.1922*, in U. CORSINI - G.B. EMERT - H. KRAMER, *Trentino e Alto Adige dall’Austria all’Italia*, Bozen/Bolzano 1969, pp. 103-229, now in U. CORSINI, *Problemi di un territorio di confine. Trentino e Alto Adige dalla sovranità austriaca all’accordo Degasperi-Gruber*, Trento 1994, pp. 145-257, and by the same author *Guglielmo Pecori-Giraldi Governatore Militare del “Trentino, Ampezzano e Alto Adige”*, in *Memorie storiche militari 1979*, Roma 1980, pp. 229-263, now in U. CORSINI, *Problemi di un territorio di confine*, pp. 259-285; R. LILL, *L’Alto Adige dal 1918 al 1920. La politica del governatore militare Pecori-Giraldi e del commissario generale civile Credaro*, in C. GRANDI (ed.), *Tirol - Alto Adige - Trentino 1918-1920*, Trento 1996, pp. 83-94.

³ For Pecori Giraldi’s military curriculum before the Great War see A. TOSTI, *Il Maresciallo d’Italia Guglielmo Pecori-Giraldi e la I^a Armata*, Torino 1940, pp. 5-8, from which the citation is taken, and for details a copy of Stato di servizio nel Regio esercito italiano (State of Service in the Italian Royal Army) consultable at the Archivio storico del Senato, *Fascicolo personale del sen. Pecori Giraldi conte Guglielmo*, downloadable at <http://notes9.senato.it/web/senregno.nsf>.

⁴ A. DEL BOCA, *Gli italiani in Africa orientale. Dall’Unità alla marcia su Roma*, Roma - Bari 1976, p. 771.

⁵ A. TOSTI, *Il Maresciallo d’Italia*, p. 8.

of Bir Tobras⁶. He was then reinstated and recalled to service on the very brink of Italy's entry to the Great War in March 1915. What experience Pecori Giraldi gained in his numerous lengthy spells in Africa is not known; we do not know if his colonial curriculum affected his approach to governing the populations of various languages who inhabited the lands due for annexation. Interesting light on this may come from a study on the subject based on his private papers. It still awaits completion and may be consulted at the Vicenza Museum of the Risorgimento and Resistance⁷. It would also be interesting to learn more about his attitude to the nascent Fascist movement and its plans for the "new provinces". Far from negative, going by Pecori Giraldi's reply to colleagues in the senate who wished to propose him for party membership at the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome. On that occasion the general recollected receiving the same offer in December 1922 for services he had rendered to the Fascist squad at Borgo San Lorenzo when it took part in the March on Rome. Ten years later, Pecori Giraldi would again turn down the invitation, political party membership being incompatible with service in the armed forces⁸.

The Governorship was based in Trento where the Italian troops and the Governor were welcomed in a way that raised their hopes. At the Town Hall—Pecori Giraldi remembered—"I was offered flowers galore, though where they found them I knew not, it being November"⁹. True Florentine that he was, he had them taken to the Dante monument, "saying that the prime author of Italy's fortune and grandeur, guiding us to that point, was the divine poet himself"¹⁰. Relations between the general and the town thus began with the inevitable ceremony marked

⁶ References to the Bir Tobras episode for which Pecori Giraldi was harshly punished, are to be found in A. DEL BOCA, *Gli italiani in Libia. Tripoli bel suol d'amore 1860-1922*, Roma - Bari 1988, pp. 135-136 and in L. FRASSATI, *Un uomo, un giornale: Alfredo Frassati*, vol. 1/2, Roma 1978, *ad nomen*. An unkind judgment on Pecori Giraldi's military skill is given in L. DEL BOCA, *Grande guerra, piccoli generali. Una cronaca feroce della Prima guerra mondiale*, Torino 2007, *ad nomen*.

⁷ M. PASSARIN (ed.), *Guglielmo Pecori Giraldi. Maresciallo d'Italia. L'archivio*, Vicenza 1990.

⁸ Roma, Archivio storico del Senato, *Fascicolo personale del sen. Pecori Giraldi conte Guglielmo*, letter from Pecori Giraldi to Pietro Fedele, October 15, 1932.

⁹ Reported in A. TOSTI, *Il Maresciallo d'Italia*, p. 200.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

by fervent Italian sentiments. All too soon, however, it would transpire that even the “utterly Italian” Trentino would have its share of teething problems upon integration with the Kingdom of Italy.

It was a sorely tried Trento that emerged from the war¹¹. Tens of thousands of people living closest to the front had been deported to other regions of the Empire where the privations of living were compounded by hostility from the host population and then suspicion by officialdom towards subjects who spoke the treacherous ex-ally’s language. When the war ended, these refugees straggled back home and labored to rebuild a community that had undergone full-scale diaspora¹². Survivors found the landscape at sixes and sevens, especially in the south of the region which had been a theatre of war suffering dire destruction. It was not just a matter of housing the inhabitants of many townships, but reviving the tattered economic fabric of what was once a developed Trentino. Rebuilding was one of the outstanding tasks performed by the Italian military institutions, employing appreciable technical and financial means in the bleak aftermath of war. There were nonetheless cases of inefficiency and malpractice, and these would throw a blanket of discredit on a reconstruction operation that historians have found praiseworthy¹³. Such episodes, and the inevitable disappointment at the long-delayed return to normality, made the Trentino people increasingly dissatisfied with Italy and its administrative machinery. Its dilatoriness and inefficiency, real or alleged, contrasted all the time with

¹¹ F. RASERA, *Dal regime provvisorio al regime fascista (1919-1937)*, in A. LEONARDI - P. POMBENI (eds), *L'età contemporanea. Il Novecento (Storia del Trentino, 5)*, Bologna 2005, pp. 75-130; A. DI MICHELE, *L'Italia in Austria: da Vienna a Trento*, in R. PUPO (ed.), *La vittoria senza pace. Le occupazioni militari italiane alla fine della Grande Guerra*, Roma - Bari 2014, pp. 3-72.

¹² LABORATORIO DI STORIA DI ROVERETO (ed.), *Il popolo scomparso. Il Trentino, i Trentini nella prima guerra mondiale (1914-1920)*, Rovereto 2003; D. LEONI - C. ZADRA (eds), *La città di legno. Profughi trentini in Austria (1915-1918)*, Trento 1981.

¹³ On the reconstruction see A. MOIOLI, *Ricostruzione post-bellica e interventi dello Stato nell'economia della Venezia Tridentina*, in A. LEONARDI (ed.), *Il Trentino nel primo dopoguerra. Problemi economici e sociali*, Trento 1987, pp. 19-118; A. LEONARDI, *Finanza pubblica e costi della “ricostruzione” nel primo dopoguerra*, in CAMERA DEI DEPUTATI, *Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulle terre liberate e redente (luglio 1920 - giugno 1922)*, vol. 1: *Saggi e strumenti di analisi*, Roma 1991, pp. 153-241; F. RASERA - A. PISSETTI - M. GRAZIOLI - C. ZADRA (eds), *Paesaggi di guerra. Il Trentino alla fine della prima guerra mondiale*, Rovereto 2010.

the image of Habsburg administrative efficiency, which now began to verge on myth.

Recrimination at the shabby treatment was fuelled when the Austrian crown had to be converted into lire. Those who had savings in the heavily devalued currency inevitably sustained losses. It led to a wry joke going the rounds: Trentino was “40% redeemed”. The reference was to the Italian authorities’ initial exchange rate by which the value of the crown was fixed at 40 cents, way below the flat conversion that Trento and Trieste had demanded¹⁴.

Another keen grudge stemmed from the slowness with which Trentino soldiers taken prisoner by the Italian army were being sent home. They had fought in enemy uniform and were now viewed askance. On top of this, those among them who had spent time in a Russian prison-of-war camp were suspected of being brainwashed by the Bolsheviks and now potential revolutionaries on Italian soil. The soldiers’ fate ties up with the fracture line that the war had opened within Trentino society. A mass of youngsters had fought with the Austro-Hungarian army, responding to call-up by their legitimate sovereign; only a few diehard “irredentists” had managed to cross the line and enlist with the ‘enemy’ Italian army. On the one side were 55,000 men, on the other around 800. After the war and especially under Fascism, the former would sink out of public memory, upstaged by the patriots who sided with the nation¹⁵.

Postwar Trentino was thus riven by fracture lines, bones of discontent and disappointed expectations, all mixed with relief that the war was over and hope that things would soon be back to normal. In some respects the situation was still more complicated in South Tyrol. On the face of it the problems seemed less serious: the land had been on the fringe of warfare, and had suffered far less destruction than the Trentino. Nor had the population undergone the mass deportation that had blighted the lives of Italian-speakers a little further south. And yet things were actually much more complex. As a territory mainly, if not entirely, inhabited by German-speakers, it saw separation from

¹⁴ On the thorny question of converting crowns to lire cf. P. CUOMO, *Il miraggio danubiano. Austria e Italia politica ed economia 1918-1936*, Milano 2012, pp. 48-59.

¹⁵ Q. ANTONELLI, *I dimenticati della Grande Guerra. La memoria dei combattenti trentini (1914-1920)*, Trento 2008.

the lands north of the Brenner as a brutal amputation. Not only had the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed, but they were expelled from the German-speaking world. The pecking order between the two main linguistic communities was utterly reversed: suddenly the Italian minority, whom the South Tyrolese chiefly knew as seasonal farm laborers, became masters in the land.

This psychological state must be grasped if one is to understand the attitude of the South Tyrolese political elite in the months that followed the war's end. They stubbornly went on rejecting the prospect of annexation to Italy, imagining the wildest of consolatory solutions—increasingly implausible ways of defusing the dreaded outcome: constitution of an independent Tyrolese state, union with Germany, proclamation of South Tyrol as the “Republic of Southern Tyrol”¹⁶. Even once it was evident that nothing could prevent their passing over to Italy, they went on invoking their right to self-determination. This is hardly surprising if one puts oneself in the shoes of the conservative, nationalist, Christian-Social politicians and their expectation only a few months before the war ended that South Tyrol was all set to Germanize with a vengeance, the Austrian border to shift down to the southern tip of Lake Garda¹⁷. It would take some time before the German-speaking leaders realized how much, and how fast, the picture had changed on their home patch.

In this complex situation, Pecori Giraldi moved with circumspection. His margin of intervention was at best a limited one: he had to stick to the restrictions imposed by international agreements and the text of the armistice. It was against regulations for troops occupying a still formally alien territory to overthrow administrative and institutional organization, or radically purge the ranks of politicians and the civil service. His temporary task was to manage lands that Rome was reasonably sure of acquiring, confiding in the London Pact signed with the Entente powers in April 1915, by which part of Italy's reward was to be the Trentino and South Tyrol. However, until the new frontiers

¹⁶ U. CORSINI, *Il Trentino e l'Alto Adige*, pp. 170-179.

¹⁷ I refer to the plans outlined at the conference held at Vipiteno in May 1918 by the Tiroler Volksbund, on which see C. GATTERER, “*Italiani maledetti, maledetti austriaci*”. *L'inimicizia ereditaria*, Bozen/Bolzano 1986, p. 248; U. CORSINI, *Il Trentino e l'Alto Adige*, pp. 155-156.

were officially mapped out once and for all, it paid Italy to preserve a moderate profile, especially towards national minorities clamoring for the right to self-determination. The Italian military and political top brass accordingly urged the governor to caution, and he consistently obeyed orders.

But that did not mean playing a purely passive waiting game. Rome would also send word to maintain surveillance and if necessary repress any scheme that conflicted with national interest; likewise to support all pro-Italian manifestations. Prudence on the one hand, activism on the other: Pecori Giraldi's instructions were not without their contradictions¹⁸.

While Pecori Giraldi was urged to play it tactful and moderate, the government appointed a nationalist from Trento, Ettore Tolomei, known for his radical stance, to head the Alto Adige Commissariat for Language and Culture¹⁹. In the upshot, Trento and Bolzano had two Italian representatives acting upon diametrically opposite principles. It came to an acrimonious showdown from which the general emerged victorious; but quite clearly within government there were two irreconcilable lines of policy²⁰.

All in all, Pecori Giraldi's tact was seen by the nationalists as weakness. He rarely resorted to political internment, left the delicate education sector virtually untouched, and showed a light hand in purging the civil service or sacking municipal administrations. The general confined his replacements to the top positions in a few offices, those that were particularly sensitive, beginning with the civil commissioners. Under his governorship, these ruled over individual political districts in place of the old district captains of Austrian organization. They had a delicate controlling role over municipal administration and public security.

Significantly, all five civil commissioners for the South Tyrol districts were from Trentino; more generally, in the offices directly under the

¹⁸ A. DI MICHELE, *L'Italia in Austria*, pp. 43-45.

¹⁹ G. FRAMKE, *Im Kampf um Südtirol. Ettore Tolomei (1865-1952) und das "Archivio per l'Alto Adige"*, Tübingen 1987; see the monographic issue of "Archivio trentino", 4th series, 47, 1998, 1, devoted to Ettore Tolomei.

²⁰ For more details on the episode, see A. DI MICHELE, *L'italianizzazione imperfetta. L'amministrazione pubblica dell'Alto Adige tra Italia liberale e fascismo*, Alessandria 2003, pp. 50-59.

Governor and in the most delicate areas the role of Trentino officials was central²¹. Though Pecori Giraldi did not plan on any drastic marginalization of South Tyrolese from public offices, it was his clear and immediate intention to put safe Italian representatives in Austria's former administrative machinery. For this, he chose natives of the Trentino. In thinking of future prospects as well as present requirements, Pecori Giraldi gave the Trentino a strategic role in the German-speaking lands which he described as "the mixed-tongue border zone". Trento would have to supply "the various branches of administration with a certain number of officials who have good German, at least until our language is sufficiently widespread in South Tyrol, and in general maintain such contact with the German sector—according to the feelings of moderation and reconciliation, which the Trentino population nurses towards its former overlords—as they think will benefit our peaceful penetration of that region"²².

The Trentino officials were thus selected on a concrete criterion: knowledge of German and of the regulations still in force, but there was also the express awareness that the tables were now turned between the linguistic groups; without resorting to score-settling, the erstwhile "subordinates" might serve the cause of "peaceful penetration" by Italian influence south of the Brenner.

3. *Liberal Italy and linguistic minorities*

Such, then, was the medium-long term objective of the first Italian governing authority in South Tyrol. There were no plans for lightning violence or punitive action against the German minority whom Pecori Giraldi's first proclamation promised that Italy would treat "with equity and love", "alien from all overlordship towards citizens of another race or tongue"²³. But inevitably, the inhabitants were expected to be assimilated slowly and peacefully, the only way of fully incorporating them in the nation. The liberal leaders, even the best-disposed towards

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-35.

²² B. RIZZI (ed.), *La Venezia Tridentina nel periodo armistiziale. Relazione del primo Governatore (1919) ampliata di note ed allegati*, Trento 1963, p. 96.

²³ A photographic reproduction of the proclamation, dated November 18, 1918, is published in U. CORSINI - R. LILL, *Alto Adige. 1918-1946*, Bozen/Bolzano 1988, p. 93.