SYMPOSIUM – REVIEW/1

A COMMENT ON TARROW'S *WAR, STATES, AND CONTENTION*

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When asked to write a comment on Sidney Tarrow's recent book, I accepted with pleasure, both because of my regard for the author, and because looking at the book has given me the opportunity to renew – after almost 50 years – an accidentally inter-rupted friendship. I also appreciate this book because it has given me the chance to talk about and discuss with him themes that have always interested me greatly. How-ever, when I accepted the proposal, I had not fully realised the problems that a straightforward historian like me, used to working only in my own backyard, might en-counter in dealing with the general questions posed by a work of historical political sci-ence. While I am the first, therefore, to recognise my limits and my possible misunder-standings, I shall try to proceed by comparing certain of the themes presented in the fascinating picture painted by Tarrow with my own, more specific, research, which deals with the social and institutional history of the First World War, and the links of this period with the advent of Fascism and the Second World War. In particular, in re-cent years, I have been looking at the role of state intervention during the war years and at the dualism that develops between the politics of emergency and the politics of assistance (warfare and welfare) in the various belligerent nations. This has led me to concentrate on both the attack on civil rights and on the concession of certain social benefits, made in response to the needs of collective assistance and to the acquired rights of certain specific categories (the wounded, the permanently disabled, the or-

phans – but also the women employed in the war industries). These are themes, I think, relevant to some of the issues raised by Tarrow and I will try to illustrate them more fully.

The central concern of Tarrow can be located in the relationship, at certain historical moments, that civil rights have with popular movements (contentious politics), with war (war making), and with the hierarchical and/or infrastructural power of the state (state building). In respect of this last element, it seems to me – certainly simplifying – that Tarrow understands by hierarchical power both the despotic power of pre-liberal governments (for example, Italy in the first decades after Unification) and that – constricting rights – employed by all governments in specific historical moments, above all if/when justified by a state of necessity. Infrastructural power, on the other hand, can be identified, in general, in the various forms of control which link states to civil society, encouraging organisms that either cultivate consensus or carry out some kind of surveillance. As far as movements are concerned, it is clear that, while Tarrow gives greater emphasis to opposition movements, he also quite rightly includes in his analysis those engendered by an exasperated patriotism and by the opposition itself – movements which support the more extreme positions of governments with the intention of compelling them to adopt a greater use of hierarchical power.

The political dynamics of states are thus seen by Tarrow as determined by the relationship that develops between these elements – hierarchical and/or infrastructural power, rights and movements – both in wartime and in the periods following war. In this context it must be remembered that, after the First World War, there begins a long post-war which lasts until the outbreak of the Second World War (a 'thirty years war', as many have described it) and that, following the Second World War, there begins a 'war without end' with a particular impact on the organisation and control of public opinion, as Tarrow shows so well for the USA. The relationship between power and rights has to be analysed beyond the limited period of the war itself, therefore, and is conditioned by factors that Tarrow identifies as being of a political nature; factors that we recognise as constituting a 'state of exception' – an openly expressed or tacit formula that permits a state, not formally involved in military operations, to pass exceptional legislation on the basis of the principle of legitimacy, which takes the place of that of legality ('what is right is what is necessary') and to exclude from the enjoyment of civil rights certain specific categories of person, identified as 'internal enemies' (suspect foreigners, immigrants, opposition figures).

Following this rather simplified argument, I want to look at a few of the five questions that Tarrow asks about power, contention and war – that is, about the ways in which rights are modified in time of war, on how protest is controlled (contentious pol-

itics), and on how all this impacts on the politics of the post-war. These are themes that Tarrow analyses well in his chapter on Italy from Unification to fascism. I want to look in particular at the period of the First World War, analysing first the relationship between power (hierarchical-despotic and/or infrastructural power) and rights (civil and/or social), passing subsequently to an analysis of the problem of protest.

As Tarrow recognises, in Italy, despite the efforts made by Giolitti to move in a democratic direction, the state remained prevalently authoritarian in character, with a low level of social integration and without an adequate infrastructural organisation (as noted by contemporaries: See Cabrini 1914). The war served to accentuate this authoritarian character and favoured the formation of a regime that corresponded fully to the prototype of the Schmittian state. If in all belligerent countries the war changed the relationship between internal powers and led everywhere to a drastic limitation of individual liberties, in Italy, thanks to the return to government of the old *Destra storica* (personified in the couple Salandra-Sonnino) and thanks also to the very broad powers given to the military in the civilian realm, a classic despotic regime (according to the classification provided by Scheppele, listed by Tarrow on pp. 22-3) was formed, with a basis closer to the model of the autocratic enemies (Germany and Austria-Hungary) than that of the allies. In Italy the power of the legislature was virtually annulled in favour of the executive, and the judiciary was also subordinated to the executive. But Italy resembled the continental autocratic powers above all because of the extensive powers entrusted to the military, whereas in Britain and France such concessions were limited and constantly controlled by civil power. In Italy the military forces were given the jurisdiction of very large zones of the country – in the last year of the war they controlled almost all of northern and central Italy – and they were also given the total control of industrial production, in such a way as to produce a very close intertwining between politics and military industries. In addition and unlike the allies, the military had control over the labour force, which was militarised and subject, therefore, to the military penal code, as in Austria and (in part) in Germany. Finally, it has to be noted that the legislation passed at the moment of entry into the war was extremely severe: not only were public demonstrations of dissent punished with severe penalties but even opinions 'likely to produce disturbances' were punishable. Censorship was extensive, including private correspondence, and assigned to military offices, and vast powers were given to the prefects, including, in the last year of the conflict, the right to send citizens not guilty of any crime but considered 'suspect' to internal exile in remote villages and islands. This power, widely used by the military authorities in the early years of the conflict to expel from the war zones those who were citizens of enemy states and Italians suspected of sympathy with Austria (the so-called 'austriacanti'), permitted

military commanders to deport hundreds of opponents, socialists and anarchists, and to 'liberate' the cities from 'undesirable' elements, such as homosexuals and prostitutes. (On the characteristics and the effects of militarisation in the various belligerent nations, see Procacci 2009).

Many contemporary writers remarked on the trauma suffered by democracy during the First World War and on the deep and far from transitory changes produced by the conflict. While some observers concentrated their attention on the abnormal presence of the state in all sectors, including that of thought ('étatisation de la pensée' ' organisation de l'enthousiasme' according to Halévy in *L'ère des tyrannies*), others looked the abnormal expansion of the executive and the marginalisation of legislative power, or else analysed the logic of power and of the state of exception; others commented on the characteristics of the planning state, of the bureaucracy, and of organised capitalism, concentrating their analysis on the expansion of military power and on the consequent limitation of civil liberties. Thus, for example, as early as 1918 J.A.Hobson was able to write.

The antagonism between war and the exercise of those personal and political liberties comprised in democracy is indisputable [….] A brief recital of the various invasions upon ordinary liberties will suffice. This legislation, supplemented by arbitrary police administration and mob violence has made heavy inroads upon our ordinary liberties of speech, meeting and Press, of travel, trade, occupation and investment. The State restricts and regulates our use of food and drink, lets down our services of public health and education, remits the wholesome safeguards of our Factory Acts, and removes the constitutional guarantees of civil liberty. Military and civil authorities may, and do, arrest, deport and imprison men and women without formulating charges or bringing them to trial. The security of Habeas Corpus and of trial by jury in an open court, in accordance with the rules of law, has been abrogated for whole classes of alleged offenders, and in many instances the onus of proving innocence has been thrown on the arrested person. Domiciliary visits of the police, the opening of private correspondence, and the use of agents provocateurs have passed from Russia into Britain. (Hobson 1918, pp. 13-14)

Returning to the question of the violation of rights, one can ask how public opinion reacted. The reply is very probably that such opinion was conditioned mainly by propaganda. As many studies have shown, the propaganda of the allies in respect of the central powers – presented in terms of a crusade of civilisation against the Teutonic barbarians – produced a strong emotional reaction and a polarisation between 'good' and 'ill' right from the start, one that was easily transposed to the home front as a struggle against 'internal enemies', intent on undermining national resistance. And while, in

other belligerent countries, these 'internal enemies' were identified above all among foreigners and spies, in Italy, where the bitter conflict between supporters of the war and pacifist socialists had characterised the months prior to Italy's entry into the war, it was easy subsequently to identify enemies among the 'defeatists', whose propaganda – it was said – had made the Caporetto route possible. More than in other countries (though even in other countries a climate of political and ideological contrast developed in the last year of the war) – in Italy after Caporetto there developed that classic dualism, so brilliantly described by Schmitt, between 'us' and 'them'. If extremist groups sprang up everywhere in the later stages of the conflict, calling for the continuation of the war and using violence to attack supposed enemies (like the 'Patriots' who supported the strong government of Lloyd George), Italy had already had this experience in 1915, when socialist demonstrators were attacked by interventionist groups with the support of the government: the path for post-war fascist organisations had opened up in this way. It was then necessary that the dictatorial regimes integrate these private armies – *Fasci* and SA – into the structure of the state, thus making them a part of the infrastructural power of the regime.

As Tarrow notes, the war, given the enormous multiplication of public responsibilities, produced not only the reinforcement of hierarchical power but also an expansion of infrastructural power. The exceptional functions that the state had to carry out in wartime within the civilian realm concerned essentially two areas: on one hand social control, on the other welfare and propaganda. As far as the first is concerned, it was effected by legislation limiting rights and through spying activities aimed at both enemy infiltrators and at possible 'saboteurs': the listing of suspects was perfected (in France this was done through the Carnet B, in Italy through the *Casellario Politico Centrale*, set up in 1894), as was that of foreign residents. Those agencies of counter-espionage which already existed were reinforced (there was already an efficient service in Great Britain which depended on the Secret Intelligence Service of 1909) and others were set up ex novo: one such was the *Ufficio centrale d'investigazione*, created in Italy in 1916 and the initial nucleus of what would become the fascist police. Turning to welfare and propaganda, there were a large number of government institutions in all countries operating to help the families of those enlisted, orphans, women, the demobilised, and the disabled. Thus, while civil rights were limited, social rights were extended – to the extent that the beginning of universal welfare has been argued to lie in the First World War (Procacci 2013). Even in Italy – dominated by a hierarchical-despotic power - the infrastructural network was extended: numerous public institutes were set up, but with one peculiarity – where social control was involved, most were run by the military. Besides the organisation of espionage and censorship, the military

was also given the task of enforcing discipline and organising welfare within the factories – this last through an office responsible for 'vigilance in health and hygiene'. Responsibility for food supplies and for food distribution, initially also delegated to the military authorities, was subsequently entrusted to a state agency (subject to an enquiry after the war because of its inefficiency). Propaganda and welfare was assigned by the government to the individual communes, which in turn relied on voluntary associations of private citizens. Only in 1918, following the defeat at Caporetto, did the state take on the task of propaganda, setting up a special agency – the *Ufficio P* (P for propaganda) which operated mainly at the front line. Propaganda on the home front and, above all, welfare, were neglected by the state, and those institutes set up to help soldiers, the disabled, and orphans struggled to keep going. Overall, therefore, the multiplication of infrastructural agencies was late in coming, fragmented and uncoordinated (between the military, the government, the communes, and private citizens) and inefficient (Crocella and Mazzonis 2002).

In the immediate post-war, with the disbanding of many of the principal agencies created for the war emergency (such as the *Mobilitazione industriale*), various projects of administrative and infrastructural reform were proposed which were, however, halted before completion due to the advent of Fascism. A large number of infrastructural agencies and institutes were then created by the fascist regime. If the totalitarian dictatorships represented the absolute prototype of the hierarchical and despotic state, they also perfected the infrastructural mechanisms of social control, both in a repressive and preventative sense and in a welfare and consensual direction. The many agencies of surveillance and integration in totalitarian states are well known – from the OVRA, to the Gestapo, to the KGB and the Stasi. These were accompanied by the youth and women's organisations, by the propaganda agencies, and so on (in Italy, the OMNI, the Balilla, the *Massaie rurali,* the *Dopolavoro,* etc.).

However, we must return to Tarrow's theme concerning the relationship between state power and contentious politics during the war and the post-war. We need to verify – for Italy – how the structure of power reacts when faced by agitation and, vice versa, how the agitations effect power itself.

It is clear that a fundamental cause of the agitations that rock the country right from the moment of Unification is the nature of political power – despotic power – and the lack of an effective legitimation of that power within the country. It is interesting to note how the profoundly anti-state character of the agitations continues through the Giolittian period, and is exemplified by the popular response to the Libyan war. The anti-system protest becomes particularly acute in 1914, beginning with the anti-military revolt of the 'Red Week' and carrying on in 1915 with popular protest against economic

hardship and, finally, with the political clash between interventionists and pacifists. The response to agitation is Italy's entry into the war, decided in part for reasons related to international equilibria and by the desire to impose an alternative to the existing government through the passage from a man of the liberal left like Giolitti to exponents of the authoritarian right, but also by the desire to impose a brake on social protest by force. Agitations were therefore a partial cause of entry into the war (the war was seen as a panacea). But the evolution of a particularly strong hierarchical power during the conflict does not put an end to agitation; repression cannot stop it because it does not originate from organised groups. The actions of the socialist party are in fact prevented by legislation, while local socialist organisations help with welfare and, in parliament, the parliamentary group fights for the defence of civil rights. The agitations are spontaneous and derive from elementary needs, such as the lack of bread, or from necessities created by the war itself, and they see women, who are difficult to punish collectively, as protagonists. The same happens in the factories, where anti-state sentiment is aroused by the physical presence of the military, which impose discipline; here it is always the women who begin the protests – usually short, unexpected, and repeated. These are then accompanied by those of the more skilled working class men – those linked to the socialist party.

The agitations in Italy are, therefore, continuous, beginning in the first months of the war and carrying on until its end, despite the state of exception and heavy repression. This prevents isolated dissent but it is unable to contain mass dissent. And if the agitations explode because of the despotic character of the state and provoke the accentuation of the same, they do not lead to changes in the infrastructural order. As we have already seen, the state concerns itself with questions of welfare only late on and insufficiently. It is clear, therefore, that the absence of a welfare network (to distribute food and subsidies for example) and the extension of despotic power serve to increase the level of agitation: Tarrow's thesis that the agitations are strongest where infrastructural power is weak and where hierarchical power is more rigid is fully confirmed.

Tarrow accepts the thesis that there is continuity between the agitations of the war and those of the post-war - the so-called 'four red years' of 1917-20 (but we could also speak of 'seven red years' between 1914 and 1920 if we include not only working class struggles but also popular protest). Tarrow correctly constructs his analysis by showing the continuities between war and post-war, identifying in the war, in its character and in the energies it releases, the origins of the economic, social, and legitimation crisis of the post-war (rights overridden, promises not kept). The defeat of the liberal state is seen as linked, therefore, with the chronic infrastructural weakness of the Italian state and with the recourse made to the traditional form of despotic power, whereas the

events in Russia and the maximalist ideology of the socialists are considered to have had only indirect importance. Tarrow implicitly differs, therefore, from those who have tried to separate the war from the advent of Fascism and have seen the cause of Fascism in the strong popular and workers' movements of the post-war and the revolutionary danger connected to it – a danger to which the reply of the fascist squads is considered inevitable (and seen as being almost legitimate in as far as it claimed to defend order and patriotic values, insufficiently defended by the liberal governments) (Vivarelli 2012). The profound difference between the popular and fascist movements was the fact that the former had a defensive character – it was in defence of order in the face of a threatened right-wing coup d'état that the socialists acted in parliament – while the latter marked themselves out for actions of attack, with clearly eversive objectives.

Now the last question: what links this period and these circumstances with the history of the USA and contemporary wars? As far as the USA is concerned Tarrow notes how, from the First World War on, a hierarchical power established itself which, based on a link between political and industrial interests and on the use of infrastructural powers to ensure popular support, passed laws that limited civil rights, aimed above all at the danger of infiltration by spies; and how, following the First World War, a kind of hysteria developed very similar to that in Europe, with the formation of right-wing extremist groups which violently attacked immigrants and those considered subversives. The campaign against the 'internal enemies' in the immediate post-war led to the arrest and deportation of thousands of foreigners, presaging, in World War Two, the illegal internment of the Japanese. Subsequently the onset of the Cold War produced a sense of permanent emergency that formed the humus for continuous military preparation and for clandestine military operations. The analogies are all too obvious.

Tarrow also clarifies how, with the condition of 'war without end' created by the Cold War and, above all, by 9/11, the relationship between war and power has changed. The forms of hierarchical power have been strengthened in such a way that the National Security State as it existed in the 1950s and 1960s, has been transformed into a real state of emergency. Government, thanks to the principal of the Unitary Executive, can use exceptional powers without end, and, through explicit laws (such as the Patriot Act) can abolish habeus corpus and proceed to mass arrests, to deportations, and to internment camps (Guantanamo). Even so – Tarrow observes – the modern state depends much more on infrastructural than on hierarchical power when it comes to beginning a war or continuing one. Thus the real danger for the modern state lies not so much in the formation of a Schmittian state, through the extension of powers of control, as in the manipulation of law while retaining the fiction of respect for

the law. The extension of infrastructural powers have permitted the gaining of consensus through the media and through the hidden agencies of control - much more extensive and capillary in their operation than before, even when compared with the situation in the USSR and its satellites.

However, Tarrow notes, since these agencies are not under public control, episodes like that of Edward Snowden can emerge, provoking protest movements (contentious politics) and legal actions aimed at protecting human rights. These are encouraged by the civic conscience and the sense of identity existing in the USA where, already after the First World War, lawyers and judges had defended the civil liberties of foreigners (with the result that Congress repealed the Sedition Act in the 1920s).

In my opinion a similar civic conscience is unfortunately not present in Italy, where, despite a current of public opinion hostile to mafia illegality and favourable to a policy of support for certain magistrates, movements for the defence of rights have been confined to a social and cultural elite and have been of limited duration. The persistence over twenty years of the Berlusconi subculture, structured on the prevalence of individual over collective interests, is the most obvious demonstration of this. In Italy forms of civil society protest comparable with the demonstrations of the 'indignados' or with phenomena like the various 'Occupy' movements in the USA have simply not emerged. The problem is, according to Tarrow, that as restrictive measures are slowly extended from one group to another and tend to become permanent, public opinion becomes accustomed to them and adapts. And where the limitation of civil rights is involved, given that the danger is no longer represented by a state but comes from enemies spread throughout the world and often hidden inside the country itself, a generalised sense of threat is easily generated, with the consequence that the application of emergency measures against 'internal enemies' becomes easier and does not meet any strong opposition.

We must hope that populations do not suffer the fate of Chomsky's frog, which would have jumped out immediately if placed in a pot of boiling water, but, put first in pot of lukewarm water and then adapting all the time to an increase in the temperature of the water, ended up boiled.

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