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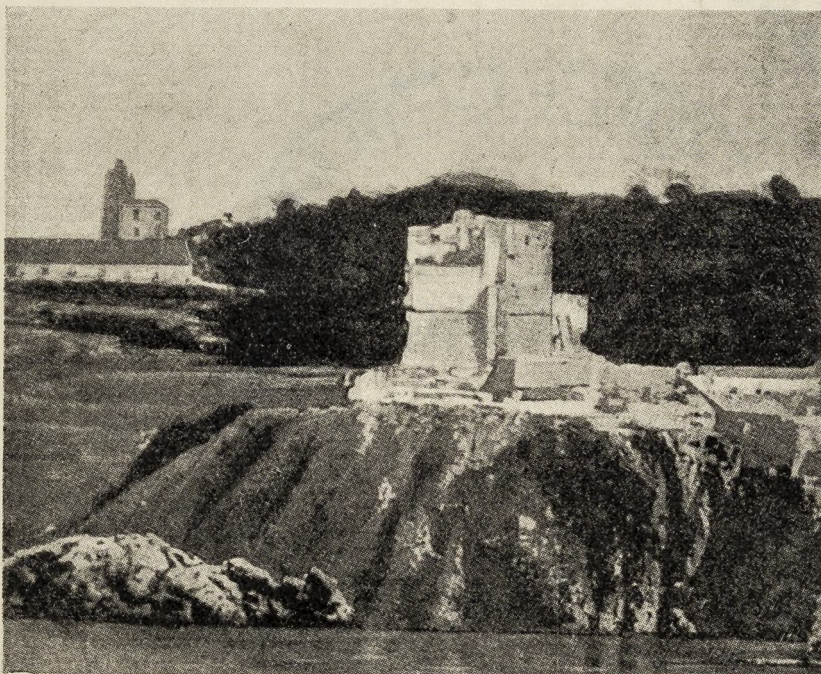
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# FASCIST WAR ON WOMEN

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*Facts from Italian Gaols*

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The Prison Island of Poza, where 270 anti- Fascists are confined

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*Illustrated*

**Threepence**







## FASCIST WAR ON WOMEN

THE whole world ought to know what happens to women political prisoners in Italy.

So shocking is the news which has leaked out during the last two or three months, as to what these women are suffering, often merely for being related to men suspected of fighting against Fascism, that public opinion must everywhere be roused to manifest itself in their defence.

Help, material and moral, is needed from all sides and with the utmost rapidity.

Several of these women political prisoners are in a particularly critical condition.

This pamphlet is published in the hope that drawing attention to these cases in particular, will mobilise in their aid the support they so urgently need.



O.V.R.A.\*—WHAT IT DOES TO ANTI-FASCIST  
WOMEN WORKERS

SINCE 1927 women have been arrested in Italy for political reasons *in thousands*.

Here is one example out of a multitude.

In the summer of 1932, in the small agricultural province of Reggio Emilia, in Northern Italy, *36 women* were arrested *on suspicion* of belonging to a secret anti-Fascist organisation. At the same time *six hundred* other arrests were made for political reasons in the same province.

In the hope of extorting evidence against these six hundred prisoners, or some of them, *seven of the thirty-six women* were singled out for *intensively brutal torture*.

This is the usual practice of the O.V.R.A.

They arrest women—often solely because they are known or believed to be wives, mothers, or sisters of anti-Fascist militants—and try to terrify them into talking. Holding over them the threats of a heavy gaol-sentence, or deportation to an island-prison for years, they hope to extort information about the activities of their men-folk. This failing, the women are detained as “political criminals”—for whom in Italy the treatment *is far more severe than for ordinary “criminals”*—until the O.V.R.A., months later, succeeds in “making them talk.” After this they are released *without any charge having been brought against them to justify their detention!*

\* O.V.R.A. ; The Secret Police organization for the repression of anti-fascism (similar to the Nazi “Gestapo.”)





Iside Viana (left), textile worker of Candelo, Biella, sentenced to 4 years of prison in 1928; she died in December 1931 in the gaol of Perugia, killed by the nuns, only 40 days before she was to be released (see Tustela's testimony)



Giorgina Rossetti (above) of Moxgrando (Biella), textile worker. Sentenced to 18 years' gaol, on February 12, 1927, together with her fiance, Mariano Gre-siano.

Anita Pustela (right), born April 6, 1903, at Como, sentenced to 9 years' imprisonment. She was released in 1933, following the Fascist amnesty, dangerously ill and is now recovering from T.B. in a Sanatorium in the U.S.S.R.



This is how it comes to be that hundreds of women can be arrested as anti-Fascists and imprisoned for long terms without the slightest attention being drawn to the fact. Naturally, the Fascist Press takes good care to say not a word about it!

And since one can, in Italy, be sentenced *without any sort of trial*, to as much as five years deportation, international public opinion has been kept completely in the dark.

Should an anti-Fascist working-woman hold out stubbornly, despite all the pressure brought to bear by the police, and refuse to give either names or

information, she is herself "deemed to be" a member of a secret anti-Fascist organisation, and sentenced accordingly to a long term of prison or deportation.

The numbers of the women openly denounced since 1927 before the Special Tribunal (102) or announced as deported to a penal-island without trial (43) gives no sort of real indication of the actual numbers of the women who have been arrested in that period.

Thousands upon thousands have been kept in gaol for years and then released without having appeared before any court. Between them these innocent women, mostly of the peasant and working classes, have thus spent *thousands of years in gaol for what their captors admit by their actions is no offence whatever.*

### *Trani and Ponza.*

All the women political prisoners in Italy are sent either to the evilly-notorious penitentiary of TRANI (for those sentenced to imprisonment) or, if sentenced to deportation, to the island of PONZA.

There are two other women's prisons in Italy, one at Perugia, one in Venice; and the former, in particular, has an especially evil reputation. Here it was a few years ago that ISIDE VIANA, a young woman from Biella, died after many days of suffering; and here, too, in the Perugia prison, in 1928, GASTONE SOZZI was subjected to prolonged tortures and finally murdered.

But women political prisoners are not now sent either to Perugia or to Venice. All are now concentrated at TRANI.

So intolerable is the state of things prevailing in this terrible dungeon, so grievous is the news of petty-persecution and systematic ill-treatment which has leaked out, that it becomes all too clear that only



a world-wide wave of protest and indignation can save the courageous women militants, who have fallen captives to the Fascists, from being overcome morally and *physically* by their brutal gaolers.

*First-Hand Evidence.*

The horrors of life as a woman political prisoner in Italy are described in truly terrifying fashion by one of their number, ANITA PUSTERLA, who, released after six years in gaol, succeeded in escaping to France.

From depositions made by her, which are confirmed and counter-signed by two other women refugees, likewise ex-political prisoners who have escaped to France after years in gaol, we select some of the more striking passages. These three young women—ANITA PUSTERLA, FELICITA FERRERO, and ANNA BESSONE—are ready to vouch publicly for the truth of every word we print.

*Anita Pusterla's Testimony.*

“Were you,” we asked ANITA PUSTERLA, “arrested for your activity or propaganda as a Communist?”

“Not in the least. When I was arrested on October 20, 1926, it was as one suspected of belonging to an international organisation whose primary purpose is to give moral and material assistance to political prisoners. I was actually charged only with supplying food, clothing, and books to political prisoners in Milan.

“This is proved by the Act of Accusation itself of which I have a copy which can be inspected if necessary by anybody. In this document the fact insisted upon is that this organisation for assisting political prisoners has at times been ‘subsidised’ by other organisations, and that its very name—‘Red Aid’—showed a specific political colour which

was entirely ‘inadmissible’ in a Fascist regime. That is why I was arrested.”

“Were you at once taken before the Special Tribunal?”

“No. The charge against me was admitted to be ‘not sufficient.’ Hence I was deported without trial to Lipari. Lipari is the small island in the Mediterranean, north of Sicily, to which the Bourbons used to send their victims. Now the Fascists send their political opponents to Lipari.

“I had already spent quite a considerable time in prison, and had made the journey from Milan to Lipari under most exhausting conditions—in what is called the ‘criminal waggon.’ In this waggon one is forced to travel in a box hardly two feet wide—for women a particularly humiliating and tiring experience. I had hoped on arriving at Lipari to be able to get some rest. Instead . . .”

“Well?”

“Well, within a few days I was again ‘transferred,’ this time to Lagonegro, a small village in southern Italy, in a most desolate district, devastated by malaria. There I stayed from December 8, 1926, until April 1927.

“On the 6th of April a telegram arrived from Rome and again I was put into the ‘criminal waggon.’ This time my destination was Ustica, another island near Sicily, about four miles square with less than 2,000 inhabitants. There I stayed for seventeen days: just time to unpack. On the 17th there arrived suddenly a warrant for my arrest, and a summons to appear before the Special Tribunal.

After the six months of detention without trial which I have just described, I then spent eighteen months awaiting trial, first in a gaol in Milan and then in one in Rome, the notorious women’s prison, the ‘Mantellate.’”





Anna Bessone, another of the ex-prisoners quoted here



Anna Pavignano, of Ochieppo Inferiore (Biella), textile worker and organiser, sentenced to 8 years of gaol, on November 10, 1928



Felicita Ferrero one of the ex-prisoners who are quoted in this pamphlet

“ Is life very bad, in these detention prisons, for women? ”

“ Of course it is! At the time I thought that nothing could possibly be worse. But then I did not know either the hell of Perugia or Trani. In comparison with these abominable penitentiaries, the detention prisons, where women are kept awaiting trial, appear really like rest-homes. . . . ”

“ When were you sent to Perugia? ”

“ On June 4, 1928, the black-shirted judges sentenced me to imprisonment for ‘ nine years, one month and twenty days. ’ It is a wonder they did not add a few hours and minutes! My destination was the Perugia penitentiary. On my arrival I found three women friends were there already, all in solitary confinement in separate cells. I learned the reason for this, when I was told to choose between going to church to take part in the daily service or to be placed permanently in solitary confinement. ”

“ Was this experience exceptional? ”

“ Unfortunately, no. The same thing happens to every woman prisoner, unless she declares explicitly, immediately on arrest, that she is an atheist. I did not know this, and had therefore made no declaration. Once in gaol, no attention is paid to any declaration you may make: *you are in the hands of the nuns. . . .* ”

“ On the other hand, if you arrive as an ‘ atheist ’ and as such are excused religious services, you are regarded almost as a leper and your treatment is even worse. ”

“ What were your experiences during your first days in the penitentiary? ”

“ While I was still in solitary confinement I had my first hæmorrhage. I realized that I had contracted tuberculosis: an appalling discovery for me. One would have thought that the nuns would have



done something to relieve me. Not a bit! They only seized the opportunity of my entire helplessness, as a chance to drag me to church!"

"It seems almost impossible."

"I know it. You see, to be in church every morning from 5.30 until 6.30 is as strict a rule as it is to stand when a superior enters the cell. . . . It is one of the regulations; and in gaol a regulation is law. Other prisoners arrived. All received six months in solitary confinement to compel them to attend the church services. That is to say, for six months they were penned each in a tiny cell with scarcely any air or light. They were forbidden to see their relatives. They were hardly ever allowed to write letters, and only rarely were permitted to take exercise in the courtyard. Worst of all, they were never allowed to speak.

Before yielding, we went to the Director to seek protection against this arbitrary treatment by the nuns. It was of no avail. The Director was the same FARINA, who had been in charge of the Perugia penitentiary when the heroic SOZZI was murdered in his cell. In our desperate anxiety to escape the humiliation of being forced to attend Mass, we asked him to intervene. The bully only laughed. He believed—or pretended to believe—that all we were making a bother about was to get another hour in bed!

*Sister Dorothy ("Suor Dorotea").*

One Sunday, the chaplain, don ALFONSO, gave for his sermon a ferocious tirade against all anti-Fascists. We rose and left in a body in protest. But we had not reckoned with SISTER DOROTHY, a nun of the order of St. Joseph, a real giant of a woman, the dragon of the penitentiary, who had on a previous occasion lifted from her bed a common

prisoner weighing fifteen stone and carried her in her arms to church."

"Do you mean to say that she drove you back to church?"

"Worse than that. She actually caught us one by one, flung us into the sacristy and soon mastered our resistance. In the meantime the warders had surrounded the sacristy. Once again we had to go for six months into solitary cells! In the end this monster of a sister was transferred to another prison."

"With promotion?"

"Exactly. She was appointed Mother Superior and sent to rule the young inmates of Airola, the girls reformatory in the province of Benevento. The scandals, as well as horrors, which occur in the prisons for women administered by these sisters are simply incredible."

"Scandals of what sort?"

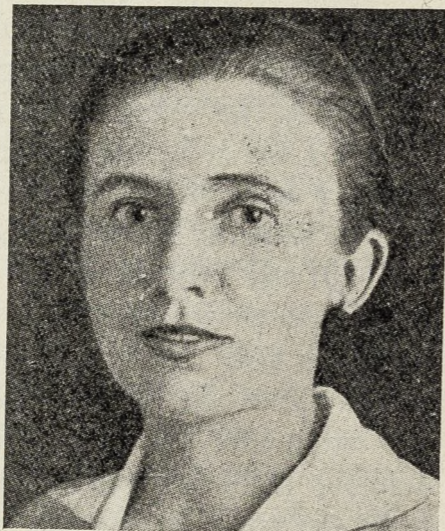
"Of all kinds! The sisters sometimes make the common prisoners work day and night, and contrive even to rob them of part of their meagre earnings. And there are still more disgusting scandals—such as intimate sexual relations between sisters and sisters, between sisters and the common prisoners, with furious jealousies, revenges, punishments and persecutions without end."

"Tell us something about everyday life in the prison."

"Rise at 5.30, personal toilet and cleaning of the cell; then to church; at 7 o'clock to the refectory. In the winter, immediately after coffee, to the workshop; in the summer, half an hour of recreation. From 7.30 until 10.45 everybody to the workshop, where it is only since July 1931 that the political prisoners have been separated from the others. Embroidery, shoe-making, weaving, dressmaking and so on. At 10.45, refectory: bread and soup.



Then during the winter half an hour of exercise, but in the summer straight back to the workshop. Then work and absolute silence until 4 p.m., interrupted about twenty times to chant the Lord's Prayer, led by a common convict. At 4 p.m. once more to the refectory for supper: bread and soup. Afterwards, half an hour of recreation and again to the workshop until 7.30. In the winter, at once to bed; during the summer, half an hour of exercise. On Sundays, no work, but the schedule is exactly the same. In order to be free earlier on Sundays, the sisters used to send us to bed at five o'clock . . ."



Maria Baroncini (*left*) and her sister, Nella (*right*), from Imola. They were both sentenced to 5 years' deportation without trial. They underwent numberless persecutions by the Fascist militia and were sentenced to new terms of imprisonment for having protested.

*The death of Iside Viana.*

"Can you tell us now how while you were interned at Perugia ISIDE VIANA died?"

"She had a weak heart and an injured stomach. For weeks on end she was unable to eat anything at all, leaving everything they brought to her—

which was not very much—untouched, and taking only three or four cups of coffee a day."

"What did the sisters do?"

"They did not care in the least. ISIDE was very much dispirited at having to give in and go to church after so prolonged a resistance. Very often she cried for hours and hours. All this wore her down. She was very delicate; and nobody ever knew exactly of what she died. . . ."

"But how is it possible that nobody knew the cause of her death?"

"Of course, her heart was weak; but not dangerously so. She was under treatment only latterly—for the last few months. Later on, by chance, I overheard a conversation between two of the sisters, which to some extent explains for me the secret of VIANA's death. The sister-nurse was very old and stupid; she was in the Infirmary because she was incapable of doing harder work. It was not uncommon, when the doctor ordered two injections, one in the evening and the other at night, for this sister to make the two injections at the same time in the evening, in order not to have to get out of bed later. The conversation I overheard suggested that a similar 'mistake' had been made in VIANA's case; and this proved to be fatal, because what had been prescribed for her were two arsenic injections separated by an interval. . . . When her mother and sister arrived, they were not permitted to see the body.

"I myself nearly died like VIANA. By the time I was transferred to the penitentiary of Venice, I was reduced to a mere skeleton: I weighed little more than five stone. When the Director in Venice saw me, he exclaimed: 'What, another! In Perugia they first kill them, and then send them here to die!' You know, a large number of our fellow-women are still lingering on in these prisons. . . ."



We ought to start a big campaign to save at least these from death."

"Tell us something about your experience at Venice."

*The police spy.*

"In Venice, there being no other political prisoners, I was isolated immediately on my arrival. For a month I was left completely alone, day after day. I was in such a state of weakness, that I became completely oblivious to the passing of time, seeing nobody, never speaking a word to a soul! After a month of this life, I asked to be put with the ordinary prisoners; and then began another fight with the sisters about compulsory attendance in church. The very first time I protested, I was given another fifteen days of rigorous solitary confinement. Then suddenly came a complete change of attitude."

"That was?"

"They said that my request had been granted, and they sent me to take exercise in company with a certain Countess MARTINELLI. She had been imprisoned for petty theft; but she also turned out to be nothing but a police spy. Thanks to her, two other women political prisoners had been heavily punished some time before.

"She began to discuss politics with me, and asked a number of questions. I was silly enough to speak my mind freely. A few days later I was called before the Director. 'My dear friend,' he said, 'there are very serious charges against you. Countess MARTINELLI has spontaneously confessed to me that you have tried to force anti-Fascist and anti-Catholic propaganda on her. She has denounced you as a socially dangerous person. I am compelled to give you three months of solitary confinement.' . . ."

"Three months!"

"Not a day less! I had to pay in full, despite the desperate state of my health. You must remember that three months solitary confinement is the heaviest punishment that can be inflicted in gaol. I was released from the solitary cell on the 18th of July, 1932, only to be at once transferred to the penitentiary of Trani, in southern Italy, where the Government had ordered that all women political prisoners should be concentrated. I reached Trani in such a state of health, that I was at once taken to the Infirmary. There I found my friend PAVIGNANO and heard from her of the terrible incident that had happened only a short time before.

*The shame of Trani.*

On the 2nd of July a special police investigation had been made. Four agents of the O.V.R.A. had arrived from Rome to 'investigate' an alleged plot among the women prisoners. Having after their first search found nothing either in the cells or in the clothing of the prisoners, the police ordered them to strip completely. . . .

"Are you quite sure that this actually occurred?"

"I take full responsibility for every word I say. Besides, there is another ex-prisoner, FELICITA FERRERO—she actually lived through this atrocious experience herself. She can testify to the truth of what I allege!

Four prisoners—CAMILLA RAVERA, FELICITA FERRERO, ANNA PAVIGNANO and GIORGINA ROSSETTI—were stripped naked by the sisters in the presence of the agents from Rome. Then at a suggestion from the men, the sisters began their disgusting search! I cannot tell you more. . . .!"

"On the contrary! It is absolutely imperative that you should tell *everything*."

"Very well!"





Camilla Ravera (see pages 19 and 26)

“The sisters were ordered to search into the private parts of the prisoners, and this was done in the presence of the four agents. When nothing was found, the men themselves conducted a search with their own hands. They said they were looking for evidence of political correspondence with someone outside. They charged us with participating in the notoriously bogus ‘plot’ which had at that time caused the concentration of all men political prisoners in the ill-famed gaol of Civitavecchia. In fairness I shall add that before the agents started their disgusting performance on these naked women at Trani, they excused themselves and gave them a last chance to indicate where they had hidden the ‘documents’ they had received from outside. Our poor friends answered that they had nothing to conceal, that they could not understand what the whole thing was about, and they protested against searches of such a character—especially when conducted by men. After this ordeal, RAVERA and ROSSETTI had to be put to bed with a high fever. . . .”

“What is the condition of women political prisoners now?”

“Just about the same. I do not think conditions can have improved very much.”

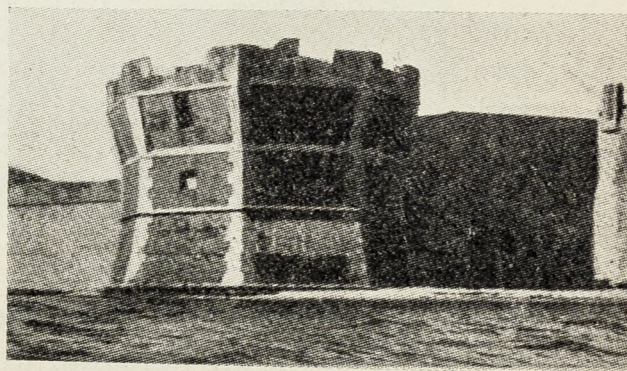
“In what state of health were your companions when you left?”

“Terrible! RAVERA and ROSSETTI are dangerously ill. RAVERA has T.B., and also serious heart trouble. She is dangerously weak, and has been reduced to a skeleton. At first she had been given food from the hospital, but after the visit of the police and the orders from Rome to treat political prisoners with still greater severity, even this was denied her. From that time things became much worse for all prisoners. We were deprived of everything—even of our personal underwear: only prison



underwear was allowed us. All our books were taken away. RAVERA was denied medical advice for months. All through the terrible heat of an entire summer Ravera and the others are forced to breathe the stinking air of one cell, so tiny that when one of them wishes to walk two steps, the others have to sit down. And there, too, the prisoners are forced to go to church.

This briefly is the story of the six years of my prison life. *You have no idea to what an extent the imprisoned and deported women have suffered and are suffering at this moment, or how they are being ill-treated and humiliated. The picture I have drawn gives only a dim reflection of the vivid horrors of the actual state of things.*"



Three typical Fascist prisons, where women prisoners are innured.

### THE WOMEN POLITICAL PRISONERS AT TRANI UNDERGOING SOLITARY CONFINEMENT.

SOME time ago the Fascist authorities proclaimed the elimination from the Fascist Penal Code of the terrible practice of solitary cell confinement, which has cost the life or reason of so many political and common prisoners. This abolition, however, has not yet extended to Trani. On the contrary, whereas under the old Code, solitary confinement could not be extended beyond certain fixed periods (except for life convicts) now the political prisoners, women as well as men, have to stay in solitary cell confinement for the whole of their term. This means that the nuns who compose the governing body seek by this means and with the complicity of the Fascist Government and of the actual Director, MARIO TAMBURINI, an agent of the O.V.R.A., to force the political prisoners to renounce their convictions.

Under such treatment the health of many of the political prisoners is destroyed; others have become mentally deranged. Common prisoners are strictly forbidden to approach the political prisoners. Any transgression, even accidental, is punished by a flogging inflicted by SISTER PATRICIA, who is the real terror of the political prisoners at Trani, as was SISTER DOROTHY at Perugia.

Once a poor halfwit, while taking water from a fountain had the unhappy idea of greeting a political prisoner who happened to be escorted by SISTER PATRICIA. In consequence, the poor soul was so terribly abused, that she became completely insane and had to be taken to the asylum.

In addition to this atrocious system, the political prisoners are obstructed in every way when they attempt any thorough cleaning of the cells in which



they are forced to live twenty-three hours out of every twenty-four and where every personal need has to be satisfied.

*Attempts to poison Camilla Ravera and other political prisoners.*

News has now leaked out that CAMILLA RAVERA has undergone a long and dangerous illness as a result of an attempt to poison her. This is not the first time that such an attempt has been made in the penitentiary of Trani. The steadfastness of the political prisoners, and their devotion to their convictions, have made it plain that nothing in the world can convert them. Probably that is why the Ministry and the warders have decided to use more drastic methods. SISTER PATRICIA is simply their executioner.

SISTER PATRICIA, who is among other things in charge of the distribution of medical supplies, took advantage of the request of CAMILLA RAVERA for medicine, to administer to her on several occasions a decoction containing a caustic and poisonous substance which affected her heart and badly burned her mouth and throat. CAMILLA RAVERA almost died from this. SISTER PATRICIA has repeatedly made attempts of this kind upon political prisoners, all of whom suffered more or less seriously in consequence.

It is impossible to imagine greater cruelty than this sustained persecution of women who have fought for their ideals.

Such is the prison regime of Italy under the Fascists. The Fascist Government has brought back into the penal system as they have done into civil life the worst barbarities of the Middle Ages.

*PONZA, ISLAND OF DEPORTATION.*

WHAT Trani is for women sentenced to imprisonment for political offences, Ponza is for women sentenced for political offences to deportation.

There are on Ponza at present about 400 political deportees, both men and women. Their condition was bad enough in the past; but during the year 1932-33 conditions have become utterly intolerable. The provocation of the Fascist Militia has become continuous, while cases of beating and maltreatment are countless.

The Militia do not want deportees to complete their terms which usually amount to five years. They find a variety of pretexts for denouncing them, so that to their five years may be added several more years imprisonment in gaol. Some deportees, have been denounced three or four times, and have thereby prolonged their term by two or three years.

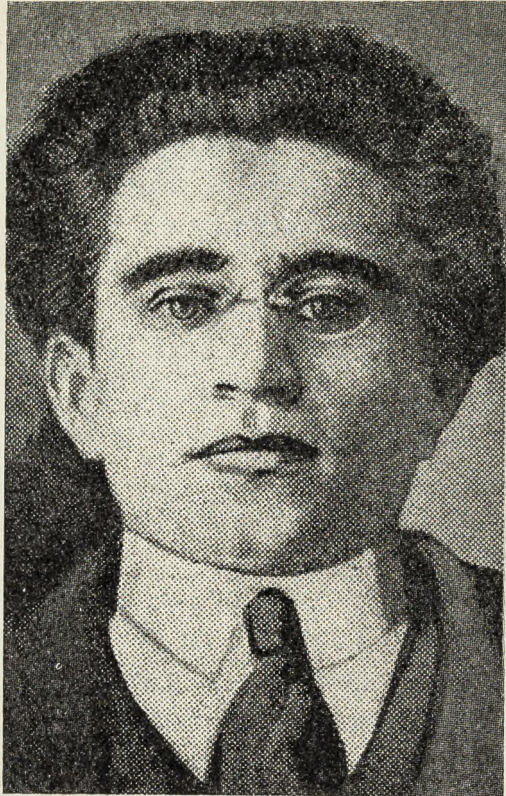
Moreover, many deportees, who have completed their terms, have been re-arrested on the very next day after their arrival at home and been deported for a further period of five years! This happened recently in the case of the anti-Fascist worker RIVABENE from Rome.

The arrest of 152 deportees and their trial before the Court of Naples in the summer of 1933, gives a bare indication of this intolerable treatment. Still more disgraceful is the treatment of the women.

*The life of the deported women.*

There are at the moment 14 women deportees at Ponza. They asked last year to be sent to villages on the mainland or in Sardinia, where conditions are a little better and where the control is not in the hands of the provocative black-shirted Militia. The answer was favourable, and in March





Antonio Gramsci, leader of the Italian Communist Party, sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment. He is dying. A big international campaign for his immediate release is being planned.



Gastone Sozzi, murdered in the same gaol of Perugia, where Anita Pustela was kept imprisoned.

1933 they were sent to different villages, some in the mountains of Calabria and some in Sardinia, in each case far from any railroad.

But a few days later an order came from the Ministry of the Interior that they should all be sent back to the tiny island of Ponza. No reason was given.

On Ponza, women lead a life of hell. In addition to the general rules which govern all deportees, special ones are inflicted upon them to make their life more unendurable. When they protested against these conditions, in the winter of 1933, the deportees were each sentenced to an additional term of from three to five months in gaol. . . .

Five and six times during the night, the black-shirts, who are in charge of all deportees, go to the cubicles where the women sleep and force them to get up and open the doors to show that they are still there. A delay of a few minutes may beget a punishment of three months imprisonment. Several times during these nightly inspections such a thing has happened.

During the past year several women political deportees have under various pretexts been denounced and brought to trial as many as three times!

According to Fascist Press reports, 132 political deportees were to have been released during Easter 1934, in consequence of a special amnesty. In fact, not a single one of the deportees has so much as been told of this alleged act of "clemency." Evidently it is intended only for foreign Press consumption.



## WOMEN IN THE HANDS OF THE FASCISTS

*Camilla Ravera*

AMONG the women captives in Mussolini's gaols and prison islands, CAMILLA RAVERA is an outstanding figure.

She was once a teacher in Turin; and was renowned for her profound culture and keen intelligence. In spite of her poor physique—she had T.B.—she joined the militant working-class movement and became an active member first of the Socialist and then of the Communist Party, devoting all her life to the anti-Fascist cause. Discovered by the O.V.R.A. after an espionage investigation of the work she was doing in Italy, she was arrested in 1930 and sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment.

RAVERA was interned in the frightful penitentiary of Trani, where she had to endure all the persecutions and humiliations of which we have spoken above.

*Now, after four years of prison life, she is dying.*

For seven months she has been unable to leave her bed in her tiny cell. Since the O.V.R.A. agents visited Trani she has been refused all medical aid. In addition to T.B. and bad heart trouble, she suffers from rheumatism contracted in the damp prison cells. It is impossible to recognize her; she looks an old woman—haggard and emaciated at thirty-five!

*If RAVERA stays much longer in gaol, she will leave it only as a corpse.*

Everyone who is interested in the life of political prisoners should demand her release, or at least her immediate transfer to a clinic. If a medical commission could visit RAVERA, it would undoubtedly report that to detain her any longer in prison means to sentence her to death.

*Giorgina Rossetti*

Another tragic case is that of GIORGINA ROSSETTI. A textile worker of the province of Biella, ROSSETTI was arrested in 1927. During her trial it became evident that her only fault was that she was the fiancé of a young Communist, MARINO GRAZIANO, also a worker from Biella. The only evidence against her was a package of anti-Fascist leaflets found in her home.

This package had been given to her by her fiancé, with the request to mind it for him. GIORGINA ROSSETTI had no idea even of the contents of the package. To show the strength of character of the Italian anti-Fascist workers, we reproduce the declaration made by MARINO GRAZIANO to the executions of the Special Tribunal:

“I distributed illegal pamphlets and papers among the workers with a full knowledge of what I was doing. No persecution could ever stop me. Your sentence will leave me entirely indifferent; my conscience is my only judge. As far as my fiancée is concerned, she had not the slightest connection with any propaganda work I did. You can prove her guilty of nothing—except of being my fiancée. If this is considered by you to be a crime, have the honesty to say so openly when you pass sentence on this young working woman.”

The Special Tribunal declared them both guilty and sentenced them each to eighteen years' imprisonment!

GIORGINA ROSSETTI, who entered prison the picture of health, is to-day, after seven years detention, only a living ghost. She has almost entirely lost her reason as a result of illtreatment. Twice she has been mortally ill—twice in danger of death. Like CAMILLA RAVERA, GIORGINA ROSSETTI also cannot survive much longer in prison at Trani.





Lucetta Betti, daughter of a railroad employee and a school teacher of Bologna. She died while both her parents were in gaol.

### *Lea Giaccaglia.*

LEA GIACCAGLIA was a teacher in the municipal school in Bologna, where she was much loved and esteemed. She was arrested immediately after her husband, PAOLO BETTI, a railroad employee, who was sentenced to twelve years' imprisonment for anti-Fascist activity. LEA GIACCAGLIA was charged with having participated in the activities of her husband. She also was sentenced to several years' imprisonment.

After four years in gaol (during which time her little daughter LUCETTA died, far away from her parents), her term having elapsed, she was free at last to return to Bologna. But she had hardly reached the town, when the local police, notoriously among the most ferocious in all Italy, sentenced her

without trial or investigation to three years' deportation to Ponza. LEA GIACCAGLIA has, while in Ponza, been arrested and tried three more times, the pretext being insubordination to the Fascist Militia!

This shows with what sustained malignancy the Fascist regime persists in persecuting its victim. She had entered prison in perfect health; now her physique has been completely undermined. After her last term of detention in the prison in Naples, she had to be moved to the hospital of the "Incurabili" (for incurable cases) also in Naples, on account of a hæmorrhage which she suffered in prison. And yet, in spite of this, she was later transferred again to Ponza. In March 1933, GIACCAGLIA, like the others, was sent for a short period to a small village in Calabria, where conditions were much better. But the order from the Ministry of the Interior soon sent her back in the island of Ponza.

### *Maria Baroncini.*

MARIA BARONCINI was deported to Ponza for five years together with her sister NELLA. Her case is particularly interesting. She was arrested in a train at the frontier when entering Italy. It is obvious that she could not have committed any "crime" on the territory of the kingdom. Nevertheless she was kept in prison for almost a year and then sentenced to deportation.

Questioned several times, she declared that she was returning to Italy in order to see her family and take a holiday. Being ill, she needed medical treatment. Apart from this, her own declaration, which was evidently the truth, absolutely nothing was found as a basis for a charge against her. And yet she was sent to the island of Ponza for *five years*. There, having had to face all sorts of provocations,



like the rest of the political deportees, MARIA BARONCINI has had to face three trials and receive a series of supplementary sentences. Her five years have already been prolonged by six added months.

MARIA BARONCINI, whose six-years-old daughter is living abroad far from her parents, is seriously ill with cholecystitis. Having legally appealed against the arbitrary measures which led to her deportation, she has had her sentence confirmed.

#### WHAT MUST BE DEMANDED.

**T**HIS brief description of the conditions endured by women political prisoners under the Fascist regime can lead to only one conclusion. *The intolerable situation, revealed in the facts given above, must be ended at once.*

Such barbarity to political prisoners—to women prisoners in particular—is an outrage upon every standard of decency and humanity. A storm of Public Opinion must be roused to demand that this cruelty should cease at once.

The need is urgent. Only by prompt action can some of those now prisoners be saved. Only so can this inhuman barbarity be prevented from extending.

We must demand:

1. The immediate release of all women interned or deported without trial.
2. All women who are bed-ridden should at once be transferred to clinics. Special measures must at once be taken to improve the sanitary condition of the imprisoned.
3. That all administrative cruelties must cease both in the women's penitentiaries, and in men's gaols. Political prisoners must be granted the enjoyment of complete freedom of conscience and

not be left at the mercy of ignorant nuns and in the hands of heartless warders.

4. That the practice of solitary cell confinement must at once be abandoned.

5. That the political deportees must be removed from the power of the provocative Fascist black-shirts in Ponza, and transferred to villages on the mainland which are reasonably easy of access by their families. Political prisoners must be permitted to enjoy elementary human rights wherever they are forced to live.

6. That we demand from the Fascist Government in the specific cases of CAMILLA RAVERA, GIORGINA ROSSETTI, LEA GIACCAGLIA and MARIA BARONCINI, their immediate release, or at least their transfer to a clinic, with freedom on parole.

Active protests must not cease until these demands have been fulfilled. The British public must be made aware of this terrible situation of these horrors and persecutions directed against the very honour of women. Once a wide-spread public opinion has been made aware of the true facts, it will express its horror with a unanimous voice.

*Protest immediately! These women are dying.*

Let everybody know these things. Let all those who sympathize with Labour ideals take the lead in helping to put an end to these shameful barbarities inflicted in cold blood upon women whose only crime is that of devotion to the highest humanitarian ideals



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