



Michele Presutto. *La Rivoluzione Dietro L'angolo: Gli Anarchici Italiani e la Rivoluzione Messicana, 1910-1914.* Foligno: Editorial Umbra, 2017. 169 pp. EUR 12.00 (paper), ISBN 978-88-88802-88-6.

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Italian Anarchists in Mexico

Michele Presutto's excellent work *La Rivoluzione dietro l'angolo: Gli anarchici italiani e la Rivoluzione messicana 1910-1914* represents an important contribution to the study of the Mexican Revolution, labor history in North America, and the Italian diaspora more broadly. Rather than being fractured by this expansive lens, Presutto manages to make these different elements work together, seamlessly highlighting the presence of Italian anarchists in the Mexican Revolution, the debate about the revolution in the Italian anarchist press, and the relationship between the political communities of Italians and Mexican radicals in the United States. While currently published only in Italian, it represents a short but rich source of information on the Italian-language radical press and the circulation of ideas that contributes to discussions currently being explored by English-language scholars such as Kenyon Zimmer, Pietro Di Paolo, Marcella Bencivenni, and Jennifer Guglielmo.[1]

Based largely on an exhaustive study of Italian-language anarchist newspapers, which are quoted prolifically, the book is less about what happened in Mexico than how the Italian anarchist community in the United States, Canada, Latin America, and Europe debated and digested events in Mexico. However, it does begin with a solid examination of the primary moment in which Italian anarchists participated on the ground, during the invasion of Baja California by the supporters of the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM). This chapter summarizes

events effectively and sets the stage of the book's real focus—the debate between those anarchists such as Luigi Galleani, who became disillusioned with events in Mexico, and those who continued to support the revolution as it advanced and changed. The introduction on the invasion of Baja is followed by a contextual chapter on the Garibaldi Tradition that animated Italian radical's political culture, giving it a particularly transnational kind of "internationalist" flavor. This is then backed up by a more in-depth examination of the relationship between Mexican and Italian radicals in the United States and an exploration of the moment when Italians began to flock to Mexico to fight. The real narrative of conflict begins as these revolutionary volunteers become disillusioned with events in Baja and return to the United States. Their criticism sparked an explosive debate among the Italian *sovversivi* (subversives), which added to preexisting divisions between branches of the Italian Left. Presutto also includes an interesting examination of the role Peppino Garibaldi (grandson of Giuseppe Garibaldi) played in Mexico, where he joined forces with Francisco Madero. Peppino was largely condemned by the larger Italian Left for this act, which was seen as a betrayal of the revolution and was one of the only points the various groups of Italian radicals could agree upon. In this way Presutto's work does an excellent job of exploring large historical events from the perspective of Italian radicals and their long tradition of internationalism, which dates back to the middle of the nineteenth century.

Of particular interest is the work Presutto does to explain the close relationship Italians and Mexicans had on the ground in the United States, where they shared working conditions, similar positions in the racial hierarchy, and as religious and social practices that allowed them to build a larger “Latin” identity. For example, Presutto highlights the frequent proximity of Italian and Mexican neighborhoods, the tendency for members from the two communities to intermarry, and the emergence of something of a shared language, or an Italianized Spanish. This was particularly significant in the area of Clifton, Arizona, where the mine workers shared political struggles that functioned, Presutto argues, as precursors for the invasion of Baja. After this beginning the author explores the role Italian anarchists in Los Angeles played in the “Magonista” movement, focusing on two Italians, Vittorio Cravello and Ludovico Caminita, who worked the Italian-language section of the PLM paper *Regeneración*. Presutto also gives us an in-depth biographical examination of the thirty Italian anarchists whom he has identified as combatants in Baja, and looks at the groups or anarchist circles they came from in places such as Pittsburgh, Kansas, Seattle, and Vancouver. This adds extremely useful background information and contributes meaningfully to ongoing attempts to create a map and biographical catalog of Italian anarchists in the United States. Presutto tells us it was in fact the Kansas group that became disillusioned with events in Baja and began the debate which would, as he describes, split the entire Italian anarchist movement in America into two warring factions. He believes this was caused by a caustic mix of ideological differences along the organizational/anti-organizational line, a difficulty with the religious fervor of the Zapatistas, and interpersonal animosity that predated the whole affair.

Expanding the focus of his study outward, Presutto also provides his readers with a glimpse of how this debate raged beyond the Italian American anarchist press, animating discussions in France, England, Argentina, and numerous other locations across the radical world. This debate continued until it was replaced by the larger debate about involvement in World War I, by which time

the role of the Magonistas and the anarchists in Mexico had already begun to decline. Presutto believes that the split that first began with the debate about the Mexican Revolution, and expanded in the debate over WWI, represented the end of the earlier form of Italian radicalism. It is therefore of importance to understanding the social movements that emerged in the postwar years, particularly for Italian history, because the Italians who fought there, much as they did in Spain, always had an eye toward transferring their revolutionary efforts back to their homeland.

In this way Presutto gives us an excellent piece of transnational history that deserves attention from scholars not only of Italian anarchism or of the Mexican Revolution but indeed from anyone interested in how migration and social networks function in a transnational context. By focusing on one national group which was highly international in its political activity, Presutto lets us see this turbulent era in a way that does not hide the importance of national identity or borders but rather juxtaposes them with the vibrancy of social networks which animated both powerful intellectual debates and violent physical confrontations of both interpersonal and revolutionary character. This book is therefore a worthwhile read, for those who can read Italian, and deserving of transition into English so it can contribute more effectively to the study of Italian immigrants and labor migration in America.

Note

[1]. Kenyon Zimmer, *Immigrants Against the State: Yiddish and Italian Anarchism in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015); Pietro Di Paola, *The Knights Errant of Anarchy: London and the Italian Anarchist Diaspora, 1880-1917* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017); Marcella Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture: The Idealism of the Sovversivi in the United States, 1890-1940* (New York: NYU Press, 2016); and Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

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