

Efharis Mascha
University of the Aegean

POLITICAL CARTOONING MOCKING MUSSOLINI'S OPPOSITION: THE LEFT TARGETING ITSELF

Abstract

The paper discusses the socialist/Leftist political humour during Mussolini's ascendance to power (1919-1925). I am especially concerned with the part of political satire that was drawn by the Left mocking the Left itself. This type of political satire has a specificity very challenging and interesting at the same time. It makes evident the limits of the fascist censor and draws the line between political satire and crude political propaganda. I will analyse political cartoons of the aforementioned period and Gramsci's theory of hegemony will shed light both to the reading of this humorous discourse and the left's political practices. The paper is divided into four sub-themes discussing the representation of socialism with the bourgeoisie, the Biennio Rosso, the Socialist fragmentation and the Aventino. The narrative across these major events reveals the counter-hegemonic project of the Left to the fascist ascendance together with their share of responsibility for the latter's power.

Keywords

Political satire, Italian Left, popular culture, Discourse Analysis, hegemony, fascism.

1.Introduction

In order to analyse the political caricatures during the fascist ascent of 1919-1925, I focused on three major agents: the ascendant power, the self-critique of the opposition, and the power contenders (Mascha 2008). All of them are organically linked together creating a totality, the totality of the socialist humour discourse. Although this discourse emerged at the margins of the left, the targets of political satire could be either the fascists, the left itself or the rest of the power contenders (i.e. liberalism and popolari). Making fun of one's own self or being ironic is a different type of humour from that degrading somebody else (i.e. fascists or power contenders), since it goes hand in hand with self-recognition and self-

consciousness. This type of humour is important for two reasons: firstly, because it is an indication of the *contradictory consciousness* of the active-man-in-the-mass as mentioned by Gramsci (1971) and, secondly, because, as a consequence, it shows that the political consciousness of the people against the 'normal order', in some cases, exceeds strict political boundaries. Humour relieves people from oppression beyond political loyalties; hence it is a part of a depoliticised popular culture. The analysis of the self-critique of the opposition will start with the contextualisation of the political lampoons by the left for the left itself. I will try to see the diverse roles of censorship, since the fascist censor would in fact encourage the degradation of the socialist discourse. Censorship played a different role on this occasion, by encouraging the lampooning of the left by the left, and the mockery of their fragmentation and political instability, while censoring the parts that referred to the fascist attacks on the left, Matteotti's murder or Mussolini's inability to resolve the crisis. This diversity in the character of the censorship changed the type of humour as well, since satire is a discourse constructed according to the prohibition of the master discourse, without which it would not be successful. I will thus analyse in detail this differentiation of political humour.

Closely linked to the aforementioned relation of humour with censorship is the part of my analysis that will involve also the application of two Freudian categories – condensation and displacement – and Freud's thesis of humour (1905) as a relief mechanism of the oppressed elements of the unconscious. Like dreams, jokes transport elements of the unconscious past the censor and give representation to deeply hidden and repressed feelings of aggression. In this sense laughter causes psychic relief, which produces elements in opposition to the repression of the super-ego. Freud argues that

dreams serve predominantly for the avoidance of un-pleasure, jokes for the attainment of pleasure; but all our mental activities converge in these two aims. (Freud 1905: 238)

Caricatures, exactly like jokes, lull the vigilance of the censor through the use of condensation and displacement. Hence, in the case of scarce use of both genres, we hardly view a caricature as a humorous device, but rather as a poster aiming at propaganda mainly and, to a lesser extent, as a form of pleasure. Together with Freud's categories of condensation and displacement, humour in this particular context, as I mentioned before, functions as a self-critique and irony more than a plain scornful satire. Hence, we need to make the distinction between the two genres. Following Linda Hutcheon, when talking about irony there is a "critical distance implied between the backgrounded text being parodied and the new incorporating work," (Hutcheon 2000: 32) whereas satire is oriented towards "a negative evaluation and a corrective intent" (Hutcheon 2000: 54). Therefore, whilst irony keeps a critical distance between the background text and the new one

incorporated in it, satire not only keeps this distance, but it also aims at correcting a specific situation. At times, both satire and irony function together and it is not easy to detect the corrective intent of satirical discourse.

In addition to the role of censorship and the role of satire as a relief mechanism or irony, we could also see the role of political satire in terms of hegemony/counter-hegemony in the following three ways: firstly, political satire as part of popular culture initiates a counter-hegemonic project against the hegemony of the bourgeoisie or the international capital defending, thus, the role of the working class at an economic level and at a socio-political level. Secondly, and as a consequence of the above, political satire in the margins of the Left counter-posed the hegemony of the bourgeoisie and strongly defended the working class during the *Biennio Rosso* against the bourgeoisie and the fascist squads, who were used as strike-breakers. And, thirdly, we notice a counter-hegemonic project to the fascist hegemony in a rather obvious way, as socialist propaganda, which might have helped the Left to counter-pose the fascist hegemony, but which certainly occupied the space of political satire without being funny in most cases.

Therefore, I shall analyse in this paper the following themes: firstly, I will discuss the role of socialism and the bourgeoisie as social-political agents, the way they were presented in the cartoons and the type of humour that was revealed. Secondly, I will discuss the period of 'reaction' or the *Biennio Rosso*, which was the apex of the struggle of the working class against the capitalist forces of production and a very important period for the creation of a socialist political consciousness for many members of the left. Thirdly, I will analyse the socialist fragmentation, the creation of the communist party and the role of the international character of socialism for Italian socialist discourse. The plurality of opinions and political divisions on the left, who were highly influenced by the Comintern's directives and were unable to sustain a parliamentary majority, which would support a stable government, played a significant role in the emergence of fascism.

Mussolini himself, during and after the First World War, was an active member of the Socialist Party and was the editor of the official socialist newspaper, *L'Avanti!* The rift in the party and Mussolini's approach to D'Annunzio's nationalism paved the way to the creation of fascism. From 1922, with the March of Rome and the emergence of fascism into power, there spread a current of violence between the fascist and socialist groups which stopped only after 1926. This current of violence and the political responsibility of the left during the ascendance of Mussolini to power reached its summit during the crisis that fascism went through in 1924. At this moment the opposition was partly united (spontaneous unification due to Matteotti's death and reaction to violence) in the Aventine movement but their inner fragmentation did not allow a permanent attack on the fascist discourse. After this crisis, Mussolini returned to Parliament as 'a master' and in a very short time, established a totalitarian state.

2. Composition of the material

The material I am using is exclusively made up of caricatures published in satirical weekly journals, mainly *L'Asino* and *Becco Giallo* of 1919-1925, by Gabriele Galantara and Giuseppe Scallarini, who at the time were the most popular cartoonists. Both journals were anti-clerical and anti-fascist due to their leftist background. More specifically, *L'Asino* (¼ the donkey) was the first socialist satirical weekly journal published in Rome starting in 1892 by Guido Podrecca. and Gabriele Galantara. From 1921 it was published in Milan under the direction of Galantara only and its circulation was 100,000 copies per week. By 1925 it was suppressed by the fascists. The *Becco Giallo* (¼ the yellow beak) was also an antifascist satirical weekly journal, published in Rome. Founded by Alberto Giannini in 1924, it was published in Italy until 1926 and its publication was restarted in France, and continued until 1931. During that period its circulation figures varied between 50,000 and 450,000 copies per week. Both journals were exclusively satirical and were popular amongst the workers of the North and the peasants of the South. During this time, the fascist answer to the leftist laughter was mainly violence. This generates the question of what really was the scope of the leftist satire. Was it resistance? Or was it a spontaneous reaction? I shall discuss these questions in detail in the rest of the paper.

3. Socialism and bourgeoisie

I discuss in this section the socio-political aspect of the socialist and bourgeois discourse. I will review the role of the bourgeoisie and the working class from 1919-1923. This is a significant aspect for the Italian society, since the post-war years were characterised by a dual crisis: the crisis of the power bloc and the crisis of the working class, which paved the way for fascism (Laclau 1979). This type of crisis had a serious economic effect, and more precisely, following Salvatorelli and Mira,

the economic crisis that started in 1920 and was increased during 1921 was mainly manifested as a crisis of demand and in relation with the exchange [...] In 1921, according to the statistics of the Confederation of Industry, the industrial production did not exceed sixty per cent of the normal level [...] At the same time salaries were reduced by fifteen per cent. (Salvatorelli and Mira 1964: 180-1) (author's transl.)

In addition, Italy after the war suffered, as with the rest of Europe, from high inflation and serious unemployment, which the liberal state did not know how to

deal with (crisis of the power-bloc). According to Martin Clark, “the inflation wiped out the middle-class’s savings, crippled the huge renter class, and drastically reduced the wages and pensions of State employees.” (Clark 1984: 206) Under those economic conditions, which affected every social stratum from the landowners to the lumpen proletariat, in his illustration Galantara wonders how to equalise the overly fat and the overly thin (Fig. 1.).



Fig. 1. “Equalise the too fat and the too thin?”

The bourgeoisie is portrayed as a person of sizeable dimensions wearing a suit and a fur-coat, while the lumpen proletariat is portrayed as a thin person in shabby clothes. Indicating this dimensional and qualitative difference, Galantara’s criticism of post-war problems focuses on social inequality. Without directly mocking the bourgeoisie or the proletariat but rather mocking both in relation to each other, Galantara successfully reduces humour to a re-determination of the general horizon in which these two ideological/social positions take place. For Gramsci (1971), this re-determination was partly the role of popular culture, which problematises the “bourgeois versus working class conception of the organisation of the cultural and ideological relationships.” Gramsci conceived the field of

popular culture to be “structured by the attempt of the ruling class to win hegemony and the means of opposition to this endeavour” (Bennett in Storey 1998: 221). The dimensional difference of the overly fat and the overly thin being mocked in the caricature shows evidence of the class struggle in Italian society and political satire problematises this antagonistic relationship.



Fig. 2. "Socialism and Bourgeoisie"

The struggle for hegemony was viewed on the political level as the struggle between the Bolsheviks, and their role in the Socialist Party and the bourgeoisie. The interference of the Third International in the Socialist Party led to its split [I will discuss this issue in more detail in the section on ‘fragmentation’]. The Bolsheviks and Comintern’s influence in Italian politics can be seen in both caricatures of this section, in an implicit or explicit way. The connotation of this influence is rather negative and foreign to Italian political life, and this, together with the split in the Socialist Party, significantly depleted the strength of the opposition to the emerging forces of fascism.

Socialism in Fig. 2 is portrayed as a trapped lion, tied up by a little girl, who symbolises the bourgeoisie. The ropes that the little girl has put over the lion

represent the obstacles created by the Italian bourgeoisie in the way of socialism. Hence, in order to interpret the mockery, we need to look closely at the ties that the bourgeoisie knots. Starting from the left-hand side of the caricature we go through collaboration, persecutions, flattery, class politics, the penal code, disagreement and fascism. The caricature propagates the capability of socialism to solve all these problems brought on by the bourgeoisie, which aim to trap the former. The lion, symbol of strength and power in the animal kingdom, has its head free of the ties and its body, although tied, seems to be able to move and gives an impression of glory. At this point a more clear understanding of the caricature presupposes a consideration of the role of *L'Asino* during the years of 1921-1926. Following Arbizzani,

The critique and the political satire through the designs, the caricatures, the poems, the epigrams and the apologies have played an important role to the political and cultural formation of the working class in their struggle against their rulers and their methods of exploitation, against the governments and their means of domination (i.e. school, police, etc), against their reactionary politics and the war [...] *L'Asino* for a long period of time was a point of reference for the Italian popular conscience, as it was producing and reproducing series of aspirations and myths incarnated in figures and situations that remained proverbial [as the one above] [...] In the middle of the myth there is a kernel of *political truth* [my emphasis] especially regarding the class struggle and the split, which divides the interest of the working 'asini' (plural of asino=donkey) with the dominant class. (Arbizzani 1970: 2) (author's transl.)

Examining the function of political humour, which is produced by the left for the left itself, I notice the following: this kind of political humour is not characterised by a depreciative stance towards the principal protagonist, but by a superlative one. "The Socialist Party (the lion [portrayal of the party as an animal signifying power]) knows how to break the ties..." This superlative character together with the degrading of the power of the actor involved does not reinforce his power but creates the opposite effect. In fact, by 1922, socialism was already to a large extent split and degraded, so propagating the strength of a lion was enough to make the caricature funny, but not enough to reinforce the power of socialism. The superlative character of political humour is characteristic of this period glorifying the anti-bourgeois element.

In other words, the outcome of the dispute did not coincide with the socialist propaganda and, by then, socialism was not fully aware of the danger of fascism. Gramsci tried in vain in many of his writings to alert the opposition to the danger of a military regime and the alliances the fascists were making with the industrialists and many agrarians. Gramsci's notion of contradictory consciousness is evident in both caricatures above. Glorifying the past with the superlative character of satire (superiority theory of humour, see Morreall in Lockyer and

Pickering 2009) is evidence of this contradictory consciousness showing the resistance to accept the new situation and political change of power dynamics in the specific context of fascist emergence. Glorifying the past can actually work as a motivating/engaging force, and/or, at the same time, ironically evaluate the present situation. Irony, as I have already discussed, entails a negative evaluation and a critical distancing. The lion represents the 'background' glory of socialism before the war and irony works as a critical distance from this past situation engaging the reader to consider the 'ties' created by the bourgeoisie and the possibility of the present dis-entrapment/freedom as an ironic statement.

The struggle between the bourgeoisie and socialism during the years 1919-1922 was intense as a consequence of the economic and political conditions generated in Italy after the war. The struggle was evident in the form of a reaction which was characterised by a number of strikes in the factories mainly of the North, which led to the period being named the Biennio Rosso and marked Gramsci's political practice and theory. How this reaction was represented in a certain form of political cartooning will be the subject of the following section.

4. Reaction – Biennio Rosso

I will begin the analysis of the Biennio Rosso with a quotation from Germino concerning Gramsci's account of the factory councils.

Gramsci saw the factory council movement as a means of breaking down the walls separating the workers in one category from those in another, so that each worker, regardless of whether he was an engineer, a designer, an electrician, or an assembly-line operator, would develop a primary sense of loyalty to the work force as a whole, thereby making it impossible for management to bribe one sector of the work force with higher wages and other benefits while keeping down the rest. (Germino 1990: 96)

The 'loyalty to the work force as a whole', the conception, in other words, of the factory as a unity and not as a sum of fragmented parts (engineer, designer, electrician and so on) such that the one can take advantage of the other, was the focal point of Gramsci's political thought during the Biennio Rosso and his writings in *L'Ordine Nuovo* (=New Order). The New Order or the 'New Politics' that Gramsci was suggesting took shape during these years of labour militancy.

The occupation of the factories and the creation of the factory councils began in September 1920, as a wage dispute, mainly in the engineering industry of the North, but the workers were afraid that the employers' reaction would be to lock out the workers, due to the economic crisis and low demand that, by that time, the

Italian industry was facing. At the same period, socialist and anarchist leaders were out of prison or in exile and found the necessary conditions for the revolution that they were advocating for a long time. Therefore, following Clark,

400,000 workers took over their factories or shipyards, expelled the managers, ran up the Red (or Black) flag, and carried on working – sometimes at making barbed wires or guns for self-defence. They stayed there for nearly four weeks, living off ‘communist kitchens’ in the factories, or off ‘wages’ taken from factory safes. (Clark 1984: 207)



Fig. 3. “In order to live you need to work and produce more.”

In this context, under these economic conditions and with the threats posed by the emergent fascist squads, political humour of a superlative character took the form of counter-hegemony and strongly opposed the bourgeoisie and the fascist squads that allied with the former as strike-breakers. As a consequence, it supported and boosted the workers’ spirit, even though, according to Gramsci, the official line of the Socialist Party’s bureaucracy did not understand the full meaning of the occupation of the factories and tried to collaborate with the liberal state without any success and/or organisation. In his view, the party should have been ‘the workers’ natural habitat’ and not an institution independent of them. He

conceived of the party as “the council’s logical extension and completion” (Germino 1990:117) and if anything that would be the only way to combat the hegemonic force of the fascist emergence. The caricature in Fig. 3, “In order to live you need to work and produce more,” illustrates this encouragement of activism and participation in the factory councils, which, in a way, makes the caricature less attractive as a humorous device. The caricatures discussed in this paragraph become means of instigation and acknowledgement of their political status and less of a rebellion against authority. Consequently, the focus is more on the transmission of the message or propaganda and less on the humorous device, thus rendering the use of condensation and displacement more limited. “Today’s duty”, according to the title of the caricature, is “to work and produce more”. The worker’s life depends on his work and production as a consequence of the war’s deficit. According to Modigliani¹, “in Germany in order to overcome the war’s deficit, they have asked the workers to work ten hours per day.” Galantara seems to mock the way (working and producing more) capitalist countries try to cover up the war deficit under the conditions of unemployment, low demand and low wages that were leading the workers to strikes or to the occupation of the factories. In other words, what Galantara suggests is that the war deficits, which were due to the decisions made by the liberal government who took Italy to war, would be paid for by the hard work of the working class ‘in order for them to survive’. Irony, as a negative evaluation of the background knowledge, functions once more here, reducing the level of laughter, but engaging more systematically in the reflection on a critical distance between the politics of war and labour politics. Alessandro Portelli in his oral history mentions a similar situation in the aftermath of the Second World War, as Italy struggled to recover from the losses accrued during the conflict (Portelli 1991: 121).

¹ Modigliani belonged to the socialist reformist leaders and was the youngest next to Nitti and Turati.



Fig. 4. “The antisocialist storm”

Following ‘today’s duty’ of hard work, Galantara considers the Biennio Rosso as a period of socialist strength.

Hence, in the following caricature, Galantara uses the word ‘bufera’, which means ‘storm’ but its first syllable [buf] refers to the Italian word ‘buffo’, meaning ‘ridiculous’, ‘comic’ or ‘funny’. Through this condensation, Galantara degrades the anti-socialist political power, which is exercised by the fascists and the *popolari*. Their power seems to be eliminated due to the huge dimensional difference with the worker, who holds a huge flag in one hand and a hammer in the other, which give the connotation of a hardworking man, belonging to socialism, unwilling to retreat at the presence of the ‘little’ obstacle in front of him. “He will pass!” is the subtitle of the caricature, giving with brevity a sense of confidence and devotion to the workers’ revolutionary project. The superlative character of political humour is once more clearly manifested here and although the caricature succeeds in depicting the socialist forces as united and well-organised against the rest of the

political world, it does not actually reinforce their power. For Gramsci, this principle of unity was lacking due to the party's organisation. In his view, the factory councils were a spontaneous reaction of the working class against the development of capitalism in Italy and there was a need for the party to organise this element of spontaneity into a unifying principle. There was, in other words, a need for a hegemonic rule that would generalise the revolutionary process from the factory councils to the rest of Italy, a rule that would unite together the workers of the North with the peasants of the South, as his Lyon Theses later on in 1926 would suggest. This rule was thus lacking and instead the political picture seemed fragmented.

Due to the highly important denominator of the fragmentation of the opposition, especially for the emergence of fascism, I will devote the following section to the explanation of the different socialist factions and the role they played in Italian politics before Mussolini monopolised power. The crucial question remains: what was the role of popular culture and more specifically the role of satire in this context?

5. Socialist fragmentation

In order to view the full image of the Italian socialist fragmentation, it is firstly necessary to have background knowledge of Italian Socialism, its moment of zenith and the figures related to it. Italian Socialism reached its peak in the summer of 1920.

The socialists flourished in the big industrial centres, Milan, Turin, and Genoa where the war had concentrated many workers in factories, and also in the Romagna where they inherited Mazzinian and anarchist traditions of rebellion and unrest. (Mack-Smith 1997: 286)

The post-war period was characterised by universal suffrage and the Mazzinian culture nurtured socialist cells to a great extent. This culture of rebellion and unrest was becoming identified with a biological predestination of being Socialist. Passerini's analysis of oral history during Italian fascism stresses this 'born Socialist' element. A characteristic example is that of

Anna Bonivardi, born in Saluzzo in 1904, who was a worker in the Polli shoe factory; she remembers that when she was 16 (in 1920) she took part in strikes and demonstrations: 'So because my dad taught me that way [...] we were already born like that [...] Your dad was a socialist? Yes, he was a Socialist then because there weren't yet any Communists'. (Passerini 1987: 23)

According to Hilton-Young,

then (by 1920) it (the Socialist Party) had 250,000 members, about 3 million workers organised in unions and Chambers of Labour, who were more or less closely committed to socialist politics and of whom 2,320,163 were grouped under the Socialist General Confederation of Labour, just ten times as many as in 1915. (Hilton-Young 1975: 121)

It is possible to calculate that the Socialist Party was by this time the “largest party in Italy, well-organised and disciplined” (Mack-Smith 1997: 287). Since the end of the war, they had preached, through *L’Avanti!* (the official socialist newspaper), the impending revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. This took place partly as the party’s propaganda, partly as the completion of a historical process starting from the time of the Risorgimento, and the Socialist Party was “inaugurating a ‘second Risorgimento’ capable of completing the first” (Bellamy 1990: 317). The socialists were also criticising the liberal state and the right for being divided according to the interests of the different factions, in contrast to an organising unity that they were inaugurating for themselves.



Fig. 5. “Good sense”

The caricature in Fig. 5, “Good sense”, shows one important aspect of this fragmentation, the lack of agreement. In 1921, the Socialist Party Congress was held in Livorno. “The fundamental question for each faction [in the congress] was defining its position toward the Comintern and its demand for the expulsion of the reformists” (Bellamy 1987: 62). During the congress, there was no possibility of agreement, as is very well illustrated in the caricature, resulting in the party’s split.

Bordiga called for the creation of an intransigent revolutionary Party based on Leninist principles of organisation and adhering completely with all of the Comintern's 21 points. Those that supported Bordiga's motion then followed him out of the Teatro Goldoni to the nearby Teatro San Marco, to hold the First Congress of the Italian Communist Party (PCd'I). (Bellamy 1987: 62)

The predominant position – in the caricature – of the worker throwing a bucket of water to the socialists who disagree outside his window shows very well that the party factions were not actually supporting the working class and were not even its representatives. This alienation between the electorate and the political elite of the PSI, together with the belief, or not, in the directives of the Comintern, ended in the ultimate division of the party. The communists' exit from Teatro Goldoni and their urge to reach collaboration are very well illustrated in the following caricature, which is entitled ironically "It is not anymore a bourgeois spectacle."

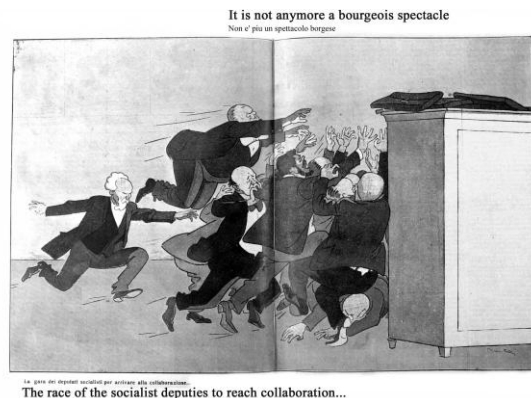


Fig. 6. "It is not anymore a bourgeois spectacle."

I consider this caricature the most representative one concerning the 'self-critique' of the opposition. It reflects the fact that popular culture was initiating a counter-hegemony beyond any political boundaries, opposing practices of the left that could resemble those of the bourgeoisie. It is ironic and at the same time deeply satirical, as it points out both the 'negative evaluation' and the 'corrective aim'. In other words, it uses irony to depict the similarity of the socialist deputies to bourgeoisie and at the same time suggests the lack of collaboration and agreement by showing the opposite, a 'race for agreement' trying to get hold of their bags whilst stepping at each other, as if in a panic attack. The portrayal of the socialist deputies' lack of agreement as a race makes the caricature funny and enjoyable.

Until September 1920, Gramsci had been strongly opposed to the split of the PSI. Instead, he thought that “the PSI’s Communist faction should fight for increased influence in the PSI itself” (Germino 1990: 115). By September 1920 Gramsci had changed his mind; he was against the PSI bureaucracy as he believed that

it is not the party bureaucracy that becomes ‘the vanguard’, but the worker who by participating in the party experiences himself as part of ‘a vanguard’ (*un avanguardia*) of the revolution [...] the vanguard is a force *composed of* rather than *forced on* the workers. (Germino 1990: 117)

The worker would be a part of a vanguard (throwing the bucket full of water) and not the members of the PSI fighting for the truth of the movement. As Bellamy has very well stressed, “the PSI and the PCd’I competed for the same electorate and the same support from Moscow in a spirit of bitterness and hostility” (Bellamy 1987: 63). Their electorate, the Italian working class, Gramsci’s vanguard, was the same for both of them, but the PSU was opposed to the Communists and Bordiga. Gramsci and the leadership of the PCd’I believed that the PSU was the only obstacle to the unification of the working class. By June 1921, Gramsci even suggested that PSI passivity contributed to the success of fascism. In “Socialists and Fascists” he writes:

The fascist coup d’etat, based on the army, the latifundisti and the bankers is the ominous spectre which has threatened this legislature from the outset. The Communist Party has its own position: the necessity of an armed insurrection leading the people to liberty guaranteed by the workers’ State. What is the position of the Socialist Party? How can the masses still have any faith in this party, which restricts its political activity to moaning and the ‘beautiful’ speeches of its parliamentary deputies. (Gramsci in Bellamy 1987: 63)

The outcome of this struggle after the events of the Livorno Congress was that the Socialist movement was shattered into approximately three different parts. On the left side, it was the Communist Party,

which was beginning to acquire the new familiar characteristics of a party under full control from Moscow; rock-like unanimity, an inconsistency that suggests time-serving, and an unwillingness to explain its motives. (Hilton-Young 1975: 133)

This loyalty to the directives of the Communist International would last until the plenary session of the Executive Committee in 1922 where Bordiga refused to accept the united front policy which led to his removal from the party’s leadership.

In the centre were most of the members of the old Socialist Party, which was now transformed to the Maximalist Socialist Party.

In it gathered those, who were faithful to the old ideal of intransigence and found comfort in the authority bestowed by the party's continued possession of Avanti!
(Hilton-Young 1975: 134)

And on the right side there was the Italian Worker's Socialist Party, "the group which had at various times been known as legalitarian, gradualist, reformist, Unitarian and concentrationist" (Hilton-Young 1975: 134).

This fragmentation was partly supported by another political agent, whose power was significant for the establishment of democracy or the rise of fascism, and that was the King. The left in general, due to the influence of the Comintern and their republican character, did not support the monarchy. Hence, in the following caricature this relationship is mocked in the depiction of a possible reception of the King by the socialists. The socialists (again due to the superlative character of the lampoon) seem to receive the King who, in following caricature,, "The surprise of a near crisis. The King . . . received by the socialists.", is presented as being timid and honoured to be consulted, whereas in reality the opposite would be expected.



Fig. 7. "The surprise of a near crisis. The King . . . received by the socialists."

The surprise of a future crisis concerns the event of the March on Rome in October 1922. The lampoon was published in July 1922 and indirectly refers to a possible change of the regime, which in fact was the rise of fascism. Therefore, the socialists are ironically portrayed as doing the King the honour of consulting him regarding the President of the Parliament. The King timidly suggests Bombacci, who was a member of the Communist Party, but in a parliamentary session discussing international trade law he had been in favour of commercial trade between Italy and the Soviet Union and in a way his statement coincided with Mussolini's stance and the right-wing part of socialism, the Concentrationists. Thus, in the caricature when the King suggests him for the President of the Parliament, it reinforces the socialist fragmentation and places in a position of power a person sympathetic to Mussolini's policies. Irony and satire function together here as well. On the one hand, the Socialists' standing point is deeply ironic as it was almost impossible for party members to receive the King; on the contrary, most often rather the opposite would happen, and hardly ever with the Socialists due to their republican standpoint. Therefore, there is obviously a critical distance in this portrayal, which makes their discourse ironic. On the other hand, the words put into the King's mouth are satirical, as it shows how his standpoint reinforced Mussolini's ascendance to power. Hence, there is a negative evaluation of his proposal and also an attempt to correct his point of view. Bombacci would be the worst suggestion, as he was Mussolini's friend, but it is a choice that could possibly scornfully ridicule the King's point of view and reinforce Republicanism.

Therefore, fragmentation was mocked hugely by the satirical journals, but in fact fragmentation was responsible for the emergence of fascism and the political humour, which originated from the socialists, made the communists the butt of their cartoons depicting them as being stupid.

The socialist movement's fragmentation supported unintentionally the emergence of fascism into power and the strategy that was followed only encouraged Mussolini and his followers to reach a 'hegemony', not by general consent but by the power of manganello (=club). Political satire counter-posed this hegemony by criticising itself and the fragmentation that battered the socialist movement. The strategy of the socialist movement after the split and the emergence of fascism with the support of the liberal state led to the Aventine crisis, which in fact did not reinforce any type of consensus between the socialists but was the last cry for agreement before the creation of a totalitarian state.

6. Conclusion

I discussed the role that the opposition played in the emergence of fascism through the analysis of the political cartoons concerning the opposition itself. The political situation and a number of external factors did not allow the creation of a united,

consistent, well-organised political force of the type that Gramsci was visualising for the Communist Party [the modern Prince] in order to resist the fascist power. The role of the liberal state, the role of the Third International and the role of the King were important elements that contributed to the lack of such a political force. Gramsci's understanding of fascism took into account many of the dimensions of the fascist phenomenon that neither the Comintern, nor the Liberals, nor the socialists were able to foresee. For Gramsci there was not one, but two fascisms.

The first was centred on parliamentary tactics and the bargaining skills of Mussolini, and relied on the support of the middle classes, moderate industrialists and other forces willing to compromise with Socialists and Populists. The other fascism relied on extra-parliamentary violence and intimidation, as the armed defence of reactionary agrarian and industrial interests against the gains of the proletariat. (Bellamy 1990: 71)

His imprisonment incurred significant costs to the strength of the opposition and many of his writings for *Avanti!* were burned.

The role of political humour is of great interest and, while dependent on its context, reveals significantly a great deal of the background political situation and the role of popular culture. It reveals many of the issues regarding the nature of political humour and regarding the object that it aims at. Its rebellious nature, not simply a reaction to standardization, as Passerini suggested, is well illustrated. At the same time and especially through the analysis of condensation and displacement, I deployed Freud's theory of humour and the way these mechanisms function successfully in the caricatures as humorous devices, whereas when they are not present, the caricatures tend to become posters or deploy more irony instead of satire.

My analysis of the 'Self-Critique of the Opposition' revealed the counter-hegemonic project, but with a different type, or types, of political humour that the opposition chose for itself. Either it was a form of comic propaganda, with a superlative (superiority theory of humour) and not a diminutive character, which aimed to counter-pose the fascist hegemony directly, or it was a type of cruel critique, full of ironic statements, of the opposition's mistakes, disagreement and fragmentation, which again aimed at revealing the threat of fascist ascent. In this last case, we could even notice a distancing of political satire from the concrete political boundaries of socialism, even though inscribed in the popular imagination was the belief in a strong and unbeatable Russian Communism, which would not permit a fascist victory (Santomassimo 1980: 59). Finally, self-criticising the opposition was a type of humour that could cope with levels of censorship and in many cases revealed the boundaries of what could be said and what could not be said that Italian society of the 1920s allowed.

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About the Author

Efharis Mascha is a temporary lecturer of Sociology at the University of the Aegean – Department of Sociology. She did her BA in Sociology at Panteion University of Athens. Then, she did a Master of Arts in Sociology and PhD in Ideology and Discourse Analysis at the University of Essex. Following that she did a post-doc at the Advanced Cultural Studies Institute of Linköping University in Sweden. Her work consists of an array of articles in Greek and international journals on sociology, humour, political cartooning and popular culture.