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“The Island without Peace” Reporting the Irish War of Independence in *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere*

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Abstract:

The article investigates the coverage of the War of Independence in the visual and textual materials of *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere* to show why these publications kept a mildly pro-British stance on the conflict while voicing their concerns. These leading publications gave extensive coverage to the Irish struggle for national self-determination, in which members of the Sinn Féin party were depicted as a dangerous minority and Ireland was called “troubled” or “the island without peace”. My contention is that such representations were influenced by the editorial staff’s fears about the contemporary Italian socio-political situation, nationally and internationally. Therefore, the articles and illustrations on the conflict should be read not only within the framework of the periodicals’ usual concern for international politics, but also by considering the anxieties haunting the Italian intellectual elite at the time.

Keywords: *Corriere della Sera*, Irish War of Independence, Italian-Irish Relations, *La Domenica del Corriere*, News Reporting

1. The Irish War of Independence as Seen from Italy

In the transformative years of 1919-1923, Ireland commanded the attention of the Italian public opinion and media, with news stories of violence and injustice that aroused the indignation of many Italian commentators (Walsh 2006, 118; Pellizzi 2011, 57). Sympathies for the Irish cause were expressed by the press and at gatherings of the Italian parliament. *Il Popolo* openly supported the cause of Irish independence; as did the Catholic daily newspaper *L’Italia* and, up to the end of 1918, the influential *Civiltà Cattolica*. Several members of the Italian People’s Party proposed (aborted) motions to the Chambers for the recognition of the Republic of Ireland; groups of young

Catholics linked to the party of Don Sturzo promoted demonstrations in support of the Irish cause and translated and published reports on the violence perpetrated by British troops on civilians on the island (Pellizzi 2011, 57).

Yet, as Sinn Féin's envoy to Rome Sean O'Ceallaig admitted in his dispatches, Irish nationalists did not garner the sympathies of the most important Italian daily and illustrated periodical of the time. The escalating levels of violence in Ireland attracted the attention of the editorial staff of *Corriere della Sera* and of *La Domenica del Corriere*, and O'Ceallaig met their reporters and illustrators on numerous occasions, but failed to dispel the negative impression that the latter had of Sinn Féin's "rebels". He wrote to Diarmuid O'Hegarty, "*Corriere della Sera* has not been very friendly to us at any time and I had a bitter argument with Signor Croce, one of their chief editors – mostly about the attitude of Ireland during the war". In fact, even though there appears to have been "a distinct change in the tone of the articles and even of the news" on the Republican struggle in the autumn of 1920, the Milanese newspaper and its supplement kept a conservative, mildly pro-British stance on the conflict for its entire duration (O'Ceallaig 16 September 1920).

This relatively uncommon posture towards the Irish War of Independence deserves attention because it highlights an aspect of the Italian-Irish relations of the early twentieth century that is still underexplored. My article seeks to contribute to the existing scholarship on the international media's discussion of the conflict (Walsh 2006 and 2008; Madigan 2020; Zách 2020) and on the complex interactions that occurred between Ireland and Italy (Pellizzi 2011; Chini 2015 and 2016), as it investigates the reasons underlying the peculiar stance of *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere*. To this end, using the methodological tools of Critical Discourse Analysis applied to the language of news reporting (Haarmann and Lombardo 2009; Richardson 2008; Bednarek and Caple 2012), I explore their representations of selected key events: the First Dáil and the Limerick Soviet in 1919, Terence MacSwiney's hunger strike and the execution of Kevin Barry in 1920. Moreover, since it follows flows and connections across the Irish borders to trace links with Italy, the study adopts a transnational approach to the investigation of the War of Independence (cf. Whelehan 2015; Delaney and McGarry 2020), and helps to show that the events of the war had become the focus of Italian attention, because they were deemed part of a wide, international story and, as such, newsworthy and relevant for Italian audiences.

In particular, drawing on Chini (2015 and 2016) and Cefaloni (2019), I focus on the image of the Irish nation conveyed by the Italian publications and how journalists used Ireland as a proxy to voice and exorcise their fears over the contemporary Italian socio-political situation, nationally and internationally, as I argue that these anxieties had direct bearings on how the commentators of *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere* responded to the Irish War of Independence.

2. *Categorising the "Us" versus "Them"*

Founded in Milan in 1876, *Corriere della Sera* was the most widespread daily newspaper in early-twentieth-century Italy, which saw the advent of mass politics, rapid industrialisation, war interventions, the *Biennio rosso*, and the inception of Italian fascism. It was in these years that the forceful editor Luigi Albertini strove to turn the paper into something that was more than an organ of information – i.e., into an active factor shaping the events that transformed Italy (Licata 1976, v), as, with a circulation of over 350,000 copies among the ruling classes, *Corriere della Sera* could monopolise the formation of public opinion. This was evident when

Albertini and his newspaper spearheaded the campaigns for Italy’s entry into the Great War in 1915 (Sciarrone 2015, 132). Furthermore, by 1919, Albertini had cemented the position of *Corriere della Sera* at the centre of the national psyche, with the establishment of special extras aimed at a more popular readership, namely the illustrated Sunday supplement *La Domenica del Corriere*, in 1899, which, under the helm of Attilio Centelli, rapidly became the most successful weekly in the first half of the twentieth century, outselling its main major competitors *La Tribuna* and *L’Illustrazione Italiana*, with over 500,000 copies sold per week and a much larger estimated readership (Ginex 2007, 18-19).

Centelli and the illustrator Achille Beltrame made the conscious decision to favour visual communication when presenting the week’s facts to the Italian readers, with illustrations rather than photographs. It is worth noting that Beltrame’s illustrations were not accurate visual records of the events, as he did not chronicle them with the images, but reconstructions that were the result of his creativity and his stance on the subject (Ginex 2007, 19-23). Discerning what Beltrame emphasised visually is therefore of interest when trying to understand how the periodical’s staff wanted to communicate to Italian readers the events of the Irish War of Independence and came to frame thinking about the conflict in Italy.

Among Beltrame’s recurring subjects were royal visits, catastrophes, and military exploits – themes for which Ireland could provide a great deal of fodder. For instance, the revolutionary years saw covers devoted to the sinking of the SS *Lusitania* and people’s mourning for the drowned civilians (*Domenica del Corriere*, hereafter *DC* 7 June 1915), to the guerrilla warfare and British reprisals of the Irish War of Independence and Civil War, and even to “bad weather drama(s)”¹ (*DC* 9 December 1928). The Easter Rising received some attention too. Although most of the covers of 1916 celebrated the military feats of the Alpini on the Karst Plateau, the “glorious deaths” of Cesare Battisti and Enrico Toti, or featured images of crowds cheering soldiers to imply broad popular support for Italy’s participation in the war (Oliva and Beltrame 2012), the uprising in Dublin was not completely left out from the pages of either the illustrated periodical or *Corriere della Sera*, but, as everybody’s attention was drawn to the conflict, the riot was understood in the context of the Great War and communicated as a war-related event. Incidentally, the ways in which *Corriere della Sera* reported the event are of relevance within the scope of this article, because the same anxieties that informed the representations of the Easter Rising (anxieties about betrayals, the precariousness of the constitutional order, and the threats posed to national security) would later underpin the commentaries on the Irish War of Independence.

The Easter Rising received frontpage attention from *Corriere della Sera* on 26 April 1916, not because of any sympathy for the Irish nationalist cause, but because of its potential repercussions on the developments of the war and the alleged role of Germany in fomenting it. This was made clear in the headline “Attempted Landing and Riot in Dublin”, which foregrounds the temporal co-presence between Roger Casement’s ill-fated gunrunning and the rebellion to create the impression that the latter was the result of treacherous war machinations with Germany (cf. Chovanec 2014). Casement and the leaders of the Rising are portrayed as “traitors” to the Irish people for having conspired with Ireland’s wartime enemy. Casement was described in a way that expressed the journalist’s negative opinion of him, as he was called a “relentless enemy of Great Britain”, “renegade”, “unlikeable adventurer”, “recruiter in German prison camps of an imaginary regiment of Irishmen”, “who put himself at the service of Germany” (*Corriere*

¹ All translations from Italian into English are mine.

della Sera, hereafter *CS* 26 April 1916). These lexical choices encouraged the paper's readers to see Casement as a man whose obsession with British rule made him unable to differentiate fantasy ("imaginary") from reality, to the point that he deserted from his allegiance to Ireland ("renegade", "at the service of Germany"). In the same line, the insinuations that he fabricated his reports of the abuse of indigenous peoples in the Congo Free State and the Putumayo district in the Peruvian Amazon (*ibidem*) can be read as further attempts, in 1916, to discredit Casement and cast a shadow over his actions and beliefs. In its articles on the aborted landing, *Corriere della Sera* provided a harsh moral and political judgement of Casement rather than an accurate account of the military operation, to highlight the villainy of Casement's plans at a time when both Ireland and Great Britain were fighting on the same side as Italy, in the Great War².

The condemnation of actions meant to destabilise Italy's ally is likewise apparent in the writings devoted to the Easter Rising. As with Casement's representation, the notions of "excess" and "betrayal" inform the depiction of Patrick Pearse and his acolytes, here written off as "exalted" individuals and as "a minority of fanatics of the worst type [who] dared to put themselves at the service of Germany" (*CS* 26 April 1916; 27 April 1916). The epithet "fanatics of the worst type" removed all possibility that the uprising had the potential to be a legitimate protest: the accusation of fanaticism depoliticised the rebels' goals, as their sole purpose of being was thus reduced to an extreme ("fanatical") obsession with England. The reasons for the protest were also questioned with a series of remarks and lexical choices that clearly defined two opposite collective identities: on the one hand, the fanatical, treacherous minority of Pearse and Casement; on the other, "the vast majority" of Irish people whose "loyalty" to Great Britain was "beyond doubt" (*CS* 26 April 1916; 27 April 1916). Indeed, "the vast majority" of Irish people "keep away from the separatist movement and have contributed spontaneously, through the bloodshed of their sons, to the victories of the British Army against Germany" (*CS* 26 April 1916; cf. also 27 April 1916).

Here, one perceives that the events taking place in Ireland were not seen as strictly limited to the Anglo-Irish framework, as they had international repercussions throughout Europe, where self-determination for small nations was the subject of heated debates before, during, and *after* the Great War (Aan de Wiel 2020, 195). Indeed, one seminal event of the aftermath of the conflict was the Paris Peace Conference, where the Irish delegates called for the recognition of their self-proclaimed republic, and the Italian envoys put before the assembly their territorial claims to Fiume and Dalmatia. In particular, the Adriatic question was a key element of connection between Italy and the other European nations after 1918, that greatly influenced Italian attitudes towards foreign countries. Firstly, Italy wanted Britain to support its designs in the Adriatic, so Italian national publications like *Corriere della Sera* avoided publishing pieces that would alienate the sympathies of a powerful ally (cf. Chini 2015, 205). Secondly, the Irish fight for independence brandished before the eyes of the Italian people the spectre of the loss of territorial integrity and union, precisely on the days when delegations of Dalmatians reiterated at the Conference "the unwavering will of their constituents to be reunited with the Italian motherland" (*CS* 6 March 1919).

In the articles covering the Easter Rising, the binary oppositions "the many vs the few", "the sensible vs the unsensible" and "the loyal vs the disloyal" attested to the fears of the Italian

² The judgement on Casement, which was the subject of numerous articles until 1921, was certainly exacerbated by the discovery of the Black Diaries on the "moral deviations that made him odious" (*CS* 11 August 1959), documents that, nonetheless, the paper never explicitly mentioned during these years. As interesting as this reticence (at least in my opinion) is the fact that the veracity of Casement's reports was not contested when they first came out (cf. *CS* 7 December 1903; 18 July 1912).

journalists, who dreaded the emergence of subversive forces and did not look favourably at a weakening of Britain. And a comparable mix of anxieties informed the pieces featured in *Corriere della Sera* at the time of the Conference, when the paper's commentators ventured to ingratiate Britain by affirming,

Italy's contempt for dealing with arguments that are unpleasant to her friend England, and for being unjust towards a very noble race which, if it exerts the imperial power even where national law does not demand it, makes its own fortune resonate for the benefit of all humanity. (CS 6 March 1919)

This *captatio benevolentiae* is also indicative of the authors' admiration for Britain as a stronghold against the advancement of forces hostile to liberal interests, precisely when Italy was unsettled by subversive agitations.

The end of the Great War did not bring peace to Italy. Social struggles, and political and paramilitary violence continued for many years after November 1918 as a bird's-eye survey of the covers of *La Domenica del Corriere* in the years 1918-1920 shows. On 10 November 1918, the periodical finally celebrated the end of the war and many of the following covers provided visual accounts of Remembrance Days or the celebrations for the anniversaries of Italian victories on the battlefield. But such images of unity, of people bonded by mourning or joy, were soon replaced by covers that exposed the deep cracks in the country's political and social landscapes in the post-war years. The era of the Italian liberal State was coming to an end and the new phase of the *Biennio rosso* was commencing (cf. Lyttelton 2005; Gentile 2005). This implied a shift in the aesthetics and subjects of the periodical's illustrations, as social conflicts started to be represented using different aesthetic codes, and as targets of abhorrence (Ginex 2007, 88). Beltrame depicted the strikes in Milan as "painful and distressing spectacle[s]" (*DC* January 1920), because public services no longer worked, chaos reigned, and public order was imperilled by laziness and a lack of discipline (*DC* 25 January 1920).

Towards the end of 1919, the commentators of *Corriere della Sera* similarly condemned these episodes, which were portrayed as attempts to sabotage the country, as the strikes and socialist activities across Italy were often presented as threats to both bourgeois social order and national values (Licata 1976, 193; Benvenuto 2000, 449; cf. also Lyttelton 2005, xii). Take for instance the following passage about a strike of railway workers:

How could the Italian railway workers, who often demonstrated their self-denial and patriotism during the war, want right now, when they are fighting against another terrible enemy, disorganisation and famine, to show themselves to be unfit for their duty and unable to understand that, with the suspension of indispensable services, they put the life of the nation at stake for an insignificant return. (CS 13 July 1919)

What was particularly frightening for *Corriere della Sera* was the idea that undemocratic powers could take advantage of the situation which was characterised by unfocused rebellion and a general mood against the State and the ruling classes, who constituted its readership (cf. Levy 2007). The articles on the social struggles of the *Biennio rosso* often revealed an overriding fear of subversive forces and their authors' anxieties about the difficulties of the Italian government and constitutional force to restore order and security. *Corriere della Sera* was not immune to the fear of the "Red Menace", nor did it hesitate to criticise Gabriele D'Annunzio's military operations in Fiume in 1919 (cf. Ledeen 1977), as they could become sources of social instability. The radicalisation of rhetoric and action was dreaded. Until 1922, *Corriere della Sera* and Albertini had called not only for law and order and the preservation of the Liberal

State, but also for the continued exclusion of “subversive forces” from the *Statuto* (Devendittis 1976, 625). Apparently, the editor even hailed the onset of Fascism as a “santa reazione” (“holy reaction”) to the illegalities of the *Biennio rosso* (Benvenuto 2000, 449).

My contention is that these fears were projected onto the Irish situation. The staff’s mistrust of the “agitators” reverberated in the articles that recounted the earlier months of the War of Independence, the most defining moment of which was the first assembly, on 21 January 1919, of the revolutionary unicameral parliament of the Irish Republic, known as the First Dáil. *Corriere della Sera* immediately reported the news, publishing a long series of articles that subtly pressed into the reader’s mind the idea that the Sinn Féiners were inept radicals, that were potentially dangerous because of their inability to foresee the consequences of their actions, whereas the British authorities came through as pragmatic peacekeepers. As a norm, the paper’s commentators avoided explicit value judgements about the morality and competence of the parties involved, but their stance on the Irish situation and its protagonists may be gathered from the words used to describe them, the contrasts and apparently neutral passing remarks, which provide the backbone for the pieces published in the winter of 1919.

For instance, in “How Ireland’s Independence Was Declared by the Sinn Féiners” (CS 23 January 1919), the author devoted a lot of attention to an aspect that may seem trivial; he did not focus on the contents of the proceedings of the very first meeting, but on *how* they were delivered. We are informed that the proceedings were held wholly in the Irish language, although English was “the only language understood and spoken throughout the country”, and that “the motions in Gaelic were understood solely by a tiny minority among the participants”, to the point that some of them had to fall back on a “rusty” French to intervene (*ibidem*). These factual details might seem innocent. However, they actually convey the idea of a minority of radicals who were stuck in the past (there were few fluent Gaelic speakers in early-twentieth-century Ireland) and oblivious to the needs of most people. Moreover, their use of the ancient language was described as “not pragmatic” and based on an anachronistic bias against the language of “the usurpers”. Thus, in the reconstruction of the event provided by *Corriere della Sera*, the message to the Free Nations for the international recognition of Irish independence sounded (albeit correctly understood) untimely, exaggerated (“to the bitter end”), and far-fetched, as it was based on a supposed popular consensus recognised by Sinn Féin alone, as “the land-owners and farmers, who used to be the overwhelming majority of the assemblies of the old nationalist party, did not intervene” (*ibidem*). How could the Sinn Féiners take the reins of Ireland in the troubled post-war era?

Interestingly, to prove that their scepticism was justifiable, the Italian journalists also made instant use of articles published by the Irish press on Sinn Féin. In the article featured on 25 January, the Italian correspondent C.C. (presumably Carlo Camagna)³ advanced his narrative through the voices of the *Irish Independent* and the *Freeman’s Journal*, which defined the party’s programme as unrealistic and, as such, “deleterious to the ambitions of our cause” (CS 25 January 1919, 2), because it called for “ridicule” of the Irish people (*ibidem*). However, while the Irish commentators only concerned themselves about how Sinn Féin’s initiatives might hinder the attainment of national autonomy, C.C. voiced his suspicion that the party’s political initiatives were not only farcical and deleterious for the nationalist cause, but also a threat to stability in Ireland. His scepticism bordered on fear when he realised that the “excess” of Sinn

³ Carlo Camagna was the paper’s permanent correspondent in London, who also covered news from Ireland, which he possibly visited on a number of occasions. Overall, *Corriere della Sera* had multiple sources on Ireland, ranging from the international press (for example, the *Freeman’s Journal* and *The Times*), to the Stefani Press Agency, which collaborated with both Reuters and Agence France-Presse.

Féin's claims and activities may foment radicalism and unrest in the country (in point of fact, these were "the dangerous aspects of the Sinn Féin movement" (*ibidem*). According to C.C., the only reason why there was no "disorder" was to be ascribed to "the wise moderation of the English authorities, who refrained from any form of coercion and recalled their sentries used to watching Dublin City Hall" (*ibidem*). Here, gross dichotomising can be detected in the words and phrases used to describe the British authorities and the Irish radical nationalists, as negative language ("ridicule", "dangerous", "to the bitter end", "minority", "not pragmatic") was associated with the Sinn Féiners and their words and deeds, to differentiate them from the "valiant", "wise" British. These polarised characterisations of the British authorities and Sinn Féin's delegates gave the impression that the former would be able to mediate between opposing views and restore order in case of trouble. However, the less politically experienced Sinn Féiners were not expected to rise to the situation.

Incidentally, on other occasions, it was implied that the significant difference between Sinn Féin and the British authorities was due to the level of respect the two sides accorded to the democratic institutions and to their attitudes towards the recognition of fundamental human rights. This was the case of the article "The Irish Republican Assembly and the Attitude of the British Government" (CS 22 January 1919); as can be seen, a form of dualism was already highlighted by the headline. Here, the actions taken by the British authorities were construed as righteous and aimed at protecting the right of freedom of speech and protest, as the journalist lingered on the British "liberal" treatment of the situation, writing that:

the new minister for Ireland, Macpherson, arrived in Dublin yesterday and his first act was the abolition of the ordinance prohibiting public meetings. The Republican Assembly will therefore be able to meet without violating any law since under the normal regime nothing prevents free citizens of the British Empire from expressing their opinions and aspirations in public. (*Ibidem*)

In contrast, the rectitude of Sinn Féin is questioned in the passing remark that "34 Sinn Féiners elected to the House of Commons have been convicted of political crimes, and 3 have fled to the States" (*ibidem*).

Following the same path, in a subtly evaluative comment, it is said to be "curious" that the "two delegates de Valera and Griffith are imprisoned in England for their relations with Germany during the war" (CS 23 January 1919). The author was referring to the arrest, in May 1918, of 73 of the most influential leaders of Sinn Féin and Irish Volunteers, because of their participation in the so-called "German Plot", namely an alleged plot between the Irish radicals and the Germans during the Great War with a view to an insurrection in Ireland (Denton 2007, 122). Here, the author did not question the truthfulness of the accusations (whether or not they were British fabrications), but focused on their consequence, namely the status of de Valera and Griffith as convicts: labelling the two politicians as such identified them as criminals, or at least as individuals of dubious ethics. The "curiosity" reported by *Corriere della Sera* was, in fact, a commentary that contained a negative evaluation, even though there was no explicit, harsh criticism. The use of the label "delegates" may appear to be neutral, but it was not, because the reference to the status of de Valera and Griffith as elected politicians could potentially imply a negative opinion of *all* of the Sinn Féin delegates, who belonged to the same party and shared the same convictions about Ireland as the two inmates (cf. Bednarek and Caple 2012, 235)⁴.

⁴ Elsewhere, de Valera was labelled the "Spanish native son", perhaps with the intention of casting doubt on the motives of his Irish nationalist aspirations (CS 3 April 1919).

The allusion to the Great War, too, is worthy of analysis because it contributed to the portrayal, in negative terms, of the start of activities of the Dáil and of Sinn Féin. It may also remind us of the commentaries on Roger Casement and Patrick Pearse, as it suggests the existence of treasonable relations during the war that put into question the reliability and patriotism of the current Sinn Féin leaders. Another commonality between this and the pieces on the Easter Rising is the focus on the theme of loyalty, which is expounded in the conclusion and which can be read as implying approval of the Irish who did not oppose the Union. In the conclusion, the author lingered on a group of Irish war veterans' singing *God Save the King* in another hall of Mansion House, while the inauguration of the Dáil was going on: it is stated that they had fought "bravely" at Loos and had been taken prisoners by the Germans, indicating that, as POWs, they never tried to establish a connection with their jailers to improve their lot, but remained loyal to their country. Again, the values of bravery and loyalty are contrasted with treachery (CS 23 January 1919).

But observing that many Irish people still supported the Union or deemed Sinn Féin's project unfeasible did not dispel the idea that the vocal minority of Sinn Féiners represented a threat to socio-political order. For all his emphasis on the loyal Irish ex-servicemen and the silent majority of people at the gatherings of the First Dáil, the author acknowledged that there was a fracture among the Irish people, which might widen over time; this was pointed out in the conclusion of the article, in which it was said that both the war veterans and the Sinn Féiners were applauded with "equal fervour" by the mob when they left Mansion House (*ibidem*).

With the wisdom of hindsight, we may argue that the journalist was right, as the sporadic hostilities of early 1919 made way for an ever-intensifying cycle of violence in the following months (Madigan 2020, 99; Hopkinson 2002, 67-68). And when the fears of disorder became a reality, there was a shift in the way that *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere* reported the events of the Irish struggle. The Ireland of January 1919 did not only command less than later events prominence, in terms of front-page and top-of-news coverage, but the ways the news was structured and written about also changed. Sweeping narratives showed Italian readers what war meant in urban landscapes, as the readers were provided with salient accounts of episodes of guerrilla warfare. Typical of war writings (cf. McLoughlin 2011, 22), these were full of references to wounded and dead bodies, physical symptoms, deafening noise, and images of destruction. The report on the assassination of Colonel Smyth, in July 1920, was emblematic, as this act

put the city of Cork in serious turmoil, and today in the streets real battles have continued between soldiers and ex-servicemen, civilians, and policemen; 3 civilians and one soldier were killed, and 40 people wounded, some of them dying. The streets of Cork are continually crossed by armed patrols, trucks loaded with soldiers and armoured cars. The activity of the Sinn Feiners is no less serious and, therefore, no less dangerous. [...] The whole city thundered continuously with gunshots. (CS 20 July 1920)

Readers were made to see the destruction brought on the city of Cork and hear the deafening noises typical of warfare ("the whole city thundered"). They were also reminded that this was an ordinary spectacle ("continually"; "continuously"), one of the many incidents of a guerrilla war that caused material devastation and loss of life on both sides and among civilians. And for this reason, i.e. because of the magnitude of the violence, the Italian journalists then started evoking the Great War in their reports and commentaries about the conflict in Ireland in a new way.

Take for instance the caption to the cover illustration of *La Domenica del Corriere* on 12 December 1920, where the outlines of the events were presented using references to the Great War and sensationalised language. Beltrame could no better communicate the scale and type of violence of the Irish guerrilla fighting than by establishing parallels with what had happened in the years 1914-1918. It was reported that "the methods of the Great War" had again been

brought to life in “Ireland, which is troubled” by “the civil war”: “in the streets of Dublin: the advance of a column of rebels is stopped by an armoured car, by launching smoke bombs” (DC 12 December 1920). The very use of the term “Great War” was at the same time evocative and politically potent, as the experience of the conflict was still very vivid in the memory of the Italian readers, with its imagery that was the epitome of destructive warfare. Applying the term to the Irish situation meant making a sensational statement and a reference to a period of unprecedented violence. Equally interesting was the use of the adjective “troubled”, which suggested the pervasiveness and magnitude of the violence. Indeed, in the same issue, a photograph captured an episode of “the Irish War”. The caption reads:

This is how the British themselves defined the series of bloody troubles that continue to afflict the Emerald Isle. Here, in our photograph, the appearance of a Dublin street after one of the many clashes between police and Sinn Féiners: two rioters and a guard are lying on the ground. (*Ibidem*)

In the passages quoted, we can also appreciate the shift in the representation of the Sinn Féiners: from farcical politicians of dubious ethics, they were now “rioters” and “no less dangerous”. The events of the Irish War of Independence were thus integrated into a wider narrative that was meant to expose the threat posed by the insurgents and mass movements. Indeed, at the time, the staff of *Corriere della Sera* and of *La Domenica del Corriere* were gathering and serving up stories of atrocities from all over Europe, to stir their readers’ fears of subversive forces and rebellious mobs; hence, I do not think it was a coincidence that the article and photograph devoted to “the Irish War” were accompanied by a lengthy reportage on what was happening “In Lenin’s Tragic Russia” (*ibidem*). Here, the readers’ fears were deliberately aroused by tales and images of people being buried alive, of torture chambers, and of the final statements made by a woman condemned to death, which were reminiscent of a Poe-esque gusto for gory details (“the walls are bespattered with blood” (*ibidem*)).



Figure 1 – “Methods of the Great War that Civil War Brings to Life in the Troubled Ireland”, *La Domenica del Corriere*, 12 December 1920. This image is reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Ireland, PD C73

The Sinn Féiners were now painted in a blacker hue. At first, Sinn Féin's "subversive" attitude and deeds worried *Corriere della Sera* because they emboldened those extremists in the masses who saw the general atmosphere of unrest in the country as an opportunity for action. For instance, the Italian commentators acknowledged that the leaders of the ill-defined "Irish Republic" – the term is usually written between inverted commas to imply scepticism about Sinn Féin's political project (cf. CS 3 April 1919) – had no control over those rebellious masses, who had no interest in the national question but were acting for their own reasons. This is evidenced in this passage:

The working-class and agricultural masses, stirred up by the tenacious and skilful propaganda of agitators whose doctrines aim to subvert the social order rather than to obtain a simple change of political regime, declare themselves in solidarity with the Sinn Féiners – just nominally, as, in reality, they further an activity of a very different nature that gives rise to serious bloody events, such as the premeditated murder of two policemen in the central square of Tipperary, which took place two days ago. (CS 25 January 1919)

Yet, as time passed, the situation got worse, and the unrest caused by the Republicans' recklessness made Ireland vulnerable also to the deleterious influences of foreign, subversive forces. *Corriere della Sera* suggested that Bolshevik Russia was trying to garner Irish support against Great Britain by abetting the Republican movement: in March, the paper announced that "by 1 March, the Bureau of Propaganda in Moscow had spent 300 million rubles", of which "50 million had been spent to fuel the revolution in Ireland" (CS 6 March 1919). Here, the newspaper gave credit to the allegations of conspiracy between the Republican movement and the Russian Bolsheviks, made by the British official publications of the period, to politically isolate the self-proclaimed Republic in the international context. Clearly, this propagandistic strategy proved effective with the editorial staff of *Corriere della Sera*, for whom the very term "Bolshevism" had already become synonymous with chaos and danger.

Italian journalists voiced their contempt for the fact that some Irish trade unionists openly preached "Bolshevism" (CS 3 April 1919), and expressed relief after learning about the demise of a general strike in Limerick, the one that followed the death of the IRA man and unionist Robert Byrne. *Corriere della Sera* devoted a lot of attention to the story of the establishment and demise of the Limerick strike, which was clearly deemed newsworthy and relevant for the Italian readers; after all, Italy was then troubled by a succession of general strikes, which were "messy affairs involving chaotic rioting" (Levy 2007, 150). The mobilisation of the citizens of Limerick was construed negatively as a serious threat to the established economic and social order, as "the workers" (*Corriere della Sera* presented them as an unnamed collective) formed a sort of "soviet" that "rules the roost" in the town. These workers took on the role of democratic institutions, as they "order", "forbid", and "issue money". To make matters worse, Sinn Féin intended to "take advantage" of this and the other rebellions (CS 1 February 1919; 3 April 1919) – a scheme that, in the eyes of the Italian journalists, further proved the hostility of Sinn Féin leaders to democratic institutions, and that these leaders were a menace to national and international stability.

Conversely, the British government came to stand out as a stronghold against the chaos and disorder threatened, and at times caused, by Sinn Féin, the Unions, and the Bolsheviks in Ireland and around the world. The *Corriere della Sera* commentators voiced their hope that the British authorities, who were still "relatively immune to contagion [...] by Bolshevism" (CS 6 March 1919), could restore peace on the Island and national and international security. Here, we may appreciate the difference between *Corriere della Sera* and many other Italian periodicals of the time. Chini (2015, 204-206) observed that Britain's refusal to support Italy's territorial claims

over Dalmatia and Fiume ultimately led the Italian nationalist and Fascist press to embrace the Irish War of Independence as a righteous fight against an oppressive imperial power. However, *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere* did not. The contributors of the former expressed their dissatisfaction at how Britain was dealing with the Italian-Yugoslavian contention over the Adriatic islands (cf. CS 5 April 1919; CS 24 April 1919), but this did not turn into open hostility against the British authorities or support for the Irish cause. A weakened Britain was very worrying in the “bitter and agitated” world of the time, and Britain’s loss of authority was only in danger of “fuelling new fires, after so much destruction” (CS 6 March 1919).

Nevertheless, I believe that the “anomaly” of *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere* emerged most distinctly in their treatments of episodes that caused savage indignation all around the world, which I explore in the next section.

3. *Highly Emotive Stories and the Pro-British Stance of Corriere della Sera and La Domenica del Corriere*

In the history of the Irish revolution, we can pinpoint two very emotive episodes that received worldwide attention from the press, which occasionally led to a more sympathetic understanding of the Irish calls for independence. Here, I am referring to the unfortunate fates of the Lord Mayor of Cork, Terence MacSwiney, who died in Brixton Prison on 25 October 1920, after seventy-four days on hunger strike, and of the young IRA man Kevin Barry.

The description of MacSwiney’s physical decline and death dominated headlines all over Ireland and abroad in the autumn of 1920, as the nationalist organisations and press made every effort to ensure international media coverage of his story, presenting him as a martyr to British oppression in order to cause outrage (Ferriter 2010, 200). To win the hearts and minds of the European public, attention was drawn to MacSwiney’s suffering body, perhaps on a cue of the Lord Mayor himself, because he might have been aware that the mass circulation of accounts of his sufferings might influence the world’s perception of the Irish (Reynolds 2002, 538). This was a good intuition, because the story of the starving Lord Mayor struck a chord with European readers, making MacSwiney “a temporary international icon” (Ferriter 2010, 200). Grace Neville (2001) and Maurice Walsh (2006, chapter 3), among others, have demonstrated how the extensive coverage of this major story in France and England unsettled the nerves of many readers, and enabled them to develop a more nuanced view of the Irish question.

Between August and October, MacSwiney’s story commanded similar prime space in the Italian press, as all of the main publications featured a succession of lengthy articles that made the lot of the Lord Mayor an ongoing concern in the minds of the Italian readers. National newspapers reacted with a lot of emotional engagement, sometimes also exploiting this story to vent anti-British sentiment. For instance, on 29 August 1920, Benito Mussolini wrote the article “MacSwiney Agonises. Long Live the Irish Republic!” for *Il Popolo d’Italia*, in which he praised the hunger strike as an act of “superb stoicism” and declared Italy’s support for Republican Ireland. “The Italians,” he wrote,

for reasons of justice and interest, cannot deny their solidarity with the Irish. Ireland has the right to live independently, and as a republic. [...] We like to hope that the dying Mayor of Cork will at least hear the echo of the auspicious cry that comes from our hearts: ‘Long live the Irish Republic!’. (Mussolini 1920)

Like its counterparts abroad and at home, *Corriere della Sera* gave extensive press coverage to “the Tragedy of the Lord Mayor of Cork” in the Autumn of 1920 (3 September 1920), continually publishing hard news reports and updates that were of particular interest, as they provided a very

distinctive voice on the Irish question and, at the same time, appealed to both the emotions and reason of its readers. The language used to describe the Lord Mayor's physical decline was designed to inflame the passions of the reader – inevitably, the strong competition for the public's attention led to “sensationalism” (Sciarrone 2015, 133) – but, at the same time, the play on emotions was tempered by extensive, dispassionate passages in which the journalists examined the socio-political consequences of MacSwiney's imprisonment. The news stories on MacSwiney were delivered with a clear angle mirroring the newspaper's conservative and pro-British stance on the Irish question and the editorial staff's anxieties that these events could further exacerbate the tense Irish situation.

First, MacSwiney's story was recorded in detailed pieces characterised by the extensive deployment of emotive vocabulary, which conveyed the drama of a suffering, trapped body that was once vital but was now in pain. The headlines, “The Tragedy of the Lord Mayor of Cork” (CS 3 September 1920), “The Vitality of the Lord Mayor of Cork” (CS 9 October 1920), “The Sacrifice of MacSwiney” (*ibidem*) focused on the prisoner's body and state of mind, turning the dry, day-by-day chronicle into a pathetic story that constantly swung between hope and despair. Passages like “although the rumour went out this morning that the Lord Mayor of Cork is dying, his condition remains unchanged” (*ibidem*) dragged readers into a gripping narrative that almost made them eyewitnesses of MacSwiney's struggle between life and death. The Italian commentators realised the immense impact that tales of brutality against MacSwiney could have on the public's imagination and, hence, provided stories that focused on the “torment[s]” caused by “brutal force-feeding and many sleepless nights” (CS 15 September 1920), like appalling descriptions of how the Lord Mayor “was forcefully made to swallow” food while he had fainted (CS 21 and 22 October 1920). At the same time, hope was fuelled by the news that similar tales had generated such passionate interest in many readers that they petitioned for MacSwiney's reprieve and demanded the Crown intercede with Lloyd George (CS 27 August 1920; CS 28 August 1920; CS 3 September 1920; CS 7 September 1920; CS 10 September 1920). Their attempts were always thwarted by the Prime Minister's refusal to do so (CS 31 August 1920).

Readers' despair and astonishment were also deliberately aroused by selecting pieces of information that categorised the story as extraordinary, and by reporting on the emotional response of MacSwiney's relatives (his wife and sisters) and the people of Cork. Pathos was intensified in the references to the MacSwiney women, who strenuously defended the dying man against any accusation levelled at him by the British authorities. With a determination that was to characterise each of their moves, they shouted at the coroner examining MacSwiney's case that the prisoner “had worked for Ireland throughout his life” and that his death was “the sacrifice of life for freedom” (CS 28 October 1920). Moreover, the Italian correspondent did not fail to mention that the MacSwiney women also suffered pointless ill-treatment when the British authorities forbade them to meet the Lord Mayor before his imminent death; the statements “following the doctors' opinion, his wife was not allowed to enter the cells; her sister was not even allowed to go through the prison gate” (CS 26 October 1920) seem to have been designed to garner the sympathies for the Irish cause of the readers of *Corriere della Sera*.

One may even venture to argue that the paper had changed its stance on the Irish question, but that would be a mistake. And the words “sacrifice” and “tragedy” should not mislead us into thinking that *Corriere della Sera* honoured MacSwiney as a martyr to his convictions, who kept alive the idea of freedom against a tyrannical Britain in a sort of David-Goliath confrontation. Even the reporting of this tragic story was subject to the convictions and anxieties of the Milanese editorial staff.

The Italian journalists noted that public opinion and many British MPs were indignant about the mistreatment of the Corkman, and stated their concern that Lloyd George would

further antagonise Irish public opinion with his refusal to concede a reprieve (CS 9 September 1920); however, this information was not used to vent anti-British sentiment. The Italian observers drew on the British press to gain insights into the conduct of the British authorities: for instance, in September, they qualified their analyses by stating that, according to the political commentators of *The Times*, "the government's refusal to release the Mayor of Cork [wa]s justifiable only with its policy in Ireland" (CS 2 September 1920). Building on this statement, they later pointed out that the reasons underlying Lloyd George's decisions were reasonable ("if the government had surrendered, it would have lost" (CS 26 October 1920), and also dared to discredit MacSwiney by claiming that "it is evident that those who go on hunger strike thereby make a combined effort to make it impossible to indict them, because legally it is impossible to judge them if they are physically unable to show up in court" (CS 9 September 1920). In short, the government was not held to be primarily responsible for the Lord Mayor's agony.

Arguably, the aim was to avoid any validation of what MacSwiney did and represented: from the point of view of the Italian commentators, MacSwiney might have made the ultimate sacrifice displaying "stoicism worthy of the ancient heroes", but his publicised death would only fuel a deadly cause – "the cause that knows all the lamentations and all the hatreds, that neither forgets nor forgives" (CS 26 October 1920).

On this point, I believe that the authors resorted to the tropes and language of sensationalism in a bid to evoke an emotional response in the readers that played not only on pathos but also on fear, as the factual details were selected for their potential to convey an atmosphere of tension that may soon result in dreaded open conflict. The accounts of the three funerals of MacSwiney (cf. Reynolds 2002) and the journey of his coffin from Brixton to Dublin and then to Cork are dramatized descriptions of the physical scenes, as the lexis and imagery there deployed convey "a sense of intensity" (White 1997, 108), in order to suggest potentially escalating emotions and tension. The commentators of *Corriere della Sera* defined "the transport of MacSwiney's body to Cork" as "dramatic" because, at a certain point, the British soldiers who were watching over the coffin found themselves face-to-face with the Volunteers, who wanted to take the casket into their custody (30 October 1920). There was a divide between the British soldiers and the Irish people.

The passages in which the narrator lingered on the crowds that had arrived at the Dublin and Cork harbours to mourn their fallen hero were emblematic: in Dublin, there was "an immense procession" and "all the Irish mourners [...], kneeling on the pier, first recited the prayer for the dead, then intoned the *De Profundis*, when the steamer passed in front of them" (*ibidem*); similarly, in Cork, the silence was broken by "the chaplain shouting his blessing to the dead man", and there gathered "an enormous crowd" and "cripples and invalids asked to be carried before the coffin" (31 October 1920). These details, which appealed to the senses of sight and hearing, conveyed the idea that the Irish had formed a collective cohesion in their mourning, whose resentment (as *Corriere della Sera* suggested) had been fed by the news of the mistreatment of MacSwiney and of the state-executed reprisals against unarmed civilians (CS 27 October 1920). The Italian newspaper thus shifted its focus to the consequences of the Lord Mayor's gesture; because of it, tensions in Ireland had reached their breaking point and Ireland was on the verge of "an imminent disaster" (CS 26 October 1920).

The same discursive and narrative patterns can be detected in the (limited) press coverage of the sentencing and execution of Kevin Barry. For the most part, his story unfolded while MacSwiney was in the final stage of his hunger strike, as Barry was tried by general court-martial on 20 October 1920 and was condemned to suffer death by hanging seven days later. Only at this point did his case attract the attention of *Corriere della Sera*, which made some passing

references to the story that are worthy of analysis, despite their brevity, as they highlight the newspaper's stance on the Irish situation.

The earliest reference appeared in a tight piece on MacSwiney's funeral, in which it was reported that the wife of Lloyd George had been "personally asked to intercede with her husband" (CS 31 October 1920). The journalist noted that the appeals had been issued on the grounds of Barry's young age and the exceptional nature of the sentence, as "no death sentences have been carried out in Dublin for political crimes, since 1803" and "the youth of the accused is invoked as a reason for grace" (*ibidem*). *Corriere della Sera's* emphasising of the reasons for the appeals may lead one to think that, in this instance, the paper had veered towards compassion for the young rebel. Yet, again, the author managed to provide a more pro-British view on the matter, by referring to those "English newspapers"⁵ that had pointed out that, although young, Barry was a peer of the victims – "of the three killed, one was 19 years old, and the other two were barely twenty" (*ibidem*).

Corriere della Sera returned to Barry's story the day after his execution, in the article "A Fenian executed in Dublin. One Inspector and five officers killed" (CS 2 November 1920). The title emphasised the dualism that shaped the structure and tone of the whole piece, in which the elegiac tones of the opening gave way to the dry account of riots in Ireland of the conclusion, and the personal drama of the young IRA man was ultimately inserted into a broader, collective narrative of violence. At once, the reader's attention was drawn to *two* facts, as the very first line read that the day before had been "another black day in Ireland", not only because "the 18-year-old student Kevin Barry" had been hanged despite the attempts to obtain a reprieve for him, but because of the "rebellious acts and corresponding reprisals" that had taken place "in various parts of Ireland" (*ibidem*). Many appeals for amnesty had indeed been received in late October from prominent politicians and opinionmakers from across Europe, but Barry's fate had been sealed and *Corriere della Sera* moved on to describe the final moments in the rebel's life, appealing to the visual, the auditory, and the tactile to drag its readers into a narrative full of pathos. The correspondent reported that Barry had been calm and composed, and had gone "bravely" to his death, making a strong impression on the Catholic priest summoned for the last rites, who "burst into tears" when recounting it to the press. Sadness then re-echoed in the Rosary recited by the "large crowds" that had amassed outside the prison gates at the very time of the execution (*ibidem*).

Focusing on the priest's and mob's reactions, on Barry's countenance, and on the acoustic and visual details seemed to link this story to those concerning MacSwiney's funeral, which had been duly reported on by *Corriere della Sera* a few days earlier. It also appeared to dovetail with the image propagated by the Irish nationalist press, which described Barry as a gallant boy who had made the ultimate sacrifice for his country and people (Doherty 2000, 224). Yet there are differences in the portrayals of these icons of Irish nationalism throughout the pages of the Italian paper, which never surrendered to unchecked nationalist propaganda. Barry may have faced his imminent death bravely, climbing onto the scaffold "with a secure gait and not shaking" (CS 2 November 1920), but this did not make him a martyr; the term "sacrifice", which dominated the headlines of Ireland's nationalist newspapers (Doherty 2000, 224) was never used by the Italian journalist to refer to the IRA rebel, as the latter had been identified first and foremost as being responsible for a terrible crime and the true cause of his punishment. In loaded language that dispelled any characterisation of Barry as an innocent idealist,

⁵ Here, the Italian journalist was presumably relying on the conclusions of a conference held by Mr. Bonar Law, which was reported on by all of the major British press agencies (Doherty 2000, 223).

the young student was presented as “guilty of participating in the murder of three British soldiers” for which he had to hang. Likewise, the label “Fenian” used in the title pressed into the reader’s mind the association of Barry with the dynamiters who had threatened British rule in the nineteenth century and the leaders of the Easter Rising, who had been called “Fenians” in the articles of April 1916 (CS 27 April 1916; 30 April 1916). So, the use of the term in this context was intended to evoke images of violent acts of resistance carried out by a small band of radicals, and its attribution to Barry further dismantled the perception of the boy as a martyr who had been victimised by the British authorities. The contributor to *Corriere della Sera* did not give credit to the allegations of British ruthlessness against Barry, as justice had run its course. Britain’s policing of the Barry affair was depicted as the government’s reaction to the threat posed by a group linked to subversive ideologies.

As with the story of MacSwiney’s hunger strike, Barry’s execution was deemed newsworthy and construed negatively for the consequences it had on the socio-political status quo (Bednarek and Caple 2012, 20). Comments were soon made about how these events contributed and were related to the persistence of violence in Ireland. In the second half of “A Fenian Executed in Dublin. One Inspector and Five Officers Killed” (CS 2 November 1920), the journalist focused on the “Fenian attacks” following the execution, which, in turn, gave rise to reprisals by the Army and the RIC. The tone of the conclusive section contrasted sharply with that of the former, because the attacks were reported in a concise, matter-of-fact way, with no concessions to inflammatory or emotional language, and the narrative pathos was replaced with the harsh reality of the numbers. The reader was left pondering the difference in the number of casualties on the two opposing sides: “the Fenians announce but just one dead”, whereas “one Inspector and five police officers have been killed” among the opponents (*ibidem*).

Corriere della Sera gave an account of Barry’s death within the construct of its own perception of the Irish situation, as the article may be integrated into the larger depiction of Ireland as the “Island with no peace” (DC 12 December 1920; 20 March 1921). A few days later, the journalists went on describing what was happening in Ireland (i.e. “The Irish Tragedy”) as a succession of “horrors” typical of “a warfare scenario” (CS 5 November 1920; CS 10 November 1920), and, over the next months, the magnitude and dreadfulness of the situation were increasingly established with references to the atrocities perpetrated by the Germans in the Great War. This was not peculiar to *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere* alone. The Irish Secretary Sir Hamar Greenwood had to spend much of his time in the House of Commons deflecting questions about Black and Tans on the rampage, who were often likened to the Huns by Greenwood’s opponents and part of the public opinion (Walsh 2006, 107). And when, in April 1921, some MPs referred to the undisciplined British soldiers as “slaughterers of children”, the Italian journalists could not but recall that “‘slaughterers of children’ had been one of the most common epithets attributed to the Germans during the war” (CS 21 April 1921). This remark could have been further extended by the author of the article to highlight that domestic public opinion was attacking the government for adopting the methods of terrorism the “Huns” had inflicted on Belgium in 1914, and therefore casting a shadow over the mishandling of the situation on the part of the British authorities (cf. Madigan 2020). And yet, the subject was left under-explored and the article closed on a mildly positive note that swung the pendulum from despair back to hope: “it is announced that a *super partes* Committee has been set up. It will conduct an inquiry into [...] the Irish situation to reach a peaceful solution of the conflict” (CS 21 April 1921).



Figure 2 – “A War Spectacle, the Island without Peace”, *La Domenica del Corriere*, 20 March 1921. It depicts war planes circling down on IRA men. This image is reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Ireland, PD C80

Corriere della Sera did not conceal the fact that the hesitant and punitive policy of the government had outraged part of British and international public opinion, but simultaneously highlighted the conciliatory intentions of Lloyd George and his cabinet, as well as their efforts to pacify Ireland. Headlines such as “Consensus and Critiques on the Peace Project” (CS 1 October 1920), “Meeting in London about Ireland” (CS 2 October 1920), “American and British Solutions for the Irish Situation” (CS 5 October 1920) recurred at that time. Arguably, information about the peace efforts was of relevance for Italian readers, who were then witnessing similar outbursts of violence within their national borders. On the same page as the headline “The Irish Tragedy” was the account of a bloody fight between fascists and socialists in the streets of Verona. In this, gory details were selected for atmospheric impact and may have reminded readers of the violence of both the Great War and the Irish conflict, as the reporter wrote about “invaders”, “pools of blood”, and “mutilated bodies”, including “truncated” hands (CS 5 November 1920). In Italy, too, the readers of *Corriere della Sera* expected the authorities “to take strict measures to maintain public order” (CS 5 November 1920).

Arguably, in describing the violent aftermaths of MacSwiney’s and Barry’s deaths, *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere* voiced their fear that the British government would not be able to put an end to this unrelenting violence, that reprisals would continue indefinitely with spiralling costs in casualties and destruction on both sides, and that the very same horrors would take place in Italy. Ireland came to represent what Italian commentators hoped Italy would never become: the latter might have seen Ireland as a window into the future of their own country if public order were not restored, and have projected their fears onto it.

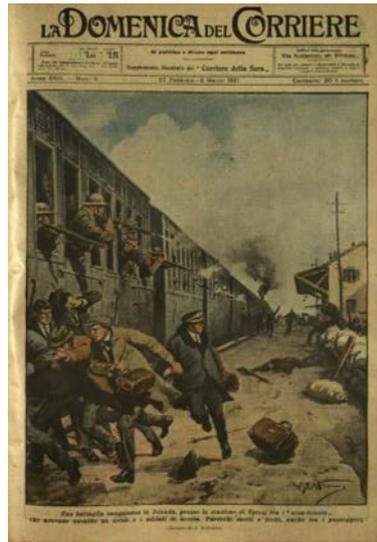


Figure 3—“A bloody battle in Ireland, at Upton station, between the Sinn Feiners who had attacked a train and the escort soldiers”, *La Domenica del Corriere*, 27 February 1921. This image is reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Ireland, PD C77

As this essay has tried to show, through a close, historically-informed reading of the primary sources, reactions to the Irish situation in the visual and textual materials of *Corriere della Sera* and *La Domenica del Corriere* were affected by a series of palpable fears about the future of Italy; on the one hand, the two publications kept a moderately pro-British stance and avoided publishing pieces that would alienate the sympathies of a powerful ally and stronghold of liberalism; on the other, anxieties concerning internecine threats to socio-political order led the editorial staff to brandish Ireland as a kind of negative touchstone and to show, in very graphic terms, how quickly violence could slip its chains. Hence, when the prospect of peace receded into the distance, in the last few months of 1920, Ireland became an “Island with no peace” and “The Island of Terror”. The latter epithet was first featured in an emotionally charged article of 24 November, “Ireland – The Island of Terror. Another Day of Killings” which, through an extensive use of the language of sensationalism, depicted Ireland as a place where violence had become ordinary. Reprisals and fights were neither temporally nor geographically isolated events, as “reports of ambushes, of assassinations, and of fires come from all over Ireland” (CS 24 November 1920).

No one could consider themselves safe in Ireland. Nor could people in Italy, who had to make every effort to avoid suffering the same plight as the Irish.

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